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Children Take Charge: Helping Behaviors and Organized Action Among Young People After Hurricane Katrina

Lori Peek, Jessica Austin, Elizabeth Bittel, Simone Domingue, and Melissa Villarreal

6.1 Prologue

Oronde¹ was 11 years old when Hurricane Katrina devastated the U.S. Gulf Coast. He, like tens of thousands of other children, evacuated and was displaced from his native New Orleans. Oronde experienced much uncertainty and ongoing academic disruption as his family sought safe and stable housing in the years after the storm.

After several moves across Louisiana and Texas, he, his mother, and his younger siblings returned to the changed physical and social environment they and many others dubbed “the new New Orleans.” Like a boat adrift,

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Oronde sought stability—an anchor—after the storm. His crumbling school, which was in receivership by the state before Katrina, was shuttered permanently following the catastrophe. The New Orleans charter school where his mother finally enrolled him in 2007, two years after Katrina's floodwaters laid waste to an already failing system, had been repaired but was badly under-resourced and staffed by a team of inexperienced educators fresh out of college.

As Oronde attempted to adjust to the new classroom environment, new peers, new teachers, a different rental home, and a radically changed neighborhood, he was introduced to Kids Rethink New Orleans Schools. Formed in 2006, the Rethinkers came together, with the support of adults, to ensure that young people's voices would be heard as decisions were being made regarding the New Orleans public school system. Over the years, the organization, which is now known simply as Rethink, has morphed into a group concerned with social, political, and economic justice to advance current and future prospects for youth of color in New Orleans and beyond.²

Soon after the group was formed, the Rethinkers decided that they would work together to identify one major issue that they wanted to tackle each year. The organizational model encourages youth voice and grassroots leadership to recognize, understand, and ultimately address issues of particular concern to young people. Using various creative means, the youth then tell the story of the grand challenges they face and

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offer concrete possibilities and actionable steps for change. They also learn lessons in how to work with hierarchical organizations and adult leaders to promote bottom-up, youth-initiated change.

Oronde and fellow Rethinkers staged a public event at a local community garden in the spring of 2011. There, they offered a presentation to the New Orleans superintendent of schools and leadership from the corporate food giant Aramark regarding the problems associated with the lack of fresh food in cafeterias throughout the city. The event, which was completely youth-led, involved presentations from Pre-Thinkers (younger, elementary school-age members of Rethink) as well as the Rethinkers. They addressed food issues in school cafeterias and explained how the lack of access to good food can influence learning outcomes. They then offered a clear plan for how to get more fruits and vegetables onto the lunch trays of schoolchildren. At the close of the session, the adult administrators agreed to sign off on the Rethinkers' demands for healthier and more environmentally sustainable food options.

After the event ended, Oronde shared more about his personal journey from displaced Katrina kid to local youth activist for school justice. Although he had always been a quiet and shy child, Rethink had "pushed him out of his comfort zone" and encouraged him to "find his voice" until he "realized what a difference" he and other children and youth could make. Through his involvement in Rethink, Oronde connected with supportive peers and adults, learned invaluable leadership skills, and came to recognize that youth can enact transformative change, even in the face of what may seem like insurmountable problems. His volunteerism through Rethink became a centerpiece of his college application essays, and he was proud to share with others that he had been accepted to college and would be studying mechanical engineering at the University of Mississippi in the fall of 2011.

Six years after Katrina upended nearly everything in his life, he said he was "recovered" and "ready" to continue on the path of scholarship and social change. He also observed that one of the biggest lessons he would take from his time in Rethink was the recognition of "exactly how much power youth can have when they unite."

6.2 Introduction

What do children do for themselves and for others in disasters? This is one of the core questions posed by Anderson (2005) in a foundational article calling for more social science investigations regarding the vulnerabilities and capacities of children and youth. Anderson argues that children “are not just passive in the face of disasters,” nor are they “merely victims and dependent observers of the scene” (Anderson 2005, 168). Although he acknowledges throughout his writing that children and youth often lack power because they do not vote, and authority because they are typically excluded from decision-making bodies, he also notes that they undoubtedly contribute across the disaster lifecycle in terms of risk communication, preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation.

