An illustration in a sketchy, hand-drawn style. A woman with curly hair is on the left, and a man with glasses and a beard is on the right. They are both wearing hooded sweatshirts and are holding a baby together in the center. The background shows a city skyline. The entire image has a color gradient from green at the top to blue at the bottom.

A SHAREABLE SERIES

The Response: Building Collective Resilience in the Wake of Disasters

Volume 2

SHAREABLE

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Building Collective Resilience in the Wake of Disasters

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Forward: The inspiring story of disasters that most people have missed

When disasters occur, the majority of news coverage teeters on the edge of “disaster porn” at best, emphasizing the sheer mass of destruction in the affected area while celebrating a few token “heroes.” At its worst, the media perpetuates harmful stereotypes, casting survivors as looters and justifying the extrajudicial murder of people of color by the police and mostly white vigilantes, [like what occurred during Hurricane Katrina](#).

But in both scenarios, news reporting routinely underplays how local communities come together to recover from the immediate devastation and rebuild the community, often on a new foundation of sustainability and justice. It’s a good thing that people collaborate instead of competing during a crisis because all signs point towards an increase in climate change-fueled disasters in the coming years.

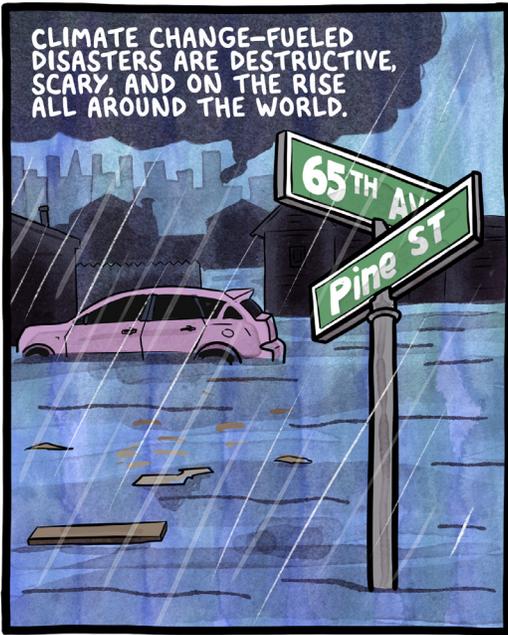
This kind of response is worth celebrating, but there’s no better way to respond to disasters than to anticipate them happening and prepare before they strike. And there’s no better time than right now to build resilience together. While a little preparation today can save a lot

of trouble tomorrow, it can also create immediate benefits like stronger community ties, increased civic capacity, and the joy that comes from accomplishing things together.

We hope the interviews, articles, guides, and personal stories in this book deepen your understanding of community led disaster response and support deeper engagement with your neighbors, family, and friends as you prepare for the future together.

-Tom Llewellyn





CLIMATE CHANGE-FUELED DISASTERS ARE DESTRUCTIVE, SCARY, AND ON THE RISE ALL AROUND THE WORLD.



BUT WHILE MOST OF THE MEDIA ATTENTION IS GIVEN TO THE DESTRUCTION, VICTIMS, "EXTRAORDINARY HEROES", AND CRIMINALITY . . .

THERE IS AN UNDER-REPORTED SIDE OF THE STORY THAT MOST PEOPLE HAVE MISSED.



DISASTERS CAN BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER.

THEY CAN REVEAL THE COLLECTIVE HEROIC CAPACITY THAT EXISTS WITHIN OUR COMMUNITIES, AND CAN LEAD TO LASTING TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE.



AND THERE'S A LOT THAT YOU CAN DO WITH YOUR NEIGHBORS TO INCREASE YOUR COMMUNITY'S RESILIENCE BEFORE DISASTER STRIKES."

THE RESPONSE

R

LISTEN TO SHAREABLE'S "THE RESPONSE" PODCAST TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE REMARKABLE COMMUNITIES THAT ARISE IN THE AFTERMATH OF DISASTERS AT WWW.SHAREABLE.NET/THE-RESPONSE

KANE LYNCH

Illustration by Kane Lynch



Illustration by Kane Lynch

Introduction: Remarkable communities that create systems change after disaster

by Tom Llewellyn

Judith Rodriguez was one of the roughly 50,000 people living in the mountain town of Cayey, Puerto Rico when it was devastated by Hurricane Maria in the fall of 2017.

The [deadliest storm](#) to hit the United States, or its territories, since 1900 left a lasting impact on the island. With the majority of the island left without power for months on end, most people, including Rodriguez, were unable to do basic things, such as cooking food.

In response to this untenable situation, the [Centros de Apoyo Mutuo](#)

(CAMs), or mutual aid centers, began springing up all over the island. When Rodriguez learned about a community kitchen, she wanted to contribute. She donated her dishes because they wouldn't be of any use until the power was back on anyways. She loved the idea of people cooperating with each other, calling it a beautiful project.

The CAMs began as community kitchens with volunteer cooks eventually taking on a whole new life, evolving into full-fledged community centers that share electricity, provide weekly acupuncture clinics to reduce the symptoms of trauma, and offer classes. Acting as an excellent example of what community-led disaster response and recovery can look like, the CAMs focus on the needs and abilities of the people and provide an avenue for the general public to participate in mutual aid, not charity.

The mutual aid centers in Puerto Rico are just one of innumerable examples from around the world of communities that create systems change after disasters. This kind of collective heroism seems to naturally emerge every time a disaster occurs across cultures, be it an environmental, social, or political disaster. It's worth taking a moment to reflect upon this phenomenon because it could be an important avenue for accelerating positive change if acted on with more intention.

Disasters are on the Rise

According to the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration](#) (NOAA), since 1980 there has been an average of six disasters (\$1 billion or more worth of damages) annually in the United States. Quite shockingly this number has nearly tripled in the past four years. In 2017 alone, 16 climate-fueled disasters left the country with a death toll in the thousands and \$300 billion in damages.

This increase in destruction is far from unique to the United States. Elsewhere around the world, disasters are taking place at an increased rate and intensity: monsoon flooding in Bangladesh; landslides in Colombia, Sierra Leone, and Japan; and cyclones in Mozambique to name just a few.

A report from the [Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre](#), found that over 17 million people were displaced by disasters around the world in 2018. For context, that's more than one and a half times as many people than were displaced by conflicts and violence. And if you look back as far as 2008, that number swells to over 260 million new displacements!

When disasters occur, the majority of news coverage teeters on the edge of “disaster porn,” focusing on the sheer mass of destruction and disruption to the affected regions. The reporting routinely underplays the local communities’ responses to the hardships they face and the ways they come together to support each other during times of disruption. News stories often lack a larger context for the pre-existing social disasters that were present in those communities.

Overwhelming evidence shows that, more often than not, it's the people living in the affected communities who, despite all the obstacles, rise to the occasion to save lives, reduce suffering, and form a community of care – experiencing what the author Rebecca Solnit calls “disaster collectivism.”

The reimagining of what's possible doesn't stop after the initial recovery is over; instead, it continues as communities regenerate; often increasing their equity, resilience, and capacity for joy.

The Response Project

Personal and collective transformation often occurs as a result of shared experience from tragic events. The comradery among survivors is almost impossible to replicate under ordinary circumstances. But we can learn from the response to these events and apply these lessons to the way we structure our societies.

With this in mind, three years ago Shareable launched an exploration into urban resilience initiatives and community-led disaster response and recovery efforts from around the world. We asked some often uncomfortable questions to guide our research to find out how communities are:

- Taking care of each other's needs in the aftermath of disasters through solidarity and mutual aid.
- Balancing the need to get back to "normal" as quickly as possible with the need to rebuild in a more just and equitable way and create greater resilience and sustainability for all.
- Pushing back against "disaster capitalists" (those who seek to profit through rebuilding/recovery efforts).
- Cultivating increased resilience in our communities before disasters occur.
- Designing our response and recovery practices so that impacted communities are able to move forward with a renewed sense of community cohesion and a sense of place.

As a nonprofit media outlet and action network who's been working to promote people-powered solutions for the common good for over 10 years, we know how effective a good (and pressing) story can be. In order to reach a mass audience we've used solutions journalism and [transmedia storytelling](#) to make our discoveries as accessible as possible.

We began producing the [The Response podcast](#) because there was a lack of high quality audio documenting this phenomenon. Each episode focuses on a single disaster such as Hurricane Maria, the Tubbs Fire, or Mexico City Earthquake and highlights initiatives which answered at least one of our guiding questions. The show has been incredibly well received and is currently syndicated on 150 radio stations through our partnership with [Making Contact](#).

