



Utilizing Stories for Resilience: Shaping Public Library Services in the Wake of Disaster

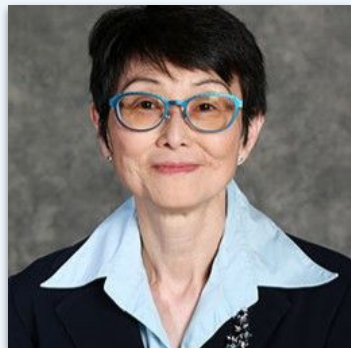
2015-2024

Kentucky Public Library Association Conference

February 20, 2025



About Us



Feili Tu-Keefner
University of South Carolina



April Hobbs
MUSC Libraries



Dr. Marcia A. Mardis
Florida State University



Dr. Denise Gomez
Florida State University



Denise Lyons
Commissioner/State Librarian
Kentucky Department for
Libraries and Archives



Dr. Faye Jones
Florida State University

Research Locations

Studies from 2015-2024: Focused on People, Partnerships, and Communications

<u>South Carolina (2015-2017)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● <u>Focus group meetings</u>● <u>Survey</u>	Flooding, Hurricanes,
<u>Houston, TX (2018-2019)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● <u>Focus group meetings</u>	Hurricane [Harvey]
<u>Northern California (2022)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● <u>Focus group meetings</u>● <u>Interview</u>● <u>Informal discussions</u>	Wildfires
<u>Kentucky (2023)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● <u>Focus group meetings</u>● <u>Interviews</u>● <u>Informal discussions</u>	Tornadoes (West) Flooding/Mudslides (East)
<u>Southern California (2024)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● <u>Focus group meetings</u>● <u>Interviews</u>● <u>Informal discussions</u>	Multiple disasters including floods, fire, extreme heat, earthquakes, etc.



Crisis Leadership

1. **Sense Making:** Grasping Crises as They Unfold
 2. **Decision Making and Coordinating:** Shaping the Crisis Response
 3. **Meaning Making:** Constructing a Crisis Narrative
 4. **Ending a Crisis:** Managing Accountability
 5. **Learning and Changing:** From Crisis to Reform
- 

Emotional Intelligence at work

- **Self-Awareness**: The ability to recognize and understand your moods, emotions, and drives, as well as their effect on others
- **Self-Regulation**: The ability to control or redirect disruptive impulses and moods, the propensity to suspend judgment- to think before acting
- **Motivation**: A passion to work for reasons that go beyond money or status, a propensity to pursue goals with energy and persistence
- **Empathy**: The ability to understand the emotional makeup of other people, skill in treating people according to their emotional reactions
- **Social Skill**: Proficiency in managing relationships and building networks, an ability to find common ground and build rapport

Great Library Ideas

- Most everyone waived fees/forgiveness
- Virtual programming including storytimes
- Postcards for Responders – community can write thank you notes to responders
- LIS Programs – Resilience Hub Infrastructure training, libraries as a community hub in Sonoma County, CA
- Staff participate in Emergency Services Training, Disaster Training
- Disaster Recovery Collection – building houses, wildfire landscaping, etc.



The Healing Library is a series of kits designed to make a family's journey of healing following a trauma easier to navigate and personalize. Designed with the intention of being lent out by libraries the materials for these scalable kits are available for free to download and assemble yourself.

<https://www.thehealinglibraryus.com>

Emotional Drain & Empathy

- **"Social worker from Kaiser [helpful]." Library Staff, 2022**
- **"Try to say no as little as you can." Library Staff, 2022**
- **"And we communicated with staff about practicing empathy and having additional patience during these fire events; to be ready for people who are under an extreme amount of stress when coming into our buildings to just be ready to accommodate as much as we possibly can." Library Staff, 2022**
- **"We had talked about starting a grief support group, but somebody already started one, so now I don't have to. But we do have the books on starting a grief support group, and I've shared it on our website, on our Facebook, and I'm going to keep sharing it." Library Staff, 2023**

