



**HURRICANE MICHAEL
SIX-MONTH ANNIVERSARY:
THE IMPACT OF YOUR SUPPORT**



Save the Children.
100 YEARS

Impact Report - April 2019

Your Support Has Made a Difference

Hurricane Michael carved a wide swath of destruction through the Florida Panhandle on October 10, 2018. The historic storm pummeled the area with 155 mph winds and caused a 9-foot tidal surge that left children and families dealing with the loss of homes and power. Schools and child care centers were closed for weeks or months. Children still need our help to fully recover from the trauma they experienced.

Facebook's generous support was the driver of our response in Florida and Georgia. At the six-month mark of the disaster, progress is slow, communities are struggling to rebound and children continue to grapple with the stress of loss and change. Our recovery team is based in the Florida Panhandle and is coordinating with community and regional partners to restore child care services, help children and caregivers cope and prepare families for future disasters.

Since the earliest days of the storm, Save the Children has directly helped more than 50,000 people impacted by Hurricane Michael – including more than 24,000 children – through its response and recovery programs. Your contribution was crucial, and we are pleased to highlight some of the many ways it has made a difference.

Six Months after Hurricane Michael

Life is still difficult for families in counties that experienced the worst devastation caused by Hurricane Michael. Many students have left the area or been rezoned to different schools. People living in Bay County, which includes Panama City, have been the hardest hit. The county's student population is down 14% and 7,800 residents are still considered homeless.

"... the impact hurricane Michael had on our family changed our life forever... our home was deemed unliveable. Since then we have moved 3 times from our house in Marianna, to Tallahassee, then to Bascom, Florida – which is closer to our area – and we are now currently looking for a new home while trusting that God will make a way for our family soon and very soon."

–Monica, mother of 3-year-old Riley (cover photo).*

Families report to our local staff that children are struggling with nightmares and anxiety and with negative behavior at home and in school. Some children are experiencing re-traumatization after having lived through Hurricane Irma in 2017. We know from experience that the need for mental health support after a disaster increases, but those resources for children and caregivers are lacking – in particular for those in poverty.

We continue to learn about local needs. For example, schools and child care centers are facing a growing shortage in certified staff. Many have moved elsewhere and many of those who stayed need part of the week to re-build their homes. In Bay County, Florida, many doctors' offices have not reopened and one of the county's two hospitals is closed. In the majority of our program areas, schools remain damaged and jobs have not returned making it difficult for parents to get back on their feet.

Cover Photo: Riley enjoys her time in a child care center that Save the Children assisted in reopening in Marianna, Florida. *Name changed for privacy. Photo: Save the Children

A Story of Determination: Restoring Child Care so Kids Can Get Back to Normal

Erica's child care center was one of the very few centers still open after Hurricane Michael reduced much of her community in the Florida Panhandle to rubble. One morning, a young couple came to the center, catching their breath as they entered. "We came immediately – you still have a space, don't you?" they asked Erica. The couple had called 15 minutes before their visit because their children's center was closed due to mold caused by the storm's damaging rains. "We've called all around and this is the only center with any space still available. If we don't find somewhere for our children, we can't go back to work."

"They don't just need care, they need quality care," Erica explained, referring to the needs of young parents in the area after the storm. "They need to know their kids will be OK." Since the storm, Erica has been determined to do just that – to pick up the pieces and, literally, the debris that surrounded her center, so she could get back to providing quality early learning opportunities to her community's young children.

With the help of our Facebook community, which raised \$1.2 million for Save the Children's Hurricane Michael response and recovery efforts, we've been able to help Erica get her child care center back up and running. We provided funding to help her staff recover so they could return to work and to repair the center's playground so



A young girl and Erica pose at a child care center in the Panhandle that is receiving support from Save the Children. *Photo: Save the Children*

children can once again go outside to exercise and play safely during the day.

"The children really need safe outdoor playtime," Erica said. "They need some healing sunshine and the chance to work out their stress and expend that pent-up energy. Having that playground equipment will be a big boost toward helping them heal."

Erica's recovery story is one of many that would not have been possible without the generous support of our Facebook community. Save the Children is working to support and reopen hundreds of child care centers across the Florida Panhandle, so they can once again provide critical early learning opportunities for the region's kids.

The Facebook Community's Generosity at Work: Meeting Needs and Building Resiliency

We are reaching forgotten and remote communities with critical services and working with partners to provide holistic programming that helps children and families get the materials, support and skills they need to recover and thrive.