Following the first season of the podcast, we produced our first film, "[The Response: How Puerto Ricans Are Restoring Power to the People](#)." We've made the film available for community groups to host free screenings anywhere in the world. And later in 2020 it will air on satellite tv across the U.S. and at several film festivals.

And finally, we published an extensive editorial series which has culminated in the publishing of this book.

This Book

The opening section has been designed to provide a context for the current state of climate-fueled disasters, and, just as importantly, to present examples of how people around the world are responding. The majority of the book has been separated into two parts. First, we explore how communities are rising to the immediate challenges that come after a disaster. The second part focuses on examples of people working together to increase their resilience.

Part one, "Community Led Disaster Response," goes deeper into examples of immediate relief and long term recovery efforts from the United Kingdom, United States, Mexico, Japan, Brazil, Puerto Rico, and beyond. In this section you'll find summaries and links to the documentary episodes of The Response podcast and interviews

with experts in the field like Dr. James Gordon from the Center for Mind Body Medicine, Sofía Gallisá Muriente who was part of the relief efforts for both Hurricane Sandy and Maria, and Mara Ventura who co-founded the UndocuFund for Fire Relief in Sonoma County. There are several replicable rapid response initiatives, examples of how communities are processing the trauma caused by disasters and other human created tragedies around the world, and a guide for using the The Response film to support community engagement and discussions about disaster preparedness.

Part two, “Cultivating Collective Resilience,” explores what you can do right now, before your community experiences a disaster. Case studies from India, Kenya, New Zealand, United Kingdom, and across the United States (de)pave a pathway forward with examples of how community groups are adapting to climate change, using citizen science, and building green infrastructure. This section also includes interviews with Paris’ chief resilience officer Sebastien Maire, “[Resilience for All](#)” author Barbara Brown Wilson, and disasterologist Semantha Montano, plus personal stories of relief and recovery volunteers, and other resources to support collective action.

This is just the tip of the iceberg of a global movement emerging to meet the existential crisis that climate change presents to all of us, here and now. We invite you to join us in this exploration; read these stories, listen to the podcast. And while you do, take the opportunity to think deeper about how ready your community is for a disaster in this moment, and about what steps you can take with others to increase your collective resilience.

This article includes portions of previously published content on Shareable.net from Robert Raymond.





Illustration by Kane Lynch

Disaster collectivism: How communities rise together to respond to crises

by Robert Raymond

When Hurricane Maria slammed into Puerto Rico on Sept. 20, 2017, Judith Rodriguez was asleep in her home. Or rather, she was trying to sleep, but the sounds of the deadly storm blowing over the island woke her up.

“That whistle was the ugliest I’ve heard in my life,” Rodriguez said. “A whistle that was never silent. It was endless. ... I thought that my house was in good condition, at least I thought that. And as I woke up at 2:30am, I felt scared. The first scare was when the back door went flying off — a metal door in the kitchen.”

Like much of the island, the town of Cayey, where Rodriguez lives, was [plunged into darkness for months](#), as winds reaching 175 mph destroyed power lines and tore roofs off houses. Already in the midst of a crippling [debt crisis](#), and with no immediate relief in sight, communities like Cayey had to make due with the few resources they had.

“In my house I had a lot of plates,” Rodriguez says. “What if I donate my plates that are laying in a corner in my home?” She wasn’t the only one with that idea. In towns and cities all over the island, from Cayey to Caguas and Humacao to Las Marias, something began to stir. Plate donations grew into community kitchens which grew into community centers which grew into a movement. With its furiously whistling winds, Hurricane Maria had awakened something in the Puerto Rican people, something that storms, fires, earthquakes — and all manner of disasters and catastrophes — have awakened in communities all around the world.

“Human beings are a community. If we are in China, in Puerto Rico, in Japan, wherever,” says Rodriguez. “We are a community — we have to help each other here in Puerto Rico, which I call the boat. If this boat sinks, we all sink. I don’t sink alone, we all sink.”

In 2007, Naomi Klein presented her thesis of disaster capitalism to the world in her groundbreaking book, “The Shock Doctrine.” Klein’s ideas seemed to perfectly explain much of what was — and still is — taking place globally. The idea is fairly simple: Create market opportunities out of disasters. Klein sketched a picture of how powerful entities use political and economic crises to weaken the public sphere and strengthen the interests of private capital. The “shock” that comes after catastrophes presents the perfect opportunity for

powerful interests to take advantage of disoriented communities with the hope of turning a profit.

Klein's thesis has been helpful in contextualizing much of what we see happening around us, from the [dismantling of the public school system](#) in New Orleans post-Hurricane Katrina to the [privatization of infrastructure](#) in Puerto Rico post-Hurricane Maria. But when we look closer, we see that the “disaster capitalist” isn't the only character to emerge out of crisis situations. In these tumultuous times it is crucial that we remember disaster capitalism is only part of the story. There is another story taking place; one based on altruism, solidarity, and social responsibility — and when we look closely, we can see it happening all around us. This is the story of disaster collectivism.

There are innumerable instances where storms have swept in a flood of mutualism, where wildfires have sown the seeds of solidarity, and where earthquakes have strengthened collective values and brought communities closer together. We see these explosions of generosity quite often. It happened in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, when an armada of boats that comprised the volunteer-run Cajun Navy descended upon waterlogged neighborhoods to rescue stranded survivors. We saw it again, on a smaller-scale, in November 2017, when dozens of New Yorkers spontaneously rushed in to help dig out trapped survivors from a collapsed scaffolding structure in Lower Manhattan.

Why do people do this? Why do we see such heroic acts of self-sacrifice and self-endangerment on such a regular basis? It certainly doesn't seem to align with the story about humanity that dominates many mainstream narratives. This story describes humanity as *Homo economicus*, a species characterized by selfishness and competition.

“When a disaster strikes, like the flooding in Houston [after Hurricane Harvey], for example, you see everyday people pouring out all this generosity and solidarity,” says Christian Parenti, associate professor of economics at John Jay College in New York City. “Suddenly the idea that everything should have a price on it, and the idea that selfishness and competition are good, all that just gets parked. Suddenly, everyone is celebrating cooperation, solidarity, bravery, sacrifice, and generosity.”

This idea is reinforced by author Rebecca Solnit in her landmark book, “A Paradise Built in Hell,” in which she explains that, “in the wake of an earthquake, a bombing, or a major storm, most people are altruistic, urgently engaged in caring for themselves and those around them, strangers and neighbors as well as friends and loved ones.”

We witnessed this recently in the aftermath of the Fuego Volcano eruption in Guatemala in June. In the face of [inadequate government response](#), everyday people came together to take care of each other’s needs. On the night of the eruption, a church in a nearby town “immediately started sounding its bells at an odd time, calling the community to come out to the church where they started collecting materials, food and clothes, and other things,” says Walter Little, an anthropologist based out of the University at Albany at the State University of New York, who was on the ground during the crisis.

Most people won’t think twice when they hear the bells ring, Solnit says: “Decades of meticulous sociological research on behavior in disasters, from the bombings of World War II to floods, tornadoes, earthquakes, and storms across the continent and around the world, have demonstrated this.”

After the Storm

But what is it about disasters specifically that inspire such acts of altruism? There is a thesis put forth by writers like Solnit, Parenti, and others, that has arisen around this question. It goes a little something like this: We've come to accept Homo economicus as the truth, perhaps not always consciously, but it haunts our dreams, our imagination. It confines our sense of possibility and imposes boundaries as arbitrary as those that carve up ecosystems and communities into nation-states. But, as we've seen, artificial borders cannot contain the flow of flora, fauna, and human generosity.

When a firestorm blazed through the northern Californian city of Santa Rosa in October 2017, the community came together to form a fund designed specifically for the undocumented community. [Undocufund](#), as it became known, stood in direct opposition to the divide-and-conquer rhetoric that has been a staple of the contemporary political climate.

"[In] the beginning we didn't know if we'd raise \$50,000 or \$100,000," Omar Medina, the director of Undocufund, says. "Never did we expect the \$6 million we've raised so far. But the generosity of people as the disasters were happening, as the fires kept going. ... and [as] people learned about us — they sympathized with the need. They understand the need based on everything that we've experienced lately on a national level as it relates to the undocumented community."

