



Vol. 20, Fall 2019

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Rebuilding Homes • Nurturing Children • Responding Globally

Puerto Rico Hurricane Maria recovery partnership to continue

by Jenn Dorsch-Messler

The Puerto Rico District Board, at the recommendation of the District Recovery Committee, voted on September 21 to extend its partnership in ministry with Brethren Disaster Ministries to continue working on Hurricane Maria recovery. More than two years after the storm, it is estimated that there are still over 30,000 households across the island with blue tarps as roofs.

The BDM Rebuilding project, located in Castañer, covers an area where few other volunteer organizations are serving. BDM and Puerto Rico district staff and leadership developed a budget and strategy to extend the rebuilding work into the new year. The District Recovery Committee will continue its important work of approving and assigning funding for the cases that will be supported.

In order to stretch the value of funds donated to the Emergency Disaster Fund (EDF) to support volunteers, BDM was initially able to obtain, at no cost, about 60 percent of its construction materials through the FEMA VALOR (Voluntary Agencies Leading and Organizing Repairs) program. Since the end of VALOR in July 2019, all funding to support the work in Puerto Rico, including all construction purchases, is provided through the EDF.

The project extension allows it to remain open and to accept volunteers through May 2020. Volunteer groups of 5-6, typically serving two or more weeks, are urgently needed to fill the 2020 PR schedule. Interested individuals and groups should

contact Terry Goodger at tgoodger@brethren.org or 410-635-8730. BDM will continue to support a portion of volunteer travel costs based on the number of days worked and what is available from their home districts.

Preparing for future disasters: The threat of a possible impact by several strong storms during the 2019 hurricane season brought several revelations to light. The entire island tracked the projected paths and strengths of storms Dorian and Karen, especially during the brief period that Dorian was projected to follow Hurricane Maria's 2017 path across the island. Even the threat of such storms inevitably causes Maria survivors great anxiety along with the fear of a repeat of the experiences they went through. On the positive side, these recent alerts demonstrated the incredible progress made by the disaster networks of both the Puerto Rico district and the territory-wide voluntary sector in coordination and preparation prior to an event to ensure a more efficient response, if needed.



BDM volunteers take a break from framing a house in Puerto Rico.
Photo by Doretta Dorsch

CDS updates

CDS involved in shelter simulations

Children's Disaster Services leadership participated in a set of shelter simulations in Pennsylvania this past summer and a CDS team recently set up a childcare center in a shelter simulation in Montgomery County, Md. These teams used a Kit of Comfort—a specialized suitcase filled with activities—to help educate other emergency and disaster agencies about CDS and why responding to the specific needs of children in a disaster situation is important. Involvement in these types of events provides opportunities for awareness about CDS, our mission and how to get involved.

New flow for CDS training workshops

CDS completed a major overhaul of its volunteer training workshops in May 2019, in anticipation of the fall training season. A new flow for the training allows additional emphasis on the specialized role of CDS caregivers and on teamwork among diverse volunteers with rich background experience, as well as providing increased information that helps teams prepare for deployment. Training materials have been streamlined allowing CDS to reduce the training length from 27 hours to 24 hours while still including the shelter simulation overnight experience.

CDS Deployment Updates

Dayton, Ohio tornadoes—June 2019

Dayton, Ohio, was hit with multiple tornadoes on Memorial Day, resulting in significant damage and many families affected. Red Cross requested a CDS team to work in the shelters to provide care for the children. The team responded for six days and had 64 child contacts.

Gilroy Garlic Festival—July 2019

A CDS Critical Response Care (CRC) team deployed to Gilroy, Calif., in response to the mass shooting at a local festival that claimed lives and left many wounded. Red Cross requested the team to serve in a Family Assistance Center (FAC) set up

in an elementary school to provide childcare and resources to those affected by this tragedy.

"Praise God we had resources to be with those children who came. Not a one came in with a smile, but they all left with them. Not healed, but healing. Quite an experience." —Judy Lewis, CDS team member, Gilroy, Calif.

