

#BahamasStrong:

Shelter Recommendations & National Society Support after Hurricane Dorian



American Red Cross

Report Authors:

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“The horror and tragedy of one of the most powerful and destructive storms ever recorded in our region is a near unbearable wound deep in the heart and soul of our country... This is likely to be the greatest single loss of life ever in our history. The fresh well of terrors will never go dry nor empty for a very long time or even a lifetime for some. As others have said before, grief is the price of love.”

Dr. Hubert Minnis
Bahamas Prime Minister
September 18, 2019
during a national prayer service¹

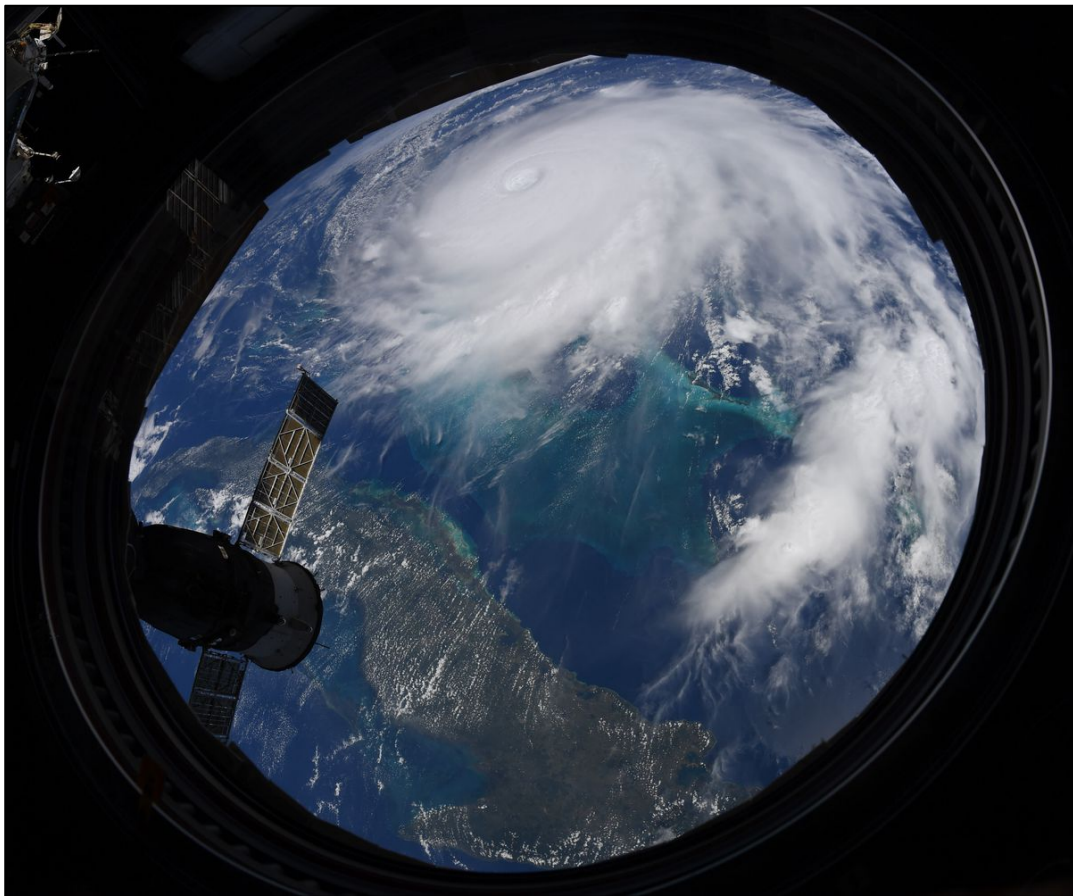
¹ Eyewitness News. (2019) Somber service for victims of Hurricane Dorian. <https://ewnews.com/somber-service-for-victims-of-hurricane-dorian>

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Background on the Disaster

On August 24, 2019, Hurricane Dorian developed in the Central Atlantic and intensified to a category 5 hurricane with sustained winds of 185 mph before making landfall in The Bahamas at Elbow Cay on September 1. What unfolded over the next few days gave scientists a preview of the future of tropical storm activity driven by anthropogenic factors.² The hurricane slowed down, and the eye remained stationary over the islands for three days. During that time catastrophic high winds and storm surges battered Abaco and Grand Bahama.