Recommendations

- Deliver collaborative real-time health information services via online platforms
- Develop partnerships before a crisis happens, including what systems and structures would offer the most flexibility and what you have in hand
- Educate the community to be prepared (scan documents, have important info in multiple places). “Survivors will tell you to prepare.” Library Staff, 2022
- Support ongoing continuing education for staff and managers; specific areas included de-escalation, HR, self-care, and technology training
- Connect with health sciences librarians and social workers in responding to the community members’ information needs

Top Tips

1. Establish partnerships with multiple organizations and government agencies, maintaining solid, long-term relationships to facilitate emergency response and recovery
2. Apply multiple channels (including social media) and technology for information distribution and services
3. Prepare reliable, easy-to-understand resources in multiple languages to provide information services on site and remotely
4. Develop user-friendly training materials on how to use online information related to disasters and health
5. Better educate librarians for community engagement with knowledge and skills to recognize the importance of public libraries as community catalysts that can vitally aid in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery
6. Team up health sciences librarians and public librarians to deliver real-time health information services via multiple channels; can also partner with social workers and mental health professionals for both community and staff

Challenges

Lack of Technology

- “There's a bunch of people who didn't have digital literacy.” Library Administrator 3, 2022
- “Cellphone 101 use because we had a lot of people who don't have any tech skills before the fire...we always offer to help people with their tech devices. But this was a concentrated, while I was at the shelter.” Library Administrator 3, 2022
- “We spent a lot of time helping folks navigate FEMA and upload pictures. That was a big one. They had no idea how to copy machine scans and upload it...A lot of people didn't even have an email address. They didn't know how.” Library staff 1, Perry, 2023

Equity of Access

- “People could utilize our internet connection and our computers...we always provide Internet access and connectivity but we kind of had to tweak that a little bit to respond to the need.” Administrator 1, 2018
- “A classic example would be, you know, issuing a personal library card. And if you ask a person who has been evacuated from their home, and they're in a parking lot, I need proof of address, and they don't know the status of their home. That's not helping anybody.” Library Director, 2022
- “...People would stop and I'd be working here and they would need copies or faxing or whatever, and I would do that for them. And if it was tornado related, I didn't charge them anything for it. I still have people that are coming in and doing tornado related business, and I still don't charge them.” Library Staff, 2023

Strengthening Community Resilience:

> Crisis

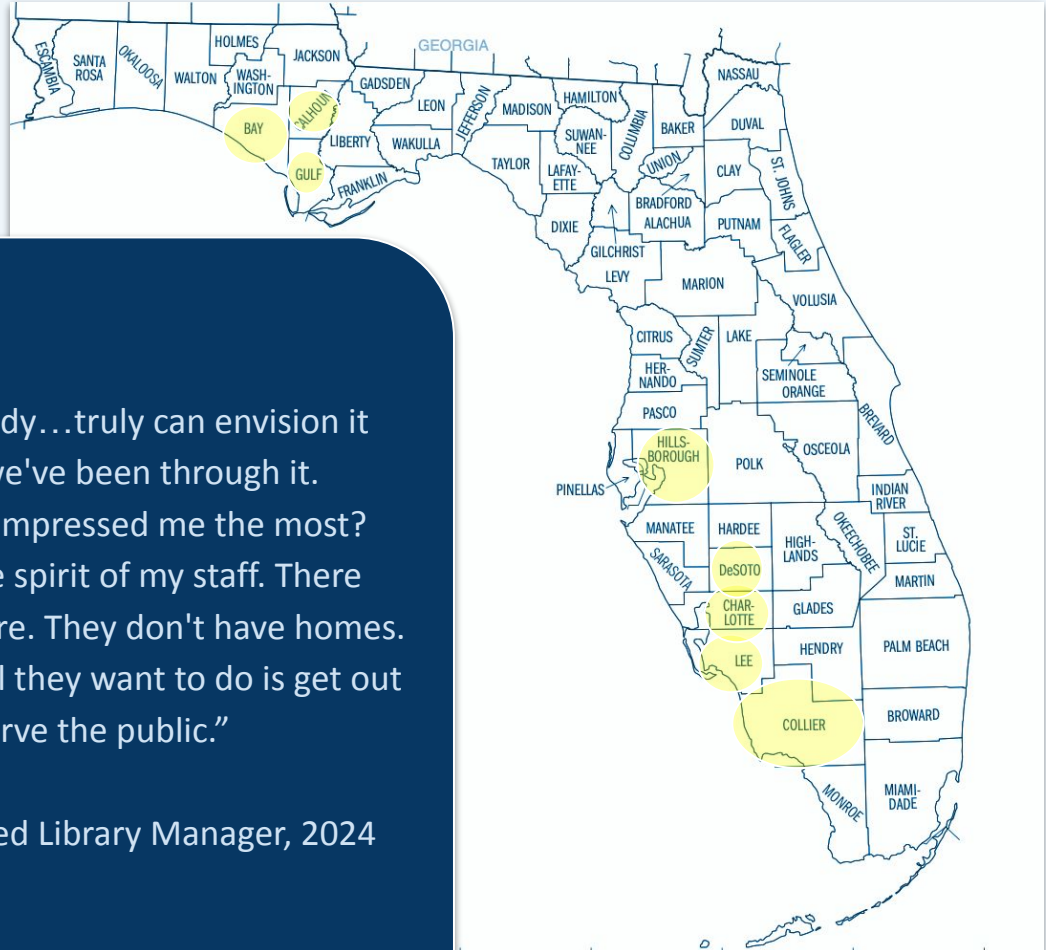
>> Climax

>>> Resolution



“Nobody...truly can envision it until we've been through it. What impressed me the most? It's the spirit of my staff. There they are. They don't have homes. And all they want to do is get out and serve the public.”

Affected Library Manager, 2024



Research Locations

Studies 2018-ongoing: Focused on People, Partnerships, and Communications

<u>Florida Panhandle (2018-2020)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● <u>Focus groups</u>● <u>Interviews</u>	<i>Rural Libraries and Disasters: Investigating Resiliency in the Digital Environment and Beyond</i> Hurricane Michael (Calhoun, Bay, Gulf Counties)
<u>Florida (2020-Ongoing)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● <u>Surveys (Library Directors & EOC County Managers)</u>● <u>Focus group meetings</u>● <u>Interviews</u>● <u>Inclusive Disaster Planning Support</u>	<i>iSmart for Disasters: Exploring Smart and Connected Disaster Planning for Small and Rural Libraries</i> (IMLS LG-246371-OLS-20) Hurricanes, Hurricane Ian (Statewide, Lee, Collier, Charlotte, Hillsborough, DeSoto Counties)
<u>Florida, Calhoun County (2020 - Ongoing)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● <u>Secondary Analysis</u>● <u>Interviews</u>● <u>Resiliency hub co-design and planning</u>	<i>CIVIC Innovation Challenge</i> Hurricane Michael, Resiliency Hub (Calhoun County libraries, government, nonprofits, citizens)

Taking on New/Unexpected Tasks in Crisis

● "This last storm was a little crazy because we went and **prepped the shelters**, then we **worked the shelters**, we broke down the shelters, we **opened the children's camps** and got out to the public. So it's gonna change a little this time, because its recognized the number of things we've taken on...That other people need to step up now and help, like at the shelters and things."

