

JULY 29, 2021 · CRISIS AND RECOVERY



FLOOD RECOVERY: ACCESS CONNECTS FLOOD VICTIMS WITH NEEDED SUPPLIES

When torrential downpours caused mass flooding in our region this summer, 2 feet of flood water and sewage filled Brigitte Fawaz-Anouti's basement. Two days later, she was in her office at ACCESS – the nation's largest Arab American community nonprofit – strategizing ways to help the thousands of others facing a similar plight.

Brigitte, the agency's director of Social Services Main and Special Projects, quickly dismisses any praise or sympathy, saying, "We're ACCESS; it's what we do." Although more than 90 percent of her team was personally impacted by flooding, they focused on securing help for others.

One of the first calls they made was to United Way for Southeastern Michigan, a partner in their mission to empower individuals, families and communities.



Thanks to our newly launched Crisis and Recovery Fund, we provided grant funding to aid the community in managing the crisis. These funds helped ACCESS assemble and distribute more than 3,000 cleaning kits and provided meals, non-perishable food boxes, and fresh fruits and vegetables to more than 700 families who lost power – an effort sponsored in part by Gleaners.

Brigitte stressed the importance of getting the cleaning kits into the hands of families with flood damage as soon as possible to reduce the risk of bacteria spreading and posing an additional threat.

"Stores were closed. Shelves were empty. The kits were the only way for a lot of people to clean and keep their family safe."

HELPING AT HOME

Volunteers got a firsthand look at the difficulty our region faced in the days after the flooding. Alex Ostergaard, a Ford engineer and Dearborn resident, assisted with one cleanup effort in Dearborn. He wanted others to understand the devastation and act.

"It's a traumatic thing people are dealing with," he said. "We're there to clean up, but depending on the level of the damage, that means tearing out drywall, ripping up carpets and tossing out the belongings of families who were already just hanging on by a thread."

After four days of work with 1,200 volunteers, he felt like they "just scratched the surface."

"So many people still need help. Some don't even realize it because the water receded, yet they're still at risk and need to sanitize," he said.

Alex hopes that the Crisis and Recovery Fund will provide earlier access to resources, including funding, volunteers and staff so that families can recover more quickly the next time disaster strikes.

"My family went through flooding in 2014, so we understand how it feels. It's nice to be able to help someone dealing with the same thing," he said.