Caption: Hurricane Dorian over The Bahamas

² Kossin, James P. (2018) A global slowdown of tropical-cyclone translation speed. *Nature*.
<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-018-0158-3>

On Abaco, Alfred Russell found himself swimming for hours on what was once land to find safety.³ Almost 50km away, Erick Auguste was evacuating his home with his mother and two-year-old daughter. As he sought higher shelter, flying debris struck and severed his arm. His mother was swept away, and he became separated from his daughter and mother.⁴ As the storm exacted a heavy toll on their fellow community, many Bahamians decided to act.

What happened next was a massive effort by the Bahamas government as well as a spontaneous coalition of Bahamian private, faith-based organizations and nonprofit organizations including the Bahamas Red Cross to help evacuees. Private boats ferried residents from Grand Bahamas and Abaco who had no shelter and were exposed to the elements.



Caption: Private boats transporting evacuees from Great Abaco Island⁵

³ Nassau Guardian. (2019) Man says he still have nightmares about surviving Hurricane Dorian. <https://thenassauguardian.com/2019/09/20/man-says-he-still-has-nightmares-about-surviving-hurricane-dorian/>

⁴ Nassau Guardian. (2019) Man who lost mother and left arm in Dorian to join Christian ministry. <https://thenassauguardian.com/2019/09/19/man-who-lost-mother-and-left-arm-in-dorian-to-join-christian-ministry/>

⁵ BBC. (2019) Hurricane Dorian: Hundreds flee chaos in storm-ravaged Bahamas. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-49616990>

When they arrived at a private airport hangar, the local Rotary Club and other organizations began independently registering people arriving and providing them temporary shelter and support. In total an estimated 4,800 of the 70,000 impacted evacuated to New Providence Island.



Caption: Rotary tents and supplies set up at Odyssey Airport (part of their Disaster Aid International Project)

Government shelters eventually opened across Nassau and some evacuees decided to stay with friends and family. Many had no social support and stayed in government shelters where they continue to remain as of September 23, 2019. The business and private sector housed other evacuees in hotels, particularly those they assessed at higher risk. Some evacuees chose to self-pay for hotels. Others have remained on both Grand Bahama and Abaco; the latter in smaller numbers. Shelter counts have remained relatively consistent since hitting a max shelter population of over 2,000 people. The IFRC is currently supporting the Bahamas Red Cross to address the needs of those impacted by Hurricane Dorian and is delivering services on Grand Bahama, Abaco, and New Providence Islands. The American Red Cross has sent and continues to send delegates to provide technical assistance with cash transfer as well as national society support.

Research Methodologies

Quantitative	Qualitative	Historical
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NEMA (National Emergency Management Agency) data • Pacific Disaster Center (PDC) data • UNOCHA operational data • IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) Report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site visits at active shelters • Site visits with Bahamian community centers and organizations • Review of community • Review of open source data • Semi-structure interviews • Unstructured interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bahamas Red Cross Annual Reports • American Red Cross program impact reports

Rapid Support: Shelter & Settlement Recommendation

Overview of Sheltering Operations

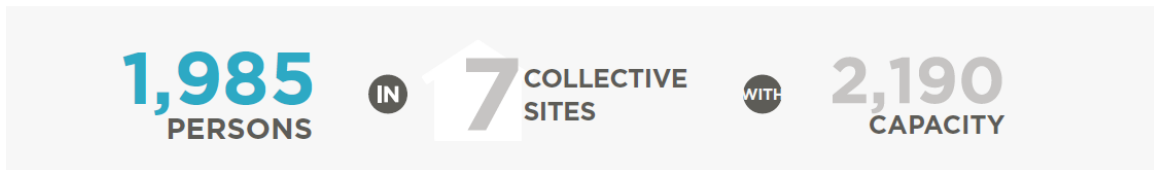
The American Red Cross bi-lateral team visited a sampling of the seven “collective centers” or congregate shelters opened by the Ministry of Social Services on New Providence. The objective of these visits was to assess the current status of the shelters, and identify any recommendations for rapid intervention, which could positively improve the experience of the shelter residents. Additional information was collected by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in coordination with local NGO, Hands for Hunger.

