

# Boat People SOS

- Year founded: 1980
- Mission: to assist Vietnamese refugees and immigrants in their search for a life in liberty and dignity.
- Office: 15 branch offices. HQ in Falls Church, VA
- **Staff:** 76 full-time staff and 12 Americorps/VISTA members

# BPSOS's S&H Program

- **Community Awareness Campaign on Occupational Safety (CACOS) funded by OSHA:** educates and trains Vietnamese both employers and employees about Occupational Safety and Health issues, since 2001.
- **Katrina Worker Education and Training in collaboration with OAI, inc., funded by NIEHS:** recruits and trains Southeast Asian workers in hurricane hazards and mold awareness in Gulf Coast communities, since Nov. '05.
- **Katrina MWT Supplement in collaboration with OAI, inc., funded by NIEHS:** provides outreach, recruit and transitional assistance to Vietnamese evacuees in Texas.

## Some Figures From National Council of Asian Pacific Americans

- **Louisiana: over 50,000 Asian Americans**
  - more than half were Vietnamese;
  - most lived in Katrina/Rita affected areas;
  - estimated 10,000 Vietnamese evacuees relocated to Houston and to other states.
- **Southern Mississippi: about 7,000 Vietnamese and other Asian residents, many of them now displaced.**

# Vietnamese Evacuees Seeking Help at Hong Kong Shopping Center



# What did we do after Katrina?

- Worked with Vietnamese Temples, Churches and other local agencies to provide emergency aids such as food, housing, etc.
- Recruited 10 volunteer staff to work in Houston office.
- Set up a temporary office in Bayou with 3 volunteers.
- Partnered with OAI to conduct a series of hurricane hazard training to Southeast Asian evacuees in Bayou, Biloxi and New Orleans.

# Emergency Aids From BPSOS



# BPSOS – Houston Office



# Bayou La Batre, AL



Many Vietnamese non-profits & volunteers across  
the country come to help

# Challenges of Vietnamese Population In General

## ■ English Difficulties

A survey in 2001 shows that 56% of Vietnamese parents over 45 spoke little or no English. 54% of these parents needed interpreters when going to doctors and social services.

## ■ Limited Infrastructure and Resources

No Vietnamese-speaking staff in most of the agencies in LA, MS and AL. A few Vietnamese staff in FEMA. Reliance on faith-based and community organizations to provide assistance.

## ■ Cultural Differences

Most evacuees prefer coming to Vietnamese community center because they're comfortable to address their health problems.

# Lessons Learned In General

## 1. Lack of Capacity

- No infrastructure for Vietnamese community exists in Gulf Coast areas with enough resources.
- Staff & community members were NOT trained to handle evacuation process.
- No safety & health trainings have been provided to staff.
- No mass media such as radio in LA, MS or AL. (BPSOS starts providing radio programs to Vietnamese families.)

## 2. No Linkage System

No linkage system between Vietnamese communities and mainstream agencies.

## 3. No Supportive Transitional Services

Example: transportation, childcare, housing, job placement, for returned evacuees.

# Lessons learned regarding S&H

## PROBLEMS:

- Lack of Resources: No PPE, no Vietnamese materials, no Vietnamese-speaking staff.
- Lack of appropriate materials and training.
- Meeting basic needs has priority over safety & health.

## SOLUTIONS:

- Target hard-to-reach workers.
- Provide PPE to those in need.
- Develop culturally and language appropriate training materials
- Provide training at accessible locations—e.g., BPSOS office, temples, churches, grocery stores, relief centers and on radio.
- Incorporate S&H trainings into other programs/services.