

Finding a way: Laredo Humanitarian Relief Team

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Introduction

Methodist Healthcare Ministries' Wesley Nurse program spans 80 sites throughout South Texas, and is Methodist Healthcare Ministries' largest geographic outreach program. The program, based on a faith community nursing model, focuses on the intentional care of the spirit, promotion of an integrative model of health, and prevention and minimization of illness within the context of a faith community. A key component Wesley Nurses undertake in their communities is providing health education, health promotion and facilitation of resources.

Wesley Nurses serve at local churches, mostly in rural areas where health care resources are limited, throughout the Rio Texas Conference area of The United Methodist Church.

In early June 2014, Rev. Paul Harris of First United Methodist Church (Laredo, Texas) contacted the Wesley Nurse program to determine if the faith community nurse could assist with the mass influx of Central American immigrants being released from government processing centers and arriving in the city hungry, in need of hygiene, shelter and a place to telephone their relatives around the country.

Goals & Objectives

Goal

Find a way for all denominations, civic groups, non-profits and any other individuals to work together instead of separately to provide immediate care and compassion to the accompanied children and adult women in the brief transition time in Laredo.

Objectives

1. To demonstrate how the faith community nurse is able to bring skills of advocating, facilitating and coordinating of resources for the least served to serve her community
 2. To bring awareness through asset based community development (ABCD) and strong collaborations of a health ministry team to rally the support of other non-profits, faith communities and communities near and far to assist in serving the humanitarian relief
- a. Define the issue (humanitarian crisis)
 - b. Describe formation of Laredo Humanitarian Relief Team
 - c. Promote ABCD best practices to provide resources