We believe that shelter residents (those who were unable to seek alternative accommodations with friends and family, in private or other shelter situations), will remain in shelters for 2-3 months, maybe even longer. This depends on a government/private sector decision to rebuild both collective shelter and work camp facilities on Grand Bahama and Abaco or approving and implementing other transitional housing solutions. Evacuees in other short-term housing solutions may run out of financial resources or host family support and may need to move to shelters. As the shelter count diminishes, the remaining shelter residents are those most vulnerable due to age, illness, pregnancy or other factors. They may have no familial or other social network. The current population could include a small number of pre-disaster homeless whose needs need to be addressed through traditional social services.

We assess that a significant number of shelter residents are first or second-generation Haitians, many of whom were not officially documented. Many of these residents lived in informal settlements such as The Mudd and Pigeon Peas on Abaco. The government has restricted rebuilding in these areas.

GENERAL INFORMATION

(UPDATE: 17 SEPT)



Caption: Shelter population at government run shelters on New Providence Island

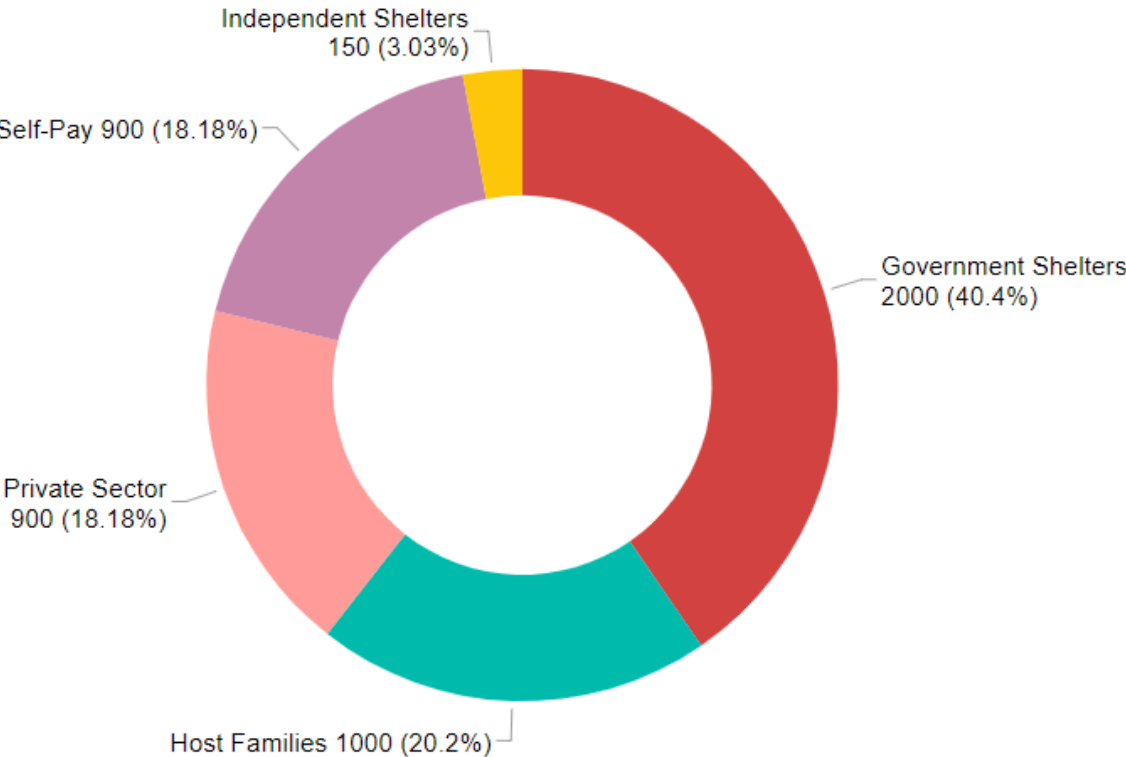
Evacuee Sheltering

Our information suggests that there are at least 6 categories of sheltering occurring on New Providence and impacted islands and cays.

