



Brethren Disaster Ministries **BRIDGES**

Rebuilding Homes • Nurturing Children • Responding Globally

Vol. 21, Fall 2020

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Rise Up Brethren: Your Support Is Needed

Your neighbors next door and around the globe need you!

The Church of the Brethren has much to celebrate and an incredible history of responding to all types of disasters and crises by walking with survivors. Over the years we have responded to hurricanes, tornados, earthquakes, floods, war, violence, mass displacements, and much more. Now we are responding to a major pandemic. As in the past, by working together we can rise above the current challenges to be Jesus in the Neighborhood. Together we can overcome our fears to become innovative and adaptable disciples, responding to the needs of today and the challenges ahead.

Challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted everyone's life. It permeates how we worship, work, shop for food and be family. The pandemic continues to cause economic turmoil in most parts of the world, causing global leaders to predict a devastating long-term impact in developing countries. As Brethren Disaster Ministries responds during this time, we are faced with significantly decreased financial support for BDM and the Emergency Disaster Fund (EDF). Increasingly desperate needs combined with fewer resources to address those needs creates many challenges.

Global Crisis: Development experts, including the United Nations, emphasize that the pandemic disproportionately affects the world's most vulnerable people, including children, older persons, those with disabilities, immigrants and refugees. An estimated **71 million people are being pushed back into extreme poverty,**



A beneficiary of a COVID-19 grant received by University Baptist and Brethren Church (Pa.) expresses appreciation for the shelter and food he received during the pandemic.

Photo courtesy of University Baptist and Brethren Church

reversing decades of development work. Some 1.6 billion vulnerable workers have significantly reduced incomes. This contributes to other disasters and emergencies, causing deep concerns about food security and starvation. All this adds up to a deepening crisis that will last for years.

U.S. Programs: In the midst of this pandemic, none of BDM's typical programming works. Meeting our two-fold priorities of keeping people safe while responding to human need has required creativity and persistence as volunteering to rebuild homes, training events, and

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Brethren Disaster Ministries
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www.brethren.org/bdm



Church of the Brethren

Celebrate What We Have Accomplished Together!

60 Years of the Emergency Disaster Fund

Created by the Church of the Brethren (CoB) in 1960, the Emergency Disaster Fund (EDF) was a response to the Biblical mandate to “carry each other’s burden” (Galatians 6:2). Grants from the EDF support Brethren Disaster Ministries, Children’s Disaster Services and a focused global response by supporting CoB churches and partners, as they respond to natural and human-caused disasters in the U.S. and around the world. The ongoing Nigeria Crisis response is the largest single EDF program with over \$5.5 million in ministry expenses to date. **Over these 60 years more than \$44 million has supported ministry to people in their time of need through BDM programming and EDF grants.**



*A survivor of Hurricane Idai (2019) in Zimbabwe received emergency supplies through an EDF grant to long-time partner Lutheran World Relief.
Photo courtesy of Smile for Africa (Zimbabwe)*

40 Years of Children’s Disaster Services

Since 1980 Children’s Disaster Services (CDS), formerly known as Disaster Child Care, has met the needs of families and children by setting up childcare centers for temporary, respite care in shelters and disaster assistance centers across the U.S. Specially trained to respond to traumatized children, CDS volunteers provide a calm, safe, and reassuring presence in the midst of the chaos created by tornadoes, floods, hurricanes, wildfires and other natural or human-caused disasters. **In these 40 years, CDS has responded to an amazing 282 disasters, deploying 3,608 volunteers who provided care for 101,172 children.**

2020 COVID-19 Pandemic and Adapted Responses

The year 2020 brought incredible challenges including the need to create new programs and to adapt existing programs in response to the pandemic. We celebrate what has already been accomplished and are ready to meet the situations yet to come. More information about these initiatives is spread throughout this Bridges.

- Created the COVID-19 Pandemic Grant Program for U.S. CoB congregations.
- Created the Global COVID-19 Pandemic Grant Program for global CoB groups, mission points and selected partners.
- Created the Individual Kit of Comfort (IKOC) program for children impacted by disasters because CDS volunteers could not safely respond in person to disaster sites.
- Adapted the BDM Rebuilding Program, enabling volunteers to safely continue to repair homes for families during the pandemic. BDM has one of the few church disaster programs open to volunteers this year.