Through our recovery efforts we are prioritizing our work in Bay, Calhoun, Franklin, Gadsden, Gulf, Jackson, Liberty and Washington counties in Florida, where the most damage occurred and where families, many already in vulnerable living situations, have limited resources for their recovery.



Providing Essential Supplies

In the initial aftermath of the hurricane, our staff and partners provided more than 23,000 vulnerable children and their families with items such as clothing, cribs, hygiene and infant care supplies. We also distributed items to help children play and cope, such as toys, books and art supplies. And to help children get back to normal we distributed costumes – so they could celebrate Halloween, even when they were displaced from their homes.



Keeping Children in Shelters Safe

Our initial response team in Florida opened five Child-Friendly Spaces at evacuation shelters. Child-Friendly Spaces are a separate and protected area where our staff and trained volunteers provide nurturing activities to children so that they can play, express themselves, and continue to learn in a safe environment. These areas also give traumatized



A young boy and a Save the Children staff volunteer play at one of our Child-Friendly Spaces in a shelter in Florida.

Photo: Nicolle Keogh/Save the Children

parents time to fill out insurance paperwork, plan next steps or have just a few moments of respite knowing their children will be okay. These Child-Friendly Space sites served 126 children over the course of four weeks in the fall 2018.



Restoring Child Care Services Critical to Families' Recovery

Hurricane Michael devastated the child care community damaging many facilities. In Bay County alone, it is reported that one-third of child care centers have been completely destroyed. That means children's learning has been put on hold and parents have delayed their return to work. In places impoverished before the storm, the impact on the already limited number of programs created a severe shortage of quality child care that has forced some families to relocate and programs to close permanently. Even six months later, some child care centers are continuing to close down.

Save the Children has partnered with local and state agencies in Florida and Georgia to restore access to early learning and to help child care

centers reopen and support children in safe, quality environments.

“Thanks to Save the Children we were able to continue operations, replace damaged equipment and supplies, and waive our fees for program participants recovering from the storm...your generosity has enabled us to get back to providing our youth with a safe place to be a kid in the midst of all the turmoil in their lives.” – Boys and Girls Club of Tabula Rasa, Florida

To date we’ve provided more than \$350,000 in grants to early learning partners so they can resume operating as quickly as possible. Our support here is uniquely critical as these privately run child care centers are vital to children and families and the economic recovery of their communities, yet most do not qualify for FEMA or other government recovery support.

Our recovery grant and distribution programs have benefited among others, the Early Learning Coalitions of Northwest Florida, which serves 93 child care providers; the Early Learning Coalition of Big Bend, which serves 230 providers.

Our grants have thus far helped 43 child care centers in Florida and 41 child care centers in Georgia to clear out debris, do physical repairs and restoration, and purchase new classroom materials and playground equipment. Our child care restoration efforts, a unique role that we play in U.S. disasters, has benefited over 6,800 children in Florida and Georgia and by supporting the preservation of these centers, will benefit children for years to come.

As recovery progresses, we will continue to support child care facility restoration. And we will address the child care shortage by providing subsidies for families in need and to help licensed

teachers be able to open programs and enroll more children.



Community Support

Our support reaches beyond the early education sector as we provided grants to local and state organizations providing rent assistance, housing, food, and care to families in need, thus far serving nearly 1,800 children and 900 caregivers. An example of this is Healthy Families Florida, which provides wrap-around services to 750 family clients in areas that Michael devastated.

In addition, grant funds have also helped a dozen Boys & Girls Clubs sites and school-age organizations to repair their facilities, replace educational materials, and provide meals so that over 2,500 children could continue to learn and over 800 parents and staff could be cared for and employed in their communities.

Ensuring Children’s and Caregivers’ Well-being

Children affected by Michael will continue to grapple with the stress and emotional turmoil of the disaster. Our partners have reported that children still become anxious and cry every time it rains. We are working with communities, early learning networks and university partners to deliver social and emotional recovery programs, including Journey of Hope and HEART, which help children and caregivers understand and cope with the stress, fear, loss and trauma that can come in the wake of a disaster like Hurricane Michael.

Developed after Hurricane Katrina, Journey of Hope is an evidence-based program that provides children a safe, small group setting to explore and normalize their emotions, develop healthy coping skills, build confidence and foster positive peer relationships. It also helps parents and

caregivers cope and become more resilient after emergencies, so they can be there to support their children's needs.