In the years since that article was published, social scientists have responded to Anderson’s call to document what children do before, during, and after disaster. In a 2008 special issue on children and disasters in the journal *Children, Youth and Environments*, several of the papers focused on children’s active contributions to preparedness, response, and recovery.³ Peek summarized those contributions and a number of case studies from around the world and observed that children have “considerable strengths that could serve as a significant resource for families, communities, and organizations attempting to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters” (Peek 2008, 14). Further, she argues that children’s “knowledge, creativity, energy, enthusiasm, and social networks could be utilized during all phases of the disaster life cycle” (Peek 2008, 14) and advocates for more evidence from the field to document these actions. Towers et al. (2014) make a compelling case for acknowledging children’s understanding of risk and strengthening children’s skill sets to respond to a wide range of threats they may face in their environments. Moreover, a growing chorus of scholars from around the world has asserted that it is imperative that agencies and organizations democratize disaster risk reduction efforts by engaging children and youth as “experts” of their own environments and, in turn, calling on their unique knowledge and life experiences in all disaster planning efforts (Bartlett 2008; Back et al. 2009; Martin 2010; Haynes and Tanner 2015).

Heeding these calls, and drawing on nearly a decade of ethnographic fieldwork following Hurricane Katrina, Fothergill and Peek (2015) offer a typology of activities that affected children engaged in to help adults, other children and youth, and themselves both before and in the long-term aftermath of the catastrophe. They include evidence from interviews and observations that demonstrates that children did myriad things like assisting with evacuation preparations, rescuing other children and adults from the floodwaters, and educating and entertaining younger siblings and children while in shelters and temporary housing. This work underscores that children have special “talents, skills, and strengths” that can ultimately speed their own recovery and the recovery of those around them, after even the most disruptive of disasters (Fothergill and Peek 2015, 206).

Additional evidence suggests that children and youth may serve as active risk communicators, even helping adults to overcome language barriers during emergency response and initial phases of recovery (Back et al. 2009; Mitchell et al. 2008; Tanner 2010). Moreover, when engaged as key stakeholders within their communities rather than as token participants (Martin 2010), children have demonstrated their power as agents of change in disaster risk reduction (Mitchell et al. 2009) and climate change adaptation (Back et al. 2009; Tanner 2010) in low-income and developing countries.

Participatory action research (Haynes and Tanner 2015) has documented how children serve as advocates for climate change awareness and adaptation strategies in their community and how they contribute to citizen science initiatives regarding changing environmental conditions (Marchezini and Trajber 2017). For example, in the Philippines, children successfully campaigned for and initiated a community-wide referendum on school relocation when they learned their school was extremely vulnerable to landslide hazards (Back et al. 2009). Other participatory projects in the US and Canada have demonstrated the importance of engaging youth through creative means in telling their own stories of recovery, to ensure that their unique post-disaster needs are not overlooked in the adult-led recovery and reconstruction process (Fletcher et al. 2016; Peek et al. 2016)

Researchers have offered various explanations for children's effectiveness in assisting with and leading disaster risk reduction efforts. Back, Cameron, and Tanner (2009, 30), for instance, observe that in comparison to their adult counterparts, children and youth tend to be less fatalistic thinkers and employ a more "yes we can" outlook, thereby opening pathways to creative and innovative solutions to socio-environmental problems. Additionally, Haynes and Tanner (2015) found that children and youth can more readily accept the social causes and consequences of disasters than adults, and as such have more malleable and adaptive ways of thinking that can serve them well in generating creative approaches to risk reduction. Indeed, Haynes and Tanner conclude that this malleable meaning-making capacity among youth makes them especially well positioned "to imagine, plan, and advocate for resilient futures" (Haynes and Tanner 2015, 367).

Researchers and practitioners alike agree that one of the first steps toward breaking down the barriers to children's participation is to flip the script on trust. This means adults must learn to recognize and encourage children as agentic thinkers and actors who are capable of constructive participation. This entails seeing children as active contributors to the processes of envisioning and manifesting solutions to socio-environmental problems at local, national, and global scales (Bartlett 2008; Back et al. 2009; Haynes and Tanner 2015).

Despite the rapidly growing body of literature that clearly documents children's capacities in disaster, children still tend to be regarded as unfit to participate in civil society (Jeffrey 2011; Lopez et al. 2012). They are often considered dependent on adults for guidance and viewed as not having the requisite skills or expertise for effective leadership or collective problem-solving. In some contexts, children are not given the right to engage in civil society and exercise their political will due to structural or procedural barriers imposed by adults (Lopez et al. 2012). Yet because children make up somewhere between one-quarter to one-half of the population of nations around the world (Bartlett 2008), and because they represent the future of all nations, it is crucial that scholars continue to document children's actions and contributions.