● Manager of Libraries, 2024 ●

● "Library staff are often pulled when there is a...crisis...even with Covid, library staff were pulled and reassigned to process paperwork. So we're very useful in that capacity. They know that **we know how to process information, process people, process documents.**"

● Library Coordinator, 2024 ●

● "We're actually a part of the emergency services for (our) County. Our staff are actually activated, libraries are closed, and our staff, who have been pre-trained for shelters do shelter work or shelter managers. I think, actually, **most of the shelter managers in (our) county are library employees.** They're called up to service. And so it would be that role which is a big role. We have employees who are **specifically trained to work in the emergency operations center**, either in logistics, communications, or, like all of our PR folks, are called up, and they're working PR for the county. We have employees who are **called up for food service** for emergency personnel. So they're...very well integrated for that and for some of them for post disaster roles like this, **points of distribution employees.** And you know other logistics duties for like distribution of materials from the fairground.

● Library Director, 2024 ●

New/Unexpected Tasks in Crisis: *Shelters*



- "They actually are there...until the door is actually open so the public can go home. The streets are safe. Because you can't put public out until they are. And in this case, until you clean everything up"

Manager of Libraries, 2024



Florida's Bureau of Library Development · Follow

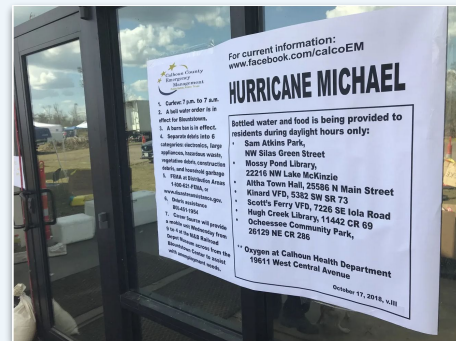
October 30, 2018 ·

Librarians at Mossy Pond Library used the building's full kitchen and generator to provide shelter and hot meals to victims of Hurricane Michael. At the height of the storm, the library sheltered 150 people.

<https://www.tallahassee.com/.../calhoun.../1682376002/>

- "We had at least one school shelter that allowed us to use the media center. And we had a children's librarian who was running children's programming...And welcoming adults who were in their playing cards and it was just sort of the relief center for... everybody...I think it helped a great deal with people's stress levels and ability to deal with that kind of situation. The person in charge of the shelter said that he had never really seen anything like it. You're in the middle of what really was a CAT 5 hurricane, whatever they say. And you've got people singing and laughing."

Manager of Libraries, 2024



New/Unexpected Tasks in Crisis: *Childcare*

- "Once some of our core services reopened, and once our buildings throughout the county reopened, they did offer childcare to all staff at one of our library locations, and I believe one of our parks locations as well."

● Branch Manager, 2024 ●

- "We are also now running the employees' kids camps...because, of course, employees will end up having to go to work when the schools are shut and there's nobody to take care of their kids."

● Manager of Libraries, 2024 ●

- "We also responded to childcare. So in the EOC our staff provides 24-7 child care to any responder that may need childcare. Most likely it's another county employee, and they're essential personnel. They're some type of emergency responder or someone else that works in the EOC, and they don't have someone at home to care for for their children under the age of 18, or they were not able to evacuate their family. So we did spend a couple of days providing childcare to those personnel."

● Branch Manager, 2024 ●

New/Unexpected Tasks in Crisis: *Call Centers*

● Call center call: "And now I'm on my rooftop in the middle of the hurricane. What can you do for me?' So you're trying to tell them, 'okay, this is what you need to do. This is how you shelter at this point.' And it's just trying to reassure them any way you can, while you're still taking the information that if it's a rescue or even if it turns into recovery. You're...taking that information so that somebody knows that this individual is in difficulty, and you'll be on the list to be checked."

● Library Director, 2024 ●

● "Our community and people that we've talked to know that we do call center. Even after the library is open and the call center hours are cut back, they'll call the library for the same information, or they'll want to talk to whoever they talked to last time. They'll make that connection, and that becomes their lifeline security. She's given me good information before, she's going to continue to give it to me. So we get a lot of that carry over phone calls, which...I never expected that to happen, but it does."