Laredo Humanitarian Relief Team logo

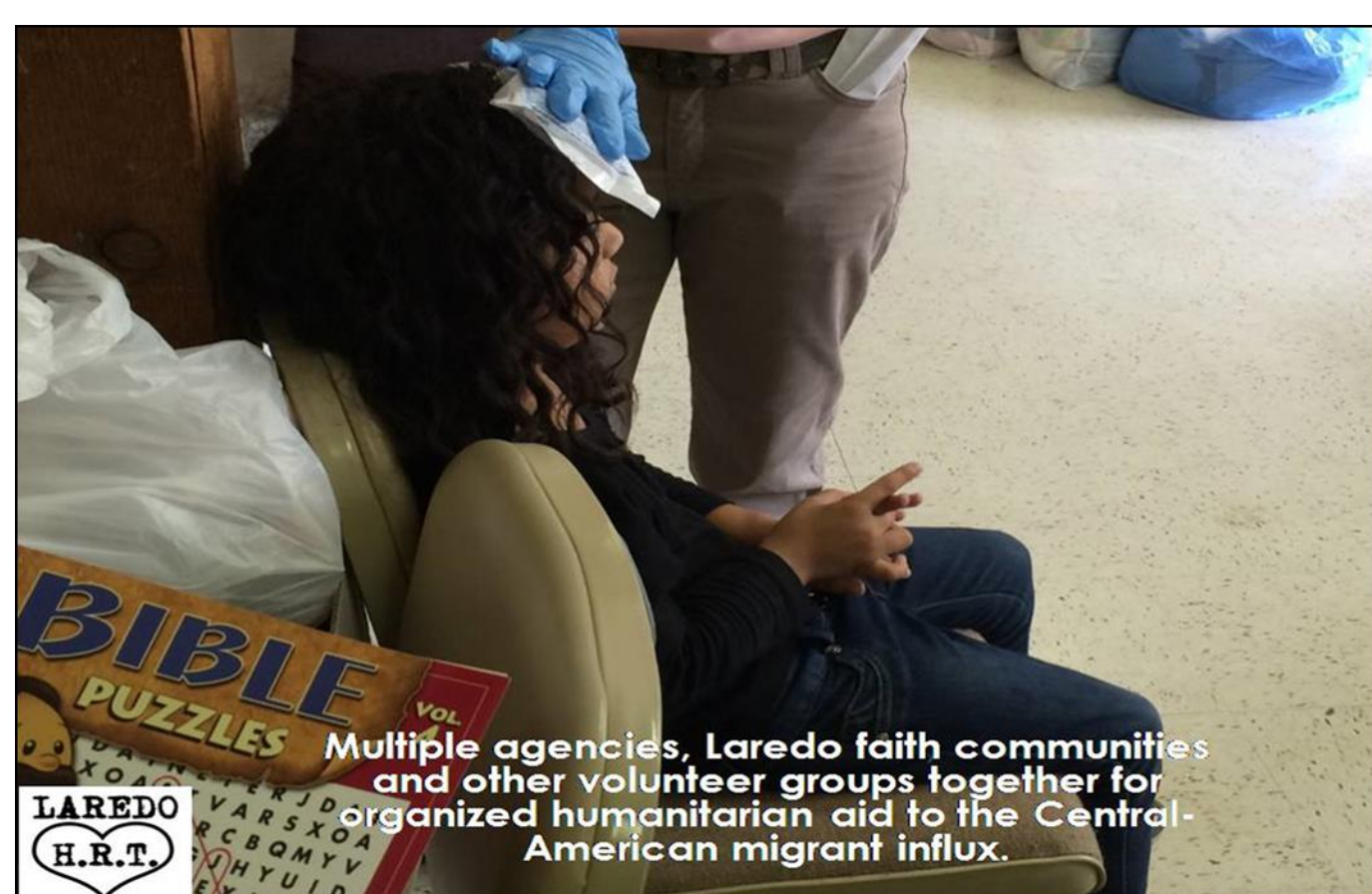


Discussion

Humanitarian Crisis

A humanitarian crisis is an event or a series of events that are threatening in terms of health, safety or well being of a community or large group of people. In summer of 2014, an humanitarian crisis occurred in Laredo with the mass migration of women and children, mostly from Central America, fleeing from violence in their country arriving at the local bus stations. They were released from government processing centers with papers which had later dates to appear at various immigration courts around the country based on confirmation where they were travelling to meet family.

1. No access to resources of any kind, and no one to offer help
2. Little food and water, no change of clothes, minimal health care while in processing centers
3. Unable to provide for their hygiene and health needs



ABCD in Action

The Wesley Nurse program was able to incorporate the strategies of ABCD—a community strategy to work as a group to identify, mobilize and connect individuals, associations, institutions and build on assets. The local Wesley Nurse was invited to a meeting to strategically plan how best to help the situation. The Wesley Nurse called upon her local partnerships to join her at the meeting.

- The first meeting had more than 50 people in attendance. Attendees created a donation list containing essential items such as hygiene items, bottled water, wipes, diapers, underwear, packaged snacks, and tote bags, and circulated the list with a newsletter via the internet.
- During the second meeting a team was formed to coordinate services; the Laredo Humanitarian Relief Team (LHRT)—a collaboration of churches, agencies and non-profits working—was established to provide a coordinated humanitarian relief. LHRT flyers posted at local at bus stations.
- Methodist Healthcare Ministries provided the first major donation to assist the humanitarian work. The area Wesley Nurses rallied support from local churches, including the Rio Texas Conference of The United Methodist Church, UMCOR (United Methodist Committee on Relief); and the Holding Institute Community Center, a United Methodist-affiliated adult-learning initiative.

Rev. Paul Harris and the local Wesley Nurse served as liaisons to LHRT in order to engage and organize interfaith groups near and far to assist the humanitarian efforts.



Map from bus station to LHRT services

Outcomes & Results

Relief Sites & Network

Three relief sites:

1. Holding Institute Community Center—Hub for all donations, volunteer training, and a place to provide clean clothes, showers and respite care along with distribution of travel bags with hygiene supplies
2. St. Peter the Apostle Catholic Church and Catholic Social Services—Case management, phones to contact family, doctor on-call, and respite care
3. Bethany House—Local shelter/soup kitchen to provide warm meals, wash towels, and take showers until LHRT was able to locate a mobile van with showers and washer/dryer

Held weekly LHRT meetings for updates and coordination of services, volunteer training, psychological first aid training and spiritual care to volunteers and migrants.