El Paso, Texas—August 2019

Within a week of the Gilroy team deployment, another mass shooting took place in El Paso, Texas, at a local Walmart. A CDS CRC team deployed to the city was present for eight days, supporting the community and helping the healing process begin for the children that sought their space in the resource center. The team saw 35 child contacts.

"We all felt mixed emotions from our hearts breaking for the families to thankfulness that we could be there for them." —Mary Geisler, project manager, El Paso



Beaumont, Texas: Laughter is contagious!
Photo by Judy Krase

Hurricane Dorian—September 2019

Two CDS teams deployed to North Carolina prior to Hurricane Dorian's expected landfall to be in position for the aftermath of what had been an unpredictable storm. Teams sheltered in place on location seeing a small number of children in the evacuation center. Once the storm passed, shelter numbers reduced quickly and the teams returned home. Two additional CDS teams were on standby for South Carolina, but as the storm's impact



A CDS volunteer finds a quiet space to read to a child in Dayton, Ohio.
Photo by Mary Geisler

was less than expected, they did not deploy.

Tropical Storm Imelda—September 2019

CDS deployed to Beaumont, Texas, to set up childcare centers in two locations. Beaumont bore the brunt of powerful Tropical Storm Imelda, whose unexpectedly high rainfall brought rapid flooding. The same community was flooded just two years earlier during Hurricane Harvey, so the children were especially vulnerable when faced with heavy rain and flooding. One parent stated that every time it rains hard, their child is afraid that they will have to escape the waters again. While they cannot stop the rain or prevent floods, CDS team members can provide a reassuring safe space for children experiencing those conditions, where they can feel loved and nurtured as they play. During 12 days in Beaumont, the team saw 185 children.

Sylmar, Calif.—October 2019

The CDS Southern California Rapid Response Team (RRT) deployed a childcare team, by request of the Los Angeles Emergency Management office, to a FAC in Sylmar, Calif., set up to assist families affected by the Saddleridge Fire which began on October 10 and forced 100,000 people to evacuate in the northern Los Angeles region. The team saw two children in three days. This was the first time in a long time the RRT was activated and they were ready to serve at a moment's notice.

CDS training workshops

When Winnie-the-Pooh had a most difficult day, his friend Piglet asked if there was anything he could do but Pooh didn't think Piglet could help. In the end, Piglet decided to sit alongside his friend, comforting without words and being a thoughtful presence. Pooh's difficult day started to improve because, as Piglet said, "Difficult days are so much easier

when you know you've got someone there for you."

We can take a cue from Pooh and Piglet on how CDS can be just what a child needs during times of disaster. Their little world can be disrupted like never before. The disruption in normal routines, loss of their favorite things and the fear of it happening again, can make for a most difficult day.

CDS caregivers are there for children on their difficult days, providing a thoughtful presence just like Piglet. What that may look like is simple: sitting alongside a child while they play or listening as they share their stories. But mainly it means showing love to a child in their most difficult days.

Would you like to care for a child impacted by disaster? If so, consider training with CDS in the coming season. Volunteers are always needed and all you need is a heart for children and a willingness to be present. For more information, contact cds@brethren.org or visit www.brethren.org/cds.



A child finds comfort in the individual attention of a CDS caregiver.

Photo by Lorna Grow

Spring 2020 training schedule Registration now open

February 29 & March 1—La Verne, California

La Verne Church of the Brethren
2425 E Street
La Verne, CA 91750

March 6 & 7—Bridgewater, Virginia

Bridgewater Church of the Brethren
420 College View Drive
Bridgewater, VA 22812

March 27 & 28—Lombard, Illinois

York Center Church of the Brethren
1S071 Luther Avenue
Lombard, IL 60148

April—Oklahoma

Dates and specific location to be determined

May 1 & 2—Rochester, New York area

Victor United Methodist Church
106 E Main Street
Victor, NY 14564

Go to www.brethren.org/cds/training/ for updates.