In this chapter, we take the position that children and youth—here defined as those under the age of 18—are capable actors who have the potential to actively contribute across the disaster lifecycle. Accordingly, we offer an analysis of children's helping behaviors following Hurricane

Katrina. Our project examines the helping behaviors of individual children and of groups, focusing attention to how young people engage in bottom-up responses even when they are not directly affected by a disaster. Drawing from a unique dataset of media coverage of children's helping behaviors, we argue that in addition to recognizing the strengths and capacities of disaster-affected children, children should also be recognized for their role as leaders in bottom-up responses to disaster. That is, not only are children reacting to their immediate circumstances, but they are also contributing to a broader civic response to crisis and are bringing to the table valuable, innovative, and forward-thinking ideas for how communities around the world can more effectively plan for and recover from disasters.

6.3 Approach

This chapter draws on a dataset that we generated of media coverage of children's helping behaviors in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.⁴ Although prior studies of children in Katrina have focused on what the youngest survivors did to help others (Fothergill and Peek 2015; Mitchell et al. 2008), less is known about how children outside the disaster zone who were not directly affected contributed to the response and recovery.

In response to this gap in knowledge and our curiosity regarding how the media covers children's helping behaviors, we examined 108 news articles published in the ten-year period following Hurricane Katrina (2005–2015) that we identified through a LexisNexis database search. We used a combination of search terms including “children,” “youth,” “volunteer,” “help,” “disaster,” “catastrophe,” “Hurricane Katrina,” and “Katrina” to find the articles.

After completing our initial search and downloading all of the returns, we reviewed each piece and deleted all duplicate entries and all non-relevant articles. We maintained all relevant news articles that were available via LexisNexis and published in the decade following Katrina in local, regional, and national newspapers. The majority of the articles (57 percent) were published in 2005, the year of the event, and 28 percent of the articles appeared in print over the next two years. Very few articles have been published in subsequent years (see Fig. 6.1).

Once we had identified the final set of news articles for analysis, we entered the bibliographic information into an Excel spreadsheet. We then

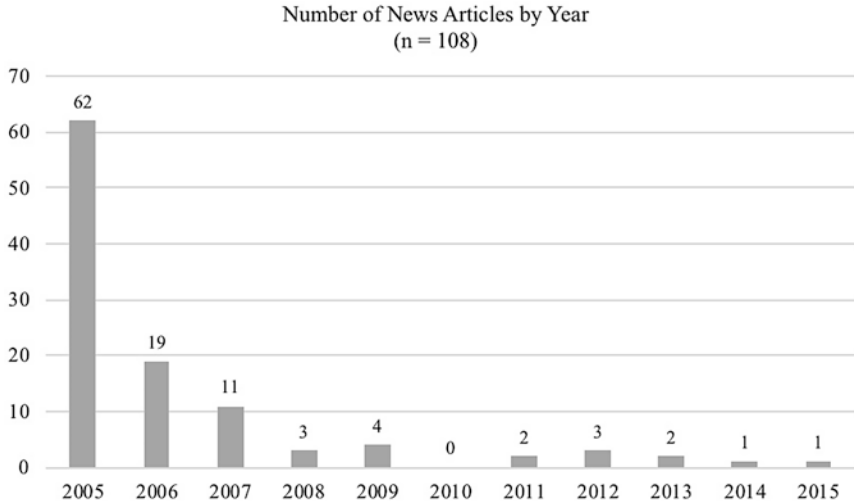


Fig. 6.1 Number of news articles focused on children's helping behaviors by year. (Source: Authors' creation)

developed additional columns to organize and analyze the entries along a number of dimensions that responded to calls for more information on children's helping behaviors in disaster (see Table 6.1). Three of the authors of the present chapter and a graduate research assistant read and categorized the articles along each dimension. Our initial inter-coder reliability was high, and we regularly met to cross-check and resolve any coding discrepancies.

6.4 Children's Helping Behaviors after Hurricane Katrina

Hurricane Katrina made landfall on August 29, 2005. The storm and the flooding that followed killed over 1800 people, destroyed hundreds of thousands of homes, resulted in economic damages in excess of \$150 billion, and led to the evacuation of well over one million Gulf Coast residents (Rivlin 2015). Katrina still stands as one of the costliest and deadliest disasters in modern US history, and the storm laid bare many of the deep and abiding racial and economic divisions that mark our society during non-disaster times (Storr et al. 2015).