This kind of human kindness — often hemmed in by the myth of homo economicus perpetuated by mainstream institutions — is bursting at the seams, just waiting for a chance to emerge. Could it be that the collapse of normality that arises during and after calamity awakens something deep within us? Perhaps these moments open

up a space, however briefly, for new forms of civic engagement and public life. But when it comes to the every day grind, those chances seem few and far between.

But there's a deep need to connect. According to research published in the journal [American Sociological Review](#), 25 percent of Americans report not having close friends or confidants. We are also seeing [the number of individuals living alone rise sharply](#) in recent years. As we become more and more isolated and atomized in everyday life, our craving for connection only increases. "Our species is a group species," Parenti says. "There's something deep and quite innate in us as a species to stick together."

We saw this innate drive towards connection occur in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, which hit New York City, New York, on Oct. 29, 2012, killing 53 people and leading to \$32 billion dollars in damage citywide. Places like the Rockaways, an exposed peninsula within the borough of Queens on Long Island, were hit especially hard. Yet even in a megacity like New York, often viewed as uniquely disconnected and unneighborly, disaster collectivism emerged in full force.

One major example of this kind of collective approach was the effort put forth by [Occupy Sandy](#), a grassroots relief network that grew out of the networks and strategies developed by Occupy Wall Street. Filling in a vacuum left by the official response, Occupy Sandy volunteers worked in partnership with local community organizations and activist networks. Their grassroots efforts focused on empowering poor and working class communities and were based on mutual aid rather than charity. With nearly 60,000 volunteers at its height, its own Amazon relief registry, legal team, medical team, prescription

drug deliveries, and meal deliveries everyday, it was able to make a significant impact in the days and weeks following the disaster.

Sal Lopizzo, a longtime resident of New York City, became involved with the Occupy Sandy recovery effort when a group of volunteers showed up at his flooded nonprofit and asked if they could convert it into a recovery hub. “People just showed up, gutted the office out, got everything out into the street,” Lopizzo says. “We started putting up tables, trucks just started showing up with supplies. Any supply you could think of. If you walked into Home Depot or into a Target store, it was in this office.”

Lopizzo’s building was just one of many hubs that emerged in the days and weeks after the Superstorm hit. It was fed by a dozen or more distribution hubs, which were located in areas that were not as heavily affected.

“There were churches in Brooklyn that were gathering supplies to put on vans and trucks and bringing them in here,” he says. “One time I saw a Greek Orthodox priest pull up in a minivan with a bunch of kids, and they had about one hundred pizzas. And he just showed up here, you know. I was like, ‘Holy mackerel’ — it was amazing.”

Lorena Giron, a Rockaways resident who was also part of the broader grassroots relief effort that emerged after Sandy, was similarly moved by what she saw.

“Just immediately seeing neighbors being worried about their next-door neighbors was something that really touched me, as well as the quick mobilization of the church and the willingness to bring in people into the church and then provide resources — whatever kind

of help would be available,” Giron says. “Just seeing that and just the feeling of the fact that we were all watching over one another.”

Recovery hubs popped up all over the city, including at the Arverne Pilgrim Church, just a few miles from where Lopizzo’s converted non-profit was located. Pastor Dennis Loncke, the owner of the church, explained how Hurricane Sandy created a space for the community to come together in a way that it hadn’t before.

“The storm really did unite in breaking some of the barriers down,” Loncke says. “Because most of us was living on opinion. We assumed that the other person had the grass greener on the other side, so they had no need for this one, and that had no need for the other one. But when the storm came everybody’s opinion just disappeared. We recognized that there are lots of people that had all different types of issues after the storm, and it was not just only the financial loss, or the the property loss. It awakened the community to what is going on inside the midst of us — what we have as neighbors.”

Once the door to another world is opened, it’s often difficult to close it. There are many instances of how the bonds and collective vision that are formed during the immediate aftermath of disasters have grown into broader projects that stretch far beyond immediate disaster relief.

For example, the focus around community empowerment encouraged by the Occupy Sandy relief efforts and organizations like [The Working World](#), also based in New York City, inspired folks like Giron to help organize what has now become a worker cooperative incubation program that has helped to launch four cooperatives in New York City.

“This was very important and very exciting because the Rockaways and Far Rockaways [were] a very poor area, even before the storm,” Giron says. “The idea of a different way to promote work and promote employment [is] exciting. So my life, I feel it’s changed. The important thing for me has been this ability to help my community and to work with my community members.”

Another clear illustration of how grassroots disaster relief can lead to larger initiatives comes out of Puerto Rico post-Hurricane Maria, where what started in the town of Caguas as a volunteer-run community kitchen soon transformed into an island-wide network of community centers, known as Mutual Aid Centers. Today, these centers provide more than just meals — they offer all sorts of services related to art, education, and therapy.

Giovanni Roberto, one of the founding members of the original Mutual Aid Center in Caguas, helps organize weekly acupuncture clinics for community members.

“This [clinic] happens every Tuesday,” Roberto says. “We work with acupuncture in the ear. We work with stress and post-traumatic syndrome, addictions, and other related issues — health issues,” adding that all services are provided for free.

The chaos wrought by Hurricane Maria went even further than the loss of life, injury, and property destruction — the storm had an impact on the Puerto Rican psyche which has had lasting and dire consequences. There are growing [reports of a mental health crisis](#) quietly unfolding on the island. It’s turning into a disaster of its own, especially since Puerto Rico’s already struggling healthcare system [was weakened after the storm](#), leaving adequate healthcare [inac-](#)

[cessible to many](#). But as Roberto's work with the Mutual Aid Centers demonstrates, communities are coming together to tackle this epidemic in their own way. Roberto recounted the story of one of the regular volunteers at the center where he works who had been dealing with depression and post-disaster trauma.

"The first day she came here she was almost crying, you know, in a really stressful way," Roberto says. "Since that day, she has never missed a single day of volunteer work. She has changed. She's not crying anymore. She's sleeping better. She says today to me that when she came here she feels that she's in paradise."

As Omar Reyes, another organizer at a different Mutual Aid Center in the remote town of Las Marias, says "we started our center as a community kitchen because that was what was going on in an urgent moment. People needed to eat. But once the problem changed the instrument changed too. It transformed. And now we have a center for the development of education, recreation, cultural skills, and opportunities."

The same sentiment was expressed by Astrid Cruz Negrón, an organizer at the Mutual Aid Center in the town of Utuado. "The Mutual Aid Center definitely does not want to stay in the emergency mindset of surviving Maria," she says. "We want everything we do to build towards a new world, a new more just, more equal society."

The first step to building a more just world might be guaranteeing that communities have the power to keep the lights on, but the ultimate goal is to ensure that communities have the power to begin growing a broad movement with the strength to make serious de-

mands on a government that has [largely abandoned them](#). But until then, they're taking things into their own hands.

The instances of disaster collectivism outlined here did not happen in a vacuum. They occur oftentimes in an ongoing tension with the forces of disaster capitalism. New York City was a battleground of opposing forces for years after Sandy hit, as communities and power brokers fought for very different types of recovery. The Mutual Aid Centers in Puerto Rico are up against a set of forces — the United States government, the Puerto Rican government, and corporate interests — whose power leaves the future of their project in the balance.

In the best case scenario, disaster collectivism occurs in conjunction with government support, at the local, state, and national levels, for small and large-scale intervention that is essential in relief and reconstruction. The challenge, however, is that as the decisions driving policies fall more and more into the hands of a powerful few, official disaster response will, without social and political intervention, likely reflect preexisting stratification often shaped along race and class lines.

Yet hope lies in the vast repository of history documenting that in times of disasters, communities take care of each other and often form new solidarities that can lead to political engagement. Recovery hubs emerge spontaneously. Religious institutions step in to help. Improved kitchens emerge, preparing not just meals, but a new vision of public life.

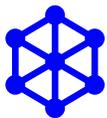
In these tumultuous and divisive times, amidst both the acute and chronic crises our society faces, we see glimmers of hope — a pos-

sibility for us to come together to take care of the most vulnerable within our communities.

“It’s trying to create solidarity in the midst of chaos,” Davin Cardenas, an organizer at Undocufund, says. “Trying to create a semblance of purpose in the midst of not knowing exactly what’s happening.” After the fires in California, “everybody had a feeling of like, ‘oh my gosh, what do I do? I’m not doing enough. How am I serving the people?’ You know, we’ve heard that so many times over. [Undocufund] gave people a sense of purpose. And that sense of purpose is critical in the midst of chaos — people’s instinct is to demonstrate love, to demonstrate care, and to demonstrate solidarity.”

