

Florida Hurricane Michael

After Hurricane Michael made landfall in October 2018, the housing need in many areas of the Florida Panhandle skyrocketed. With wind speeds around 160 mph, this historic Category 5 storm demolished a multitude of homes and damaged thousands of others in and around Bay County. In nearby Chipola, Florida, an area that lacked decent, affordable housing before the storm, close to 60% of the housing stock was depleted.

In the aftermath of the hurricane, the housing crisis in this area is worse than ever. Many residents are financially constrained, and the limited availability of rental properties is forcing families to either pay exorbitant rates or live in subpar conditions just to keep a roof over their heads.

Local Habitat organizations have partnered with communities in need and local governments to complete

repairs, demolitions and rebuilds; build new houses; and develop a strategic plan to increase the area's resiliency in the future. To date, these organizations have completed more than 50 home repairs and rehabs and constructed seven new homes in areas where they are needed most. They plan to continue the construction and repair work throughout the coming year.

Habitat organizations are educating families on the importance of homeowners insurance and teaching budgeting and finance classes for new homeowners. By performing construction-related interventions and providing this education, Habitat is ensuring that homeowners will have the strong homes and solid foundations they need to weather future storms.

A safe space to recover

When Hurricane Michael slammed into the Florida coast in October 2018, Tiffany and her four children felt lucky that their roof was the only thing damaged on the home. The damage caused leaks, though, and even after the initial problem was repaired, the roof continued to let in water, causing mold to grow in the home. Concerned for her children's health, Tiffany moved the family into a small travel trailer behind her parents' home, but conditions there weren't much better. The space was far too small for a family of five, and a strong storm in late 2019 caused roof damage to that structure as well.

In the midst of the family's housing struggles, Tiffany was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. She has undergone treatment and is doing well, but her worries about providing a sense of security and normalcy for her children continued.

Chipola Area Habitat partnered with the family to build a new home, and now Tiffany feels like she and her children will finally be able to recover together.

"It might seem simple, but I'm most looking forward to just getting back to a normal life," Tiffany says. "One where I don't have to constantly worry about the health of my children because of our living conditions."

Habitat's RV Care-A-Vanners contributed to the construction of Tiffany's new home, with nine volunteers



Tiffany and her children can safely recover from both the hurricane and medical issues in their new Habitat home in Florida.

giving 275 hours to help Tiffany achieve her dream of a safe space for her family.

"The kids are thrilled to have their own space, and they have big plans for how their rooms are going to be decorated," she says. "I'm extremely grateful to have the opportunity to have a brand-new home for my family. Excited would be an understatement!"