Table 6.1 Categories of analysis of children's helping behaviors

Location of the children helping/ where the helping occurred	Disaster phase when the helping occurred (emergency response, short-term recovery, long-term recovery)	Age(s) of children who engaged in helping behavior	Type(s) of help provided	Organization(s) that the children were involved with, if relevant	Organization(s) that the children were contributing to, if relevant	Tangible outcomes or change generated
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Source: Authors' creation

Dramatic and devastating images of babies being rescued from rooftops, of children wading through neck-deep waters, and of thousands of Americans—most of them black and poor—trapped in desperate conditions at the Superdome in the city of New Orleans shocked and catalyzed many into action. Some came by rescue boat to try to help move people from the flooded city to higher ground. Others donated blood or gave cash contributions to local and national charities. Celebrities held benefit concerts and other events to raise additional funds for the survivors scattered far and wide across the nation.

As our analyses show, children also sprang into action after the storm. For some of the youngest helpers, this was the first major disaster that they had witnessed unfold in real time on their home television screens. For older youth, the imprint of the 9/11 tragedy, which also entailed a large number of deaths and concentrated destruction, was still fresh enough to remind them that they were coming of age in an era now regularly punctuated by catastrophe. Although children's precise motivation for helping was not always clear in the news articles that we reviewed, we were able to ascertain a range of things that children did to help in response to Hurricane Katrina.

6.4.1 How Did Children Help?

Our analyses revealed that the media covered six primary ways that children helped after Katrina (see Table 6.2): (1) raising money (43 percent); (2) collecting material goods for children and adult survivors (33 percent);

Table 6.2 Types of help children provided

Type of help	Number of articles ^a
Donating and raising money	57
Collecting and donating material goods and supplies	45
Necessities	22
Comfort goods	23
Assisting with restoration or rebuilding activities	18
Supporting mental health and raising spirits	6
Developing programs and raising awareness	5
Founding new organizations	3

Source: Authors' creation

^aThe total exceeds 108 as some articles mentioned more than one helping behavior or type of help provided

(3) developing programs to raise awareness of the disaster (4 percent); (4) assisting with restoration or rebuilding activities (13 percent); (5) raising spirits and mental health considerations (5 percent); and (6) creating new organizations to help with Katrina and future disasters (2 percent). We describe each of these activities briefly, drawing on the ways that the media covered children's helping behaviors.

6.4.1.1 Donating and Raising Money

Children as young as three years of age and through their late teens did many things to raise money after Katrina. Some literally emptied their piggy banks and sent the funds to affected schools or to national organizations such as the Salvation Army. In response to a national call from the American Red Cross, children from across the United States set up lemonade stands and sold drinks so they could donate the proceeds to Katrina relief (Vanden Brook 2005). In addition, school-age children across the US held bake sales and organized car washes and other events to raise cash contributions for Katrina survivors.

Children also created things so that they could sell products and donate the funds to disaster relief. For instance, one little girl made fans out of paper, sold them for \$1 each, and donated all the profits to Katrina relief (Wiggins 2007). Other children made and sold bracelets (Sloan 2005), while another group of school children, who had also been involved after the 2004 Indian Ocean Earthquake and Tsunami, created a picture book that they sold and then donated all proceeds (Moore 2006).

6.4.1.2 Collecting and Donating Material Goods and Supplies

Disaster researchers have long discouraged the donation of goods and supplies after a catastrophe because research has repeatedly shown that such material convergence can create a disaster of its own (Phillips 2009). After Katrina, however, calls went out for toys, backpacks, warm clothing, and other items that children and families who had lost everything needed immediately and would need as the summer stretched into fall and winter.

Children across the nation responded to these calls through collecting both new and lightly used supplies and preparing them to be sent to the Gulf Coast. Children donated both comfort goods, which we defined as things like toys, stuffed animals, sports equipment, and leisure books, and basic necessities, such as food, water, clothing, school supplies, and toiletries. School classes collected backpacks and stuffed them with school supplies (Florida Times Union 2005). Children in northern states gathered up warmer winter clothes and blankets for Katrina survivors who were now scattered across the United States, and for many, living in colder climates for the first time (Peek and Richardson 2010). In addition to donating and gathering donated goods, a few of the news articles emphasized that children joined in-person distribution of the supplies along the Gulf Coast.

