

HURRICANE HARVEY AND ITS IMPACT ON HOUSTON
AN UPDATE FROM THE JEWISH FEDERATION OF GREATER HOUSTON
MAY 31, 2018

CURRENT STATUS

Immediately after the storm, the Jewish Federation of Greater Houston (JFGH) and Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA) set up the Hurricane Harvey Relief Fund to provide for short- and long-term recovery needs. This Fund, which provided immediate assistance to individuals and families, continues to support the continuity of Jewish life and rebuilding of Jewish institutions, and now is working to be a part of the solution to find meaningful change and ensure resiliency from future flooding.

Together JFGH and JFNA have raised more than \$22.8 million to aid in recovery efforts. Institutional damage within the Jewish community alone is estimated to exceed \$50 million, with more than half of those costs not covered by insurance reimbursements or other sources. Fundraising efforts continue.

Even eight months after the storm, many families remain out of their homes and continue to struggle with plans for the future. Jewish Family Service estimates that for many, the recovery will take three to five years because the intensity of the needs is so great. Many of these families are also at risk of losing their connection to Jewish life as they struggle to balance the costs of participation in things like day school and summer camp with unanticipated necessary basic needs including home repair, replacing lost items and simultaneous payments of rent and mortgage.

ALLOCATIONS

To date, \$18.4 million of the funds raised to support hurricane recovery and rebuild efforts have been allocated.

Funds allocated include financial aid for families and individuals that supports both basic needs and participation in Jewish life. Families have been helped with immediate cash assistance grants, furniture and appliance grants, scholarships for Jewish day school, Jewish camping programs, Israel experiences, synagogue membership dues, and other critical community needs.

We continue to gather data and allocate funds based on needs and know that recovery will take years.

PRIORITY AREAS

As a community, we have focused our work in four areas:

- \$9.7 million - Helping families recover
- \$3.9 million - Institutional restoration
- \$4.6 million - Ensuring connections to Jewish life
- \$88 thousand - Flood mitigation and resiliency efforts (these efforts have just begun)

KEY ALLOCATIONS

- Primarily funded by the Federation, Jewish Family Service is working to help more than 1,870 households, containing 5,672 individuals.
- To date, more than \$275,000 has been provided to 150 Jewish overnight summer camp participants whose homes flooded.

- Scholarship assistance for day school and early childhood programs has been provided to 480 students across 12 separate institutions and 17 learning programs.
- Jewish educational institutions have been provided with a total allocation of \$601,500 to address immediate cash flow and lost revenue needs resulting from Harvey.
- An estimated \$75,000 will be provided to more than 140 families who applied for day camp scholarships for the summer of 2018.
- More than 130 school administrators, teachers, JFS staffers and Federation employees have attended sessions by the Israel Trauma Coalition to help them respond to community need. (This is especially important as it is estimated that close to 18% of Harris County residents are experiencing significant trauma because of the storm.)

REMAINING NEEDS

Houstonians will feel the effects of Harvey for many years. There will continue to be pressing needs in the community which we will need to address. Our current focus is geared toward 2018/19 Jewish Day School scholarships and providing support to enhance the work of Jewish Family Service's Disaster Case Management team.

The Federation worked diligently to allocate funds expediently to meet urgent needs and has purposefully held back \$4.7 million to meet needs that continue to arise as families and institutions work to make long-term decisions.

- Scholarships - One of the key components of sustaining Jewish life is ensuring that families can continue to send their students to Jewish schools. We have provided over \$713,000 in scholarships for day schools, overnight camp, day camp, early childhood and Israel experiences. The need is expected to continue for several years because there is still a large portion of our Jewish population who will not have the financial flexibility to send their kids back to these Jewish educational experiences. It is important for us to support these families and schools to ensure our Jewish students are getting the best education possible and stay connected to Jewish life.
- Case Management - Jewish Family Service of Greater Houston is our main provider of the services families need to recover. Its response has been tremendous, and the staff continues to show their dedication toward helping our community recover.

There are 1,671 Hurricane Harvey related cases currently open, and new cases are ongoing as some were "paralyzed" by the crisis and could not make immediate decisions. UJA Federation of New York team members who managed its response to Hurricane Sandy have worked with the staff at JFS to estimate ongoing need. Their consensus is that case management will continue for three to five years and cost approximately \$3 million especially since 80 percent of the cases have some characteristics of intensive case management.

In the aftermath of the storm, JFS received the single largest grant from the Harvey Fund of \$8.5 million. These funds have provided for case management, direct financial aid to families, and furniture grants to help families replace belongings. JFS recently requested an additional \$3 million to meet the ongoing needs.

Three of our major institutions also face continued significant challenges to returning to full operations.

- **United Orthodox Synagogues**
Their sanctuary had to be demolished after multiple flood events made repair impossible. Because this is a modern Orthodox shul, 300 families – most of whom live within walking distance and are also working to repair their own homes – will be significantly impacted by the decision of when, how and where to rebuild.
- **Seven Acres Jewish Senior Care Services**
Before the storm, it housed the largest Alzheimer’s unit in the country. It had no choice but to move out hundreds of residents after Harvey when their first floor was destroyed. In the aftermath, they had to lay off approximately 100 employees. It is unknown when and if Seven Acres will be fully repaired and able to return to full-scale operations. Many of the residents who were relocated would like to return, but local and state regulations must be met before they can do so.
- **The Evelyn Rubenstein Jewish Community Center**
Unrecovered financial losses from Hurricane Harvey caused the JCC to examine its program and facility expenses. Based on that assessment, it announced in recent weeks that it must close its West Houston facility, which houses an early childhood school. It also is still working to complete repairs to its main campus before summer camp begins in June. Parts of the main campus have now flooded multiple times. The JCC continues to weigh costs of repair with cost of relocation.

NEW EFFORT - FLOOD RESILIENCY TASK FORCE

The Jewish Federation of Greater Houston Flood Resiliency Task Force is working not only within the Jewish community, but with local, state and federal officials to help ensure that flood mitigation and community resiliency strategies are put into place.

This committee will operate with three foundational goals:

- Developing technical solutions to prevent future flooding
- Facilitating a cohesive community strategy for communicating a shared plan
- Enhancing public advocacy efforts for our community.

Both technical mitigation strategies and consideration of the economic and social impact of those strategies on the families, businesses and institutions must be advocated for in this work. The path to change requires a singular voice advocating for this community.

CONCLUSION

When the waters rose, and members of Houston’s Jewish community found themselves facing unprecedented devastation and destruction, you were there to help us get through.

In less than one year since the storm, our community has come a long way, but we have also realized that we are far from full recovery and we must work toward a comprehensive long-term plan. No other Jewish community in the United States has witnessed such widespread destruction, and the recovery process is estimated to take years.

The quick and effective mobilization of the Jewish community has been critical in moving Houston toward recovery; however, there is much work to be done in order to have a world-class Jewish community in the years ahead. Your support is crucial. It will help keep this community vital, vibrant and thriving for years to come.