<p>Collective Sheltering Sep 20 data</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Providence – 9 shelters with population of 1,889 Note: this number includes a co-located main shelter building and 2 tent shelters at Sir Kendall Issacs Gym. The third identified tent is intended for use as an after-school study/homework location • Abaco – shelter reported deactivated • Grand Bahama - 2 shelters with population of 68 • Eleuthera – 1 shelter – private shelter and population not available • Note: We assume an actual population of approximately 2,000 which accounts for itinerating or intermittent residents
<p>Private Sector</p>	<p>The private sector, including the business community, is supporting an estimated 900 evacuees on New Providence assessed to be at higher risk, for example pregnant women. This “assessment” was conducted by the private sector. These evacuees are being housed in hotels and other private solutions. This project may not be sustainable for 2-3 months</p>

	without additional funding. According to one of the coordinators, \$30,000 per day is being expended to support this sheltering solution
Host Families	The IFRC has a good level of confidence that a minimum of 120 identified families or 480 individuals are being hosted by families and friends on New Providence. Note: Our team’s assumptions include a higher number and estimates four members per household – this household number aligns with IFRC Cash Team assumptions
Independent Shelters	We believe there are collective shelters in churches or other facilities on New Providence that are not reported to the Ministry. Efforts continue by IFRC and IOM to identify these locations. Our assumption is there are 150 individuals in independent shelters
Self-pay	An unknown number of evacuees are using their own resources to stay in hotels or other facilities on New Providence. We estimate this number at 900 individuals
Remaining	An unknown number of residents have stayed on the impacted islands or cays and are living outside identified shelter locations in partially damaged buildings or in primitive outside conditions

Total Assumed Shelter Population on New Providence Island (Evacuees Only)



Roles at government shelters

The Bahamas government designates community centers, churches, or public buildings as shelters. Most shelters in New Providence Island are churches. On Abaco Island, government schools functioned as multipurpose shelters during an emergency. Grand Bahama also relies on religious buildings as shelter sites.

Impacted Islands	Shelter sites (Churches)	Shelter Sites (Government)	Shelter Sites (NGO)	Shelter Sites (Union Hall)	Island Total
New Providence Island	24	2	2	1	29
Grand Bahama Island	7	1	1	0	9 (At least 2 functioning)
Abaco Island	3	12	0	0	15 (Major Damage or Destroyed)

The reliance on churches as sites of emergency shelter speaks to the current challenges facing the Bahamas government in long term sheltering of evacuees from Grand Bahama and Abaco Islands.

Dormitory Management	Shelter Reception	Shelter Security	Casework	Mental Health	Education
Ministry of Social Services	Royal Bahamas Defence Force – Royal Bahamas Police Force	Royal Bahamas Defence Force – Royal Bahamas Police Force	Ministry of Social Services Health Social Services Division	Ministry of Social Services Health Social Services Division	Ministry of Education

The Ministry of Social Services organizes their shelter management into three shifts. The shelter manager is a social worker. There is always a shelter manager on each shift with a variable amount of shelter support staff dependent on the shelter size.

Shift	Staff on hand	Total Staff needed at a shelter
8:00 AM – 4:00 PM	1 Shelter Manager 1-3 Shelter Support Staff	2-4 Shelter workers
4:00 PM – 12:00 AM	1 Shelter Manager 1-3 Shelter Support Staff	2-4 Shelter workers
12:00 AM – 8:00 AM	1 Shelter Manager 1-3 Shelter Support Staff	2-4 Shelter workers
24 Hour Period for shelter management		6-12 Workers (Upper range represents Kendall Isaacs Gym)

Overall Assessment

The bi-lateral team’s findings are that most human needs were being met, at a basic level, by the Ministry of Social Services shelter management team. The bi-lateral team made the following observations while visiting these centers:

