

## **Community Support Grants made from the UUA-UUSC Gulf Coast Relief Fund**

(December, 2005) - An initial four grants have been made from the UUA-UUSC Gulf Coast Relief Fund (for a total of \$100,000) to the following new partners. Since these are our first grants to the wider community, we wanted them to respond to both Mississippi and Louisiana and illustrate our priorities namely:

- Support local organizations to represent the rights of evacuees through organizing, support and advocacy.
- Support groups that work with and represent populations most disadvantaged by race, class or gender.
- A focus on African American, Vietnamese and Latino immigrant communities as three of the communities most direly affected by the hurricane and most marginalized by the relief efforts.

-- Martha Thompson, for the Gulf Coast Relief Fund/Community Fund panel

### **1. PICO WIN (PICO in Baton Rouge) and PICO ACT (PICO in New Orleans temporarily located in Baton Rouge).**

PICO is a national organization of grass roots groups organized through churches and schools. The local groups PICO WIN and PICO ACT, are working closely with the evacuees in Baton Rouge to organize them around the right to return. PICO articulated a platform with the evacuees called the Covenant which forms the basis of their organizing and advocacy work. PICO has been an important voice in the advocacy work at both the federal and state levels on the rights of those affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The grant is to further their organization and advocacy work with evacuees in Baton Rouge and the returnees in New Orleans around the right to return and conditions for dignity in New Orleans. **\$35,000**

### **2. Vietnamese Initiative for Economic Training.**

VIET is a Vietnamese community organization which works with the large Vietnamese population in New Orleans. VIET has received initial funding from UUA-UUSC Gulf Coast fund for a community outreach team which guides members of the Vietnamese community through the process of applying for assistance from FEMA, insurance and the Small Business Association. Some of the women on the VIET outreach team were trained by a disaster prevention and response group, TRAC, in southern Louisiana after Hurricane Andrew. The five person team rotates between the receiving people in the office and going out in the community. **\$25,000**

## **Mississippi**

### **3. Mississippi Immigrants Rights Alliance.**

MIRA works for justice for immigrants on the Gulf coast. In the wake of Katrina, they are increasingly responding to flagrant abuses against immigrants subcontracted to work on the clean up and reconstruction. FEMA subcontract this work out to companies who then subcontract to others etc. At the end of the line are the subcontractors who hire immigrants with promises of good wages and then once on site, pay them below

minimum wage or not at all. The employers do not provide shelter or food and the immigrant workers are thrown onto the relief system for their basic needs or sleep on the streets and under cars. They have been threatened with deportation when they seek shelter or try to complain. Immigrants who have lived in the area are vulnerable to eviction and deportation when they apply for assistance. The funding helps support MIRA's expansion of their emergency outreach work on the coast including funding another outreach organizer to keep up with the demand. The two outreach organizers are continually on the road, finding immigrants, responding to calls for assistance, providing emergency assistance and information to the immigrants about their rights. MIRA directs immigrants to legal assistance and documents the multiplying abuses. **\$25,000**

**East Biloxi Center for Coordination and Relief.**

The East Biloxi center came out the work with evacuees in East Biloxi who wanted a voice in how relief would be provided in their community. It is now a central place for coordination among agencies working in East Biloxi, they meet there every Monday to discuss work. The Center coordinates goods distributions, guides residents through FEMA and other applications, directs them to assistance, accepts work orders for different clean up crews, assigns volunteers to tasks, especially clean up, systematizes information and maintains communications among the different groups working on relief and reconstruction in East Biloxi. They want to move towards a community development model, including work with seniors and teens, community outreach etc.

**\$15,000**