

INTRODUCTION

When a catastrophic disaster strikes, a local legal aid program is faced with a vast number of problems in addition to the ones it deals with ordinarily. Some of these problems may be old ones, such as clients' lack of income, food and housing, but in far greater numbers and possibly more intractable situations than previously encountered. Other problems will be new, such as how to deliver legal services in an area in which all of the buildings have been destroyed and there is no electricity, and how to make sure that people are advised of their legal rights when none of the usual means of mass communication are functioning. Some of these problems will call for new applications of familiar legal rights, such as tenant and consumer protection statutes. Other problems will call for poverty law practitioners to learn a whole new body of law known as disaster benefits law.

In the past, each legal aid office impacted by a hurricane has reacted to the disaster on an *ad hoc* basis. However, the 2004 hurricane season which engendered four severe disasters within a one-month span and impacted legal aid programs throughout Florida, taught us that we need to have a concerted plan. Following statewide consultation with legal aid staff, the Florida Bar Foundation decided to compile this loose-leaf manual to serve as the basis for development of a disaster plan by each legal aid organization, as well as the primary resource guide for training attorneys in advance of the hurricane season (annual training) and following

catastrophic disasters (post-disaster training).

This manual therefore sets out issues that Florida legal aid programs should consider in developing their own disaster plan including the post-disaster steps that a legal aid office located in a disaster impacted community should take to address the needs of its clients. The manual contains material on administrative and service delivery issues, describes the ABA Young Lawyers' Division (YLD) *pro bono* disaster program, provides the names of contact people and agencies, lists the staffing and resource issues facing legal aid offices after a disaster, describes the annual and post-disaster training provided by the Florida Bar Foundation, and comprises a chronological checklist of disaster-related tasks for legal services staff. In addition, the manual sets out a synopsis of federal disaster assistance law and an outline of long-term rebuilding legal issues, and contains sections on the rights of tenants after a disaster, insurance law and consumer protection measures, particularly regarding home repair contracts. The materials on substantive law may be used to train both legal aid attorneys and private attorneys willing to provide *pro bono* services for disaster victims.