

Critical Areas of Need Where Students Can Have an Impact

Restoring and rebuilding towns, neighborhoods, and lives following Hurricane Katrina will take many months. Identifying needs in these areas and matching your group's skills with those needs will be essential to the success of your effort.

In determining the focus of your group's efforts in the Gulf Coast, here are a number of service projects to consider:

Restoration: Student groups can be helpful in restoring community centers, libraries, schools, and other public buildings. Under the guidance of restoration experts, for example, student organizations can clean up, paint, and replace ruined gardens, furniture, rooms, and books. Many groups have been engaged in cleaning mold, disposing of families' belongings, removing sheet rock, and preparing houses for restoration, roofing, and clearing downed trees. Other service has involved building and rebuilding homes and public structures. *(Suggested skills: Ability to lift and move heavy objects, some ability to use tools and climb ladders)*

Distributing supplies: While in the Gulf Coast area, groups can join members of the local community in distributing food donations and supplies to people in hard-hit neighborhoods. *(Suggested skills: Ability to lift and move heavy objects, organizational skills)*

Tutoring: Many students in the Gulf Coast area have lost precious days and months of learning while schools were closed. Few schools in New Orleans and in other hard-hit locations have reopened, and schools in other areas are challenged by lack of teachers, books, and educational materials. Group members can help students with reading, math, or other subjects, or help provide recreation and afterschool activities. Students affected by Hurricane Katrina still may be dealing with fear and loss. Older volunteers can help these children to talk about their experiences and express their feelings. *(Suggested skills: Tutoring or mentoring experience, empathy, and listening skills)*

Healthcare: The Gulf area is still suffering the damaging effects of Hurricane Katrina caused by destruction of clinics, limitations on health resources, and the continued lack of medication, sanitation, and other health supports. Members of student groups can help with health screening and referring residents to clinics for medical treatment. *(Suggested skills: Basic first aid training, some healthcare training, listening skills, organizational skills)*

Housing: In recent months, many student groups have gutted houses in preparation for others who will help families restore their homes. This is grueling, but according to trip leaders, rewarding work. As time goes on, volunteers will be able to help residents who are living in shelters, trailers, or other quarters to move back to restored or newly available housing. Providing service, comfort, and aid to those residents can fill a critical community need. Elderly residents who have endured the loss of their homes and possessions need special attention but may be overlooked. Even displaced pets in shelters may benefit from your attention. *(Suggested skills: Basic first aid, organizational skills, some counseling training, empathy and listening skills; prior work with animals)*

Testing for water quality and other environmental effects: Salinity, toxic chemicals, and waste have affected the environmental quality in urban places and in beachfront and coastal areas. The richly dense plant and animal habitat may have been altered significantly. Testing, recording, observing, and helping reverse the environmental effects of the storms can be critical to restoring and creating ecosystems to support plants, wildlife and coastline. *(Suggested skills: Basic biology laboratory work, ability to observe and keep clear records, ability to work in teams, experience using testing equipment, ability to move and lift heavy equipment)*

Pre-trip service: While the service trip is the group's central focus, you may want to include a pre-trip service activity. The service can include fundraising or collecting monetary donations that will go to the community you will serve. Whatever

the service, the experience of working together can be valuable in creating a positive group dynamic that will carry over to your Gulf Coast service project.