With an uncertain future ahead marked by deepening divisions and climate change, the many examples of collective relief and recovery efforts can serve as a blueprint for how to move forward and rebuild with a radical resilience. They can also provide a glimpse of another world, one marked by empowered communities filled with more connection, purpose, and meaning.

Paige Ruane, Juan C. Dávila, and Ninna Gaensler-Debs contributed research and reporting for this piece. Some of the interviews were done in Spanish and have been translated to English.



The Response: Building Collective Resilience in the Wake of Disaster

Community Led Disaster Response



Illustration by Kane Lynch

Radical approaches to disaster relief in New York

by Robert Raymond and Tom Llewellyn

How do we respond to natural disasters? What comes to mind? Large relief organizations like the American Red Cross? Or perhaps the Federal Emergency and Management Agency?

Well, those images are certainly part of the story — but they're not the whole story. In our podcast series, [The Response](#), we aim to share a perspective that isn't extensively covered in the mainstream media. Specifically, we ask the question: how do communities come

together in the aftermath of disasters — often in the face of inadequate official response — to take care of each other?

In this episode of this series, we answer that question by taking a deep dive into the Rockaways Peninsula in New York City, to explore how, in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, a grassroots network of activists and volunteers emerged to coordinate one of the most effective relief efforts in the city. The group became known as Occupy Sandy, and in this episode, we tell their story, focusing on the personal narratives of three New Yorkers who were thrown into this spontaneous relief effort. We'll explore how, in the midst of the unfolding catastrophe, unlikely friendships were formed, deep bonds were cultivated, and a perhaps dormant side of New York City was awakened — one based on collectivity, mutual aid, and solidarity.

Listen to the episode [here](#).





Image from Bike Ready NYC

#BikeReady: How cyclists in NYC are delivering disaster aid

by Casey O'Brien

In a natural disaster, normal amenities like roads and gas stations are often unavailable. That means cars often can't get to communities in need and other solutions are necessary.

Luckily, human-powered disaster relief can reach even inaccessible areas with no fossil fuel required. That's the idea behind the #BikeReady campaign from Green Map, which encourages bicyclists to organize disaster relief campaigns in their own communities.

Bike-powered disaster relief was key during [Hurricane Sandy](#), which

left much of New York City flooded and without power. Cyclists brought in relief supplies, reported conditions and carried messages, and even generated electricity for charging phones. New York's robust cycling community came together to meet the need of vulnerable neighborhoods that were flooded in Manhattan and Queens, where electricity was still out even after the rest of the city was back on the grid. [A short documentary about #BikeReady from Green Map](#) (available in Spanish, Chinese, Japanese and English) shows cyclists loaded with supplies, bringing aid to people who had lost their homes in the flood. Bicycle-powered relief efforts are environmentally friendly and easy to replicate and don't require highly skilled cyclists as [Green Map notes in its Bike Ready guide](#). Even walking bikes loaded with supplies can be helpful in an emergency.

The guide has instructions on how to create a bike relief group ahead of a disaster. It emphasizes the importance of having multiple ways to reach cyclists — phone numbers, WhatsApp, social media, and email are all options, since in an emergency some forms of communication may be down. If group members have any special skills, like long-distance riding or bike mechanics, that should be noted in the contact list.

Disasters are rapidly becoming [a new state of normal in America and beyond](#). Rather than treating hurricanes, wildfires and floods as isolated incidents, we need to see them as what they are — a consequence of climate change — and prepare for them in order to keep people safe when extreme weather does arrive. Programs like #BikeReady help communities create disaster relief plans that don't rely heavily on infrastructure that could be hampered in an emergency — and instead, lean on residents themselves, who are an invaluable resource to help take care of each other.





Image provided by Sofía Gallisá Muriente

Q&A with Sofía Gallisá Muriente from Occupy Sandy

by Robert Raymond

When Hurricane Sandy barreled into New York City on Oct. 29, 2012, it left a trail of death and destruction in its wake. It also resulted in the spontaneous formation of a grassroots relief network that came to be known as Occupy Sandy.

Similarly, after Hurricane Maria slammed into Puerto Rico in September 2017, a series of Mutual Aid Centers popped up, drawing inspi-

ration from the same values of mutual aid and solidarity that shaped Occupy Sandy.

Sofía Gallisá Muriente, a Puerto Rican artist, was living in New York City when Sandy hit. She was a volunteer with Occupy Sandy. She was also on the island when hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico. Muriente is the co-director of [Beta-Local](#), a nonprofit organization in San Juan that is run by artists with the aim of fostering knowledge exchange and collaboration between artists, thinkers, and doers of all sorts. We spoke with her about her experiences in grassroots relief work in both New York and Puerto Rico.

Robert Raymond: What were some of your larger takeaways that came from your involvement with the Occupy Sandy relief efforts that you were able to apply during Hurricane Maria?

Sofía Gallisá Muriente: Part of what I learned during Sandy was just to understand that you have to tap into a pre-existing network of agents, spaces, and collectives because people will naturally respond from wherever they are and whatever they know how to do. A big lesson for us during the Sandy days which we always used to joke about is we all thought you had to be an expert of some sort to be a relief worker. Then it turned out all you needed was kind of common sense and initiative. Also really early on, I learned that there is a pre-existing crisis that is often even worse than the natural disaster, and that the really hard part of recovery is dealing with that exacerbated pre-existing crisis. That was really evident in Rockaway as it is in Puerto Rico.

The relief efforts of Occupy Sandy are very similar in a way to the Mutual Aid Centers that have popped up in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria. They're both based on the idea of mutual aid. Can you talk about that concept?

I always loved the Occupy Sandy slogan of “mutual aid not charity.” I think to me it always defines our approach to the communities that we are working in, which was: treat humans as humans, to offer ears, skills, time, and energy without assuming any particular power dynamic or power relationship between you and the person that you're talking to. That to me is what differentiated us from the Red Cross, or FEMA, or any other organization that treated residents as clients or that understood themselves as service providers.

We were just there in the interest of being human and being human to each other, and putting whatever privilege we had in not having been as directly affected by the storm in the service of other people. That to me has always been present in my understanding of mutual aid. But I think it's even more clear when you talk about the Maria effort because everyone in Puerto Rico was affected. I know many people who were heavily affected who have done a lot for others since the storm. I'm really so excited that that term mutual aid has started being used in Puerto Rico because I think it's one of the things that came from the storm. I never heard anyone speak of mutual aid in Puerto Rico before Maria. It was a term that caught me off guard when Mutual Aid Centers started popping up. It's a really important tone to proclaim and a really important stance to take in the face of so much charity and so many dehumanizing dynamics with regards to aid and relief and supporting different people's recovery process.

Although no substitute for the resources and scale of the state, one of the benefits of mutual aid is that it can be incredibly empowering to communities and to individuals. Did you notice this in the New York or in Puerto Rico?

I think that collective work, and the kind of effort that the mutual aid centers have been doing is so exceptional that it really generates a particular adrenaline — and a sense of hope that really can empower a lot of people. One thing that I noticed a lot during Occupy, both Occupy Wall Street and Occupy Sandy, is that there are a lot of people that are smart, willing; people that have not had a lot of opportunities to use their skills, talent, or intelligence in the purpose of something they believe in strongly. When you have that opportunity, it is so incredibly rewarding because it suddenly makes clear how political everything that you do is — and how you can politicize any sort of talent or skill that you might want to share for the purpose of dealing with something like a natural disaster.

This Q&A has been edited for length and clarity.





Image of Lorena Giron courtesy of *The Working World*

How a series of disasters led one entrepreneur to a life of cooperatives

by Robert Raymond

After a catastrophic earthquake devastated Guatemala on Feb. 4, 1976, Lorena Giron, who was just twelve years old at the time, was trapped under the rubble of her collapsed apartment for hours. She was eventually pulled out of the debris by a rescue team — but her family never made it out.

“All of my siblings as well as my mother died,” Giron says. “I was the only survivor.” The earthquake claimed approximately [23,000 lives](#). It

was during this time of crisis early on in her life that Giron first experienced the powerful forms of community-led relief efforts that tend to arise spontaneously during times of acute crisis — something that she would carry with her throughout her life. “I think that traumatic experiences make people stronger and more resilient,” says Giron. “After the earthquake, we were completely isolated. But in that moment, despite all the losses, we all came together to move beyond that disaster.”