Rise Up Brethren: Your Support Is Needed

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Children’s Disaster Services responses all had to be reimagined. The articles in this Bridges will give more details about those changes.

A Call to Rise Up—Your support is needed now more than ever

BDM is following Jesus’ example and boldly reaching out to those in need. With individual and congregational giving down, EDF reserves, which fund all BDM and CDS programs in the U.S. and abroad, are being depleted. The three large annual auctions that support the EDF were canceled in 2020 in order to keep people safe during the pandemic. This has meant an additional loss of about \$500,000 for the EDF, which substantially impacts the funds available for this important work.

Additional funding is crucial to continue the COVID-19 grant programs and to respond to this year’s very active wildfire and hurricane season, other inevitable disasters, and the growing global crisis. The **Rise Up** campaign was developed to call for your support. The image of rising up above the pandemic, above our circumstances and above our fears to stand and support people in need seems particularly fitting for this year.

Please join us and Rise Up in support of the BDM programs.

COVID-19 Grant Programs

With the COVID-19 pandemic affecting the United States and 235 countries and territories we were challenged to develop appropriate responses. Two special pandemic grant programs, introduced in the Summer 2020 Bridges, address the ever-growing humanitarian needs of our members and our neighbors. These programs can only continue with additional resources.

The U.S. COVID-19 Pandemic Grant program supports churches and

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The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic Grants

It is hard to overstate how much the Church of the Brethren's U.S. and Global Pandemic grants have provided life-sustaining assistance to our sisters and brothers during this difficult time. There can be no doubt that the financial support that we share blossoms into God's love and grace made real and tangible to others.

Rise Up Brethren

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districts in meeting humanitarian needs in their congregations and communities. The hope of this program is to encourage meaningful ministry, big and small, throughout the denomination. *Through Sept. 30, 2020, grants were provided to 28 congregations, from 11 districts, totaling \$122,562.* These churches are addressing a variety of needs in their communities including through food distributions, feeding programs, and temporary shelter. They have also assisted with other expenses such as utilities, rent, medications, and funerals. New grant requests are still being accepted. Churches that received grants and have provided good reporting are being offered the opportunity for a second grant.

The Global COVID-19 Pandemic Grant program provides emergency support to global Churches of the Brethren and selected partners. *Through Sept. 30, 2020, 14 grants have been provided to 10 countries, totaling \$216,550.* This includes the CoB groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, Nigeria, Rwanda, Spain and Venezuela, as well as the mission in South Sudan. Most of these programs have focused on providing food, and safety and hygiene supplies. A few grants provided medical supplies and emergency financial support for housing. In many of these areas there is more fear of hunger than COVID-19. This program has been vital in the support of marginalized people unable to work because of the pandemic.

Shared here are just a few examples of comments and photos from the COVID-19 grant reports.

U.S grants

- One mother told the staff member, *"I've never had anyone be so kind to me before."*
- *"[This program] is a blessing in our lives. Everyone involved are so kind and caring to help those of us who need it."*
- A young volunteer commented: *"I never knew that helping people could be so fun and useful to the community and other people around the world."*

Global grants

- An 80-year-old woman with no one to support her exclaimed, *"My brothers and sisters have not forgotten me!"*
- *"We want you to know that you saved many lives during the pandemic COVID-19, because they would have died not from the COVID-19, but from famine."*
- *"Families are witnessing that God cares for the needy. Thank you, brothers and sisters, for sending not only a monetary contribution, but also your spirit of solidarity and compassion by walking with us in the Spirit of Christ."*



COVID-19 funds support GrabNGo meals in Sebring, Fla. Photo courtesy of Sebring Church of the Brethren



This single mother was assisted through pandemic grant funds after she lost her job due to COVID-19. Photo courtesy of BDM



In Ecuador, vulnerable people received foodstuffs and fresh organic vegetables. Photo courtesy of Fundación Brethren y Unida



A COVID-19 grant supports the Miami Haitian Church drive-thru food distribution to about 500 people weekly.

Photo courtesy of Eglise des Freres Haitiens Miami

Nigeria: COVID-19 Grants and a Continued Nigeria Crisis Response

The COVID-19 pandemic has made responding to the terrorism and violence in Nigeria even more difficult and complex. The combined crisis has made people increasingly desperate, leading to more crime, theft and lawlessness. A \$14,000 COVID-19 grant is providing food for the most at-risk people, who are impacted by the double crises. A second pandemic grant is being processed.