● Library Director, 2024 ●

● "We do participate in the briefing sessions in the emergency management EOC area and find out what's going on there. We also keep certain websites up, like the flood maps...weather radars, up on our screen so that we can say, okay, this is what's happening. These sort of predictions. Our road and bridges...highway patrol, Florida power and lights...All of those are represented within that EOC...They help support us with information that we don't have. And we're also passing along to them information..."

● Library Director, 2024 ●

Building Resiliency by Strengthening Communication

● "What we're trying to build right now is really to strengthen that resiliency, if you will, as a community to get them better communication and also that we can spread out further to help them."

● Manager of Libraries, 2024 ●

● "We are setting up Go Boxes so that we can get out to the community immediately with hot spots and Wi Fi and devices. We understand our buildings may not be open. Public still needs it, so we set up a number of locations immediately after the storm."

● Manager of Libraries, 2024 ●

● "(One library) opened ridiculously soon, amazingly soon they were out there with access in their parking lot...and they were packed. There were people all on the lawns, they brought chairs, they brought their own tables, they brought their devices because it was the only place that you could actually access the internet."

● Manager of Libraries, 2024 ●

● "We gave a list to the EOC...like large batteries, generators, backup power. Communications. Many, many, many different forms...redundancy for communications in case one doesn't work."

● Manager of Libraries, 2024 ●

Public Libraries Are Resiliency Hubs.



District 3 (Mossy Pond)

Community: •sparse population,
•predominantly white •median age 34 •high poverty •low educational attainment •low disability

District disaster impacts: wind damage, road debris, power outage, uninsured residents, unemployment, depopulation

Gaps: road block reporting, generator access, employment postings, telehealth, Spanish language versions of county and state documents, legal assistance, basic distribution



Thank you!
Questions?



TABLE ACTIVITY (15 mins)

1. Each table will have an assigned theme: **Technology**, **Access Equity**, **New Roles**, **Communication**
2. Take **3 minutes** to discuss who has a story related to that theme they'd like to share.
3. As the group member tells the story (**5 minutes max**), other group members actively listen either taking notes or listening closely. Consider the similarities and differences between that story and group members' own experiences.
4. After the story is complete, please ask the storyteller any clarifying questions to make sure everyone understands the story and how it relates to the theme. Then, as a group and using Crisis Leadership Principle 5: Learning and Changing, discuss:
 - What went wrong (there may be multiple answers and/or viewpoints on this question)?
 - What should be adapted to prevent similar crises from happening again?
 - What are the “must haves” vs the “nice to haves” in this solution?
 - What went right? How can that effort be recreated or sustained in the next disaster?

Be sure someone has been appointed your **scribe and speaker** to share this information!

5. **Report to the group!**

Discussion Questions

- What went wrong (there may be multiple answers and/or viewpoints on this question)?
- What should be adapted to prevent similar crises from happening again?
- What are the “must haves” vs the “nice to haves” in this solution?
- What went right? How can that effort be recreated or sustained in the next disaster?

More about Crisis Leadership and Storyelling

The power of storytelling in crisis leadership: Crisis communication lessons from the real world

<https://www.mindtools.com/ah183tc/storytelling-crisis-leadership>

“Storytelling as crisis leadership,” in *Crisis leadership: Using military lessons, organizational experiences, and the power of influence to lessen the impact of chaos on the people you lead* (by the Center for Creative Leadership, pp.24-26).

<https://www.ccl.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/crisis-leadership-center-for-creative-leadership-guidebook.pdf>

Crisis leadership lessons: Voices of experience from leaders in the Pacific Southwest region.

<https://www.schoolcrisiscenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/SMH-Crisis-Leadership-Lessons-Guide.pdf>

—

Antonacopoulou, E. P., & Sheaffer, Z. (2013). Learning in crisis: Rethinking the relationship between organizational learning and crisis management. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 23(1), 5-21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1056492612472730>

Boin, A., Hart, P., Stern, E., & Sundelius, B. (2016). *The politics of crisis management: Public leadership under pressure* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.