

Some Affected by 9/11 Are Hard to Reach

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Byline: By DAVID W. CHEN

Body

A day after three major charities announced a last-minute extension for victims of the Sept. 11 terrorist attack to apply for emergency cash grants, charitable organizations and social service agencies scrambled yesterday to get the word out to a group that has probably received the least, and most contradictory, information to date: non-English-speaking immigrants.

But even with a two-week postponement of the deadline to March 8, some groups believe that logistically it is still too difficult to contact the tens of thousands of people in Lower Manhattan who have not applied. As a result, some groups said yesterday that they still thought the deadline was arbitrary and hasty, and therefore should be waived altogether.

Together, the three charities -- the American Red Cross, the Salvation Army and Safe Horizon -- have disbursed more than \$250 million in emergency assistance to 50,000 displaced workers and other individuals who lost income because of the attack. And on Feb. 8, the charities established a Feb. 22 cutoff date for applicants to make appointments, saying that it was time to shift attention from emergency assistance to long-term help.

On Thursday, though, the charities decided to postpone the deadline, in part because of concerns that some people were still unaware of the deadlines, or even of the programs. And yesterday, the Sept. 11 Fund -- which has been the primary source of money for Safe Horizon and has provided another \$70 million in assistance to displaced workers -- held a press conference to reach out to the ethnic press and emphasize that noncitizens, too, are eligible for assistance, regardless of their status.

Immigrant advocacy groups said that while they were pleased by the extension, they were still concerned that immigrants would be reluctant to apply by March 8 because of linguistic and cultural barriers.

"What we're hearing from community groups is that they are still reaching people every day who are unaware of the benefit programs and the eligibility requirements," said Margie McHugh, executive director of the New York Immigration Coalition. "So it's a slow process both to get the correct information, identify people who are eligible and arrange times for them to go to the centers."

While each charity has established its own eligibility criteria, the basic requirements have included anyone who worked below Canal Street, lost a significant portion of income or has been unemployed any time between Sept. 11 and either Dec. 31 or Jan. 11.

Business entities, by contrast, have no deadline, and in fact are eligible for assistance from additional sources, including the federal government, said Nicole Elkon, a spokeswoman for the 9/11 United Services Group, which is coordinating relief efforts among several charities.

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Jeanine Moss, a spokeswoman for the Sept. 11 Fund, said: "It's very challenging to establish the boundaries under which you can help people. We have a responsibility not only to help people, but also to keep faith with our donors and our donors' intentions."

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