

Mutual Aid Disaster Relief



*Solidarity
not
Charity!*

Why “not charity”?

- Hierarchical relationships, based on class and race, forced into light by a disaster, are only reinforced by charitable institutions unless they address privilege and power.
- Charitable organizations refuse to align themselves with the populations they are serving and fail to share power with those they are purportedly helping.
- These groups in effect collude with and perpetuate oppression, human rights abuses, and reinforce a sense of powerlessness.
- It is patronizing, selfish, creates a sharp dividing line between those who have and those who do not, solidifies disaster survivor's position as needy, helpless victims, and further entrenches the existing socio-economic order.
- These charitable organizations' self-proclaimed neutrality, and their position of superiority furthers the continuation of oppressed peoples' marginalization.
- Although at times filling necessary functions, these large institutions nevertheless become tools of oppression by defining individuals and communities' needs for them, rather than listening and responding to people's self-determined needs.





Why “not charity”?

- ▶ Their vertical model is not effectively responsive to the self-determined needs of the people it serves.
- ▶ Charity does not question existing unjust relationships in society. It takes them for granted, and in fact, it reinforces them by perpetuating a sense of superiority among those who give aid and a sense of inferiority among those who receive it. Although in close proximity, these two groups exist in worlds apart.
- ▶ Given an elevated position of power, those who engage in charity have no accountability to disaster survivors, which leads them to invalidate the needs of those they are supposed to serve, ignore the knowledge, skills, capabilities and resources of survivors, and even undermine the organization's own mission.
- ▶ People impacted by disasters have more of a stake in their own survival and well-being than well-intentioned paternalistic givers of charity, and these people will firmly grasp the tools to participate in a communal recovery given the chance. Survivors of disasters look for accomplices who can assist them in achieving this communal recovery without imposing the stigma of needing assistance.



Solidarity, what does it mean?

- ▶ The understanding that we too, just like those we are assisting, are exploited by capitalism and the state creates the conditions for partnership, solidarity and mutual aid to arise.
- ▶ Work to include survivors of disasters *as equals*, which necessitates sharing power.
- ▶ Offers opportunities for meaningful, authentic participation to disaster survivors.
- ▶ Self-determination and agency are critical in this process.
- ▶ Breaks down the borders between volunteers and those impacted by disasters via a two way mutual exchange that involves mutual giving, mutual gratitude, listening, trust, and being affected, and blurring the dividing line between service providers and service recipients.
- ▶ Undermines false notions of superiority and inferiority among givers and receivers of aid.

Solidarity, what does it mean?

- ▶ Grounding our work in socio-economic realities of oppression and inequality and resistance to these realities.
- ▶ One component of this approach is a self-awareness of the role that some of us may play in perpetuating relationships of inequality and a willingness to attempt to use the social rewards of being part of an oppressor class to spread resources to support people's survival and self determination.
- ▶ Those impacted by disasters are not seen as passive consumers of assistance, empty vessels to be filled with water or blankets. They are seen as powerful actors with their own desires and their own skills and resources, but oppressed by disaster capitalism and aloof, unresponsive, or deliberately antagonistic state power.



Solidarity, what does it mean?

- ▶ In prioritizing asking, listening, learning, working with, and sharing power with impacted individuals and communities, it largely eliminates bureaucracy in the process.
- ▶ Offers disaster survivors a dignified path towards a communal recovery supported by allies and accomplices.