American Red Cross honors CDS volunteers

When Children's Disaster Services project manager Mary Geisler served in June 2019 in a shelter for survivors of an EF4 tornado in Dayton, Ohio, the last thing she expected was to receive special recognition for serving disaster survivors. The fact that the recognition came on her birthday made the experience even more special.

Geisler was awarded a Challenge Coin from the American Red Cross Northern Miami Valley Ohio Chapter, an honor given to those who provide services above and beyond the call of duty to make a difference in the lives of others. Responding humbly to the surprise award, Mary said, "I never thought I would ever receive the coin. I was shocked and honored. It meant so much to have CDS recognized for our role with Red Cross. I told the team it was for all of our hard work,

not just mine. A project manager is only as strong as the team itself. To be given the coin was something I will never forget."

The CDS team that recently served in Beaumont, Texas, was also commended for the service they provided following Tropical Storm Imelda. Dave Gray, of the Red Cross Beaumont/Orange Texas district, remarked to CDS project manager Martha Reish, "The work that you and CDS do for the children and the community is so valuable and great to our clients. I have enjoyed working with and alongside CDS over the years. I do have to say, that your group was definitely the most enjoyable group I have ever worked with. Y'all made our day with your smiles, hugs, banter, and laughter."

These are just two examples of the impact that team members have on

the communities in which they work. We appreciate these formal recognitions, but equally special are the smiles on the faces of the children and parents/guardians whose lives are touched by CDS volunteers.



CDS volunteer Mary Geisler holds the Red Cross Challenge Coin presented to her in Dayton, Ohio.

Photo courtesy of Mary Geisler

Sharing deep down goodness

by Lisa Crouch

Bring love wherever you go. Shine light wherever it's dark. Leave blessings wherever you've been. Be kind wherever you are.

—Mary Davis, Irish activist and CEO of Special Olympics

We continue to see increasing violence, shootings and disparaging news that may leave us feeling sad and hopeless. Let's find ways to share goodness in our day-to-day life that can be spread like a light in the darkness.

I recently heard the term “sharing deep down goodness” and really like what it portrays. CDS volunteers demonstrate sharing deep down goodness. Our volunteers set their lives aside to go into a disaster situation to serve children in conditions that can be less than desirable. Yet time and again, these

volunteers want to be deployed. They will tell you that they see the difference they make when a child smiles again for the first time since the disaster happened. In a CDS childcare center, children are welcomed with warm smiles and an environment that harbors the deep down goodness that allows a child to feel safe and loved.

Melodie Bernhard, a CDS volunteer who responded to North Carolina for Hurricane Dorian, said this about her first time deploying:

“It was remarkable, energizing and eye-opening. The children filled my heart. This experience centered me and reminded me that I have so much more than most people in the world. After this, I got to come home



CDS volunteer Melodie Bernhard (r), with Toni Custer, on her way to her first deployment. Photo courtesy of Toni Custer

to a house, clean bed and plentiful food but many in our country do not. It made me think, ‘How can I be the hands and feet of Jesus?’”

How can you be the hands and feet of Jesus? What can you do to share some deep down goodness to others?

Rebuilding updates

Carolinas

BDM rebuilding work continues in North and South Carolina with Hurricanes Matthew and Florence recovery. BDM hopes to complete the scheduled work for families in the town of Nichols, S.C., at the beginning of 2020 or sooner. Two One SC Fund grants are partially paying for the construction materials for three Nichols homes. Volunteer groups are also still serving families in Robeson County, N.C., where cases are being received through a partnership with the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church.

The Carolinas site is now a single site with up to 15 volunteers each week staying at the First Presbyterian Church of Lumberton, N.C. The Memorandum of Understanding with the church lasts through April 2020 and any extension options or possible moves will be discerned in the new year.

Jacksonville, Fla.

