

## **Local relief effort launched**

**By Katie Robinson**

**The Progress**

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Hurricane Katrina's devastation has left thousands in turmoil.

People are without food, without shelter, without the basic needs. These people need help and Chilliwack wants to be that help.

The Chilliwack Progress and local aid organization Hungry For Life International have once again joined forces to create the Neighbour to Neighbour Katrina Relief Fund raising funds for those hit by Katrina.

The Progress is acting as a conduit for those in the community wishing to assist those in need. And HFL, a non-government organization, will directly distribute all that is raised to its contacts in the region. But it was 20-year-old Tyler Robinson's desire to help that got the ball rolling.

Robinson watched Oprah Winfrey's in-depth coverage of the disaster Wednesday morning.

He saw the destruction and the grief, and instantly wanted to help.

"I felt like we really needed to get some aid going out here," said Robinson, who contacted The Progress with his desires. "If every person in Chilliwack donated a little bit, a dollar, five dollars, whatever, we could help these people start their lives again.

"People need to realize that this is a big devastation and the people there need our help -we can help them. And if it ever happened to us, we would want them to help. We would want them to care."

The Progress contacted HFL and in just a day HFL was able to create a partnership with the Genesis Church (a church of the same denomination as Chilliwack's Alliance Church) in Elberta, Alabama, which is already providing relief.

This church, with a congregation of just 500 people, is contributing \$10,000 a day in food and fuel. Everyday it trucks aid to Waveland, Mississippi, a town about 35 miles east of New Orleans that was practically washed off the map by Katrina. It has a medical team stationed there; it provides counselling and bereavement for those still in shock; it's constructed a makeshift shower and bathroom facility; it's provided 1,000 gallons of fuel to run large generators through the area; it's brought in baby food and clothes; and it feeds 3,000 people a day.

It also feeds 50 to 100 families twice a day in Baldwin County, and is looking for homes to place them all in.

"This disaster is more overwhelming than I ever anticipated for the United States.

Right now there's an inability to deal with the short term - the struggles are on the immediate. Babies are starving in the U.S. and families are displaced - these people need help now," said HFL's Dave Blundell.

HFL has a history of facilitating direct relationships with churches around the world to help people in need. It engages in one-to-one contact with other relief groups on the ground to ensure that any dollars raised here goes to the project and not to any organization costs. It helped The Progress distribute \$53,000 this past year in donations for tsunami relief in Sri Lanka. This relief effort however, is different.

"We usually focus on developing countries, poor countries," Blundell said. "Normally we don't do aid relief in the U.S. but it has to be treated the same because these need our help. We're building the relationships with churches out there, just the same as we did in Sri Lanka.

"It's fairly logistical and should be simple to do because it's so close to us. It's in our time zone."

And Robinson's grandmother Illana Bolwell couldn't be more pleased.

"It's like a personal connection we're making. It's ideal," she said. "I just hope other communities will pick up on it because if you think about it a dollar per person can make a huge difference for a lot of families out there."

Anyone wishing to make cash donations can go to Envision Credit Union and ask for the Neighbour to Neighbour Katrina Relief Fund.

The Progress is also encouraging schools, businesses and individuals to write letters of comfort and support for the victims, which it will help distribute.