The Nigeria Crisis Response continues to respond to the violence by Boko Haram (BH) in Northeast Nigeria, which began in 2009 and resulted in the displacement of 70 percent of the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria (EYN) members. In the last six years many families have returned home and restarted life, but the violence continues and has evolved as Boko Haram uses new tactics, including smaller raids of villages, threatening farmers, killing people, and taking food and supplies which

leads to increased hunger.

As the violence by Boko Haram and other militia groups likely connected to it spreads to new areas further south and west, almost nowhere in Nigeria feels safe now, even though the government reports that BH has been defeated. This, along with kidnappings and increased crime, has made the response and situation in Nigeria more difficult and at the same time more desperately needed.

In the midst of this, the Nigeria Crisis Response continues to provide effective and critical response programming for displaced families and communities caught in the violence. The response in 2020 focuses on life-saving interventions such as supporting agriculture, food

distributions, medicine, peace building, trauma recovery, education for children, and fresh water supplies.

“Our enemies chased us from our communities, we encounter various troubles. But because of the love of God, He sent His children to come to our aid. We thank God and we thank you people for bringing us food...Our request is your prayers, so that we can return to our homelands where we will continue following God with one heart.”

—Tani, a displaced mother living in a camp in Maiduguri



Residents of the Luvu IDP Camp in Nasarawa State, Nigeria, draw clean water from an EYN borehole.

Photo courtesy of EYN

DR Congo Flood Relief

In mid-April 2020 heavy rains caused extensive flooding of towns and villages along the shores of Lake Tanganyika in South Kivu Province in the Democratic Republic of Congo. More than 40 people were killed and over 3,500 homes were destroyed, leaving nearly 80,000 people displaced without shelter, food, or household items.

The city of Uvira was particularly hard hit when the Mulongwe River flooded, causing a bridge to collapse, diverting the water which damaged or destroyed hundreds of homes and buildings, including the local Church of the Brethren and homes of church members and the pastor, Ron Lubungo, who is still displaced. DR Congo church leaders were already struggling with a growing food crisis from the COVID-19 pandemic when

the flood multiplied their challenges.

A \$12,000 COVID-19 Pandemic grant at the end of March supported food distributions.

In April, a grant of \$20,000 was approved for flood recovery to provide mattresses, cookware and other household supplies. The

church is currently developing a proposal to clean flood debris out of the river canal and to repair the riverbanks, enabling people to return

home to begin rebuilding. The project would be supported by EDF funding, hopefully in partnership with other interested groups.



The Mulongwe River flooded the town of Uvira, South Kivu province, DR Congo, in April 2020.

Photo by Ron Lubungo

Port of Beirut Explosion

The massive explosion in Lebanon's Port of Beirut on Aug. 4, 2020 was a horrific disaster in its own right, but in Lebanon it was just another in a series of crises that have stolen most of the hope from the Lebanese people. The explosion destroyed the port area and damaged much of the city. At least 203 people were killed, around 6,500 were injured and about 300,000 were left homeless. An estimated \$15 billion in damage included the destruction of a grain silo at the port and the port itself. It was a crippling event that left poor and hungry people even worse off.

Before the explosion Lebanon was already challenged with an economic crisis, hyperinflation, a 25 percent unemployment rate and a third of the population living in poverty. Further, Lebanon has the highest per capita

concentration of refugees in the world (25 percent, mostly Syrian and Palestinian). The COVID-19 pandemic and public safety restrictions have only added to this crisis, leaving more than half of the people concerned about food security.

An EDF grant of \$25,000 is supporting a long-time partner in the Syrian refugee crisis, the Lebanese Society for Education and Social Development (LSESD), in their comprehensive response to households affected by the explosion. This includes providing food, hygiene products, housing, medical support, non-food household items, and psychosocial support for traumatized children.

An additional EDF grant of \$10,000 is supporting Lutheran World Relief (LWR) and IMA World Health in providing food, household supplies,

livelihoods, and healthcare. This complements a large project of repairing homes damaged in the blast, funded by U.S. Agency for International Development. LWR has been working in Lebanon for years and happened to have two containers in the port, full of blankets and supplies shipped from the Brethren Service Center, that were destroyed in the explosion.