A new Rebuilding project opened in September 2019 in Jacksonville, Fla., to continue Hurricane Irma recovery in the area. Irma's damage was not so much from the wind as from the

storm surge that brought up to 24 feet of water over the banks of the Black River and its tributaries. Vetted cases and construction materials are primarily provided by the Florida Conference of the United Methodist Church, through funding from the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR). This funding was originally anticipated to provide cases for BDM into 2020. However, since more work than was expected had been completed before the site opened, the remaining jobs will be finished by the end of 2019 and the BDM site will close in December.

DRSI

The Disaster Recovery Support Initiative (DRSI), a program founded by the disaster ministries of the Church of the Brethren, United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), has been officially transferred to Church World Service (CWS) as part of their Development and Humanitarian Assistance programming. CWS will employ the DRSI staff and facilitate this program designed to support local disaster-affected communities as they plan their recovery. The three original

denominations are member communions of CWS and will continue to support the program through advisory and partial funding roles.

Dire need for volunteers in Robeson County, N.C.

by Ann Wade, North Carolina Conference United Methodist Church, BDM local partner

As the site manager for the Lumberton office for the North Carolina Conference United Methodist Church (NCCUMC), it has been my privilege and pleasure to work with Brethren Disaster Ministries for the last year and a half in Lumberton and Robeson County. During this time, I have come to know quite a few of the volunteers who have come to this area, including quite a few that have made the trip more than once. I am always amazed to see the distances some of these volunteers have traveled to help someone they do not even know.

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Southern Ohio/Kentucky district responds to tornado outbreak

When one tornado hits a community it can be devastating, but what the state of Ohio saw in May 2019 is being called an “outbreak”. A state record of 19 tornadoes touched down overnight between May 27 and 28, according to the National Weather Service. Some of the most powerful hit the Dayton area, which is home to many BDM volunteers and Church of the Brethren congregations in the Southern Ohio/Kentucky district (SO/KY). The district felt the call to serve their neighbors by leading in the response and cleanup efforts of the tornado damage, which spanned a 17-mile stretch.

Responding within days of the outbreak, district disaster coordinators Burt and Helen Wolf and veteran BDM volunteer Sam Dewey began coordinating cleanup work with Brethren members who were affected, or who knew others who were; state and national Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters (VOADs); and local officials, businesses and donors. Volunteers were recruited to do jobs such as removing debris, installing tarps on roofs, canvassing homes, and paperwork and data collection. Five local Brethren churches also

supported by providing breakfast for the daily volunteers during the first month.

Cleanup efforts were initially scheduled daily. Later in the summer the work was moved to weekends. The district reports they have hosted 65 workdays with 665 daily volunteers serving over 290 families. These volunteers included Church of the Brethren members from the SO/KY district and from other districts around the country. It also included

non-brethren groups and individuals.

The SO/KY district is now considering how they can support rebuilding during the long-term recovery phase of the disaster. Several leaders have been actively involved with the local Long Term Recovery Group, where members of the community are working together on recovery planning. The BDM office will continue to be in touch with these leaders to determine ways to support the area in 2020.

Dire need for volunteers

continued from page 4



BDM volunteers and leaders with representatives for the NCCUMC (most in lime green) at a house blessing for a house that both organizations work on.

Photo courtesy of BDM



BDM volunteers from Southern Ohio/Kentucky district help with cleanup efforts in the Dayton, Ohio area.

Photo by Sam Dewey

What really is so thrilling for me is the attitude that everyone has had. They all have a heart for the Lord as well as wanting to serve through volunteering to help their brothers and sisters in Christ. They have all been so friendly and just jump right in for whatever job it is that needs to be done. I use BDM as my “leader, my example of a team” when I talk to other teams that come to this area to work. The work ethic from all the Brethren teams has been outstanding.

The partnership that we have with BDM is something that I treasure and I continue to pray that more and more

volunteers will follow the footsteps of the previous volunteers. I cannot stress enough the dire need for volunteers in this area. We are nowhere close to being through in Robeson County. To continue here we must have the commitment of organizations such as BDM to continue to work to help these survivors get back in their homes. I urge everyone who is able to consider coming to be the hands and feet of Jesus and to serve his people. Praying “you” reading this will be the “next” volunteer. Blessings to each and every one.

