

# Youth service for hurt state

January 25, 2006  
Opinion

One of the bright spots after the arrival of hurricanes Katrina and Rita has been the enormously important role of volunteers from throughout America and the world, coming to Louisiana to help us through our worst trials.

Many of them have had to return to their regular jobs and lives, but with the support of the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, one program will provide an outlet for young people to continue to help in Louisiana for the long term.

City Year, the model for youth service organizations in America, was founded in Boston and has 16 branches around the country.

Among its founders was a Harvard University graduate student named Jennifer Eplett, the Baton Rouge civic leader whose husband is Sean Reilly, a member of the Louisiana Recovery Authority.

Jennifer Reilly has helped to bring City Year to Louisiana to provide volunteers to help children and families here.

The program's initial focus will be tutoring and mentoring children from low-income families. City Year plans to bring mental-health counselors to prepare volunteers to work with young children hit hard by the experiences of the past few months.

"Many of them believe this is a defining moment for their generation," Eplett Reilly said of the volunteers. "This is an American disaster warranting an American response."

Typically, a City Year organization takes about three years to put together for a new city, but organizers are trying to get that done in six months to deal with the urgent needs of south Louisiana. National foundations and the Baton Rouge Area Foundation have collaborated in funding this effort.

We commend them for their efforts.

There's a great deal to be done, and nothing beats the energy and idealism of young people. We need them, and we welcome City Year to Louisiana.