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**NEW JERSEY  
DEPARTMENT  
OF CHILDREN  
AND  
FAMILIES**

**PLANNING TO SUPPORT CHILDREN  
AND FAMILIES IN THE AFTERMATH OF  
SUPERSTORM SANDY**

*A FOCUS ON LONG-TERM RECOVERY*

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Commissioner

## Executive Summary

The New Jersey Department of Children and Families (DCF) is the state's agency dedicated to ensuring the safety, well-being and success of children, youth, families and communities. DCF's vision is to ensure a better today and even a greater tomorrow for every individual we serve.

DCF mobilized resources prior to Superstorm Sandy and was a member of the team that responded immediately following the storm. DCF took many steps during the initial phase of the disaster response to ensure all children, women, and families being served by DCF were safe and receiving the supports they needed. DCF, along with FEMA and the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), created the State Led Child Task Force in the weeks following the storm to strategize and coordinate efforts to support children and families in New Jersey in the aftermath of the disaster.

As the initial response phase transitions into a long-term recovery phase, DCF has developed three targeted areas of focus to guide the work to support children and families. The risk and need assessment in this document reviews the data, research and past experiences that clearly indicates children and families experience many negative psychological and social impacts following disasters. These negative impacts include mental health problems, domestic violence, child abuse, and an overall corrosion of family life due to the stress associated with recovery. With a goal of keeping families strong, preventing the potential negative impacts of the disaster on children and families, and providing swift support and intervention, DCF has identified the following three (3) targeted areas of focus:

- 1. Strengthening Families and Preventing Instances of Child Abuse Exacerbated by Superstorm Sandy's Impact**
- 2. Preventing Violence and Exploitation Exacerbated by Superstorm Sandy's Impact**
- 3. Building Resiliency and Supporting Recovery**

For each targeted area, DCF has developed a comprehensive strategy that is focused on prevention and intervention with consistent emphasis on strengthening families. DCF long-term recovery is a comprehensive approach that not only will support families and address the needs of children in the aftermath of the storm, but will also have a cascading effect on many other aspects of our State's recovery. Stronger families, fewer incidences of child abuse, fewer incidences of domestic

## DCF's 3-Point Plan

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violence, fewer child mental health problems, and fewer school disruptions will lead to better school performance, more successful graduations, a more stable workforce, and less court involvement and incarcerations. **Safe children and strong families are the backbone of a strong New Jersey.**

This planning avoids the duplication of the work of other State working groups or departments. The individual assistance, public assistance, employment, healthcare initiatives, adult mental health and substance abuse interventions, Head Start, child care centers, and housing needs are all critical to the success of New Jersey's families and DCF has provided input and insight into many of these ongoing efforts. However, these areas are primarily managed by other State departments. DCF has primarily focused on the mental health and social impacts on New Jersey's children (from birth to age 21) and families. There are no regulatory changes needed to implement this plan.

DCF's strategic long-term recovery planning is organized based on the targeted areas of focus. The following is a brief overview of the planned strategies detailed in this document:

### **Strengthening Families and Preventing Instances of Child Abuse Exacerbated by Superstorm Sandy's Impact**

Strategically bolster DCF's network of Family Success Centers to enable the centers to continue to be a resource to families during the long-term recovery phase.

Provide direct assistance to foster/resource homes displaced by the storm to maintain stable home environments for children under the care of DCP&P.

Ensure child protection worker caseload sizes remain at appropriate levels to be able to effectively and efficiently respond to allegations of abuse or neglect.

Expand respite services for families with children with special needs.

Engage pediatric primary healthcare practices in a partnership to assess, identify, and intervene in a coordinated manner to mitigate the potential negative impacts of this disaster.

### **Preventing Violence and Exploitation Exacerbated by Superstorm Sandy's Impact**

Broaden existing domestic violence prevention programming.

Prepare the domestic violence intervention system for the expected increase in incidents of domestic violence.

Strengthen programs for homeless youth and victims of human trafficking.

### **Building Resiliency and Supporting Recovery**

Expand access to mental health services for children.

Provide evidence-based psychosocial disaster recovery programming in schools.

Provide psychosocial programming for child care centers and other early childhood centers to promote positive early childhood development and build resilience.

The planning outlined in this document is based on the reality that New Jersey can expect to experience many negative social impacts following this disaster if we do not effectively and strategically implement and enhance prevention and intervention efforts. These negative social impacts can, and will, directly impact New Jersey's overall recovery if not appropriately addressed. **Keeping children safe and families strong is essential to New Jersey's recovery.**

## ***Acknowledgment***

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The Department of Children and Families (DCF) would like to acknowledge the work of the State Led Child Task Force which began assessing the needs of children and families and planning response efforts in the weeks following the disaster. The Child Task Force members provided insight, knowledge, and experiences that were essential to the development of this plan.

The Child Task Force was a collaborative assembly of federal and state government agencies as well as a few key additional organizations that have been active in this disaster. The agencies represented on the task force along with DCF included:

- **State Agencies**
  - Department of Human Services
  - Department of Health
  - Department of Education
  
- **Federal Agencies**
  - Federal Emergency Management Administration
  - Health and Human Services
  - HHS Administration for Children and Families
  
- **Additional Partners**
  - University of Medicine and Dentistry Traumatic Loss Coalition
  - Montclair State University Center for Autism and Early Childhood Development
  - American Red Cross
  - Save the Children
  - Children's Health Fund
  - Southern Baptist
  - Church of the Brethren
  - American Academy of Pediatrics

DCF sincerely thanks all of these agencies and all of the various individuals that gave their time and talents to ensuring the needs of children and families have been addressed throughout the disaster response. The coordinated focus on children was both impressive and effective.