

Non-Profit Organizations Benefit from FEMA Funds

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Guaynabo, PUERTO RICO ? The Support and Therapy Center of the Puerto Rico Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus Association is one of the non-profit organizations that recently received funds from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to repair its infrastructure after Hurricane María and to continue offering its services for the development of its participants.

The organization, which focuses on promoting the functioning, independence and integration of people with developmental disabilities, also offers services in social work, physical and occupational therapy, and assistance with the purchase of orthopedic equipment.

“The social and health needs of our island are different and precise. We have the great talent and dedication of communities that are ready to meet these needs and FEMA remains committed to assisting in the recovery of these organizations,” said Federal Disaster Recovery Coordinator José Baquero.

The Support and Therapy Center serves over 200 people. It also offers educational workshops on the management and prevention of births with neural tube defects and supports families during and after a pregnancy with a neural tube defect diagnosis.

The Association’s director, Isolina Laboy Arroyo, said that they recently discharged a 3-year-old participant, who “lives a full life, participates in extracurricular activities such as gymnastics and is a girl who enjoys having reached her full potential thanks to early intervention.”

The organization offered direct services to the mother during her pregnancy and after a surgery to treat the infant’s spina bifida from the womb. After birth, the entity offered direct occupational and physical therapy services to the girl from 5 months to 2 years old.



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Laboy Arroyo stated that “over the years, this organization has been able to fulfill its mission of offering direct services to participants to promote the functioning, independence and integration in the community of people with developmental disabilities. This entity has played an important role in being able to provide patients with the opportunity to become as independent as possible within the limits that their condition allows.”

The Association has about \$35,000 from the agency to replace the roof waterproofing system, the air conditioners, floor mats for therapy rooms and some office equipment, among others. Mitigation funds within this allocation will anchor the water cistern tank and improve the facilities’ infrastructure against infiltration.

On the other hand, FEMA also obligated funds for Bill’s Kitchen, an entity that has been providing food security along with nutritional counseling for 31 years.

Bill’s Kitchen was born in memory of a young architect named Bill, who died of AIDS in Seattle in 1992. His mother Sara Metcalf, who lived in Puerto Rico, decided to help people on the island living with this condition by providing food to everyone who needed it, replicating several service programs in New York, Seattle, San Francisco and Washington, DC. Today, Bill’s Kitchen serves more than 30 towns in the northeastern area of the island: they serve about 1,175 people a year, distribute over 11,000 bags of food for two weeks, and coordinate thousands of clinical and support services for their participants.

Bill’s Kitchen Executive Director Sandra Torres Rivera explained that its participants also have services in place to ensure they maintain their treatments for HIV and other chronic health conditions.

“Our nutritional services program complements the provision of food, offering food security to the medical and nutritional counseling, to give the participant the tools to combat not only hunger, but also prevailing health conditions on the island such as diabetes, hypertension and gastrointestinal problems. Through the Intégrate Program we offer medical transportation, oral health and visual health services, which include the purchase of eyeglasses, laboratories and emergency assistance, among other services that our participants cannot access through their health insurance coverage,” said Torres Rivera.



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This organization received about \$470,000 for its infrastructure. The work includes the replacement of equipment, such as the *mezzanine* and kitchen air conditioners. More than \$78,000 of the funds were destined to mitigation measures aimed at ensuring proper drainage and preventing infiltration to the roof and interior of the facilities.

For his part, the executive director of the Central Office for Recovery, Reconstruction and Resiliency (COR3), Manuel A. Laboy Rivera, said that “our work team assists non-profit organizations such as Bill’s Kitchen, an entity that is currently in the construction acquisition phase to make way for the reconstruction of the facilities where they offer services aimed at a population in need. Puerto Rico has thousands of non-profit entities like this one, which have the commendable work of supporting and contributing to the quality of life of our citizens. At COR3 we will continue to guide them in the process so that they can complete their works.”

To date, FEMA has allocated over \$34.2 billion for more than 11,000 projects to address Puerto Rico’s recovery following Hurricane María. A total of over \$1.4 billion are destined exclusively to support the recovery of 1,105 non-profit projects across the island.

For more information about Puerto Rico’s recovery, visit fema.gov/disaster/4339, fema.gov/disaster/4473 and recovery.pr. Follow us on our social media at Facebook.com/FEMAPuertoRico, Facebook.com/COR3pr and [Twitter @COR3pr](https://Twitter.com/COR3pr).



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