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## Families need help here, too

**Katrina filled world's TV screens with faces of our nation's needy**

*From Bob Simmons, president of the board of the nonprofit Council for Children and of the Children and Family Services Center:*

Our community has a history of providing help for the troubled children and families among us, but the need for help has grown faster than the capacity of our public and private organizations to deliver. Over the past 10 years, the number of children in our community has grown by nearly 74 percent. Nearly 12 percent of our children live in poverty; 1,500 are homeless; and countless others live in dangerous or unstable homes.

In addition to this slow-motion disaster occurring among us every day, the sudden disaster of Hurricane Katrina has caused the number of children and families needing help to skyrocket -- both those who remain distant and those who have come to our community for shelter. The outpouring of money, time and energy to meet their needs is a testament to our generosity, but our ability to sustain support will be the test of our character.

The sudden influx of troubled children and families has further strained limited and uncertain resources of agencies.

As board president of Children and Family Services Center ([www.childrenfamily.org](http://www.childrenfamily.org)), and as board president of one of the 10 CFSC resident agencies, Council for Children, I'm in nearly daily contact with folks who provide some of the help. In addition to collaborating to raise funds and to provide volunteers for the broader disaster relief effort, five of the 10 CFSC agencies are working directly to meet the immediate needs of children and families displaced by Katrina.

A Child's Place is providing educational support and advocacy services to homeless children and families. Communities In Schools has extended its annual "School Tools" campaign until September 30. Community Health Services is performing physical exams for new kindergarten students and teachers. Community Link is providing crisis intervention counseling, short-term resettlement and long-term relocation services. And United Family Services is offering both financial and psychological counseling.

Within these immediate needs lurks the seed of greater long-term need. As shelters close and our new neighbors remain, all of our local agencies, including those at CFSC, must be able to respond over months and years to provide help for these children and families, including services for special education, mental health, juvenile justice, foster home placement, and child care.

Our community has reached out to help with disaster relief, but I encourage you to remember that our local agencies will still need your ongoing support after the headlines fade -- to help not only those who have come to us in crisis because of Katrina, but also those among us already in need. Now is the time for us to demonstrate that our character is strong enough to outlast crisis and outpace need.

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*For The Record offers commentaries from various sources. The views are the writer's, and not necessarily those of the Observer editorial board.*