6.4.1.3 Assisting with Restoration and Rebuilding Activities

Of the news stories that focused on efforts to rebuild and restore badly damaged built and natural environments, nearly all focused on high school–age youth who, through their schools or places of worship, raised funds to travel to the Gulf Coast so they could provide direct assistance. These older youth engaged in a variety of short-term recovery activities associated with mucking out flooded homes, schools, churches, and other structures. Older youth also became involved in longer-term projects associated with restoring the wetlands and rebuilding homes and other structures that had been partially or completely damaged in the disaster. Several stories also focused on children’s efforts to help rebuild child-centric spaces including playgrounds (Wiggins 2007), parks (Livingstone 2006), and school gardens (DeFour 2011).

6.4.1.4 Supporting Mental Health and Raising Spirits

Many children focused their efforts on improving the emotional status and raising the spirits of child and adult survivors of the storm. For example, children sent cards and letters of encouragement to affected individuals, many of whom had been displaced from their homes. Some

children sent artwork. One child hosted a Christmas party for children in a FEMA trailer park (Frazier 2007), and a group of teenagers organized a vacation for affected teenagers in New Orleans, bringing 22 teens to Florida for a five-day winter vacation (Weingarten 2007).

6.4.1.5 Developing Programs and Raising Awareness

Children, like many adults, were obviously deeply moved by the images of profound human suffering that were so apparent in Hurricane Katrina. In response, children engaged in efforts to raise awareness of the extent of the physical and social damages caused by the storm. Young people hosted educational and benefit events that focused explicitly on the racial and class dimensions of the disaster and emphasized the long road to recovery ahead. One child created a mosaic in her community to draw attention to the plight of Katrina survivors (Javid-Yazdi 2007). Other children engaged fellow youth in listening activities in their schools and broader communities.

6.4.1.6 Creating New Organizations

Although much of the news coverage focused on heartfelt stories of individual children or on the efforts of a small group, it was also readily apparent that children and youth were working for more systemic and institutional change after Katrina. Indeed, a handful of news stories covered newly developed, youth-led grassroots organizations that were formed after the storm. Specifically, the coverage we reviewed focused on three organizations created by children to help with Katrina and any future disasters: RandomKid, a nonprofit focused on empowering “any random kid to solve real problems” (RandomKid 2010, n.p.); Kid4Kid, a nonprofit where “every child is important and can make a difference” (Kid4Kid 2017, n.p.); and Kids To The Rescue, formed to help kids to “learn the value of giving, not just in times of disaster like Katrina but as part of our everyday life” (Kids To The Rescue 2017, n.p.). All three of these organizations are still active today. And it is worth noting that there were many other youth-led groups that were created after Katrina (see Abramson et al. 2014; Fothergill and Peek 2015), which did not appear

in the news coverage that we analyzed. What was clear in the analyses of this category of news coverage was that children and youth were attempting to bring fellow young people together to enact social or environmental change for the greater good.

6.4.2 How Old Were the Children Who Helped?

The news stories reviewed the actions of children as young as three years of age, to those who were in their late teens and graduating high school. Specifically, of the 108 articles, 34 (31 percent) focused on children of middle childhood (ages 6–11), 28 (26 percent) focused on teenagers (ages 15–17), and 17 (16 percent) focused on young teens (ages 12–14). Preschool children (ages 3–5) represented 5 percent of the sample, while children of multiple age groups represented 18 percent, and 4 percent of the articles did not specify an age (see Table 6.3).

6.4.3 Where Were the Children Who Helped and Who Were They Affiliated With?

The news stories we reviewed identified various states where children who sent help to hurricane-affected areas were located. Of the 108 articles, 16 described children's efforts from Florida, 12 from California, nine from Pennsylvania, and eight from Illinois. Most of the rest of the articles depicted children's help from various locations across the United States (see Table 6.4). Interestingly, four of the articles represented efforts among children in Canada, but no other foreign nations were mentioned in the media that we analyzed.

Table 6.3 Ages of children engaged in helping behaviors

Age group	Number of articles
Preschool (3–5)	5
Middle childhood (6–11)	34
Young teens (12–14)	17
Teenagers (15–17)	28
Multiple age groups	20
Not specified	4

Source: Authors' creation

Table 6.4 Number of articles by state where remote helping efforts were initiated

Location	Number of articles
Florida	16
California	12
Pennsylvania	9
Illinois	8
Multiple locations across the United States	3
Maine	3
Virginia, Massachusetts, Indiana, Georgia, Canada	4 articles each
Maryland, Iowa, Alabama, Ohio, Washington, Oklahoma, Missouri, Minnesota	2 articles each
Utah, New Jersey, South Dakota, Idaho, Texas, New York	1 article each

Source: Authors' creation

Some of the news coverage focused on children and youth traveling from outside the hurricane-affected region to Louisiana and Mississippi to provide hands-on help. Of the news articles we reviewed, nine described the efforts of children who traveled to New Orleans to help and six described children who went to Mississippi to help.