The border crisis: Children in detention

by Roy Winter

Called to alleviate human suffering, Brethren Disaster Ministries responds to many types of disasters, crises and humanitarian needs, both natural and human-caused. The crisis at the southern border of the United States has been a particularly challenging and politically loaded humanitarian crisis. Focusing on the plight of children, a very vulnerable group, BDM has sought ways to make a difference in

their lives. By following Christ's call to "bear one another's burdens", BDM is attempting to provide care while staying politically neutral.

Children's Disaster Services responded to the crisis in 2018 by sending volunteers to support children and families in a migrant respite center in McAllen, Texas. Three teams of CDS volunteers provided two weeks of care each during July, August and

November, caring for 4,337 children. Emergency disaster funds totaling \$32,306 supported these deployments. As the crisis escalated and children were separated from their parents in detention, CDS reached out to partners and government agencies to offer services in the detention centers, consistently hitting dead ends.

After prayerful consideration and guidance from partners, we determined there is currently not an effective and efficient way for BDM or CDS to have a meaningful impact. Continuing to spend over \$5,300 per week serving in respite centers, when the volume of need along the border is so much greater than our capacity, and with many others in need around the world, did not seem good stewardship.

BDM and CDS will continue to stay focused on our mission, working after natural disasters, war and mass shootings, sharing compassion and the message of God's love.

First BDM volunteer group serves in Jacksonville



These volunteers from Pennsylvania and Maryland were some of the first to work on homes damaged by Hurricane Irma (2017) at the new BDM Jacksonville site.
Photo courtesy of BDM

The first volunteer group to work at BDM's new project site in Jacksonville, Fla., based at Camp TEAMeffort in Green Cove Springs, was supported by Mount Wilson Church of the Brethren in Lebanon, Pa., (Atlantic Northeast district). The 15 member team consisted of both seasoned veterans who have volunteered every year for the past seven to eight years and those volunteering for the first time. They served from September 1-7.

The team was worried that the trip would be canceled because Hurricane Dorian was approaching the area at the same time. But God had other plans and the trip went ahead. They did experience one day where they had to stay at the camp as the storm passed through. They lost power, requiring them to cook by gas grill, but it was later restored.

Despite a day off, the team worked extra hours to be able to complete their expected work on two houses that had been damaged two years earlier during Hurricane Irma. Gary Hiden and his son, from the Mid-Atlantic district, joined the Mt. Wilson team. Gary, summarizing the experience, said, "It was a fulfilling week for our team. Both property owners were thankful and appreciative of our efforts. Praise the Lord for these and all volunteers who unselfishly donate their time each year to BDM projects. Special thanks to the churches and families of volunteers who support them in serving others!"

New BVS volunteer joins BDM

Frieden Gresh joined the BDM project team in August to serve his third year in Brethren Volunteer Service. Prior to joining BDM, he served a two-year placement at ABODE Services in Fremont, Calif. Frieden, of Fairview Church of the Brethren in Maryland, spent time in orientation at the BDM office in New Windsor and the Carolinas site and is now serving on the Jacksonville, Fla., site.



BVS volunteer Frieden Gresh (front), working on one of the first houses on the Jacksonville, Fla., site.
Photo courtesy of BDM

LATEBREAKING NEWS FLASH:

Project 2, currently in Jacksonville, Fla., will move to Tampa, Fla., in 2020 to continue Hurricane Irma work in that area.

The site will be open from January 12-April 4. Details can be found on the BDM website or by contacting tgoodger@brethren.org.



Marshalltown, Iowa, was hit by a devastating tornado in July 2018. In September, a group of 16 volunteers from Northern Plains district partnered with the local Iowa River Church of the Brethren congregation to help three families with severe damage to their homes. They installed new windows, re-sided a home, replaced a driveway, installed a sump pump system and helped a homeowner finalize repairs to a garage and repair a deck. The church provided lunches during the week.