“Very young children are showing signs of stress and fear stemming from the aftermath of Hurricane Michael. By helping provide resources such as therapeutic play materials and early childhood mental health consultants, we know we are making a difference.” –Suzan Gage, Executive Director of the Early Learning Coalition of Northwest Florida.

HEART (Healing and Education Through the Arts) helps children affected by serious or chronic stress find new ways to share their feelings and experiences, using the proven power of artistic expression to help them recover.

Even toddlers are not immune to the impacts of stress after a disaster, so we plan to train our early learning partners in our Shelter from the Storm program that teaches participants how to recognize signs of stress in children ages 0-3 and respond appropriately. Our trainings will also include training for teachers and caregivers on self-care, and how to identify, normalize and cope with trauma.

Preparing Children and Partners for the Next Disaster

Emergency preparedness and resilience building are key to Save the Children's recovery strategy in Florida. Through our community partnerships, we are helping child care providers gain knowledge and skills to be equipped for future disasters.

We are rolling out our Prep Rally emergency preparedness program through summer and community programs to ensure more children and their parents are ready and resilient for

disasters. Prep Rallies, for children in grades K-5, use games and activities to teach children about the importance of planning ahead, gathering supplies and knowing what to do during a disaster. The program helps children feel equipped with the knowledge and skills to weather whatever storm may come their way.

Thank You

Thanks to the Facebook community and everyone who contributed to our Hurricane Michael appeal, Save the Children will continue serving children and families in Florida through December 2019.

We are grateful for the dedication and collaboration of community partners in reaching thousands of the most vulnerable children affected by this disaster. We continue to work alongside these local groups to support longer-term recovery of impacted communities across southwest Florida. Some of our community partners have included:

Florida

- Boys and Girls Clubs of Bay County, Big Bend and Tabula Rasa
- Early Learning Coalition of Big Bend
- Early Learning Coalition of Northwest Florida
- Florida Coalition for Children
- Florida State University Early Head Start
- Florida State University School of Social Work
- Healthy Families Florida
- PlayBig Therapy and Recreation Zone

Georgia

- Boys and Girls Club of Albany and Marguerite Neel Williams Southwest Georgia
- Department of Early Care and Learning-Foundation for Disaster Relief
- Dougherty County Family Literacy Council

Learning to Pick up the Pieces after Hurricane Michael

For children, a cardboard box can present limitless possibilities – it can become a spaceship, a time machine, a clubhouse.

Even in the aftermath of Hurricane Michael, at an emergency shelter for families in the Florida Panhandle whose homes were unlivable, extra cardboard boxes offered children that same potential – plus the chance to be kids again.

Inside Save the Children’s Child-Friendly Space, busy little hands shaped and taped boxes into an elaborate fort, decorated with chalk and complete with a roof.

The Child-Friendly Space – designed as a safe and protective area where children can play, socialize and begin to recover from an emergency – also offered children a chance to pick a book in the reading corner, create at an arts-and-crafts table, jump rope or play with toys. The older children at the space gravitated to the cardboard and the growing structure they were building together.

Suddenly, the fort came tumbling down. Children burst out of it, kicking the cardboard, breaking the tape and the fort’s walls. They were shouting, “Hurricane! It’s a hurricane!” Their masterpiece was quickly flattened.

However, the children, still grappling with the memories of Hurricane Michael and the reality of its impact, did not look upset. Instead, they were playing the role of the powerful hurricane that devastated their homes.

At first, Save the Children staff members moved in to help the kids pick up what was left of the fort. “We were trying to clean up the space because it was getting so boisterous,” said



A young boy and a Save the Children staff volunteer play at one of our Child-Friendly Spaces in a shelter in Florida.

Photo: Nicolle Keogh/Save the Children

Marisa, a trained volunteer at the space. “And then they started rebuilding.”

The teamwork was unspoken — it started with one or two children and then others followed suit. They moved the remains of their old fort to a new spot in the room and began building again. They dragged big pieces of cardboard and carried smaller ones over their heads. They shared materials and rebuilt their fort.

This time, they made it bigger and better than before.



Save the Children believes every child deserves a future. In the United States and around the world, we give children a healthy start in life, the opportunity to learn and protection from harm. We do whatever it takes for children – every day and in times of crisis – transforming their lives and the future we share.

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