

Youths make vital contributions to emergency preparedness

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AUSTIN, Texas — When members of the Aransas Pass Police Explorers Post returned home after evacuating for Hurricane Harvey in 2017, many of the youths felt helpless in the wake of the storm's historic destruction.

"You could see the devastation on their faces, and they wanted to help out, but being children and not trained in any special skills, they were not able to," said Cory Elrod, an Aransas Pass code compliance officer and adviser for Police Explorer Post 347. "A lot of them talked about [wanting to] be able to help if the area would be hit by another hurricane."

This year Elrod brought five members of the Explorers Post to Texas State University in San Marcos for a five-day course in June that taught teens from around the state how to help in a disaster. Hosted by the Texas School Safety Center, the annual Youth Preparedness Camp taught skills such as triage, fire safety and search-and-rescue, and explained elements of disaster psychology and the Incident Command System.

"They learned a lot, and even when we went back to our rooms each night, they were practicing, wrapping each others' arms up and clearing rooms," Elrod said after the camp had ended. "On the way back [to Aransas Pass], all they talked about was wanting more training, wanting to attend more camps and grow."



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Eight groups from around the state, totaling 66 students and adult sponsors, attended the camp, ensuring their communities will be more prepared and resilient if disaster strikes again. Each group prepared an Action Plan during the camp and will begin implementing it this summer.

“[Our plan is] to bring these skills back to Aransas Pass to educate and train our community and school district,” Elrod said. “We are going to begin a second Community Emergency Response Team [and] hold quarterly training for our groups and educational events for the public.”

The Community Emergency Response Team, or CERT, program is a FEMA-sponsored nationwide system of volunteers trained in disaster preparedness and emergency response. The San Marcos camp provided the full 20-hour CERT Basic Training course, then capped it off with a simulated flooding scenario in which students treated injuries, extracted patients to secure locations and operated under the Incident Command System.

The newly trained Explorers compose Aransas Pass’ first-ever CERT team. Although there is a separate Teen CERT program, the San Marcos camp provided adult CERT training, ensuring the campers will be able to integrate into any CERT team.

“These kids are young, but they’re very mature for their age ... and they’d give you the shirt off their back,” Elrod said, adding that they picked up great skills at the San Marcos camp. “The instructors are truly experienced and have great knowledge to share. I’ve done this for a while, and sometimes I was like, ‘I didn’t even know that.’”



To learn more about CERT, visit www.ready.gov/community-emergency-response-team or www.listo.gov/es/equipo-comunitario-de-respuesta-a-emergencias for Spanish.

FEMA's Youth Preparedness Council provides another avenue to make a difference. The Council brings together young leaders to complete local and national disaster preparedness projects and provide input to FEMA on strategies, initiatives and projects. More on the Council is available at www.ready.gov/youth-preparedness-council.

FEMA Disaster Preparedness Education Programs for youths are also available nationwide. Find programs in your area by visiting <https://go.usa.gov/xycZp>. To learn how to establish a program in your community, go to <https://go.usa.gov/xycZv>.

For 4th and 5th graders, FEMA recommends Student Tools for Emergency Planning, a classroom-based emergency preparedness curriculum available at <https://go.usa.gov/xycZM>.

Find more resources by visiting www.ready.gov/youth-preparedness.

For additional information on Hurricane Harvey and Texas recovery, visit the Hurricane Harvey disaster web page at www.fema.gov/disaster/4332, Facebook at www.facebook.com/FEMAHarvey, the FEMA Region 6 Twitter account at www.twitter.com/FEMARegion6 or the Texas Division of Emergency Management website at www.dps.texas.gov/dem.



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