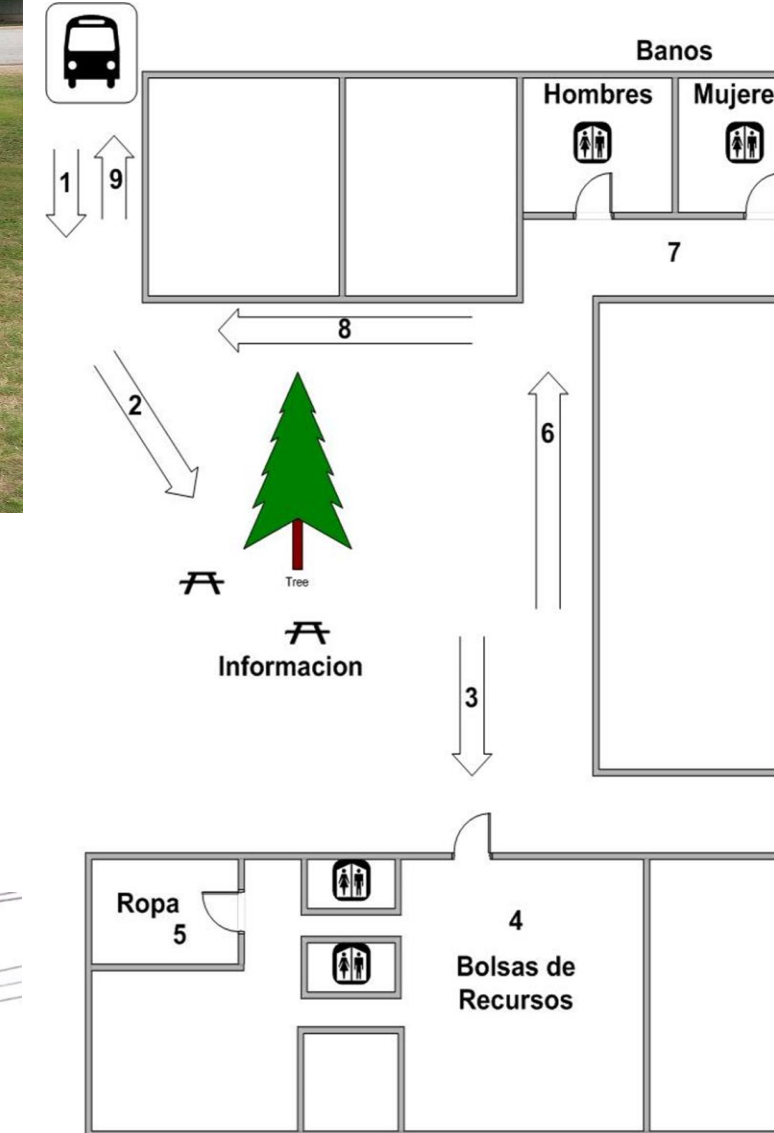
ABCD Best Practices

Relationships are key and must come first to support a cause, and coordinate services and resources. All support rallied around a common core value and vision—an interfaith effort with no one group seeking ownership.



Donations collected through efforts of Wesley Nurse site congregation and postal carriers hosting a collection drive.

Map of the Holding Institute Community Center property – the hub of LHRT.



Shuttle that bussed women and children to sites and back to bus station.



Traveller care bags each uniquely packed at Holding Institute Community Center by volunteers depending on family size and members' ages and needs of family members.

Conclusion

Through the use of ABCD, an ecumenical mix of community partners formed a network to create a coordinated care system in Laredo to provide humanitarian relief for migrants—mostly women and children fleeing violence in their country. By August 2014, LHRT was able to move all operations to Holding Institute Community Center. In summer of 2014, approximately 1,800 women and children immigrants were provided food, comfort, compassion, medical and respite care in Laredo.

1. New collaborative relationship with the local Catholic Church—Satellite office of Catholic Social Services at Holding Institute Community Center for welcome center for immigrant families.
2. Revitalization of Holding Institute Community Center—New partnerships formed, new programs offered.
3. LHRT—Relationships cemented; ability to call on team when needed.

Matthew 25:35 "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in....."

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"Serving Humanity to Honor God"