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Nonprofits can help recovery. They need our help first. | **Commentary**

By Dr. Elly Du Pré | Guest Columnist
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ORLANDO, FL — Nonprofits will help us recover from this pandemic.

Once again, Florida is an epicenter of a natural disaster. What do we know from our experiences with hurricanes that we can apply to the Covid-19 pandemic? We know the power of community.

For many of us in Florida, our first experience with a natural disaster was a hurricane. When Hurricane Andrew hit Miami-Dade County in 1992, it was a surreal experience. One day we were living in paradise. The next morning we awoke to the unimaginable.

But the community pulled together. The recovery was based largely on nonprofit organizations — both the existing ones and the ones formed especially to plan for recovery as well as improving our ability to withstand the next onslaught.

Nonprofits are America’s unique invention, part of our heritage, one of our most precious gifts to the world. Helen Keller, the deaf-blind icon of the 20th century who devoted her life’s work to nonprofits, said it best: “Alone we can do so little. Together we can do so much.” That is the very spirit that gave birth to nonprofits — a sense that together we can solve everyday problems.

Currently, Congress and the president are creating economic stimulus plans literally to save our country. These plans focus on large corporations, considered too big to be permitted to fail. In Florida alone there are 69,130 active nonprofit organizations, employing 7% of the workforce and contributing \$86 billion in annual revenues. Individually they are small, with small cash reserves. Collectively, they also are too big to fail.

COVID-19 is vastly more devastating than a hurricane. We can’t drive out of it to a safe place with gas and hot coffee. This pandemic has no such lifeboat.

But COVID-19 is similar to hurricanes in the reliance we will place on nonprofits to provide recovery, and resilience, and planning for better preparation next time. Nonprofits are the core of our country’s resilience.



Independent Sector, the national organization of nonprofits, foundations and corporations is calling on Congress for a \$60 billion stimulus package to protect the very existence of nonprofits, a sum similar to what is being given to the airline industry. <https://bit.ly/2J27MXb>

The 17 members of Florida Agencies Serving the Blind are working remotely, using telephones and online teaching tools to stay in touch with parents of blind babies, youth, working age adults and seniors to support their independent living, employment and school success.



Our work depends equally on contracts with our partner, the State Division of Blind Services, and your donations. You also can help by contacting your elected representatives to urge support for the stimulus package for nonprofits.

As we learn that our civic duty requires “social distancing,” we also realize that each of us is integral to the survival of our communities. We are responsible for each other. Nonprofits gather all that individual effort and the result is a better life for all.

The author is the executive director of Florida Agencies Serving the Blind.

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