Giron’s connection to grassroots, community relief was strengthened throughout her subsequent experiences during the Guatemalan Civil War, which was a more chronic disaster that afflicted the country from 1960-1996. Giron’s husband was killed in the war, which she says was politically motivated. She says she knew then that she had to leave Guatemala. She moved to the United States, eventually finding herself in New York City, New York. She was living in the Rockaways when, remarkably, she experienced yet another disaster: Hurricane Sandy. At the time Giron says she was commuting two hours a day to get to work as a domestic housekeeper. After the hurricane hit, the commute became impossible, she says, and she lost her job, leaving her unemployed for six months. But then something unexpected happened at the church that Giron attended.

As a center for community action in a heavily immigrant and low-income community, Giron’s church regularly organized a number of events to address the local community’s challenges, including things like health campaigns and clinics with immigration lawyers. After Hurricane Sandy hit, the church began forming partnerships with other organizations and activist groups to provide help for those affected.

“One of the first organizations that came in was Occupy Sandy,” Giron says. “They came with the idea of inviting other churches into the mix and creating working groups.” Occupy Sandy was a newly formed community-driven relief effort that grew out of the networks and strategies developed by the Occupy Wall Street movement. It filled a vacuum left by the official disaster response and made a significant impact in boroughs like the Rockaways and the Far Rockaways. At Giron’s church, Occupy Sandy volunteers began setting up community kitchens and distributing food and supplies to those in need. What distinguished Occupy volunteers from other relief organizations was their style of relief work — it was always community-led and focused on community empowerment. “They were looking to collaborate with the community in order to provide this assistance.” Giron says. “It was very beautiful to see the way that they went about it.”

Occupy Sandy’s slogan was “another world is possible,” and their ultimate aim was to go beyond immediate disaster relief to begin addressing some of the systemic challenges afflicting the communities they worked with. It didn’t take long for this broader vision to take hold of Giron and her community. Giron had been dreaming of opening up a restaurant for some time before Sandy hit, and when she shared this dream with Occupy volunteers, they sprung into action. With the support from The Working World, a local organization that builds cooperative businesses in low-income communities, they began to explore how to turn Giron’s dream into reality in a way that would bring it under the framework of radical economic empowerment. In collaboration with the church, they began a twelve-week course that focused on launching a worker owned and managed cooperative. “One-hundred and fifty people showed up,” Giron says.

“It was exciting because I learned I wasn’t alone in wanting to start a business.”

Giron and her fellow church members were already accustomed to working together cooperatively in their church, so the idea of starting a cooperative business felt natural to them. “What I really liked about it was that I wouldn’t be governed by any one individual, but that I would be a co-owner along with my co-collaborators,” Giron says. “The thought of governing a business together in a democratic fashion was very new and exciting to me.”

It wasn’t long before they opened their first business: a cooperatively-owned and run bakery called La Mies Bakery in the Far Rockaways. Like a lot of new businesses, it didn’t stay open for long, but for Giron, it was just the beginning of a new career in cooperative business development. “There were a lot of mistakes that we made with the bakery, and a lot of challenges that we faced where now, when I’m working with a business that is looking to start fresh, I can say, ‘Oh, you know, you can avoid these pitfalls by doing such and such things.’”

Giron is now a coordinator for [Worker-Owned Rockaway Cooperatives](#), an initiative that works to equip Far Rockaway residents with the skills and financing to launch small, worker-owned businesses that fill various needs in their community. According to the [Democracy at Work Institute](#), worker cooperatives have been shown to promote local economic development and to generate community wealth. In co-ops, profits go directly to workers instead of accumulating at the top or going to distant investors, and this makes a big difference in their impact on a community. This is especially true for underserved populations. Since most cooperatives are value-driven

they tend to focus on the needs of their communities better than traditional, for-profit businesses.

Giron says the personal and community empowerment that comes with being involved in cooperatives is crucial to addressing the power imbalances that exist within the current economy. To date, her group has helped to launch four cooperatives, spanning from the sectors of construction to custom printing. There are two more in the works: a moving co-op and a childcare services co-op.

Moments of disaster and crisis often have silver linings. In this case, Hurricane Sandy awakened something in the community that had been dormant. And for Giron, the storm swept in a flood of solidarity and hope that has transformed her life for the better. “The most important thing for me has been the ability to help my community and to work with my community members,” she says. “Before, when I had my prior job, I was earning money for myself and for my family, but that was only for us — that was only for me. Now with the work that I do I’m directly working with my fellow community members. And for me that’s big because now I can help people to realize that their dreams don’t only have to stay dreams, that they can be realized.”

Paige Ruane contributed research and reporting for this piece. The interview with Lorena Giron was done in Spanish and has been translated to English by Smiley Rojas-Nuñez.





Header image provided by Paige Ruane

The profound questions being raised by disasters: Q&A with The Response field producer Paige Ruane

by Robert Raymond

To report for the podcast, “The Response” field producer Paige Ruane travelled to the Rockaways Peninsula in New York City, New York, to speak with people who organized relief efforts after Hurricane Sandy hit the area in 2012.

I spoke with Ruane about what she learned about disasters and mutual aid while working on the episode. Here are excerpts from our conversation:

Robert Raymond: What would you say were some of your most profound takeaways from conducting interviews with folks for the episode?

Paige Ruane: What I took away was that storms and disasters raise profound questions that the people that I spoke with were answering in new ways and with greater depth than they had been answered in the past. Though I think there's always been a response of people helping people, I think it's becoming much more organized now. Also, since disasters like Hurricane Sandy are becoming more common, it feels like a call for us to rethink how we respond. I knew that there, of course, was a link between climate disasters and economics but it became more vivid to me as people shared their stories that economic issues are inextricably linked to these disasters. I noticed and saw it made plain that the poor suffer most in these circumstances.

The arc of Terry Bennett's story was also really interesting to me. I liked the questions she was asking about the dynamics of helping, and ways that we want that good feeling of helping. For instance, she worked in Haiti after the Haitian earthquake, and she saw all these people going down to Haiti to help. She thought people were so well-intended in building things, but she made the point that the plane tickets cost maybe \$700, and there were like a thousand people going down. She posed the question, "What if they had just sent that money to Haiti for skilled workers there to rebuild their nation and their island?" So I appreciated that she really began to think about all these dynamics.

With Hurricane Sandy, I saw people making efforts to rebalance this power dynamic. What I saw were people using the chaos of Hurricane Sandy as an opportunity to empower people and communities and not just rescue them. So the idea was to apply mutual aid rather than charity and for people to help people rather than rescuing them.

Was there anything that excited you in terms of the research you did for the episode? Anything that impacted your beliefs or worldview?

A point that was driven home is that the impulse to rebuild and help others is a natural one. Hurricane Katrina awoke something that continued in Sandy which was rooted in the Black Panther movement and the anti-globalization movements — forgotten forms of community solidarity that were reborn in Katrina. I think the lessons from Katrina were taken into Sandy, so it's exciting that that is gaining speed in its form.

Things like the Black Panther survival programs that would strive to satisfy immediate needs while simultaneously raising people's consciousness about their human rights — that's exactly what was happening with Hurricane Sandy as well. Maybe this is a way that it affected me — made me change my belief system — because sustainability is a word we use so easily but what does it really mean? So I started to hone my vision, I started to really listen for and watch for examples of sustainable changes as the mutual aid responses evolve and become more common. Does the immediate crisis response create sustainability or greater equity and does it address the underlying problems?

Any resources or organizations you'd like to share that didn't make it into the episode? Any final thoughts?

I recommend people look for mutual aid groups in their area. There's a website: mutualaiddisasterrelief.org. For example, during Hurricane Florence, they were sending out information and connecting people. They also referenced the history of how mutual aid has been evolving. I would say Rebecca Solnit is an interesting thinker on the topic of disasters and what they mean in our lives. In her book "A Paradise Built in Hell," she writes about the strange joy that happens in a disaster. Not to say that horrible things don't happen, but people report — and always have — about how it brings them out and connects them to people, their neighbors, and their community in ways that day-to-dayness doesn't. That they feel a great sense of meaning when they're able to help others in that way. Of course Naomi Klein's work connects a lot of dots on these issues. And groups that work on climate and related justice issues like [Uprose](#) in York City. I think grassroots changes are crucial but policy changes at every level may be even more crucial to affect long-term resilience — and groups like Uprose are working on that.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.