New BVS Volunteer Joins BDM



BDM was excited to welcome Evan Ulrich to our ministry in July when he joined the Rebuilding Program through Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS). Originally from Homer, N.Y., Evan graduated from Juniata College in May 2020 with a Bachelor of Science in Physics and Mathematics. He has experience attending, volunteering, and working at Camp Blue Diamond in the Western Pennsylvania district. Evan completed his virtual BVS orientation and helped with unpacking and setting up at the Coastal NC project in July and August. He then traveled to the Dayton, Ohio, site and has been serving there since. Evan is scheduled for a one-year term of service.

Iowa Derecho Response

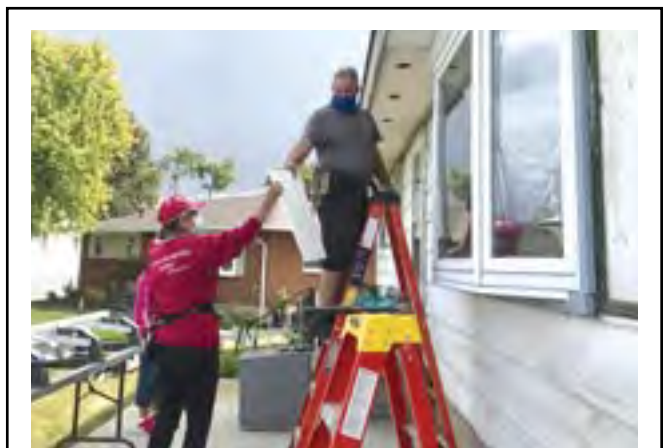
Early on August 10, 2020, a series of thunderstorms blew across the Midwest causing widespread damage. The storm, classified as a derecho—a widespread, long-lived windstorm associated with a band of rapidly moving showers or thunderstorms—traveled 770 miles from South Dakota and Nebraska to Ohio in 14 hours with an average speed of 55 mph, with peaks over 100 mph. A federal disaster declaration included 23 counties and FEMA reports that

almost \$8 million has already been awarded to over 2,100 applicants.

A recent EDF grant supported a group from the Northern Plains district, organized by district disaster coordinator Matt Kuecker, which spent Labor Day weekend helping with tree and debris removal in their district, primarily in the small town of Union, Iowa. The group included 5-18 volunteers each day with 8-9 people staying overnight at Camp Pine Lake. During a five-day period, volunteers served over 500 hours helping two families, the Iowa River Church of the Brethren and the Union community cemetery. They were able to rent a man lift to assist in the removal of trees from structures and unsafe limbs from trees still standing. All volunteers were provided lunch and overnight volunteers were also served breakfast and dinner. A total of 131 meals were prepared.



The Northern Plains district rented equipment to safely clear trees and limbs affected by the derecho for families who could not have completed the work on their own. Photo by Betsy Kuecker



BDM volunteers continue to work together to repair homes on the BDM site in Dayton, Ohio Photo by Sammy Deacon

Rebuilding Updates

“Volunteers and leaders shared that while they were nervous about serving at first, the COVID-19 protocols in place to protect all involved and the fact that everyone is observing the precautions has helped them to feel much more comfortable serving.”
—Dayton, Ohio Project leadership

New Coastal NC Project

A new BDM site has opened in a different location in North Carolina that will continue to support Hurricane Florence recovery. Volunteer housing is located at the Mt. Zion Original Free Will Baptist Church in Bayboro, N.C., where BDM has a private section of the church. There are currently no other organizations that have regular volunteers serving in the area. The project is scheduled to stay open through the end of March 2021, unless changes need to be made due to COVID-19.

The project opened for volunteers on September 14, the two-year anniversary of Hurricane Florence which brought a record breaking storm surge and rainfall of 20 to 30 inches in some areas along the coast. Work is being obtained through the Pamlico County Disaster Relief Coalition (PCDRC) which was supported early in its development by the Disaster Recovery Support Initiative (DRSI). DRSI is a partner project that BDM helped found and has since been moved over to Church World Service.