Cleanliness	The team did not observe any significant lack of hygiene in the main shelter space. Some shelter sites even instituted a cleaning schedule maintained by the shelter residents. The Departments of Health and Environmental Affairs conduct regular assessments for both sanitation and vector control and implement mitigation strategies as indicated
Organization	Inflatable beds were separated in grids (single men, women, and families, each on their own quadrant). Beds were placed next to each other or close by due to the lack of space in each facility
Feeding	Regularly scheduled feeding has been provided by international NGO’s (lunch and dinner). Shelters log meals received and the source of meals to ensure they can pinpoint any outbreaks of food related illnesses. Food is provided by a combination of international NGOs, local NGOs, community organizations and the facilities themselves
Clothing	In-Kind donation of used clothing had been steadily available to shelter residents by the local community. In kind donations are being managed by individual shelters or in the case of Sir Kendal Isaacs facilities, via a private sector effort. Some residents are going to the BRCS to obtain items
Personal Hygiene	Personal hygiene kits provided by the international NGO’s and the local community
Security	Shelter security was present and provided by Royal Bahamas Police Force and Royal Bahamas Defence Force personnel
Accessibility	The general space in the shelters were wide enough to accommodate wheelchairs and such; however, other items such as accessible ramps at entry points, wide bathroom doors, and other accommodations were not present. There were no accessible toilets or shower facilities
Psychosocial	The Bahamas Red Cross Psychosocial units conducting regular visits

Support	to shelters. Official shelters are managed by Department of Social Services Social Workers. They provide social work resources and other resources to residents as indicated
Health	Medical services were available through itinerating medical staff
Childcare	Some form of childcare was available in at least the Sir Kendall Isaacs Gym. Anecdotally, the team was advised that the childcare did not afford adequate respite for the parents
Livelihoods	Employers are visiting some shelters offering employment

Forecasting the Current Sheltering Situation

Shelters on New Providence opened for evacuees on September 8, 2019. The longer that evacuees remain in congregate/collective shelters, the greater the probability of disaster-caused trauma and mental health impacts. In most cases, evacuees have left their homes and local support systems, may not have employment to support their families locally or through remittances, and have no prior ties to their “new” community. This leaves residents with “nothing to do,” reduced social capital, and a lack of a sense of hopelessness and anxiety about their future.

Government plan for transitional or interim housing

The Bahamas government and private sector are exploring transitional or interim shelter solutions on the islands of Abaco and Grand Bahama. *A statement from the Prime Minister’s Office on September 22 included the following clause:*

*“A shelter and housing plan has been developed to provide for the relocation of evacuees now living in shelters in New Providence, to return to Abaco and Grand Bahama. Temporary housing options will be available for staff and many residents.”*⁶

The private sector is reportedly assessing the potential for building a worker’s camp on Abaco to support rebuilding efforts, particularly for the Tourism sector.

Sheltering in New Providence Island

⁶ Statement: (2019) The Most Hon. Dr. Hubert Minnis, Prime Minister: Announcement of Minister of State for Disaster Preparedness, Management and Reconstruction, Special Economic Recovery Zones for Abaco and Grand Bahama, Housing Relocation. <http://www.tribune242.com/news/2019/sep/22/pm-new-ministry-deal-disasters-and-recovery-dorian/>

IOM met with the Ministry of Social Services and proposed the implementation of the Integrated Shelter Registration System (SIRA) supporting the registration of shelter residents at all collective shelters.⁷

School Registration

Bahamian children are required to attend school. As of September 18, more than 1,000 evacuee children had registered to attend school in New Providence. We were unofficially advised during an open coordination meeting that the authorities would not actively pursue the children of undocumented residents to register them to avoid the appearance that they were pursuing them for deportation or detention.

⁷ Reliefweb. (2019) IOM Offers Real-Time Information for People Displaced by Hurricane Dorian in the Bahamas. <https://reliefweb.int/report/bahamas/iom-offers-real-time-information-people-displaced-hurricane-dorian-bahamas>

Rapid Intervention Recommendations

Assumptions

1. **Congregate shelters are needed on New Providence for an additional two to three months.** Given the complexity of government plans and the feedback received from international NGOs and humanitarian actors, we do not foresee rapid construction of new shelter facilities on Abaco or Grand Bahama.
2. **Shelter counts are probably higher.**
There are a small number of private shelters operating “off the radar” of the Ministry of Social Services. Humanitarian agencies do not have complete situational awareness of the sheltering situation on New Providence or affected islands or cays.
3. **Shelter numbers may eventually climb.**
While most evacuees are not in government shelters, trends suggest that the various other sheltering options reliant on social generosity as well as personal funds are rapidly expiring. Staying with friends and family is not a long-term solution. Those paying for hotel rooms are expending their last financial resources.