Illustration by Kane Lynch

The impact of Northern California fires on the undocumented community

by Robert Raymond and Tom Llewellyn

In this episode of The Response, we travel to Northern California to provide a unique perspective on the topics of climate change and immigration. California’s climate-fueled weather conditions have left the state in an extreme condition that has led to an unprecedented number of wildfires that are burning hotter, faster, and ever more acreage.

The largest wildfire in the state’s recorded history was the Mendoci-

no Complex Fire, which scorched well over 400,000 acres during the summer of 2018. And the second largest fire in California burned just a year before that. As California Governor Jerry Brown says, “since civilization emerged 10,000 years ago, we haven’t had this kind of heat condition, and it’s going to continue getting worse.”

We’ve already reached a one degree celsius increase in average global temperatures, and we may be on track for four by the end of the century. As the reality of an increasingly chaotic climate begins to settle in, it must be viewed through a lens of social, economic, and political circumstances as well. What does the growing threat of climate-fueled disasters mean for the most vulnerable among us?

In this episode, we put the focus on last year’s Tubbs Fire in Santa Rosa, California — the state’s most destructive fire to date — and how it impacted the undocumented community. We explore how, in the face of ICE raids, labor violations, a housing crisis, and climate-fueled wildfires, the broader community is coming together to stand in solidarity with those who are being forced into the shadows.

Listen to the episode [here](#).





Image provided by Undocufund

The Disproportionate effect of disasters on the undocumented: Q&A with Mara Ventura of Undocufund

by Robert Raymond

One of the [episodes](#) of our podcast series, “The Response,” featured the emotionally stirring stories of two Undocufund recipients as well as a number of experts who helped us to anchor the conversation within a broader social, racial, and economic justice framework.

One of these experts was Mara Ventura, the Executive Director of

North Bay Jobs With Justice, a community and labor coalition in the Bay Area's North Bay region that helped to found Undocufund.

Our conversation with Mara Ventura went beyond simply analyzing the dynamics of the 2017 Tubbs Fire and Undocufund, to exploring the broader issues faced by the undocumented community in California. Ventura explained the importance of organizing and community empowerment when it comes to minimizing the effects of not just environmental disasters — but economic, social, and racial injustices as well. What lessons can we learn from the undocumented community in California and Undocufund when it comes to creating disaster relief efforts that go beyond simply mitigating acute harm and which look beyond to broader issues of equity and resilience?

Read an excerpt from the interview with Mara Ventura below and [listen to the extended interview bonus podcast episode](#).

Robert Raymond: Can you let our listeners know what you do and how you came into doing the work that you do?

Mara Ventura: I'm the executive director of North Bay Jobs with Justice. We are a community and labor coalition in the North Bay. We have a little over 20 different labor unions, community, faith, and student organizations in our membership. We meet at the table to figure out what are the most pressing issues that are facing our community, with an emphasis on how people are able to really live with the wages that they have to access the worker's rights that they have. To ensure that they have access to things like collective bargaining rights if they so choose to unionize. A lot of our work is so community-based, that means that we're doing a lot of work on the immigrant

rights front because a huge portion of the workers here, and a huge portion of people who are not getting access to their labor rights, are undocumented communities.

Speaking of the impacts of unjust labor practices. It's a good segue into exploring this idea of how environmental — or broader speaking natural disasters in general — affect undocumented communities. What barriers do they face before, during, and after natural disasters?

I think one thing that's been really important in the work we've done with the fire relief fund we set up, Undocufund, and also in our work with North Bay Jobs With Justice is to highlight how undocumented immigrants were in crisis even before the fires. When we talk about how natural disasters impact undocumented communities before, during, and after the actual disasters, one thing that we really want to start with is the context of the crisis that undocumented families, workers, and communities have been in long before the natural disaster came. For example I think of the barriers we could address here, such as the inability to have stable, secure, and safe working conditions.

Do you have any specific stories that you think were powerful or emotional or that stood out to you throughout this entire process of the fire, and coming together afterwards?

I don't have any particular stories from beginning to end, but what

I can talk about in terms of the experience I've had in Undocufund is really just [what] you're naming: this collectivism of folks coming together in these really beautiful and kind of unique ways that we don't always see when we're organizing and we are trying to bring the community together.

People really coming out of the woodwork. We were really surprised when we started Undocufund, we thought if we could raise \$500,000 that would be amazing, and our dream goal would be a million at some point. We hit a million dollars within probably five or six weeks of launching. We were shocked... To see this outpouring of people who were not necessarily giving large donations... In fact we find that well over half of all the money to this day that we've been bringing in have been individual donations of \$10, \$25, \$50.

We were at a point where we had stacks and stacks of envelopes, people just sending in whatever cash was in their pocket or sending in a check or whatever they could give, or jumping online. We're still continuing to fundraise; we've fundraised over six and a half million dollars which is really just incredible. I think it speaks to how people really wanted to figure out how they could support in the smallest and biggest ways.

We had a 7 year old girl who decided to organize her birthday party as an undocumented fundraiser and sent out invitations to all her friends to come to her house for a barbecue and asked people instead of birthday gifts she wanted donations that she was going to be given to Undocufund. I think she raised over \$1,000. She brought it to our offices and we took photos, and gave her hugs, and just said, "Thank you so much, this was beautiful."

We had organizations that we didn't even know... holding small fundraisers in their house, having house parties. We had an organization that had been planning their fundraiser for a year, and decided to split half of everything they fundraised with Undocufund.

We had LGBTQ organizations driving up from Oakland and San Francisco to give us checks, or, you know, we had church masses that all of their collections to Undocufund. It was really beautiful I think the diverse outpouring of where in our community people really wanted to pull funds together and help.

We were also up to our ears in e-mails of people asking, "I have coats, I have diapers, where can I bring them? Where can I provide services?" And also people saying, "Can I come volunteer? I have hours to give." [People were] driving up from as far as the East Bay or the South Bay just to spend an afternoon getting trained and helping folks applying for Undocufund aid.

I think the collectivism of people really coming together even if it's the five bucks in their pocket or taking advantage of the people that they knew and the events they knew were happening and figuring out how to hone in on those opportunities was really powerful.

Can you tell me a little bit more about the listening circles? Where did that idea come from and what are you hoping to get out of it?

What was really unique and a great advantage and strength of the Undocufund Fire Relief Fund is that the organizations that came together to start this fund are all organizations who, for the most part, don't actually do very much service-oriented work, or do very little

of it, and do it in tandem with organizing work, and movement building work, and thinking about root causes of systematic injustices. So we brought, I think, a very unique perspective to putting a fire relief fund together, one in which we thought about what were different systematic, operational pieces we needed to have in the Fire Relief Fund to ensure that it was accessible and equitable and truly reached undocumented communities where they were. But also from the get go have been thinking about not just the immediate needs but also the intermediate and long term needs.

We were going through the process of helping families get aid from the fire fund, incorporated in our conversations and understanding of what was happening in people's lives. So an example of that is that we really tried to ensure that as people came and applied for aid they didn't feel like they were at an agency filling out a bureaucratic application. We wanted an application process where folks came in and sat down with a trained volunteer. We really looked at pools of volunteers from people that were already in trusted positions, so we had a lot of health care workers from local clinics where a majority of their patients are undocumented community. In fact we had a few folks come in and see their doctor or their nurse and wait — they would come for hours waiting to apply for aid and they would let people skip in front of them just so they could wait to sit down and apply for their aid with their doctor, health care worker, the teacher that they know that taught their kids at school, and so forth. We wanted to make sure, step one that there was people who already had experience, and were trusted people in the undocumented community and doing that work. Then we really wanted to create a process where folks came down and sat down with one of these trained volunteers and just started off with a conversation, didn't immediately sit down and start looking at an application.

In fact another thing that we thought was important — and many of these best practices came from a local nonprofit that had been giving aid called La Luz — was to not even have folks fill the applications out themselves, but as much as possible they just were able to sit and have a conversation and feel supported and safe to talk about their story, and talk about their experiences, and what had impacted them, and create a place that felt safe and supportive, and didn't feel like you're here to see if you qualify for money that people you can't see or don't know are going to determine. So really ensuring right away, our job is to be here to help you get as much aid as you can get for the things that you need.

Is there anything else that you want to add before we wrap up?

I am really appreciative of this great conversation that we've had around just a small fraction of some of the barriers that undocumented workers and undocumented families face in our communities.

