

## Hurricane Maria Response: Our Nonstop Relief and Recovery Reaching Puerto Rican Children and Families

November 9, 2017

"Save the Children is dedicated to making sure children are safe and able to recover physically and emotionally. Providing families with a way to repair their homes is an important step toward getting children into a safe environment and allowing them to regain a sense of normalcy and routine."

-- Casey Harrity, team leader in Puerto Rico, on our distributions of shelter kits

Hurricane Maria created catastrophic damage in Puerto Rico and upended the lives of innumerable children there. Save the Children, the national leader in child-focused emergencies, responded quickly. Today, we remain at the heart of the disaster, working to alleviate children's and families' needs, restore access to critical child care and education s and help children overwhelmed by their experiences to rebound and become more resilient.

***While our donors have contributed generously, we still require support to fully fund our responses. Your contribution, pooled with other resources, will help ensure that we have the funds to sustain our humanitarian relief and scale up recovery programs to reach as many children as possible.***

### Maria's Continued Impact

On September 20, Puerto Rico sustained a direct hit from Hurricane Maria's 155-mile-per-hour winds and torrential rain. Power and communications on the island was lost, homes and buildings were damaged or levelled, and shortages of clean water and food were widespread.



*Mia is all smiles in a Save the Children child-friendly space set up in Canovanas. Inside the safety of the space, children have an opportunity to read, play and begin to recover from the trauma they experienced as a result of Hurricane Maria.*  
Photo: Noel Del Pinar/Save the Children

Over a month later, the situation is still critical, although progress is being made. Power and cell phone service are gradually being restored; more stores are open and, as of early November, schools in 22 of Puerto Rico's 78 municipalities were re-opening. However, it may not be until January that schools in remote mountain communities open. The availability of clean water remains a serious concern and many families, especially those outside of urban locations, have seen little aid.

### Our Helping Hand

Save the Children is on the scene in ravaged communities, with our trained staff and proven programs providing the assistance children and families require.

Here are highlights of our current work:

- 500 families in and around Caguas began receiving tools and supplies to repair their homes this week through our partnership with Habitat for Humanity. These shelter kits will help low-income families make interim repairs to homes. We plan to distribute a total of 2,000 shelter kits on the island this month.
- Our teams and local partners have provided children and families with food, water, baby supplies and hygiene supplies.
- We are coordinating with key actors to ensure there is clean water available for children at schools, day care centers and other children's activity areas. We are providing bottled water to areas where there are no other options and are also identifying partners who can provide filtration systems so that these areas will have more sustainable access to water.
- We've opened safe spaces and are running community child activities so that children who are surrounded by damage and destruction can take part in structured play and learning activities run by trained adults.
- We're working with Head Start programs, child care providers and education officials to make sure that children can return to comforting routines and school as soon as possible – enabling parents to focus on their recovery knowing that their children are safe.
- Trainings have been conducted for teachers and social workers so they can respond with emotional “first aid” to children who are distressed.
- Small grants have been provided to child-focused community organizations to help them provide much-needed services to children and their families.
- We are co-leading a Children's Task Force in partnership with the government's Department of Families. It will prioritize areas of highest need for children, ensure resources are appropriately allocated across the island and will also focus on the most vulnerable children.

## Planning our Long-Range Response

Thanks to our donors, are able to plan for a sustained presence in Puerto Rico and remain by the side of children and families as they recover. Our team has created a response strategy that focuses on emergency distributions, children's protection from harm and restoring their access to education. It will be guided by our assessments and

needs that continue to be reviewed and monitored by our teams on the ground in Puerto Rico. Our goal is to directly reach 250,000 children and adults with programs that will run through the end of the 2018-19 school year.

## Why Save the Children?

No other U.S. charity fulfills the role that Save the Children plays in domestic humanitarian response. Our focus on preparedness, relief and recovery means we are a leading organization that helps to prepare U.S. children, families and communities for an emergency; rushes aid to those in need when a crisis strikes; provides long-term recovery support to children and families; and advocates so that children's needs are prioritized.

*Nobody knows when the next crisis will strike. That's why 10 percent of your generous gift goes to helping our emergency teams prepare for and provide critical assistance when and where children need us the most.*