

City and Community Response To Hurricane Harvey

City of Austin created and mobilized a database of volunteer interpreters:

- On-the ground interpreters only identified Spanish-speaking LEPs, no identified need for other languages
- Prioritized COA trained interpreters and employees for shelter work (background checks are necessary, they are trained, etc.)
- Interpreters for ASL, Arabic, Cantonese, French, Mandarin, and Vietnamese attended an orientation and were ready to provide services
- The community call for volunteer interpreters resulted in over 2,000 people signing up, which represented 77 different languages

VACAT connected with the Vietnamese community in Houston and got together with other Vietnamese organizations and formed the Viet Hurricane Harvey Victim Relief of Austin (VHHVRA) group. They were provided a table at the Multi-Agency Resource Center (MARC) along with Red Cross, FEMA and other local relief agencies.

NAAO responded to a briefing on the event at their August meeting. They offered to provide Asian meals at the emergency shelter. Vince set up the process, but it was not needed. NAAO also provided donations for the group of Burmese evacuees who were in Austin for a short time, but then had to return to Port Lavaca.

AARC Nonprofit Health Navigator, Pawkhu Hser, identified a group of Burmese evacuees in the temple and Burmese community here in need of services. After a few days, however, their employer in Port Lavaca insisted they return so she organized donations to be sent to them by truck through personal contacts, NAAO and the Austin Disaster Relief Network (ADRN). The pastor at the church in Port Lavaca is still accepting donations for assistance:

Karen Baptist Church Of Port Lavaca
Address: 5463 FM 1090
Port Lavaca, TX, 77979

Commissioners Pooja Sethi and Cat Conti: On August 30 and 31, the City of Austin South Asian community came together in a big way to donate, box, and send to Houston Texas in the wake of the destruction of Hurricane Harvey. The event started by one Austin resident and **AA Quality of Life Commissioner, Pooja Sethi**, who created a private facebook event for 20 people to donate at her home. Within 3 hours, the event was shared over 150 times by different people, and over 2,000 people had responded. In a mad dash, Pooja Sethi, enlisted the help of her close friends, and sister, Shelly, and booked the Sai Babe Temple of Cedar Park to accommodate the outpouring generosity of

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the Austin South Asian community. The event turned into one like no other, where it was purely one community helping another community. There was an auditorium full of donations, that ended up going to four different locations in four large truckloads, to the lower income families in Fort Bend county, to the George R. Brown convention center of Houston, and to Tyler County, one of the poorest counties in the State of Texas. There were also very special boxes made for some evacuees that came to Austin that had fled from the flooding and left all of their belongings behind and were **delivered by Commissioner Cat Conte**. This event, with over 500 volunteers, and truckloads of donations, shows the power of a community, and one girl with a facebook account and an idea.