I just wanted to very briefly touch on not just the impacts of how climate change completely exacerbate their situations and the crises is that there in the United States, but also just to encourage folks to also think about the story of migration for many undocumented folks here. Oftentimes when I hear that this false narration of undocumented folks coming here to steal jobs or bring in drugs and create crime or whatever it is, these negative stereotypes, I think it's important to force people to step back and see a broader view that for most undocumented or most immigrants they don't want to leave their ancestral homeland that they have been in for generations where they know the culture, and know the language, and have a spiritual or religious ceremony they practice, and have community, and are have

familiarity, and probably assumed since they were young that they would grow old and pass things on to their kids there.

Most undocumented communities and people don't want to leave where they live to come here and they didn't leave oftentimes for their own free will. I mean everyone has a different migration story but I think it's important that we actually look at some of the culprits of what is causing so many people to flee their countries and come here. And it absolutely intersects with climate change because it oftentimes boils down to Westernized companies, millionaire, billionaire CEOs and companies who are in developing nations — like the one that I'm from which is Colombia — extracting resources, extracting oil, mining, drilling, deforestation, planting genetically modified crops.

So really the devastation on both the land and the indigenous communities and the communities living there that drive people out, that make it completely impossible for folks to sell their own food or make their own clothes or just lives and make money and take care of themselves and afford the food there. You know there's a whole host of things around that.

I realize we could do a whole show just on that piece but just wanted to also for a minute encourage folks also to think again about the narration of how we talk about undocumented communities and environmental impacts and how interrelated and interconnected these megafires and megastorms and all these things are seen here are to the origin stories of undocumented communities and what's happening in their homelands.

This Q&A has been edited for length and clarity.





Illustration by Kane Lynch

Reimagining Paradise in an age of climate disruption

by Robert Raymond and Tom Llewellyn

In this age of climate disruption and record shattering megafires, hurricanes, and the many other disasters wrecking havoc around the world, how do you rebuild from scratch?

Allen Myers grew up in the town of Paradise, California and like thousands of others, lost his childhood home to the Camp Fire when it burned through 153,336 acres of the Sierra Foothills on November 8th, 2018.

Despite its name, Paradise had been afflicted by deep poverty and opioid addiction for years before the fire — it is also located in a very

high danger area that regularly experiences wildfires. So, perhaps a more relevant rebuilding question is, how do you rebuild a town better than it was before? Not just recreating the old systems and structures that weren't working for most people in the first place, but rebuilding with more resilience, equity, and humanity?

After the initial fire recovery was completed, Allen set out to find answers to those questions; visiting the small town of Onagawa on Japan's Tohoku coast.

Seven years earlier, a magnitude 9.0 earthquake sent a 45-foot high tsunami crashing into the eastern coast of Japan, washing away several towns in the process, including Onagawa. While many of the surrounding towns have been slow to rebuild and have had a difficult time getting residents to move back, Onagawa has taken a unique path through a participatory process which has been incredibly successful.

In this episode of The Response, we follow Allen's journey and explore the lessons he brought home from Onagawa and the rebuilding efforts in Paradise. It's a unique window into how residents are working together to build a new vision for what comes next, while fighting against the forces pulling them back towards the status quo.

To learn more about ongoing regenerative work in Paradise, CA please visit: www.regeneratingparadise.net.

Listen to this episode [here](#).





Remains of a house on Cross Creek Road in Fountain Grove, Santa Rosa, after the October 2017 Northern California wildfires CC-BY SA 4.0 Frank Schulenburg

Typical wildfire recovery is ‘rebuilding to burn’, but there’s another way

by Erin Axelrod

In 2018 the Camp Fire, California’s deadliest and most destructive wildfire, killed 85 people, virtually destroying the entire town of Paradise and shrouding large swaths of Northern California in a two-week haze of toxic smoke.

Just a year before, my home community of Sonoma County, about 200 miles southwest of the Camp Fire, was engulfed in a fire which claimed 44 lives. These climate-change-related death tolls are the

new normal, linking California with the growing [masses of climate migrants](#) around the globe.

[These tragic disasters have a disproportionate impact on communities of color and shelterless populations.](#) They are the same communities that have been subjected to centuries of oppression and exploitation by the very capitalist, white supremacist, and patriarchal economic systems that created and continue to uphold inequities and competition for scarce resources across race, class, and gender lines.

As communities struggle to put their lives back together, corporate entities fall back into building the same, flammable homes, regardless of the risk to property and lives. Companies are rapidly rebuilding homes to maximize profits. But what do we sacrifice for the sake of speed? Business-as-usual is rebuilding-to-burn. Nevertheless, some communities are starting to consider other approaches, and are mobilizing towards a new, collective vision. Grassroots organizers know that when we design for — and with — front-line communities, we design a better system for all.

For several weeks last year, when the Camp Fire thrust Northern California into the category of “[poorest air quality in the world](#),” I, along with millions of Californians attained a renewed appreciation for clean air. I realized that to ensure clean air for all, we must regain a wildfire-adapted culture, like the culture that indigenous Californians had for millennia, and which shaped the abundant landscapes that settlers extracted upon arrival.

To adapt to the constant threat of wildfires, we need to revisit the purpose and function of the built environment, and find a way to con-

struct communities that mimic how indigenous Californians sheltered themselves.

Lisa Kleissner, treasurer of the [Community Association of Big Sur](#), is an advocate for the need to allocate capital to incentivize fire-resistant new construction and retrofits. In California, “folks are working with what they have (i.e. low or no-cost protection options) to address the constant threat of wildfire,” explains Kleissner. “Addressing the reality of climate change and its impact on our communities requires action on the part of the residents, homeowners, and municipality, not just CalFire.”

Kleissner believes that we can and must defend our own homes and that state and federal resources dedicated to fire suppression must be better leveraged. “Capital used to fight fires should, in part, be used to provide tax incentives and low cost long-term debt to enable retrofitting of structures,” says Kleissner.

While research is being done around [fire-resistant construction strategies](#), much of it does not take into account the need for the building industry to reduce its sizeable contributions to the climate crisis, which exacerbates [the severity of fires in California and beyond](#). The building sector [accounts for 39 percent of U.S. Carbon emissions](#) according to the U.S. Green Building Council.

Benefits of natural building

Citizens reason that we cannot fight climate-caused disasters with the same mindset that created them, nor can we pretend to create community resilience by using high-carbon emitting materials in rebuilding; we have to imagine a different path forward. That path will include [natural building](#) strategies such as [rammed earth](#), [straw-bale](#)

[buildings](#), [green roofs](#) and [home hardening](#). Natural building generally refers to a philosophy of construction that favors durable, minimally processed sustainable materials such as straw, wood, and clay in creating human shelters.

Nearly all of the buildings designed by the ecological architecture firm [Arkin Tilt](#) within or adjacent to wildfire-affected areas [survived the North Bay wildfires](#). Although natural building has been criticized for being costly, it is possible to build fire-resistant homes at a similar cost to conventional building. Arkin Tilt made [plans available for free](#) to anyone who had lost their homes in a wildfire.

The additional benefits of natural building include homes that are nontoxic for the workers to construct (and for people to live in) and that are able to withstand a seismic event. In some cases, homes could be designed as emergency shelter-in-place oases, protecting families indoors in an extreme wildfire. The designs could incorporate rainwater harvesting and gray-water reuse to help address California's water crisis; and they can utilize community-owned power (even off-grid), from organizations such as [People Power Solar Cooperative](#), and [Sonoma Clean Power](#).

Another benefit of natural building is the potential to address climate change. The straw, wood, or other materials are made up of what was previously atmospheric carbon transformed via photosynthesis in contrast to conventional building materials created via processes which emit carbon into the atmosphere. Natural materials are then integrated into the construction in a way that permanently preserves that carbon in the building envelope, constituting “sequestered carbon.”

Preliminary findings from [California Straw Building Association](#) (CASBA) (currently in review by [ARUP Engineering](#)) show the [Mahonia mixed-use building, near downtown Eugene, Oregon](#), measures 12.1 metric tons of carbon (CO₂e) sequestered. This commercial mixed-use structure was built with straw, wood framing, and clay in place of the more typical materials used in commercial construction: metal framing and foam insulation. These findings compared the total embodied carbon of the straw bale/clay plaster wall assembly with the embodied carbon of a comparable typical commercial wall assembly, and the highlight just how powerful natural construction can be for addressing climate change.

