



Hurricane Helene and Hospitality House of Northwest N.C.

Hospitality House of Northwest NC is the regional housing agency and service provider for families and individuals experiencing homelessness - a span of nearly 2,500 square miles - across seven rural counties.

On average, prior to Hurricane Helene, there were close to 1,000 unsheltered people across our region on any given night. Since September 27th, we have been preparing for the long-term recovery when the immediate emergency needs have been met by outside relief organizations. We operate as a 24/7 crisis response agency 365 days a year and this extreme weather event will push us to our limits.

The roof and several HVAC units of our Boone Brook Hollow Complex will need replacing, four offices in our Watauga Housing & Outreach Center flooded and will need new flooring, and the roof and well at Rock Haven, one of our group living homes for adults living with a disability, will need to be repaired or replaced. At this time, we are still waiting for a final determination from our insurance on the damages we experienced in these three buildings that we own. They did inform our agency that damage from wind and flooding is not covered, so we are hopeful that some damage will be covered under debris. The costs so far will be over \$277,615 for immediate needs.

Additionally, several of our Scattered Site Housing Program clients lost all their belongings and were displaced from their homes. We have rehoused both clients one county away in another Scattered Site apartment.

In the immediate aftermath, we began operating our Watauga Housing & Outreach Center, which was without power for nine days; running on portable generators and cord lights, as a supply donation and distribution site for households who were displaced by the Hurricane.

We sent multiple truckloads of supplies to the most hard-hit communities in Yancey, Mitchell, Avery, Watauga, and Ashe counties.

Our staff and medical provider began driving to the devastated mobile home communities in Boone, knocking on doors to offer water, food, diapers, baby formula, medical care, flashlights, batteries, cleaning supplies, toiletries, clothes, pet food, bedding and other necessities. We brought in a mobile shower unit to the parking lot of our Brook Hollow Complex for any displaced person or anyone living in a home without safe, running water.

For three weeks we opened the doors of our Watauga Housing & Outreach Center for displaced individuals and families to “shop” for food, medicine, and any of the available supply items that were donated by caring and concerned groups, churches, and individuals from all over the south and eastern seaboard.

As it stands now, we have rented four 20’ steel containers and procured a 53’ tractor trailer to store all the donated items. This is part of our long-term preparation, knowing that we will need these supplies in the months to come.

Our Brook Hollow Complex is equipped with a permanently installed Cummins diesel generator and powered the entire 18,000 sf facility for nearly two weeks. The Town of Boone water systems were compromised so we

relied on bottled water and a boil advisory, while asking local community members to donate pre-cooked soups and meals to be served out of our Community Kitchen to the 150 - 160 people we were sheltering immediately after Hurricane Helene.

As anticipated, the number of people coming forward for housing assistance is continuing to climb. Many of those reaching out are now realizing that they cannot make it on their own, that their condemned home is actually not repairable, that the friends and family who took them in are no longer able to do that, or that their landlord has no plans to rebuild.

The impact of this storm on an already fragile population will have lasting effects. We know that our focus must be on housing those individuals who are currently homeless and those that have found themselves without a home following the storm and devastation in WNC. At the same time, we have pending storm repairs at those very buildings that provide temporary and permanent housing for individuals and families.

In late December, thanks to a grant from the Golden LEAF Foundation, we began operating a **Disaster Recovery Housing Project** and promoted Tom Reuteler to be the Housing Navigator for the project. As of January 21, 2025, we are working with 15 displaced households totaling 48 people. Previously, we housed two displaced households that totaled five people.

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<https://spectrumlocalnews.com/nc/charlotte/news/2024/11/13/helping-helene-victims->

<https://spectrumlocalnews.com/nc/charlotte/news/2024/11/26/helping-western-north-carolina-before-the-holidays>



Photos in front of Brook Hollow Complex 9/27/24



(photo 9/27/24 during the hurricane looking down onto the road of Brook Hollow Complex and Bradford Park neighborhood)