BDM has also formed a new partnership on this site with the Fuller Center Disaster ReBuilders. Both PCDRC and the Fuller Center have very few volunteers due to COVID-19. BDM volunteers are repairing homes vetted by PCDRC for which the Fuller Center has purchased the materials. New partnerships like these are becoming critical with so many organizations being hit hard with lower volunteerism in recent months.

Openings for volunteers

There are still openings most weeks on both the Dayton, Ohio and Coastal NC sites for those comfortable

traveling and willing to follow all COVID-19 protocols. If you know of individuals who can serve any time, please have them reach out to Terry Goodger at 410-635-8730 or tgoodger@brethren.org even if other groups are listed on the schedule. There is a strong chance that there are still open spots with those groups. You can find our current schedules here: www.brethren.org/bdm/rebuild/schedules

2021 Schedule

Primarily due to the lower numbers of weekly volunteers and leaders comfortable going out right now, BDM will only be able to sustain one rebuilding site for the beginning of 2021. The only option for serving on a BDM national site for January, February, and March 2021 will be at the Coastal NC site.

The national BDM Dayton, Ohio, site will be paused during the first three months of 2021, with local BDM volunteers and other local groups continuing to work as the weather allows. In April we will plan to close the Coastal NC site and resume the national site in Dayton, with the expectation that work will continue there at least through the end of 2021.

At the beginning of and throughout 2021 we will reassess our schedule and funding to see if two site locations could be resumed and maintained at some point in 2021. This will depend on many factors, including whether there are enough leaders and volunteers to fill the schedule for two sites. We will also monitor options for short-term responses in locations where we could serve for a week or two to contribute to additional recoveries.

Puerto Rico Hurricane Maria Response Completed

Just after Hurricane Maria caused devastation across the island of Puerto Rico in September 2017, BDM and the Puerto Rico District of the Church of the Brethren began a partnership in ministry to serve those who were most affected, beginning with emergency



Volunteers work on the first home BDM served in Pamlico County, N.C.
Photo by Kim Gingerich

feeding and supplies and moving into a volunteer rebuilding program. As of June 2020, the homes of over 100 families were repaired or rebuilt. In 2021, BDM will be offering multiple ways to celebrate this incredible partnership. A full report will be shared in the Winter 2021 Bridges newsletter.

North Carolina Earthquake Grant

A magnitude 5.1 earthquake struck near Sparta, N.C., on Aug. 9, 2020 and was felt throughout the state and into Virginia. Emergency Management and other officials in Alleghany County report a total of 525 businesses and homes that sustained structural damage with 19 homes being condemned. Immediately after the disaster, Peak Creek Church of the Brethren, in nearby Laurel Springs, began supporting church members and those immediately connected with the church, including with financial gifts through their Deacon's Fund. Through BDM, the church applied for and was granted \$5,000 through the Emergency Disaster Fund to help them expand their support to 33 families in the community. Pastor Tim Sizemore and the church shared that they are looking to serve and show ways that the Church of the Brethren can be a positive ministry to the community.

CDS Updates

Individual Kits of Comfort (IKOC) assembled for children affected by disasters

In late spring 2020 it became evident that CDS would not be deploying volunteers this disaster season due to COVID-19 restrictions and Red Cross adjusted disaster responses. After brainstorming how to adjust the CDS response to these new challenges, the IKOC was developed to be distributed to children affected by disasters in 2020 who would not be utilizing congregate sheltering but would likely be isolated in hotel rooms. The IKOC was designed to provide interactive, imaginative play opportunities that could be used individually or with a parent. Resources provided in the packs included information for parents on trauma and play for their children as well as activity ideas to use the items provided. An appeal went out to CDS volunteers and Church of the Brethren districts for at least 2,500 kits to be assembled in a few short months. The appeal was heard and the IKOCs came flooding into CDS. The final count of assembled IKOCs was over 2,700.

CDS says THANK YOU to all the individuals, church groups, and congregations that made this project successful!



These girls, displaced by wildfires in Colorado, are delighting in the items in their Individual Kit of Comfort.

