

Action Update- July 13

West Street Recovery Models Resilience and Flexibility in Disaster Recovery



In the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey (Aug. 2017), West Street Recovery emerged as a community based disaster recovery organization. Over the past four years, it has grown into an adaptable, rapid response organization, helping communities deal not only with the impacts of Harvey, but also Tropical Storm Imelda, COVID-19, and the February 2021 Winter Storm.

Each disaster has amplified race- and class-based injustice; widened the financial gap between BIPOC and white households; and negatively impacted the health of economically and racially marginalized communities. In response, WSR has developed a community organizing program that seeks to empower communities by helping them prepare for future disasters and by building networks of mutual care in Northeast Houston. This combination of service provision and organizing allows WSR to meet immediate needs while addressing persistent, underlying issues of poverty, low-quality housing, and environmental risk factors.

Week of Compassion has partnered with WSR for the long haul, providing support for disaster recovery and preparedness. This support has enabled our partners to be flexible and adapt to changing needs as the community has been impacted by compound disasters.

Now several years post-Harvey, much public support and exposure has dissipated--but thousands of families in the affected areas have not recovered and still live in dangerous conditions. The Northeast Houston area remains at extreme risk of flooding, and a disproportionately high number of residents in the area who applied for help from FEMA after Hurricane Harvey were denied.

Now, the added impacts of COVID-19 and the Winter Storm have created further economic strain. The residents of Northeast Houston had not received the sustained support they needed to entirely overcome the last disaster and before facing the next.

“I would say that it sort of evolved our understanding of what we felt was a natural

disaster, or what we felt was appropriate for disaster recovery work,” said WSR co-founder Andrew Barley in a [recent interview](#). “For a lot of our homeowners, all of these things are sort of interconnected. You know, they live in communities that are flood-prone and have poor flooding infrastructure, but they also are [affected] in other ways due to heavy industrialization in these neighborhoods...[and] various forms of environmental racism.”

As our partners continue repair work, they are also growing a unique model that not only restores homes, but also empowers community members by creating opportunities. WSR hires other flood survivors and NE Houston residents to complete or participate in the construction work. Projects like this keep money in the community, build skills and resumes, and deepen bonds between survivors.

With support from Week of Compassion, WSR is currently working to complete repairs on six homes that will make significant improvements to the safety, dignity and longevity of six families. The work ranges from removal of moldy sheetrock, to replacement of walls, electrical systems, windows, and doors. These repairs will make it possible to move the families back into their homes, while also making those homes more sound for future disasters.

During and after working on homes, and with contractors, WSR discusses underlying issues in survivor communities and invites clients and construction workers into organizing work. They also work to prepare communities for other disasters that will inevitably strike.

Recently, community residents and volunteers got together and assembled disaster bags, an important step towards planning for future safety. In addition to gathering typical supplies like non-perishable food and bottled water, the group also prepositioned generators, PPE, and solar chargers in key locations in the neighborhood. Another purpose of this measure was to inspire civic leaders to take meaningful action to prepare ahead of the need--and to address more systemic issues. By planning ahead for the next disaster, our partners are empowering community members to be resilient in the face of challenges--despite ongoing inequities that disproportionately affect marginalized communities.

Week of Compassion is grateful for partners like West Street Recovery that model resilience, build community, and adapt quickly to changing needs from compound disasters. We are also grateful for the generous support that makes this life-giving work possible. Thank you for sharing your compassion!

Volunteer Opportunities

Week of Compassion has some great opportunities for Disciples volunteer groups to help with the hands-on work of rebuilding in disaster-affected communities!

Visit our [website](#) to learn more about volunteer needs and locations, or submit [this interest form](#) to request registration information.

Please note, at this time, Week of Compassion requires that all volunteers who are eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine do so before serving.

Week of Compassion
Responses Since June 29



-  Texas, Winter Storm Response
-  California, Emergency Relief
-  Ohio, Emergency Response
-  Ohio, COVID-19 Relief

For an interactive map of responses, [visit our website](#).

Week of Compassion is the relief, refugee and development mission fund of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada.

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