The following recommendations are designed to maintain the quality of life in a prolonged congregate shelter setting. These proposals are synthesized and derived from our observations, consultation with other sectors such as Protection, Gender and Inclusion (PGI), the IOM report and the following sources:

- [Sphere Handbook 2018 - Chapter 4: Minimum Standards in Shelter, Settlement and Non-Food Items](#)
- [UNHCR Emergency Handbook Collective Shelter Rehabilitation](#)
- [IFRC: Minimum Standards for Protection, Gender and Inclusion in Emergencies](#)
- [American Red Cross - Sheltering Standards and Procedures](#)
- [American Red Cross - Sheltering Support Group Lead Job Tool](#)
- [American Red Cross - Operating a Shelter Job Tool](#)

Note: This is not an all-inclusive list of resources.

Shelter Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop one cross-Ministerial workgroup with other ESF-6 members as auxiliary members to provide overall management and support oversight for all collective shelters • Consolidate the shelter operation to two to three main sites that provide increased space for residents - premised on the need for long term sheltering.
Shelter Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily communications between the shelter managers at each

	<p>shelter location and the Ministry of Social Services to identify specific resource needs. In the American Red Cross, this process is called “<i>Every Shelter, Every Day, Every Need.</i>” This should occur even if there are no identified resource needs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide external signage identifying building as collective shelter • The small shelters reported no issues with the workload of operating their center. The Sir Kendal Isaacs Gym stated that they could benefit from increased shelter operations staff. • Ensure that shelter management teams are receiving situational updates from their Ministry supervisors
Access to Information or Information as Aid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to information & situational awareness updates – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Information boards (in English and Creole) with details relating to clean-up, restoration, or transitional housing efforts in Abaco and Grand Bahama ○ Location of religious services, parks, or places of interest
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detailed information and process on how children can be enrolled in interim school, and obtain donated uniforms and school supplies (as part of the “access to info and situational awareness” intervention) • Transportation assistance to central school registration location. • Offer consistent after-school support at all shelters to prevent decreased academic performance due to their current status
Psychosocial Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess need for additional Psychosocial Support resources in collaboration with local and international NGOs and social service providers
Childcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent childcare in each location to provide respite for parents
Entertainment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to TV, books, magazines, etc. In both English and Creole • Access to culturally appropriate board/table games conducive to strengthening bonds between shelter residents • Create a “child friendly space” or safe-play areas, equipped with durable (and washable) toys
Management of Infectious Diseases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resource additional Showers / toilets <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Showers 1 unit/25 persons ○ Toilets 1 unit/20 persons • Install handwashing or sanitization stations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 1 unit/25 persons
Gender Protection and Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure shelter structures provide adequate privacy for women and girls who may need to use the space to change their

	<p>menstrual hygiene materials or change clothing; and for lactating mothers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure adequate lighting • Install privacy partitions and doors with locks (on the inside). This could be a women’s “safe room” • Ensure consistent patrols or assigning female Royal Bahamas Police Force or Royal Bahamas Defence Force members near women’s facilities
Personal Hygiene	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase capacity and access to supplies where residents can hand-wash and air-dry their clothing • Provide access to adequate laundry facilities co-located with shelters or nearby
Improved Comfort	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide additional cooling systems to non-air-conditioned shelters • Secure space for storing additional clothing or other items – usually outside the shelter
Casework & Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with NGO community to provide access to legal aid services
Personal Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide charging stations for phones at every shelter location • Provide access to computers or loaned mobile phones for communication • Increased number of independent Haitian Creole translators
Shelter Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and communicate facility emergency evacuation plan to residents. This would be required in the event of a fire or other similar occurrence • Request that shelter security - Bahamian Police or Military-engage in perimeter walk-throughs at random intervals, during the day and night, to deter opportunistic crimes or aggravated harassment
Shelter Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate shelters for accessibility for persons with disabilities. This would include adequate space for individuals with assistive devices or wheelchairs to travel safely through the shelter. Provide accessible showers and toilets as indicated. Provide access to safely enter or exit shelters through installation of temporary shelter ramps