The post-Katrina news coverage that we analyzed focused on the activities of individual children as well as on classes, schools, and organized groups of children and youth who helped after the storm. Over half of the articles (53 percent) focused on schoolchildren and how they worked through their schools or school districts to help provide relief. The rest of the articles mentioned churches and youth groups (8 percent), nonprofits (7 percent), or children's own organizations (2 percent) as organizations that the children were affiliated with. In addition, three children (3 percent) represented organizations that do not fit into the aforementioned categories. These included a hospital, an ambulance company, and a government organization. The rest (27 percent) were not specified or not applicable—for instance, some children raised money individually (see Table 6.5).

6.4.4 When Did Children Help?

As noted previously, most of the articles we reviewed were published in the immediate aftermath of Katrina or in the first few years following the storm. Accordingly, coverage focused on what children were doing to

Table 6.5 Types of organizations children represented

Organization type	Number of articles ^a
School/school district	59
None specified/not applicable	30
Church/youth group	9
Nonprofit	8
Own organization	3
Other	3

Source: Authors' creation

^aThe total exceeds 108 as some articles mentioned more than one organization

assist in terms of initial emergency response versus short- or longer-term recovery efforts. Emergency response, which represents 43 percent of when children's helping behaviors took place, includes those actions and activities that occurred anywhere from zero to less than six weeks after the event. Short-term response, representing 31 percent of the articles, includes those where the helping occurred anywhere from six weeks up to one year after the event, as well as those that were written in 2005, but did not specify an exact time frame. Long-term response, encompassing 20 percent of articles, includes those where the helping occurred one year or longer after the event. Six articles, or 6 percent, did not specify when the helping occurred (see Fig. 6.2).

6.4.5 Which Organizations Did Children Contribute To?

While the majority of articles (51 percent) did not specify an organization that children contributed to, 38 (34 percent) named nonprofit/community-based organizations; of those donations, 65.8 percent were to the Red Cross. The rest of the articles mentioned schools (5 percent), relief funds (3 percent), children's own organizations (3 percent), and churches/youth groups (2 percent) as the types of organizations that the children contributed to. In addition, 3 percent of the articles described contributions to organizations that do not fit into the aforementioned categories, including FEMA, Scholastic Book Clubs, and an unincorporated volunteer group (see Table 6.6).

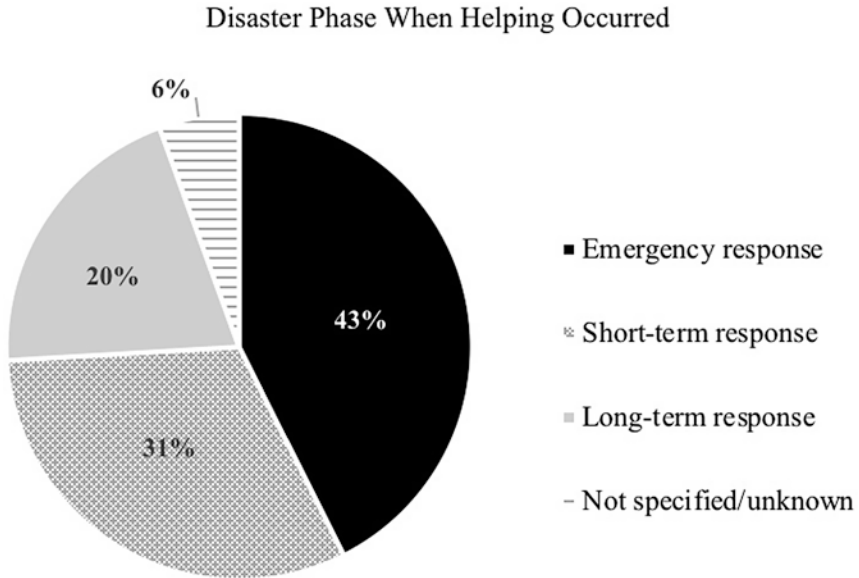


Fig. 6.2 Disaster phase when helping occurred. (Source: Authors' creation)

