



AmeriCorps & Disaster Response

SPOTLIGHT ON HURRICANE HARVEY



On August 25, 2017 Hurricane Harvey made landfall along the Gulf Coast devastating communities in Texas and Louisiana.

In the days, weeks, and months that followed first responders, Coast Guard, National Guard, national service members, and everyday Americans lent a helping hand.

In just the first month after the storm, the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), the federal agency for volunteering and service, deployed more than 1,800 AmeriCorps and Senior Corps members to areas impacted by the hurricanes. In Texas, more than 800 AmeriCorps members supported recovery activities. Their service included volunteer and donations management, disaster survivor assistance, operations and logistics, damage assessments, and muck and gut operations, working alongside local response organizations.

Caleb Bell was deployed from Conservation Corps Minnesota & Iowa (CCMI). He was excited because disaster relief work was the reason he joined AmeriCorps.

“Houston was definitely different than I expected. It was a shock at first to see how much devastation the flooding caused,” said Bell. “In the neighborhood where we served, there were people who had experienced four or five feet of water in their homes. The people we helped hadn’t started mucking and gutting at all; the water had just receded a few days prior to our arrival.

“I was in one house that really needed help. The homeowner had belongings in every room, floor to ceiling. At first it was extremely difficult to work on her home. I had a really hard time believing what I was seeing, and she had a hard time letting things go. The more I worked on the home and talked to the owner, the easier it became to help her. She knew that things needed to go, and began to let us throw things away, even though it was hard for her. It really showed how 10 strong backs and three long days can really change someone’s life. In the case of this survivor, she would never have been able to remove everything herself.”

“I think that everyone should take the opportunity to help with disaster response if they have the chance. This deployment has definitely been life-changing for me.”

Following a disaster, national service acts as a force multiplier, providing key resources and significantly expanding the capacity of existing organizations on the ground. Since 1994, these national service programs have provided critical support to millions of Americans affected by disasters, including forest fires, floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, terror attacks, and oil spills. AmeriCorps and Senior Corps members typically stay in communities for substantial periods of time, not just in the immediate aftermath of a disaster.