



Director's Report to the Social Services Board of Directors

Subject: Hurricane Helene Response and Shelter Operations

Date: October 16, 2024

Overview:

Hurricane Helene made landfall on Thursday, September 26th, causing widespread damage and disruption across Rutherford County. The Department of Social Services (DSS) was actively involved in coordinating and supporting emergency shelter operations throughout the county as detailed below.

I. Timeline of Events:

1. Landfall and Initial Impact (September 26th – 27th)

- Hurricane Helene made landfall on Thursday, September 26th, bringing heavy rain and high winds to Rutherford County through Friday, September 27th.
- The storm caused significant flooding, power outages, and road blockages, rendering some areas in the county impassable.

2. Emergency Shelter Notifications (Friday, September 27th)

- Rutherford County DSS received notification from Rutherford County Emergency Management around 4:00 AM on Friday, September 27th, that an emergency shelter would be opened at the Town Hall in Lake Lure.
- Due to impassable roads leading to the Town Hall, a decision was made to open a shelter at Rutherfordton Presbyterian Church at approximately 10:00 AM. However, the church lacked power and a generator.

3. Shelter Relocation to RS-Central High School (Friday, September 27th)

- Rutherford County Emergency Management opened a new shelter at RS-Central High School at 3:00 PM on Friday, September 27th.
- DSS staff remained at Rutherfordton Presbyterian Church for several hours after the RS-Central shelter opened to assist and redirect anyone seeking shelter.
- Clients arriving at the church were transported to the RS-Central High School shelter Friday afternoon.

4. Second Shelter Opened for Oxygen-Dependent Individuals (Sunday, September 29th)

- A second shelter was opened at Chase Middle School specifically to accommodate oxygen-dependent individuals requiring medical support.

5. American Red Cross Support (Tuesday, October 1st)

- The American Red Cross arrived on Tuesday, October 1st, and took over operations at the RS-Central shelter at 8:00 PM.

6. Relocation of Shelters (Sunday, October 6th)

- On Sunday, October 6th, the shelters at Chase Middle School and RS-Central High School were relocated to Rutherfordton Presbyterian Church.
- DSS assisted with this relocation effort, ensuring a smooth transition for all shelter residents.

7. DSS Onsite Support (September 27th – October 11th)

- Two DSS staff members were stationed onsite at the shelters each day, from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM, to aid and coordinate services.
- The last day that DSS provided onsite support was Friday, October 11, 2024.

II. Shelter Utilization:

It is estimated that 160 individuals utilized the emergency shelters across Rutherford County during this period.

III. Conclusion:

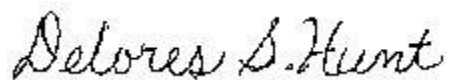
The response to Hurricane Helene and the subsequent shelter operations were a collaborative effort between DSS, Emergency Management, Transit, EMT, Sheriff's Department, and the American Red Cross. DSS played a vital role in providing critical services, ensuring that shelter facilities were appropriately staffed, and assisting with shelter relocations. The swift actions taken by the county minimized the impact of the storm on vulnerable populations, and services were maintained until conditions stabilized. Other agencies and community organizations that played a significant role was Rutherfordton Presbyterian Church, Transit, Julie Greene, ICC, volunteers, faith-based communities, etc.

IV. Recommendations:

DSS recommends the following:

- Staff Debriefing: Organize debriefing sessions for shelter staff, volunteers, and emergency responders to review what worked well and what challenges were encountered during shelter operations.
- Resident Feedback: Collect feedback from shelter residents on their experience to identify areas of improvement. Surveys or interviews could gather insights about shelter conditions, services, and overall satisfaction.
- Lessons Learned Report: Prepare a formal report documenting lessons learned from the sheltering experience, including operational successes and areas for improvement to enhance preparedness for future emergencies.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Delores S. Hunt".

Delores Hunt, MA

DSS Director