

*It was hot.
It was smelly.
It was worth it.*

By **Bethany Bartholomew**
Church Magazines

It was like something from the days of Noah. The rain just didn't stop. Within three days, more than 31 inches of rain fell on parts of Louisiana, USA, back in August 2016. Homes filled with several feet of water, mud, and debris from the overflowing rivers and swamps around the area.

When the flood was over, people returned home to find most of their belongings unusable. Furniture, carpets, and floorboards needed to be completely removed—along with a few feet of drywall. And all their other possessions had to be sorted through to see what they could keep. It would take weeks to complete the project.

A FLOOD of Mud

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROBBIE KIRK, JONATHAN ROGERS, AND KURT SCHULZKE AND COURTESY OF DAVE JACKMAN AND THE CORDNER, GOMEZ, HATCH, AND ROBERTS FAMILIES



Emma H.



Luke G.



Lindsay K.



Lauren H.



Mark G.



Jacob K.

D

and
Hope



Micaela V., Julia C.

Another Flood

But a different kind of flood was on the way—a flood of help, hope, and love. Thousands of members of the Church volunteered as part of Mormon Helping Hands and poured into Louisiana from all over the Southeast. They brought food, tools, and tents to camp on the grounds outside of Church buildings so they could spend the weekend working.

Each morning, these volunteers gathered to receive marching orders.



Meghan K.



Chandler H.



Volunteers slept in tents on the grounds outside of the Church buildings so they could spend the weekend working.

“The crew captain would give us the number for somebody who had asked for help,” says Nels S., 14, from Georgia, USA. “Then we would call and schedule a time to show up.”

Groups soon drove off to find their work sites. But the sight that greeted them was shocking.

Will This Take Forever?

“We started driving and after about 30 minutes we started seeing huge piles on the sides of the road,” says Hannah H., 14, from Alabama, USA.

“It was all of their personal stuff,” says Alana C., 15, from Alabama. “That was really sad. They were throwing it all out because it had gotten destroyed.”

“I was scared at first,” says Andrew H., 13, of Alabama, “because I saw all of this and thought it was going to take forever to clean up. But then I was happy because I realized this stuff wouldn’t stay sitting inside the house collecting mold. It would be easier for them to start new and get their lives back.”

And that was just what the Helping Hands hoped to do—help people start to get their lives back. So they set to work.

A Little Does a Lot

Teams tore out drywall, ripped out floors and ceilings, broke down walls, pulled out soggy insulation, removed furniture, and helped homeowners sort through their belongings. Then they gathered what was ruined and piled it by the road for sanitation

services to haul away.

“Everyone did a small job,” says Meghan K., 12, from Georgia, “but it all ended up equaling a big work effort.”

Hallie R., 17, from Georgia, agrees. “It may not seem like you’re making a huge difference, but every little bit counts. When so many people come together and help, you can make a big difference.”

Working Together

The Helping Hands weren’t alone in their work. Neighbors, other church groups, and larger organizations also joined the flood of service.

“There were rescue teams from other areas in Louisiana,” explains Anna J., 13, from Alabama. “I don’t think we would have been able to even get close to where we got with one house without those rescue teams and a few of the neighbors.”

“It was cool to see different churches working together under God’s name and to see God’s children working together even if they are from different churches and places,” Landon R., 14, from Georgia says.

Homeowners pitched in when they could too. Many of them worked side by side with the Helping Hands and others.

“You would think that they would all be absorbed in their own pain, and you wouldn’t blame them for that,” says Nels. “But most of them were positive and looking for ways to help their neighbors. They weren’t caught up in their emotions; they were just working to rebuild their lives.”

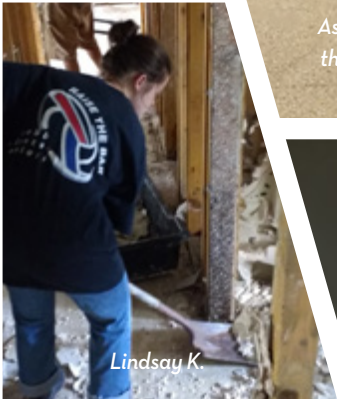


Teams tore out drywall, removed furniture, and helped homeowners sort through their belongings.





As the groups arrived at their work sites, the sight that greeted them was shocking.



Lindsay K.



David S., Landon R.





The Helping Hands and sanitation crews had their work cut out for them.



Anna J.



Rodney R., a local homeowner, Hallie R., and Landon R.



"When you're serving these people, the love you feel for them is definitely memorable."



Working with one homeowner was especially memorable for Hallie. “He had been in an accident years ago, so he wore a back brace, and yet he was still helping with us,” she says. “It was an amazing experience.”

A Memorable Experience

And “amazing” was just one way to describe it. Many youth also explained why the opportunity was memorable for them.

“The people we helped had gone through some rough times,” says Derek T., 13, from Alabama. “I felt warm inside doing service for other people.”

“Talking with the people, you couldn’t even tell that their houses were just destroyed. They were so thankful and smiling and positive,” says Gavin R., 14, from Alabama. “When you’re serving these people, the love you feel for them is definitely memorable.”

“You can see these things on the news, but you never really know what people are going through until you go out and help,” says Luke G., 13, of Georgia.

Life Lessons

Many volunteers also felt that the hard work and service helped them gain new understanding.

“I realized that everyone has problems, and sometimes people need help because they can’t help themselves,” says Lindsay K., 14, from Georgia. “It was hard. It was really hard. But I am grateful that I am in a

good situation so I can help others.”

Madison C., 13, from Alabama says, “Service helps you understand that bad things happen to people and that they can get over it, so you know you can get over hard things too.”

“It was a great way to prepare for a mission,” says Jared R., 15, from Alabama. “You were tired, you woke up early, and it was hot. But you went in there and got it done. Once you got into the swing of things, everybody was talking and having a good time.”

Gloria G., 16, from Georgia, says, “I realized that there might be big problems in the world, but God will always be there. He’ll always find a way to help you even though you might think that you lost everything and there’s no hope. He’s not going to abandon you.”

“I’ve been having issues with my testimony, but what He did for these people showed me that He really does care, He really is there, and He’s going to make sure we’re OK.”

“I learned that I should give my all and not give up when I’m tired or bored,” says Landon. “I think in some ways the man we helped blessed my life more than I blessed his. I know God gave me this opportunity to serve because He loves me and He knew I needed it.”

“I was able to serve as the hands of Christ,” says Julia C., 15, from Georgia. “It was humbling, and I was grateful that I was blessed to go. I loved the experience.” **NE**

