

Your Support Helps us Deliver Aid, Launch Recovery Work for Children and Families after Hurricane Maria

December 2017

Hurricane Maria was the worst disaster to affect Puerto Rico since 1928, and the fifth-strongest hurricane on record to strike the United States. It carved a trail of destruction across the island on September 20th. Our relief team arrived to find children and families struggling with tremendous damage and challenges ranging from no power to shortages of clean drinking water, food and fuel.

Our quick work – made possible by your support – has benefited nearly 25,000 children and adults and provided us with the firm footing to initiate longer-term recovery programs that will be ongoing for the next two years. We are pleased to share this progress report with you, with gratitude for your generous and heartfelt contribution.

Maria's Ongoing Impact on Children

Three months after the devastation caused by Maria's 155-mile-per-hour winds, the impacts of this extreme disaster continue to be felt by children, families and communities. Nearly all public schools across the island were closed into November. Children lost nearly two months of education and for those schools that have opened, many are running on half-day schedules. Behavioural and mental health needs are also rising. Many children and caregivers are losing hope and, alarmingly, suicide rates across the island are reportedly on the rise.

Your Support Makes a Difference

Save the Children, the national and international leader in child-focused emergency relief and response in the U.S., deployed our trained staff to mobilize relief. Your support, pooled with other resources, allowed us to address urgent needs among children and their families in shelters and battered communities by collaborating with local partners on aid distributions. We delivered truckloads of supplies for infants and toddlers to shelters in metropolitan areas; we worked with authorities to deliver supplies by helicopter to remote mountain communities; and worked with the Department of Family and FEMA to



Mia* is all smiles as she plays at a child-friendly space we opened at an evacuation shelter in Canovanas. Children could read, play and begin to recover from the trauma they experienced as a result of Hurricane Maria.

Photo: Ebed Carrasquillo/Save the Children

** name changed to protect identity*

deliver supplies via plane to the island of Vieques. At the three-month mark, here are highlights of that work, with much more recovery assistance on the way:

Meeting Immediate Needs

- We helped to provide 58,032 prepared meals to Boys and Girls Club of America in Las Margaritas (San Juan municipality), Isabella, Loiza and Arecibo.
- We donated 6,720 cases of water to Convoy of Hope to distribute to over 10,000 families.
- Over 500 “parent-baby kits” and newborn diapers were delivered to families in Aguas Buenas; Orocovis; Toa Alta, Humacao and Yabucoa. These kits include items for families with children under age 2, such as warm, soft blankets, baby hygiene supplies and a toy or book.
- We have worked with over 30 partners to provide diapers, hygiene supplies, water and toys. This has been especially important in hard-to-reach communities where churches and small community groups we support have been essential in meeting families’ needs.
- With Habitat for Humanity of Puerto Rico, we provided shelter repair kits to 1,460 low-income families in Guayama, Orocovis and Humacao. The kits included hand tools, tarps, ropes and other materials families needed to make interim repairs to homes damaged by Hurricane Maria.

Strengthening Local Capacity and Community Engagement

- Our grants to trusted community organizations help them reach children and families. These awards are largely for private child care or educational centers that provide extracurricular activities to children. Most of these facilities suffered extensive damage and lack equipment and supplies. We are processing \$300,000 in grants in response to 30 applications and we are soliciting additional applications.
- Save the Children, in collaboration with FEMA and the Puerto Rican Department of Family, formed a Children’s Task Force to address children’s needs. The group brings together stakeholders concerned about children to share information. To ensure that coordination is locally owned and driven by those who know the island best, we are working with local organizations to take over our leadership role.

Protecting Children and Return to Learning

- Our child-friendly space in a shelter in Canovanas gives children whose families have not been able to return home access to structured activities that help relieve the stress of living in the shelter. Adult facilitators that we trained offer psychosocial support.
- We’ve trained 20 local social workers to offer psychosocial first aid to children. They have used this training to work with hundreds of local volunteers to provide distressed children with reassurance, support and comfort.
- At our 21 Community-based Children’s Activity Centers, children of all ages take part in learning and development activities.
- Educational kits – book bags filled with notebooks, pens, paper and folders – are being provided to children in Humacao and Yabucoa.
- Now that many schools have re-opened, our education team is working with teachers, principals and the Department of Education to ensure that children have access to afterschool activities to help them recoup the lost months of learning.
- Our team continues to identify child care providers and Head Start programs that require financial support to provide services to children.

Looking Ahead: The Next Three Months

We will continue to work with children and families as they recover from the impact of this monster storm. While we seek contributions for our two-year response plan to reach 600,000 children and adults, we are rolling out programs where damage was extreme and where children and families have the fewest resources. Our community-focused strategy will help get children back to learning and overcome the stress of their experiences.

Over the next three months we will be:

- Targeting 10 of the hardest-hit communities with transformation events to kick-start a process of *child resilience and recovery*. The events will include clean-ups, mural painting and refurbishing and resupplying schools, daycare services, afterschool activities and playgrounds. This is the first phase of our working with the communities to jointly develop plans for building back better and to ensure children's needs remain a key focus.
- Working in 40 locations to develop Community-based Children's Activities adapted to the specific needs of each community.
- Supporting key partners for larger, longer-term grants as we work with them to design programming for early education, basic education and afterschool activities.

Story of Hope: Your Support Helps Light the Night

Mary and her son, James, wake every morning before dawn so that they can arrive at James' bus stop on time. Until recently, they ended their day in the dark, too, as Hurricane Maria knocked out power in the area, and there's no telling when it will be restored. Save the Children distributed backpacks to James and the other children at his school. The backpacks contained school supplies and a small solar light that can be recharged by the sun. As James holds his light up to the sun, he explains how it works. "It takes the sun out here and then we can use it inside." He gestures up, and then peers through it as if he's looking through a spyglass. With his new light and school supplies, James can color after the sun goes down, and Mary can cook and read.

We continue to distribute solar lights and recharging panels to families in municipalities that were in the direct path of the hurricane and suffered great damage. To date, nearly 2,000 light kits have been provided, along with 675 of the smaller lights for children's backpacks.



A young boy holds a solar light that his family received from Save the Children.
Save the Children Photo