*Contributed by Matt Kuecker, Northern Plains district disaster coordinator.
Photo by Bruce "Doc" Johnson*

Progress continues in Nigeria

by Roxane Hill, Nigeria Crisis coordinator, from reports by EYN Disaster Relief Ministry

Livelihood Program: In September 2019, EYN's Women's Ministry celebrated a graduation ceremony for the Seed Grant women's project. Fifty-six widows, orphans and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) from five different areas of northeast Nigeria received training in fashion design in various courses over a six-month period. They learned all aspects of tailoring and flower and bead making. During the final ceremony, a skit was performed to emphasize "the importance of faithfulness and commitment in business." Along with certificates of completion, each woman received about \$150 as seed money for her own business. Several of the beneficiaries promised to train others and pass on the gift they had received.

Kucheli, one of the beneficiaries, burst into tears when receiving the seed money. When asked why she was crying she gave the following testimony, "I grew up as an Orphan under my father's relatives' care. I was abused in different ways and got married to a drunkard at a tender age. I have four children and I am the one taking care of their welfare. When my name was short-listed for training in fashion designing, I was very happy. I started well but during the rainy season it became very difficult for me

to have time for both the class and my farming. I struggled but God saw me through. I planned to work hard all next year to buy my own sewing machine but when my name was called for my certificate and behold money was given to me, I could not control my emotion seeing that my story has changed within a twinkle of an eye. May God bless Women's Ministry and all those who are support the Ministry."

Home repair: Seventeen households of the most affected people in the village of Bijibiji were reached with well-constructed shelters. The project was a great success and made the people in the village happy. They never thought such development would ever take place in their village since no other NGO had ever reached the community with such a project. The project was difficult and required transporting building



*Small temporary tent housing is constructed in a new Maiduguri displaced persons camp.
Photo courtesy of EYN Disaster Relief Ministry*

materials on people's heads in order to cross a large river to reach the village.

A second project being undertaken is the new construction of tent shelters for a camp in Maiduguri that was forced to move to a new location. The move from one temporary location to another will involve 92 males and 120 females. One of the EYN churches in Maiduguri donated the land for this new camp.



*Beneficiaries of the EYN Women's Ministry Seed Grant project show off their certificates after their graduation ceremony.
Photo courtesy of EYN Disaster Relief Ministry*



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Hurricane Dorian—Bahamas

As a powerful Category 5 hurricane with 185 mph sustained winds, Dorian caused massive destruction to Abaco Island, major damage to Grand Bahama and affected other islands in the Bahamas on September 1, 2019. Brethren Disaster Ministries responded quickly with \$30,000 in grants to support emergency feeding through two partners and a rapid assessment by Church World Service (CWS).

Grants of \$10,000 each were given to two faith-based programs already working in the Bahamas: Mercy Chefs and Feed the Children. They are providing food and drinking water for some of the 54,000 people in need of aid on Abaco and Grand Bahama islands. Another \$10,000 grant is supporting the efforts of CWS and the ACT Alliance (a coalition of Protestant and Orthodox churches

and church-related organizations) to assess the disaster and develop long-term recovery plans. BDM is monitoring the groups of displaced Bahamians on other islands and those who traveled to the U.S. to determine if it can offer additional assistance.

With an estimated \$7 billion in losses, major damage to infrastructure and at least 13,000 homes severely damaged or destroyed, recovery and rebuilding in the Bahamas will be difficult and take careful planning. BDM plans to provide grants in support of recovery efforts and

home rebuilding in the future. Volunteer opportunities to help with home repairs are being explored, possibly involving joining the short-term trips of partner agencies.



Hurricane Dorian caused widespread devastation in the Bahamas.

Photo by Rachel Lamatt, CWS

Bridges is published three times a year by the Brethren Disaster Ministries of the Church of the Brethren.

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Design: Debbie Noffsinger