Thanksgiving in the Rockaways

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Representatives of Occupy Sandy say they are in desperate need of one resource this Thanksgiving in their effort to help residents of the hurricane-ravaged Rockaways recover: Volunteers.

"We just need bodies," says Kei Dowea, a volunteer who has been helping out with the recovery effort in the Queens community for about two weeks. "We have had such an incredible response it just needs to be maintained. I've seen a slight decline in turnout in the last few days and what we really need are people in vehicles or in groups."

Dowea says volunteers can head to Saint Jacobi Lutheran Church at 5406 4th Street in Brooklyn where Occupy Sandy has a supply station to pick up goods and bring them out to the Rockaways.

Don't have a vehicle? Dowea says that isn't a problem.

"We just got two semis that delivered supplies to the church, so people are welcome to buy things and bring them out, but what we need desperately are the things we already have to be brought out there," she says. "Just come up here and we can get them a ride out to Queens."

Occupy has a list of specific goods that are needed in Queens.

Meanwhile, Greater New York For Change is championing a Change.org petition that is asking officials to deploy "red horse tents" in the Rockaways to give displaced residents a place to sleep, be warm and receive medical attention.

"Since Hurricane Sandy tore through New York City over two weeks ago, tens of thousands of people in the Rockaways have been living without heat, electricity, or running water â€” and now freezing temperatures could threaten their lives," reads the pettion.

Kate Linker, a board member of Greater New York for Change, says her group took part in a recent assessment of the conditions in the Rockaways with state Sen. Joe Addabbo's office.

"We were seeing what people needed," Linker says. "Some had electricity but no heat because their boilers had been destroyed by the flood. Some have torn out the flooded areas that are moldy, but they haven't gotten the money to make the units dwellable."

She says these warming tents would give people a safe place to stay after they have exhausted the charity of relatives, hotel money or other arrangements." She also thinks it would be a great way to bring centralized medical care to the people who need it most.

"A lot of people need medical help," she says. "Some of them have life threatening conditions that are not being treated. Other people have had their prescriptions run out or are suffering conditions due to being exposed to the weather."

Linker says she met a displaced Queens resident who is nine months pregnant and whose husband speaks no English. "These are the kinds of situations where people need help," she says.

Linker is calling on FEMA, the governor's office and anyone else in authority to get these warming stations deployed as soon as possible.

"FEMA has only been present to get people registered for claims that are secondary to flood insurance," Linker says. "They don't deal with larger issues. Things are quite uncoordinated and a lot of the public needs raised by this situation aren't being addressed. People are living in situations that people shouldn't live in."

Sen. Joe Addabbo says that his office has been assessing living conditions and trying to

provide medical care and connect people with resources.

"We are assessing when LIPA can bring power back to some of these areas," he says. "If it's not in the short term and we are talking weeks away, we are going to have to do more about providing secure living situations."

Addabbo says even in areas where things are returning to normal his office is hearing about increased health problems due to the storm. "If these living conditions stay the same, the health problems are going to worsen," he says. "We are hearing about kids who are back in school who are facing increasing asthma problems because of the debris leftover from the storm."

Addabbo says he is on near daily conference calls getting updates from the mayor, governor, FEMA, as well as the utilities and other agencies, but he knows that despite his best efforts his community needs more.

"Lots of constituents say they donâ€™t see their comunity in the news. I tell them it isn't about being in the news but about getting the services you need to rebuild," he says. "Let's just make sure all the agencies know what we need because the needs are different for Breezy Point to Howard Beach. Some places are worried about getting in contractors to do work while other places don't even have power."

Council members including Christine Quinn and Eric Ulrich were in the Rockaways today handing out turkeys. They issued these statements:

â€śAt a time when we should be giving thanks, too many New Yorkers, are still without basic essentials in Sandyâ€™s aftermath,â€ť said Speaker Christine C. Quinn. â€śTodayâ€™s turkey distribution will make sure New Yorkers can enjoy Thanksgiving and have a delicious holiday meal. The Council is proud to stand with the Met Council and do our part to help.â€ť

â€śThe Jewish community is a weave spoke in the rich cultural fabric of Far Rockaway, and too many of our Jewish brothers and sisters are suffering in the wake of Sandy,â€ť said Councilman Sanders. â€śI thank Speaker Quinn and the Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty for working with us to ensure that all the members of our community can enjoy a Thanksgiving meal this Thursday.â€ť

â€śThe Rockaway Peninsula has been devastated by Hurricane Sandy, and I thank Speaker Quinn and the Met Council for coming out and supporting the community during its time in need, especially during the holidays,â€ť said Council Member Eric Ulrich.

Photo: Gov. Andrew Cuomo helps distribute goods at the Far Rockaway Distribution Center. Provided by the office of Gov. Andrew Cuomo.

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Occupy Sandy

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