Table 6.6 Types of organizations children contributed to

Organization type	Number of articles ^a
None specified/not applicable	57
Nonprofit	38
School/school district	6
Relief funds	3
Own organization	3
Other	3
Church/youth group	1

Source: Authors' creation

^aThe total exceeds 108 as some articles mentioned more than one organization

6.4.6 A Sum Total of Children's Contributions

We concluded our analyses of the news coverage by attempting to sum up the tangible outcomes that resulted from children's post-Katrina helping efforts and their bottom-up organizing activities. Table 6.7 lists the things that children generated for others—which as previously discussed,

Table 6.7 Outcomes produced

Outcome	Details
Financial contributions	Over \$471 million was raised
School supplies	Approximately 50,700 backpacks, plus 90 boxes full of backpacks; approximately 700 backpacks' worth of school supplies, plus \$2000 worth of supplies
Books	23,000 books plus 400 "reading kits"
Toys	14,351 toys, plus 45 boxes' worth, \$6000 generated for toys, and 170 "fun boxes" (kits with toys and other entertainment)
Necessities	200 toiletry kits; trailer full of bottled water; 2 truckloads of clothing; 500 hams for holidays; 2000 meals; 130 bricks for rebuilding
Labor power	Manual labor, including contributing to rebuilding efforts, cleaning/clearing debris, distributing supplies, and helping plant food gardens
Volunteer hours and other non-material contributions	Time spent with/reading to children and families; cards and letters to children; vacation for affected teenagers; Christmas party for children living in FEMA trailers

Source: Authors' creation

included raising money and collecting school supplies, books, toys, and other basic necessities (food, water, clothing, shelter, and toiletries)—as well as contributing labor and other services, such as reading to children and providing consolation.

According to our analyses, in terms of monetary assistance, children donated or raised over \$471 million dollars after Katrina. School supplies were a common donation that children helped garner for Katrina survivors; the articles we reviewed described a total of 50,700 backpacks, plus 90 boxes full of backpacks, along with 700 backpacks full of supplies, and \$2000 worth of school supplies gathered by children and youth. Children helped generate over 14,000 toy donations, plus 45 boxes full of toys, \$6000 worth of toys, and 170 entertainment kits assembled by one school (Hussey 2005). Children organized the collection of over 23,000 new and used books and 400 new reading kits (DeFour 2011) after Katrina. Necessities offered included 200 toiletry kits (Kilbride 2005), a trailer full of bottled water, two truckloads of clothing, 500 hams for the holidays (Frazier 2007), 2000 meals, and 130 bricks for rebuilding (Smith 2006).

Children did much more than collect and distribute material donations, however. They also gave of their labor and time. Of the articles reviewed, 18 described children volunteering their labor to help with rebuilding efforts, cleaning and clearing debris, distributing supplies, and planting food gardens. Children also engaged in extensive volunteer efforts after the storm, including helping to raise people's spirits by creating artwork to send to children in affected areas (Averill 2005); sending cards and letters to children (Johnson 2005; Ramirez 2005; Cho 2005); organizing a short vacation for affected teenagers (Weingarten 2007); and planning a Christmas party for children living in FEMA trailers (Frazier 2007).

We categorized articles that specified a total monetary donation, results of a fundraising effort, or listed the number of goods donated by outcome and then added the totals together to give an overall sense of what children did after Katrina. Of course, this is an incomplete listing as we were only able to draw on the coverage available to us, and we know from our own research and experiences after Katrina that children did far more than was captured in these 108 news articles. Nevertheless, the sum total of what was covered by the media and summarized in Table 6.7 was still impressive in quantity and quality.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter builds upon a growing body of literature that clearly demonstrates that children are highly capable and creative in the face of disaster (see Peek et al. 2018 for a recent review of this wave of research activity). Drawing on a dataset of news coverage of children's helping behaviors after Katrina, our analyses demonstrate how non-disaster affected children across the US contributed to post-Katrina response and recovery efforts. We found that children from age three onward did a range of things including making personal monetary donations and raising financial contributions, gathering necessary supplies and other goods, assisting with cleanup and rebuilding efforts, and otherwise working to improve present and future conditions for children and adults of the Gulf Coast.

