

**County** Cumberland County  
**Department of Social Services**

**Submitted By** John Nalbone

**Title** Hurricane Matthew DSNAP Response

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**Project Title** Hurricane Matthew DSNAP Response

**Category** Innovations in Services to Customers  
(Please select one)

### **Project Description and Summary**

**What did you do?**

**Describe your program or project. What did you do? What is the history behind the program/project? What did you hope to accomplish? What was your timeline? Your budget? How did you identify your objectives? How well did you use available resources?**

What did you do?

The objective of this project was to design processes and procedures that would enable our agency to operate a large-scale Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (DSNAP) that focused on serving the needs of our distressed citizenry in the most respectful and efficient way in response to Hurricane Matthew. This process was also used prior to DSNAP activation for Replacement Food & Nutrition Services (FNS)

program for those citizens actively receiving benefits. We implemented a plan that optimized customer flow, centralized DSNAP services on one floor, provided separate service areas for our elderly and disabled customers, and continued to deliver superior customer services for non-disaster related social services programs.

Customers were greeted and screened as they approached the building's North Entrance to ensure that they were directed to the correct service line. Elderly and disabled customers were picked up by golf carts and driven to the front of the building. From there they were directed and assisted to a separate area to receive services. Workers continuously escorted groups of around 90 plus customers into two waiting areas to shelter them from the elements and make them as comfortable as possible. For any customer waiting in line, staff were stationed outside to provide general information, bottles of water, and portable restrooms were in several locations outside.

When interviewers became available, customers were escorted into the interview room where they sat at individual tables with the interviewer. Upon completion of the interview, they formed a line along the wall. Workers keyed the application information onto a batch spread sheet. Once the batch spreadsheet was completed, the customers eligible for disaster benefits were escorted to the EBT waiting area to be seated. The escort delivered the batch folder (containing the applications and batch sheet) to the EBT supervisor.

At the EBT service windows, customers were called up individually, in batch order. Customers verified their information, signed the manifest, received their EBT card and were given an informational flyer about the approximate length of time it might take to receive benefits on the EBT card. The flyer also included information on how to check the card balance. This concluded the process for the customer. Escorts were on hand to direct customers to the South Entrance to exit the building. The batch order along with applications were taken upstairs to the Computer Training Room by a runner to be keyed by income maintenance caseworkers for final processing.

Elderly and disabled customers who sought services at our main building went through a similar process, but were served in a separate area. After the interviews, they were seated in a special waiting area away from the general population. Senior aides were available for assistance as needed.

The seniors were escorted to the EBT waiting area in groups, and their batch folder was delivered to the EBT supervisor.

At the EBT service windows, customers were called up individually, in batch order. Customers verified their information, signed the manifest, received their EBT card and were given an informational flyer about the approximate length of time it might take to receive benefits on their EBT care. The flyer also included information on how to check the card balance. Workers in the corridors then directed customers to the South Entrance to exit the building. Golf carts provide transportation to their vehicles.

A Triage desk was created to assist customers who had unresolved/unique issues at any point in the process. These customers were either given a color-coded triage pass or were personally escorted to the triage desk by a worker.

In addition to dedicated space at the main building, an off-site location was set up at a local church to serve the elderly and disabled population also. DSNAP services were delivered in a large fellowship hall. Customers were seated in a waiting area. When interviewers became available, customers were escorted to individual tables for the application process. Once interviews were completed, customers were seated in the EBT waiting area. Individuals were called to the EBT issuance table where they verified their information, signed the manifest, received their EBT card and were given an informational flyer about the approximate length of time it might take to receive benefits. The flyer also included information on how to check the card balance. Workers in the corridors then directed customers to the exit. Volunteers from the church, a local sorority and fraternity were on hand to assist customers as they entered/exited the building and their vehicles. Applications were also taken at the Red Cross Shelters for citizens staying in those locations.

What is the history behind the program/project?

Five years prior to Hurricane Matthew, our county conducted a DSNAP event due to a local disaster resulting from tornados. Thousands of impacted citizens were served and lessons were learned from a similar process that helped us refine the program delivery and provide better services and improve customer flow especially during normal operating hours for non-disaster related services.

What did you hope to accomplish?

We recognized that our customers were distressed; some were traumatized, displaced, homeless, and had lost their possessions. Our plan was developed with the intention of serving the maximum number of customers in the shortest time possible while providing superior customer service. We also knew the importance of providing disaster services while conducting our regular business during normal operating hours and assisting with Red Cross shelters services.

What was your timeline?

Preparations began on October 12, 2016 and the DSNAP event was conducted from Saturday, October 22, 2016, through Wednesday, October 26, 2016.

