

Aiding residents new, old

Support groups convene to provide centralized help

BY WILLIAM CROYLE | ENQUIRER STAFF WRITER

COVINGTON - Nathaniel and Joshika Robertson lost everything after Hurricane Katrina ripped through their home in Violet, La.

They fled to Bay City, Texas, but were chased away again, this time by Hurricane Rita.

With their 8-month-old daughter, Nathalia, they moved to Independence to live with friends. And now, they've decided to stay in Northern Kentucky to start over.

That's why the Robertsons were at the Regional Poverty Resource Fair Saturday at Holmes High School. They have found jobs and an apartment in Erlanger. But they still need help.

"We had to come to terms with the fact that we lost things, but things can be replaced," Nathaniel said. "Now we're just trying to get back to normal."

The fair was sponsored by the Northern Kentucky branch of the NAACP and the Northern Kentucky Social Services Poverty & Hurricane Katrina Response Group.

About a dozen organizations including Catholic Social Services, Housing Authority of Covington and the Northern Kentucky Independent District Health Department gave people a single place to talk with several agencies.

"We not only have Katrina victims living here, but people say you can drive down the street here and see a 'Katrina' every day, meaning you can see people living the way those hurricane victims are living," said Jerome Bowles, president of the Northern Kentucky branch of the NAACP.

"It's important to remind the citizens of Northern Kentucky that these resources are available."

The four-hour event attracted 32 families in the first two hours. Children worked on crafts while parents talked to agency representatives.

"A lot of people we see live with a crisis every day and know what it's like to have to start over," said Rina Saperstein, program director at Welcome House, which helps homeless people. "As long as one of these agencies can give them some help, we don't care which one it is. These people need the support of the entire community."

The Robertsons said they will take parenting classes they learned about from Catholic Social Services. They said they were also hoping to find an agency that could help them pay rent.

Bowles said he plans to have this fair every year. The Robertsons said he should.

"What happened to us makes us appreciate what we had, but we're just looking at this as a new start in a different area," Joshika said. "And this fair helps."