

Habitat for Humanity's Response to the Haiti Disaster

"How can I help the earthquake victims in Haiti?" is a question you may be asking. Financial support is the most pressing need at this time.

According to Mont Arnold, executive director of LaGrange County Habitat for Humanity, one way to "stretch" your donation is to utilize NAP tax credits available to residents of Indiana.

Donations to LaGrange County Habitat for Humanity that are labeled "Haiti Relief Fund" will be sent directly to Habitat for Humanity International. Donations of \$100 or more qualify for a NAP tax credit for the value of 50% of the donation. For further information, call the LCHFH office at 463-8519.

Habitat International plans a threefold attack: 1) mobilizing people to clear the way for shelter construction and home rehabilitation; 2) distributing building materials and tools in shelter kits; 3) construction of transitional housing.

The cleanup: To clear the way for home repair and construction, Habitat for Humanity plans to mobilize people to remove debris and salvage materials that can be recycled in new shelter. Working with other organizations, these activities could include a "cash for work" component that would organize local people in affected neighborhoods and provide them with tools such as shovels, wheelbarrows and crowbars. This involvement in productive activity provides a small influx of cash to those affected by the disaster to help them meet other basic needs and also contributes to their mental health by providing a positive, active opportunity to help with recovery.

Shelter kits: Shelter kits include building materials and tools and are designed to help families and neighborhoods make immediate repairs. Typically, the kits include items such as wall panels, roofing sheets, hurricane straps, and hammer and nails. For the past three years, Habitat for Humanity has offered vocational education programs in Haiti, meaning that it now has a cadre of certified masons and carpenters to assist families in Port-au-Prince.

Transitional shelter: Habitat for Humanity also plans to repair and rebuild housing, using a transitional-shelter model. Small transitional shelters can be built quickly and provide permanent base structures that can be expanded over time. The initial transitional shelter will meet Sphere humanitarian standards of adequate living space and provision of water and sanitation. Given Haiti's history of being affected by natural disasters, the structures will be designed with hurricane- and earthquake-resistant features.