

Note: The American Red Cross/National will be presenting at the Kirby Alliance Meeting on March 1, 2018 at the FMKF offices. If anyone is interested in joining the group for the presentation or would like to receive a copy of the ARC's presentation materials, please let Dillard know and we will arrange accordingly closer to the date.

Grantee: American Red Cross/National Headquarters

Program Area: Human Services

Most recent grant: 2017; \$250,000; For: National Disaster Relief Fund

Total funding: Since 1989, approx. \$10,000,000 (not including regional funding)

Over the past few months, American Red Cross (ARC) Disaster Services has very visibly helped millions in the paths of three successive historic hurricanes – Harvey, Irma, and Maria – as well as the California wildfires – the most destructive wildfires in California history. Our hope in choosing ARC National as our grantee spotlight this month is to detail exactly how expansive (to a nearly unprecedented degree) the Disaster Service aid has been in recent months, as well as to address ARC's response to the negative press that has come with recent media attention.

Since late August¹, the Red Cross, along with community and government partners, “provided more than 1.3 million overnight stays in emergency shelters (opened in eight states, Puerto Rico, and the US Virgin Islands), *which is more overnight shelter stays than the past five years combined*; served more than 11.4 million meals and snacks, *which is more food than the past four years combined*; distributed more than 6.2 million emergency relief items; and provided more than 214,600 health and mental health contacts.”

To prepare for disasters such as hurricanes, the Red Cross pre-positions additional blood products and stocks hospitals to capacity. As floodwaters inundated communities in southeast Texas, the Red Cross continued to provide blood products to its hospital partners (sometimes working with federal and local authorities to airlift products) to ensure patient needs were met. After local blood collections were significantly impacted in Puerto Rico by Hurricane Maria, the Red Cross provided about 1,200 blood and platelet products to help hospitals not typically served by the Red Cross. These were in addition to ongoing distributions to Red Cross hospital partners on the island.

These responses were followed closely by the deadliest week of wildfires in California history. The organization partnered with community and government entities to provide 27,900 overnight stays in emergency shelters, distribute 145,600 emergency relief items, serve more than 195,700 meals and snacks, and administer more than 16,100 health and mental health contacts.

In addition to these natural disaster responses, the Red Cross also provided support to those affected by the Las Vegas and Sutherland, Texas shootings, delivering more than 450 additional blood products to area hospitals, offering mental health support, serving meals and snacks, and supporting the families of those impacted, truly exemplifying the motto of “All day, every day, wherever someone needs us.”

With this nearly-daily spotlight on Disaster Relief Services comes increased media attention. While, according to the Red Cross, 98% of the 5,000 traditional media news stories the organization sees every day are positive or neutral, there has been a history of negative press, most notably in the past few months, in USA Today and ProPublica. Both articles were critiques of the Red Cross'

¹ Statistics as of November 13, 2017

response to Hurricane Harvey that cited specific complaints or anecdotes from members of the areas affected. The ARC claims that neither organization attempted to follow up with them for a response; subsequently, the ARC released formal responses to these articles that either contradicted each complaint or tried to provide an explanation for why a “failed response” panned out the way it did. To counter negative press, the Red Cross works to “flood the zone” with positive stories of its work across all its lines of business, provides comprehensive details to media preparing their own stories about the organization, and addresses misunderstanding or misstatements, when necessary. However, it should be noted that in the recent past, the ARC’s management of Disaster Relief responses has, at times, been disconcerting. Examples cited have included its administration of the September 11 Fund and similar criticism related to its performance following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, Superstorm Sandy, and the 2010 earthquake that devastated Haiti. While some criticism has been unwarranted and sensationalized, the ARC acknowledged its many shortcomings, but has committed itself to overall quality improvement to restore its reputation and donor confidence.

It is important to remember that disasters, by their very nature, are chaotic. And while even the Red Cross (or any disaster response organization) can be hindered by the challenges these catastrophic events bring, it exemplifies a non-stop drive to provide as much help as possible wherever and whenever needed – all without federal funds and with a 90-percent volunteer workforce. Even more impressive, the American Red Cross is unique in its ability to provide all assistance free of charge to the people in need due to its relationship with generous donors. To borrow a quote referenced by the Board Chair of the Houston Red Cross in the wake of Hurricane Harvey, “If there wasn’t a Red Cross, we’d have to invent one.”

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