Monitoring

In addition to daily check-ins between the shelter manager and Ministry, weekly in-person monitoring and assessment of shelters and residents is critical to maintaining quality shelter conditions, and reducing feelings of ‘restlessness’ that residents may experience due to their

prolonged stay at the collective shelter. As noted, this is best accomplished through a collaborative government-NGO workgroup effort. It is important to note that no matter the number of monitoring visits and subsequent interventions, the more time residents spend in a collective shelter, the more anxious and frustrated they could become; perhaps finding ways to vent their frustration, through contacting media, acting out inappropriately, protesting, etc.

PROPOSAL: CONSOLIDATION OF SMALLER CHURCH SHELTERS TO A NEW SHELTER SITE

Observed Challenge

The sheltering infrastructure on New Providence Island relies on small church buildings to house the community. These sites are not designed for long-term residence nor do they have the space, bathroom, and kitchen capacity to comfortable shelter populations.

Disaster Cycle Services solution to problem

Utilize empty or shuttered malls as a potential site for large scale sheltering.

Recommendation

Utilize the empty portions of the Town Center Mall as a new consolidated shelter site for the smaller church shelters. The mall will have air conditioning, space, potential bathrooms, and warehouse space.

Time frame

1-2 weeks dependent on condition of the site and whether it is viable





View inside from the front entrance



MULTI-AGENCY RESOURCE CENTER (MARC)

The BRCS reinforces its role as auxiliary to the government by convening agencies in collaboration with the government to open a Multi-Agency Resource Center (MARC) comprised of a coalition of relief and community agencies. These efforts begin in Nassau, then expand to each affected island, as the majority of residents begin to return. The MARC is a “one-stop-shop” for affected residents, fostering a collaborative and information sharing environment (as all agencies are essentially under one roof). It leverages all agencies with tangible contributions to offer, decreases competition for resources between organizations (i.e. multiple agencies competing for service center space).

- Bahamian Gov’t - Ministry of Disaster Preparedness, Management and Reconstruction
 - NEMA / Ministry of Social Services
 - Dept. of Labour
 - Reconstruction Office
 - Department of Education
- Community Organizations
 - BRC
 - Rotary Club
 - Hands for Hunger
 - Faith based organization(s) – (e.g. New Providence Church/ Bahamian Christian Counsel)
- International NGO’s (for example):
 - IFRC
 - IOM
 - Shelter Box
 - Samaritans Purse
- Others
 - Haitian consulate representation
 - Bahamian Banks (mortgage servicers)

Potential BRCS services offered at the MARC:

- Additional Psycho-social support
- Resiliency training
- CPR/First aid
- Meals-on-wheels program management
- Distribution of NFI’s, donated clothing, shelf-stable foods
- Reunification services
- Act as a redundancy measure to ensure no clients are missed or “fall through the cracks”

WORK WITH GOVERNMENT OF BAHAMAS TO DEVELOP A NATIONAL VOAD STRUCTURE

Proposal

Work with the National Voluntary Organization Active in Disaster (NVOAD), Government of Bahamas, and BRCS to develop a national civil society coordination body.

Time frame

12 months

Observed Challenge

After Hurricane Dorian many NGOs, churches, and private businesses spun into action to try to help evacuees. Many had no experience motivated out of generosity. There often was duplication of assistance with many organizations either collecting used clothing or canned food. Some sheltered evacuees through their own social networks. This diffused spontaneous response has led to a difficult situation for coordinating and communicating with impacted evacuees.

Recommendation

On September 22, 2019, Prime Minister Minnis announced the establishment of a new Ministry of Disaster Preparedness, Management and Reconstruction will also be responsible for disaster response. One of the direct mandates of this ministry is the management of relations with NGOs, NPOs and civil society relief efforts. The American Red Cross participates in a National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster structure. This structure helps better to let the Red Cross society coordinate and discuss areas of collaboration during a disaster.