

# SUPERSTORM SANDY TWO YEARS LATER: An Exercise in Persistence . . . and Love

by Rick Jones

If you visit communities along the coastline of New Jersey and New York, you can still feel the impact of Superstorm Sandy's powerful punch two years later. The aftermath of the superstorm left more than 100 people dead, residents in 24 states without homes and \$64 billion in damages.

New Jersey and New York took the brunt of Sandy's force. The two states also saw the largest contingent of support as thousands of volunteers traveled to the region to help families clean up and rebuild. Two years later, 17 hosting sites provided by Presbyterian Disaster Assis-

tance are still housing volunteers. God's people continue to shower families with love and support.

"There are a whole range of emotions from the residents in these states," said Rick Turner, an associate for the church's disaster recovery efforts. "Some people are emotionally drained and feel forgotten. After two years, estimates of up to 25 percent of the residents have yet to see any movement in the recovery effort."

Turner attributes the defeated spirit on the slow process of cutting through government red tape. Navigating the details of housing codes and regulations has sapped strained residents even more. Sandy also wiped out businesses that have yet to re-open, adding to the stress.



*Members of the volunteer work team from Bardstown Road Presbyterian Church in Louisville, Kentucky, working on a roof during their August 2013 trip to New Jersey to help with Superstorm Sandy recovery efforts.*

“You’ll find frustrated families in nine out of ten homes in the impacted areas,” said David Rauer, manager of volunteer housing in New Jersey. “We are coming up on two years since the storm and these families are looking at two or more years before work gets started.”

Rauer said families are still waiting on financial aid. In addition, there are a limited number of companies that can perform the needed work on many of the homes.

The First Presbyterian Church in Jamaica, Queens, New York operates one of the largest volunteer hosting sites. But it recently hosted a family that had been living in a damaged home since the storm. The family had received federal funding to rebuild, but a dishonest contractor took the money and ran leaving them with no source of income or support. The Red Cross found the home saturated in mold and took charge of the rebuilding effort.

“There is still a lot of work to be done and we need funding to keep it going, but getting those needed dollars is a very slow process,” said Dora Sawh, the church’s disaster assistance coordinator. “We had originally planned to host volunteers for two years, but because of the demand, we will continue through 2015.”



Photo by Chris Lieberman

*Peggy Elgin, a member of the volunteer work team from Bardstown Road Presbyterian Church in Louisville, Kentucky, serving in New Jersey.*



Photo by Janis Leach

*A volunteer work team member from First Presbyterian Church in Cambridge, Ohio, helping with rebuilding efforts in New Jersey.*



Photo by Janis Leach

*Volunteer work team members from First Presbyterian Church in Cambridge, Ohio, serving in Superstorm Sandy rebuilding efforts.*

Sawh's church hosted 712 volunteers in 2013 and approximately 640 as of September 2014. The summer months tend to be the busiest as youth groups take summer vacation to offer their support to the impacted communities. The fall months see a decline in groups. Rauer echoes the seasonal support numbers. During summer months there may be 120-150 volunteers a week; that number is cut in half between September and April.

Compassion fatigue is common among volunteers in disasters like Sandy. Day in and day out, they are surrounded by the pain and frustration of people struggling to get their lives back on track.

"We assist the volunteers and church leaders in the impacted areas by making sure they don't burn out," said Eden Carroll, manager of the disaster assistance call center. "These workers are surrounded by destruction and discouragement and they need to be lifted up as well."

"Pastors and case managers sit through meeting after meeting listening to people who have lost everything and have nowhere else to turn," added Turner. "It doesn't take long to take its toll on the support network."

Presbyterian Disaster Assistance volunteers are concerned about the coming year. With other disasters and

emergencies around the country and the world, they fear the victims of Superstorm Sandy will be forgotten.

"In New Jersey alone, there are more than 160,000 homes in need of repair," added Rauer. "We need to keep Superstorm Sandy in the minds and hearts of compassionate people around the country."

More than 5,500 volunteers have given 310,000 hours of help in the Sandy response. Volunteer work teams are still needed to assist with recovery and rebuilding efforts from Superstorm Sandy. For more information on how your team can be involved, contact the PDA Call Center at [pda.callcenter@pcusa.org](mailto:pda.callcenter@pcusa.org) or call toll-free 866-732-6121.

*Rick Jones is the Communications Strategist for Compassion, Peace and Justice.*



*Bill Bowman, a member of the volunteer work team from Bardstown Road Presbyterian Church in Louisville, Kentucky, serving in New Jersey.*