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United Way and our Keys community mark 3-year Hurricane Irma anniversary and our journey to recovery

Florida Keys—September 10 is a day that will always be remembered in the Keys, and this year marks 3 long years since Hurricane Irma devastated portions of our chain of islands. Evidence of Irma’s wrath remains and these have been 3 years of struggling to rebuild our community. While it hasn’t been easy, most residents have now recovered or are close to doing so.

Almost half of Monroe County’s year-round residents struggle to make ends meet, living paycheck to paycheck, just one disaster away from household instability. Irma was this disaster for so many families. United Way and our strong community have worked hard to help make the dream of recovery, which may have seemed impossible 3 years ago, become reality for these Keys residents. From gift cards and cleaning supplies in the immediate aftermath to helping with financial assistance and repairing childcare facilities nearly 3 years later, United Way of Collier and the Keys has lead community partners supporting Keys residents throughout this disaster.

Immediately after the storm, United Way made the commitment that 100% of funds raised would directly benefit the Keys community through individual assistance or through our network of vetted, established nonprofit partners. United Way knew that recovery would begin with initial relief, continue with recovery, and, finally, transition to rebuilding. Hurricane funds provided assistance such as short-term housing, case management for residents, rental or mortgage assistance, mental health services, free legal aid, rebuilding damaged facilities and homes, and replacing destroyed items at child care centers and health care facilities.

June 2020 saw the final disbursement of the \$1.7 million raised for Hurricane Irma Relief funds in the Keys, all of which has now been distributed in the community. This helped complete projects at nonprofit partners that were still unfinished and included awnings for five facilities serving families, patio and generator repairs at a transitional housing shelter, replacing a destroyed icemaker at a childcare center, installing storage at four local schools for donated clothes and basic necessities for students in crisis, and more. During the last year, \$60,000 in United Way financial assistance also aided 219 Keys residents still struggling with purchasing furniture and appliances, rental deposits, minor home repairs and other expenses needed to finish their recovery. For a brief look at United Way’s work with Irma recovery in the Keys, see

KeysUnitedWay.org/UnitedWayIrmaVideo

United Way board and staff are grateful to everyone around the world and right here in the Keys community who assisted with recovery from Hurricane Irma by donating, volunteering with clean up, or helping friends and neighbors rebuild. Hurricane Irma showed how we #LiveUnited, coming together in times of crisis; together, we are resilient and strong.

UWCK’s mission to fight for hard-working families here in the Keys is only possible through supporters, partners, and volunteers. With this support, United Way remains committed to serving the Keys community—not just during times of crisis like Hurricane Irma recovery efforts or now during COVID-19, but also each and every day. That is the United Way.



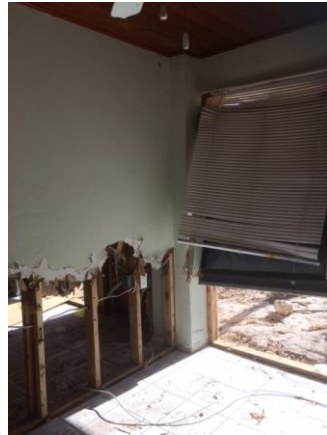
1.



2.



3.



4a.



4b.



5.



6.



7.



8.



9a.



9b.

Captions, left to right:

- 1. SOS delivered mattresses to affected areas with help from United Way funding that allowed them to immediately expand their capacity following the storm.**
- 2. After Irma, long-time Keys resident, Florence, a senior on a fixed income, had no hot water for 4 months until United Way purchased and installed a water heater in her home. She was in tears, overcome with gratitude.**
- 3. United Way provided Boys and Girls Club with supplies to open a temporary location in Big Pine after their location was destroyed, and helped replace their van so they could begin safely providing afterschool care again in this hard-hit area.**
- 4. Linda's apartment before and after United Way funding to Catholic Charities helped with repairs.**
- 5. United Way helped the Good Health Clinic replace a medication refrigerator so their clients had a safe method to store their needed prescriptions.**
- 6. Thanks to United Way, the lunch area at Independence Cay has new tables and shade so Marathon residents have a safe place for a free hot meal each day.**
- 7. United Way replaced the awning protecting Big Pine Academy students and staff safe from weather as they move about their school campus continuing their education.**
- 8. All public schools in Monroe County now have storage for donated clothes and basic necessities for students in crisis, thanks in part to United Way funds.**
- 9. Children at Kreative Kids Christian Academy have safe classrooms to learn and grow in while their parents are at work, after United Way assisted with the cost of repairs to their substantially damaged building.**

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About United Way of Collier and the Keys

United Way of Collier and the Keys (UWCK) is committed to improving lives and strengthening our community so all individuals and families have an opportunity to thrive and achieve their full potential. As a local volunteer-driven organization, UWCK advocates for Asset Limited Income Constrained and Employed (ALICE) residents in our communities looking for a hand-up by providing them information and referral and supportive tools and resources. We accomplish this through improving education, economic stability and health, as well as providing access to food and critical safety net services for all Collier and Monroe County residents.