While some of the activities that the children engaged in are conventional in that they mirror forms of help that adults often offer after disaster, these analyses demonstrate that children also can take charge after disaster. Children engaged in various child-centered helping behaviors including donating and gathering up various items that they knew would be meaningful to those of their same age range. They also collectively acted to educate and engage others in bottom-up collective organizing for social change. Perhaps most importantly, these stories demonstrate that children can and do make a real and potentially lasting difference after disaster. Further, this underscores why children should be treated as active agents, not as passive or uninterested observers (Pugh 2014).

At the same time, children are not isolated or acting independently most of the time. Indeed, our review of the media coverage showed that children often initiated helping behaviors, but they were also embedded within schools, churches, nonprofits, and other organizations that helped facilitated their post-disaster helping behaviors. In addition, often times children's help was geared toward supporting already-established or newly emergent organizations.

We argue that understanding children's helping behaviors—including those emergent or spontaneous behaviors as well as ones encouraged within organizational contexts—has important implications for how disaster resilience is fostered at a grassroots level. Just as adults regularly express a desire to help after a disaster (and disappointment when they are not allowed to do so) (see Steffen and Fothergill 2009), children also share a similar impulse and may too be frustrated if they are not able to find an outlet to help. It is thus crucially important that emergency managers and others who respond to crisis anticipate that children may want to help, and work to make space for the range of helping behaviors that children may wish to engage in or contribute to after disaster.

Although Katrina still stands as a distinctly devastating event in our national history, we are living in an era of more frequent and intense disasters. With the increased number of these events, it is all the more likely that this and future generations of children will continue to be engaged in pre- and post-disaster helping behaviors. Accordingly, we call for more nuanced analyses of how cultural, social, political, and technological practices and values within communities and broader societies influence

children's participation in disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation strategies as well as in disaster response and recovery. How do these different structures encourage or constrain their voices, actions, and involvement at local, regional, and national levels? How might our traditional means of data collection, reporting, and analysis also bias our understanding of children's responses to crisis? Anderson (2005) previously observed that children are often excluded from these very conversations about hazards and disasters (and other issues of social importance) because they cannot vote and are rarely included in decision-making processes. Similarly, children are often overlooked in terms of their contributions to civil society or not trusted as agentic thinkers, perhaps rendering them as invisible agents in bottom-up responses to crisis.

Moreover, the complexity of children's experiences, actions, and group characteristics require further investigation. Although Katrina was perhaps the most obviously racialized disaster of modern history (Dyson 2006), the news media rarely identified the race of the children who were helping or the race of those who they were working to help. Similarly, we know little about the motivations for the children's helping behaviors, nor whether those behaviors in the immediate aftermath of the storm translated into longer-term personal or social transformations.

Although gaps in knowledge persist, it is clear that there has been movement for a more grassroots, inclusive, child-centered disaster risk reduction agenda in recent years, such as the efforts witnessed at the Child and Youth Forum of the Third United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai, Japan (Cumiskey et al. 2015). At that conference, young people from around the world made their desire to become critical players in disaster risk reduction apparent. How much systemic change will result from that action is still an open question. What is clear, however, is that both disaster-affected and non-disaster-affected children can contribute in meaningful ways to reducing risk and supporting those who have lived through crisis. This chapter has shown that non-disaster affected children raised their hands and were ready to help after Katrina, and their contributions were substantial. Recognizing these contributions represents an important step toward further legitimizing the space they deserve to hold in civic society and democratizing discourses around disasters.

Notes

1. Oronde is a pseudonym. He was a participant in a study focused on children's long-term recovery in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina (see Fothergill and Peek 2015).
2. For more information, visit <http://therethinkers.org/>.
3. For more information on the special issue, visit <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7721/chilyoutenvi.18.issue-1>.
4. The larger dataset includes 205 news stories regarding children's helping behaviors in response to some of the costliest and deadliest disasters of the early twenty-first century, including the 9/11 terrorist attacks, 2004 Hurricane Charley, 2004 Hurricane Ivan, 2004 Hurricane Wilma, 2004 Indian Ocean Earthquake and Tsunami, 2005 Hurricane Katrina, 2005 Hurricane Rita, 2008 Hurricane Ike, 2010 Haiti Earthquake, 2010 British Petroleum (BP) Oil Spill, 2011 Japan Earthquake and Tsunami, 2011 Joplin Tornado, and 2012 Superstorm Sandy. We focus specifically on Hurricane Katrina in this chapter as the bulk of the media coverage (108 articles, or nearly 53 percent of all the articles that we found) concentrated on that disaster. Given space constraints with this chapter, we plan to complete cross-disaster and cross-national analyses of the additional media coverage in future work.

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