Photo ©American Red Cross, used with permission



Liz Haff of the Westminster (Md.) Church of the Brethren with an Individual Kit of Comfort and examples of some of the 24 items that fit into the IKOC plastic pouch. Photo by Tom Haff

Deploying IKOCs amidst COVID-19 challenges

Red Cross and CDS staff worked very hard to get kits out to children affected by recent disasters, but many roadblocks presented themselves with COVID-19 changing so much of the typical disaster response. With perseverance, however, CDS was able to get nearly all of the 2,700 kits into the hands of children in need by early November with the remaining kits expected to be given out by the end of 2020. Kits were distributed to numerous disaster sites across the U.S. including wildfires in California and Colorado, flooding, tropical storms, and hurricanes. The largest shipment of kits was sent to our new partner, Partnerships with Native Americans (PWNA).

CDS and PWNA

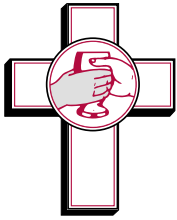
Partnerships with Native Americans (PWNA) is a non-profit organization with over 25 years of experience supporting tribal communities in nine states west of the Mississippi River. This new connection, made possible through Red Cross, gave CDS an alternative viable outlet to distribute IKOCs to children in need. Facing difficult logistical challenges sending kits to disaster locations, and wanting to get the kits into the hands of children that could benefit from creative play, CDS saw this as a “God moment” to be able to go beyond its

typical disaster response. Native American children are still facing great hardships from the COVID-19 pandemic and these kits would bring a smile to their faces. So, adapting yet again to the challenges of disaster response in the time of COVID-19, CDS arranged to send 1,000 IKOCs to PWNA’s two warehouses. The kits will be distributed to the children along with other COVID supplies. According to PWNA, Native Americans have the highest need in the U.S. yet less than one percent of America’s charitable giving supports Native causes. CDS looks forward to finding additional ways to support the children with this new partnership. For more information on PWNA and their mission, see their website at www.NativePartnership.org.

CDS develops new interactive learning webinar to teach about disaster response

During the COVID-19 pandemic, CDS did not hold training workshops. However, due to inquiries about sharing information on how CDS responds to disasters, CDS developed a new interactive learning webinar. CDS first presented the webinar on Sept. 24-25 to volunteers of the Western Massachusetts Medical Reserve Corps (Mass MRC) to provide information about the basics of disaster childcare. The webinar was led by CDS associate director Lisa Crouch and CDS trainer Katie Nees. The two-day, four-hour webinar covered the history and basic principles of CDS, the importance of child-led play, and emotional/physical safety concerns in a play space. Guided imagery, polls, breakout rooms, and an overnight assignment for developing a safe play space were some of the features utilized in this virtual setting. Feedback was positive for this new delivery method for CDS and gives staff hopeful visions for the future utilizing more virtual options for training and outreach.

“The webinar was WONDERFUL! Lisa and Katie are SUCH great facilitators!”—Corinne McKeown, webinar participant, Mass MRC



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CDS Celebrates a Milestone

Over 100,000 children in disasters have been served by CDS volunteers during its 40-year history. What a great accomplishment to be reached in this 2020 anniversary year! This milestone could never have been reached without the dedicated volunteers that have faithfully supported the CDS mission over the years. Another key component of the CDS mission has been the partnership with American Red Cross, our main deploying partner. As we move into 2021, we are excited to see where the next 40 years take us in nurturing children when they need it most. We would like to say THANK YOU to all that have been part of our history and will be part of our future.

- CONGRATULATIONS to Children's Disaster Services for providing support to children in disasters for 40 years! CDS has been a partner with the American Red Cross for over 22 years. Our partnership

allows us to effectively fill gaps in service delivery and better provide for the needs of disaster survivors. Here's to another 40 years of service!
—Mary DeWitt-Dia, Red Cross

- *The abiding music of children and families' gratitude towards our teams sings to my volunteer's heart.*
—Susan "Boon" Murray, CDS volunteer
- *We walk away feeling thankful for being able to make a child smile and giving the parents comfort they need to pick the pieces back up. There are really no words to describe CDS other than: a blessing and gift to everyone.*
—Mary Geisler, CDS project manager
- *It is a privilege to see God at work bringing healing into the children's minds and hearts as they have a safe place to play and process the experiences of the disaster. It is a blessing to witness. I am given the opportunity to love in a situation that seems hopeless.*
—Paula Langdon, CDS volunteer



CDS celebrates 40 years of bringing smiles to the faces of children affected by disasters.

Photo by Judy Frankart

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