Your budget?

Operational Expenses \$13,702.52 (Porta Potty, Golf Carts, Traffic Control Barriers, Security overtime)

Copies and signs \$ 1,100.23 (Copies of customer forms, signage)

Office supplies \$ 634.47 (paper, legal pads, folders, pens, badges, calculators, staplers, etc.)

Total (excluding overtime) \$15,462.78

Total Overtime Salaries Total Compensation

Week Ending 10/22/16 \$ 72,823.83 \$219,170.27

Week Ending 10/29/16 \$ 93,777.37 \$394,229.21

Totals \$166,637.83 \$613,170.27

How did you identify your objectives?

The magnitude of the flooding in our area made it apparent, that our county could be designated for DSNAP and that many of our citizens would need DSNAP benefits. We understood the importance of early preparation and our main objective was to determine the optimum method of getting large numbers of customers into the building and through the application/card issuance process as efficiently and respectfully as possible, while conducting our normal business operations.

Experiences from previous disaster relief efforts enabled us to identify opportunities to improve and refine our service delivery for the large crowds.

How well did you use available resources?

Our county utilized internal resources by repositioning equipment and

supplies to allow service delivery in a centralized area. Many agency staff members were temporarily assigned disaster duties that utilized their talents and strengths. Even though county offices were closed, we brought income maintenance and support staff in for one day to do their normal work so they could focus on DSNAP once it was activated. Also, on the closed business day, and all days leading up to the start of DSNAP, we activated a similar system for mass Replacement FNS benefits. This helped to proactively reduce the large crowd size, once the DSNAP began.

Collaboration with community partners included:

- Utilization of a local church fellowship hall as a satellite DSNAP location that served elderly and disabled customers with mobility issues
- DSS' from two other counties assisted in keying DSNAP applications into NC FAST
- Security details provided by our local Sheriff's Department
- Coordination of delivery of large quantities of bottled water from a local church for distribution to our customers
- Volunteers from other county departments helped with interviews, crowd control, customer flow, and ground maintenance

## **Project Success and Impact**

**What was the outcome?**

**Was your program/project a success? What was the impact? How did you measure the impact? How widespread is the impact of your program/project? How were you able to overcome obstacles and challenges? Did your program/project meet your established objectives?**

Was your program/project a success?

Our program was successful because we conducted a well-organized event that facilitated efficient customer flow and addressed their needs while providing excellent customer service.

Customers and non-DSS officials were randomly polled; the overwhelming response was that the operation ran smoothly and the customer service was first-class.

In addition to local acclamations, during an on-site visit by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) officials, they commended us, to include stating our method for DSNAP and Replacement benefits should be considered as a national model. USDA shared the sentiment with the state DSS Director, Wayne Black, and the state Economic Services Section

Chief, David Locklear; each called our agency personally to commend our efforts.

What was the impact?

Our department served more than 11,000 DSNAP customers during the five-day period. Applications were processed and approved for eligible customers; this decreased the stress on the families by enabling them to feed their families during a difficult time. In addition, approximately 8,000 customers actively receiving FNS benefits at the time of the disaster event were served seamlessly, prior to the DSNAP operation.

How did you measure the impact?

The impact was gauged by the thousands of customers who were assisted by our agency, and the millions of dollars in DSNAP benefits that were processed and approved.

How widespread is the impact of your program/project?

The thousands of DSNAP applications and replacement benefits taken resulted in millions of dollars in benefits being issued to our customers. These benefits enabled families, who had suffered loss, to feed their families during a difficult time. The funding used to purchase the food helped businesses recover from flood related losses.

How were you able to overcome obstacles and challenges?

A centrally located War Room was manned by agency leaders who addressed issues as they arose. Project managers surveyed the operation periodically throughout the day, and solicited input from workers regarding concerns and suggested improvements.

Collaboration with our community partners enabled us to raise public awareness of the event dates/times, increase our workforce by using non-essential county employees from other departments (HR, library), provide services at an alternate location to help ease crowding, and to share information about other organizations that could provide additional disaster relief assistance.

The hours worked were longer than usual, limiting opportunities for staff to take breaks and lunch. In an effort to provide consistent customer service and to combat worker fatigue; a staff lounge with breakfast, lunch, and snacks was set up in a centralized location. Due to the elements, hot beverages were continually on hand.

Did your program/project meet your established objectives?

Yes. Our agency served all customers who came to our agency to apply for

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DSNAP benefits during the five-day event and Replacement FNS benefits prior to and during DSNAP, with limited the impact on our normal business operations. Customers and other government agencies provided positive feedback about the efficiency of the process and the superior customer service that our staff provided.

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