

Volunteering after a Disaster Can Help Make a Difference with Recovery

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GUAYNABO, Puerto Rico – After Hurricane Maria, some people instinctively reached out to help their storm-ravaged neighborhoods. No one told them to do it. They took action on their own and gave what they could.

In Ceiba, Efrain Hernandez continued to work his day job with the municipality's Planning and Emergency Management Division. By night, Hernandez, along with four family members and a friend, drove his van to San Juan and picked up donated food and water for Ceiba's survivors.

Hernandez inspired others to donate more provisions and truck owners to help distribute the donated food and water not only to Ceiba but to Naguabo, Humacao, Yabucoa, Morovis, Utuado and Vieques.

In San Juan, Gretchen Ruiz Ramos, a photographer, cultural promoter and avid outdoorswoman, launched a campaign to assemble and donate Eco Kits. The kits included solar lights, solar chargers, mosquito nets, solar radios, rechargeable fans, headlamps, purified water and water filters.

She acquired supplies for her Eco Kits by opening a GoFundMe account and raising \$10,000.

Hernandez and Ruiz Ramos were just two of many people who donated to hurricane survivors. A year later, volunteers are still needed.



Volunteerism covers a wide range of activities.

Some volunteers may want to raise money—anything from bake sales to charity events—to help nonprofits with the expense of replacing essentials not covered by FEMA or other organizations. Others may want to donate their skilled labor or participate in a community cleanup campaign.

People looking for volunteering opportunities can contact Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster. The Puerto Rico chapter includes 45 nonprofits that assist communities across the island.

To take part in the Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster, send an email to Ovad.PuertoRico@gmail.com.

Individuals may also find a list of local volunteer organization websites at the Centro para el Desarrollo de Voluntariado website www.voluntariospuertorico.com

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Disaster recovery assistance is available without regard to race, color, religion, nationality, sex, age, disability, English proficiency or economic status. If you or someone you know has been discriminated against, call FEMA toll-free at 800-621-FEMA (3362) 711/VRS - Video Relay Service). Multilingual operators are available. (Press 2 for Spanish). TTY call 800-462-7585.

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