

# Whole Community Recovery: It takes the whole community to make a community whole.

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*By Amy Meister, Executive Director East Central Bay Chapter of the American Red Cross with Holly Miller, President and CEO United Way of Midland County*

On May 19, 2020, when dams failed on the Tittabawassee River in the Great Lakes Bay Area of Michigan, thousands of people were in harm's way. Flood waters raged, severely damaging and destroying homes in a matter of minutes leaving people and communities coping with unprecedented challenges. In small towns with a big sense of community, neighbors came together to help one another, mobilizing with great generosity.

Eight weeks later, many community groups and agencies large and small are still working together on the recovery efforts. Midland, Gladwin, Saginaw, and Arenac Counties all have active long-term recovery groups, their members include: Midland Area Community Foundation; United Way of Midland; Salvation Army – Midland; Midland County Emergency Management; Midland's Open Door; Home to Stay; Midland County Education Service Agency; Midland Habitat for Humanity; Gladwin County Emergency Management; Mid-Michigan Community Action Agency; Bay Area Community Foundation; United Way of Saginaw; Saginaw County Emergency Management; Saginaw-Shiawassee Habitat for Humanity; Saginaw Community Foundation; Spence Brothers Construction; Michigan Conference, United Methodist Church; Arenac County Emergency Management; Northeast Michigan Community Service Agency; Sterling Health Center; 211 Northeast Michigan; Michigan State Police, Emergency Management & Homeland Security.

In the immediate aftermath of the floods working closely with local emergency management, several community groups and the American Red Cross opened a combined **total of 25 shelters** for people needing temporary emergency lodging.

These shelters provided for the immediate needs of evacuated residents, including a safe place to stay, food (meals, snacks), water, medicine and basic health services, emotional support and other support resources. To date, community groups and Red Cross have supported over **7,738 overnight stays** for residents affected by the evacuation orders.

Meals were available at every emergency lodging location. Midland's Open Door, the United Way of Midland County, Food of Faith – Bay City, and Meijer worked together with the Salvation Army - Midland and the Red Cross to serve over **31,057 meals and snacks**.

The many varied and complex issues involved in recovery from the floods makes this a challenging and emotionally draining time for everyone involved. Red Cross Mental Health and Health professionals, as well Spiritual Care teams have provided over **6,327 basic health, mental health and spiritual care contacts**.

Clean clothes were also scarce in the muddy aftermath of the flood and communities that were without access to water or power. Laundry Service vouchers were accepted by: Lifestyle Garment Care; Totally Clean Coin Laundry; Coleman Laundryland; Sun and Suds Laundromat; and Gladwin Cleaners.

“When disaster strikes, hundreds of people, businesses, and community organizations step up to the plate to help,” said Amy Meister, American Red Cross East Central Bay Chapter Executive Director. “We are incredibly grateful for the generosity of these businesses, organizations, and individuals who made significant efforts to help people affected by the floods.”

The Southern Baptist Disaster Relief, Salvation Army, NECHAMA – Jewish Response to Disaster, The Michigan Conference of United Methodist Church, as well as the Red Cross, gathered and distributed cleaning, hygiene and comfort items in hardest-hit neighborhoods. These items include water, snacks, non-perishable meals, and clean-up items such as gloves, buckets, trash bags, and masks. To date, over **9,562 relief items** have been handed out.

Resource Centers both physical and virtual, were opened where residents accessed information and resources available from many organizations, including: 211 Northeast Michigan; DOW Chemical Company, Michigan Dept. of Health and Human Services; Disability Network of Mid-Michigan; Northeast Michigan Community Service Agency; Mid-Michigan Community Action Agency; United Way of Midland, Habitat for Humanity – Midland; Midland’s Open Door; The Salvation Army – Midland; West Midland Family Center; United Way of Saginaw; Au Gres Christian Charities; Sterling Area Health Center; Michigan Conference of the United Methodist Church.

Red Cross case workers met one-on-one with people on matters such as emergency needs for prescription and durable medical equipment replacements, document replacement, and recovery planning. Red Cross caseworkers provide displaced residents invaluable assistance as they help residents get connected to the partner agencies that meet specific needs. **More than 1,149 cases** have been opened by Red Cross caseworkers to provide individualized recovery support.

Disasters are often complex, with complex needs – and no single agency can meet every need on its own; it takes collaboration and partnership. “In a crisis of this scale, working together is so important,” shared Holly Miller, President & CEO of United Way of Midland County. “In the early days of recovery, American Red Cross was there with over 300 flood clean up kits for those hardest hit by the flood. In addition, we helped get the

word out about their impactful financial assistance program that helped many families.”.

“At The Salvation Army we understand that none of us have the capability to meet all of the needs after a historic event like this, which is why partnerships with others like the Red Cross, United Way, Midland Area Community Foundation and many, many others are so important,” said Captain Brian Goodwill, The Salvation Army Midland Corps Officer. “It was a privilege to be able to help stand alongside of American Red Cross to provide meals for the flood survivors they were housing over these past eight weeks. We know there’s much more to be done, but we’re on a good path towards recovery because of these partnerships.”

The Red Cross, United Way and Salvation Army are only three of many agencies that come together to ensure that basic needs are met and to work on the long-term recovery of entire communities and to help them be prepared for and more resilient in the face of future disasters. The Great Lakes Bay Area is indeed fortunate to be served by such strong network of supportive resources.