

# Historic Floods Ravage West Virginia: Save the Children Responding to Children's Needs

June 29, 2016

## The Emergency

Torrential storms that battered much of West Virginia in late June dropped up to 10 inches of rain, triggered unprecedented flash floods and sparked at least two tornados across the state. At least 23 people were killed and hundreds more were stranded. Some of the hardest-hit areas include Roane County and Kanawha County, where 900 homes and 70 businesses were destroyed. In Kanawha County, the town of Clendenin was entirely submerged by the floods, which damaged hundreds of homes, the entire downtown, schools and libraries. In response to the severe flooding and mudslides, a state of emergency was declared in 44 of the state's 55 counties. Early comparisons are being made to the November 1985 floods, which remain the state's most devastating natural disaster.

## The Impact on Children

Children are always among the most vulnerable in any emergency. Early estimates indicate that over 18,300 children have been affected by these storms. The floods have caused families to lose their homes, vehicles and belongings, forcing hundreds into shelters and leaving thousands without power. In many areas, children's education has been disrupted, as the floods have damaged resources and closed schools. In addition, children have lost their shoes and are walking barefoot in contaminated waters. Girls and boys are also traveling in vehicles without car seats because their families' own cars were washed away. This natural disaster exacerbates the state's already complex socioeconomic issues – 33 percent of children in West Virginia were estimated to be living in poverty prior to the flooding.

**Due to the unprecedented impact of these historic floods, we have issued an initial appeal of \$300,000 to support our 2016 West Virginia**



Save the Children's emergency relief workers are on the ground in flood-affected West Virginia, where roads, schools, homes and businesses have been completely submerged by water.

*Photo: Anna Hardway for Save the Children*

**Floods Fund. Your contribution will help us provide immediate support to those affected – many of whom have lost their homes, belongings and livelihoods.**

## Save the Children's Response

Save the Children has worked in West Virginia since 2010. Our early childhood development and school-based literacy programs serve over 1,800 children in five counties, three of which were impacted heavily by this week's severe flooding. These include girls and boys attending our programs in the Cherry River Elementary School in Nicholas County, our program sites in Calhoun County, and the Geary School in Roane County.

When the flooding broke out, our expert staff in

West Virginia immediately switched into response mode. We conducted rapid needs assessments in hard-hit areas by communicating with schools, reaching out to families and networking with local organizations on the ground. Despite telephone and power outages that have encumbered such outreach, we are continuing to contact families of children who participate in our programs, and those in their community areas, to assess and respond to their immediate needs.

***Our response to date and in the imminent future includes the following:***

- We were the only group to provide baby supplies in some areas, and have distributed blankets, pop-up cribs and baby car seats to affected families.
- We visited schools, city halls and distribution centers in affected areas, providing blankets and other relief supplies and making further situation assessments.
- Our Southern Calhoun literacy and math summer program is currently collecting and distributing items for those affected by the floods, including cases of water. They will also be assisting with cleanup in the next few days as floodwaters settle.
- We are supporting teachers and learning programs, such as Save the Children's Early Steps to School Success early childhood home visiting program, and will work with schools and teachers to help them reestablish classrooms and replace learning materials and books that may have been damaged or destroyed.
- We will soon provide cash cards to families through schools in under-resourced areas so that they can purchase essential items for their children including clothing, shoes and school backpacks.
- We are currently looking to network with local faith leaders, special education directors and other child-service providers to collaborate on future responses and reach as many affected children as possible.



We are providing blankets, baby supplies, bottled water and other essential relief items to children and families affected by the floods in West Virginia.

*Photo: Tom Riser for Save the Children*

**Why Save the Children?**

*Save the Children is the world's leading child-focused humanitarian organization. We have nearly 100 years' experience responding to children and their families during and after crises. We are exceptional among aid agencies because we provide comprehensive emergency preparedness, relief and recovery programs that are specifically designed to meet the unique needs of children and their families. We have well-trained national staff ready to respond at a moment's notice. Our international experts in health, nutrition, food security, shelter, water and sanitation, education and child protection can join our local staff if needed. We also have pre-positioned relief supplies and medicines that can be distributed quickly. Because we work directly with children and families in the heart of the crisis, we know immediately when conditions change and can adapt our programs to meet children's most urgent needs. Save the Children also stays as long as it takes to help children, families and communities recover from their losses, rebuild their lives and become more resilient to future shocks.*

*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.*