Straw, a waste product of California's rice and grain industries, has been used for millennia in buildings as a highly-insulative building material. Furthermore, it can be grown via methods that restore degraded lands, as is being done by regenerative viticulturist Kelly Mulville at [Paicines Ranch](#). Mulville sees the production of straw as a co-benefit of restoring an overgrazed section of the ranch.

Despite straw-bale construction being an [approved building method under international codes](#), we need more public education and visible pilot projects. Massey Burke, co-director of CASBA and a natural materials design/build consultant, says that CASBA and ARUP are partnering with [StopWaste](#) to develop a carbon-sequestering multi-family housing project in the East Bay, and more generally to support the growth of carbon-sequestering construction practices.

“Citizens can participate in our upcoming workshops such as a skills-training workshop on August 10 and 11 [2019] teaching how to complete a straw bale retrofit to an existing home,” says Burke.

Training the Next Generation of Builders

We have an opportunity to train up a new wave of builders. Our youth are inheriting an increasingly insecure job market. Youth [unemployment has been rising](#) and a [recent survey](#) showed that 29 percent of millennials regret their college degrees. The predictability of home loss to natural disasters in the future means that developing tangible skills in rebuilding from natural disasters is job security.

Letitia Hanke, founder of [The LIME Foundation's NextGen Trades Academy](#) in Sonoma County, says the school covers natural building techniques in its green building curriculum because it believes in nontoxic work pathways for its students. The program trains and helps youth find gainful employment in the construction industry and builds a workforce for local contractors. She says the program has a success rate of more than 60 percent in finding full-time job placements for participants.

“We hope to train hundreds of youth to be able to build tiny homes with nontoxic materials for the sake of our climate and our world,” says Hanke, who is also the award-winning business-owner of [ARS Roofing](#).

Workforce development in the natural building industry is also in the works at [California Human Development](#), a nonprofit organization focused on fighting poverty. CHD is thinking proactively about what can be done to retrofit communities to prevent future disasters, with plans to retrofit an existing vacant building and to transform it into a fire-resistant model for natural-building retrofit and sober living center. “We especially target the most vulnerable in our communities with no benefit of extra safety nets when disaster hits,” says Kai Harris, CDH’s program director. “We are pleased to be integrating

natural building principles into our workforce development and building techniques so that we can move into a new era of climate and community resilience.”

And finally, we need code shifts. While straw-bale construction is already codified, cob, another popular method of natural building, is not. Quail Springs in Southern California is [working on changing CA building code](#) to incorporate cob as a viable building method.

This is a vision of a new story that is possible if we align our hearts and adopt a larger sense of “home,” one that is tied up in our mutual survival. The inertia of business-as-usual in a capitalist system will follow an inevitable, globally devastating path, unless we take radical action.

In sum, we must not just rebuild our homes, but retrofit the political, economic, and social structures that keep us beholden to models of extraction and competing against one another. Everyone can be involved in this vision, because everyone lives somewhere. We must all be architects of our collective home.

Parts of this piece previously appeared in [Dumbo Feather](#).





Illustration by Kane Lynch

Fighting misinformation in the aftermath of the Mexico City earthquake

by Robert Raymond and Tom Llewellyn

In this episode of The Response, we travel to Mexico City and puts the focus on the 2017 Puebla Earthquake — a magnitude 7.1 quake that toppled over forty buildings and killed over 350 people. Specifically, we explore the significance of information flows by telling the story of a very unique initiative that arose in the wake of the earthquake.

In the aftermath of a disaster, information can mean the difference

between life and death. After the earthquake hit in Mexico City, it wasn't just buildings that collapsed, the normal lines of communication that connect the city did as well. It was in this dangerous state of confusion and chaos that a group of friends using WhatsApp to share information ended up creating what later became known as [Verificado19s](#), a spontaneous, grassroots initiative that consisted of a vast network of volunteers that traveled throughout the city to gather and verify information.

The episode tells the story from the perspective of several Verificado19s volunteers: Volunteer Ana Givaudan, found herself working with official rescue workers and the Navy in the heart of the “zero zones,” the areas that were mostly heavily devastated by the quake. Daniel Montaña, a bicycle volunteer, biked around the city as fast as he could to verify whether or not certain reports were accurate. Sandra Patargo is the person who started the original WhatsApp group and who also helped coordinate elaborate spreadsheets and a real time disaster map to be made available to the public.

What can we learn from the efforts of Verificado19s? Are there replicable models and strategies that could be applied to future disasters? How can communities come together to respond to and challenge the spread of misinformation both in the context of acute disasters and also more generally? These are just some of the questions we explore in this episode of The Response.

Listen to this episode [here](#).





Image provided by Isis Medeiros

Resilience in the aftermath of Brazil's deadly dam collapse

by Shanna Hanbury

In the small mining town of Brumadinho in southeastern Brazil, the Córrego do Feijão tailings dam owned by Vale, the largest iron ore producer in the world, collapsed on January 25, 2019. It unleashed a tsunami of toxic mud packed with iron ore rejects, killing at least 270 people, and causing widespread environmental damage. The mud covered 290 hectares or about 300 football fields.

But amid one of Brazil's most fatal environmental disasters, community-led resilience efforts and organization stepped in to provide vital relief and support for the remaining residents. By pooling their energy and time, the people of Brumadinho have been able to organize for immediate assistance, fight for their rights, and pave the way towards restoring their collective memory.

In Córrego do Feijão, the Brumadinho district where the mine is located, 20-year-old law student Jeferson Custódio Santos Vieira was at home making lunch when the dam collapsed. His younger brothers were outside playing football. When he heard a loud noise, Custódio stepped outside and saw neighbors running. A cloud of smoke emerged in the distance. "There was a sea of mud coming down, destroying everything in its path," he recalls.

After ushering his brothers indoors, Custódio ran down the hill in the direction of the dam. People warned him not to go because it was dangerous. But at the bottom of the mountain was an inn where his grandmother worked as a cook, and his aunt, a cleaner. He wanted to see if they were OK. But as soon as he had an unobstructed view, he froze. "It was already completely engulfed," he remembers sadly.

For the following week, all 200 families in his village gathered daily in their adobe community center. For the first two days, there was no electricity, no water, and no internet access. All connecting roads were destroyed. "We were isolated, and everyone had family members missing," says Custódio.

From these daily gatherings, a people's commission – Comissão de Atingidos do Córrego do Feijão – formed of those willing to get involved. In the beginning, the group centralized information coming in

from the rescue teams about victims and survivors of the tragedy. As donations started pouring in through makeshift paths that bypassed the mud, their community collectively received and fairly divided food, water, and other basic supplements. Twelve people currently on the commission represent about 600 people. “There aren’t any leaders here,” Custódio says. “Everyone here needs help, including those helping others the most.”

Five months later, Custódio’s village reports 27 confirmed deaths. Many residents still report chronic headaches and rashes. The reasons are uncertain. Depression and anxiety are rampant. Chickens continue to drop dead – no one knows why, but people suspect contaminated water. Villagers who made extra money by selling eggs and herbs are going without. All the fishermen in the greater region are out of work because the river is now contaminated by heavy metals. Many fish died and the surviving fish are unsafe to eat.

The Brumadinho disaster comes just a few years after another traumatic dam collapse in the nearby city of Mariana. Custódio learned lessons from Mariana’s bad experiences and was keen not to share the same fate. “We needed to ensure our collective rights to help ourselves and each other,” says Custódio. “In less than a month, we got authorities to reopen roads and re-establish electricity and water here – things that didn’t happen in Mariana.”

As a group, they are able to act as spokespeople for those most affected and collectively pressure the mining company and authorities for their rights. Several months down the line, with immediate relief out of the way, they continue to distribute mineral water as well as slowly rebuild community structures.

“Collectives have strength, and collective action is always greater,” Custódio adds.

Remembering the victims

On the other side of town, 32-year-old homemaker Flávia Coelho dedicates all her free time to creating a memorial. Her father, Olavo Henrique Coelho, worked at the mine for almost 40 years. After identifying safety issues with the dam seven months before its rupture, he urgently reported his concerns to Vale but was ignored. He was one of the victims who perished in the collapse. His daughter’s mission is to make sure that this disaster is never forgotten – or repeated.

At the entrance of Brumadinho, large white concrete letters spell out the town’s name. Photographs and flowers now cover the landmark. A banner with the names of all those still missing is hoisted high, with one side attached to a wooden pole and the other to a street sign. This area is where family members come together on the 25th of every month to protest and honor the lives lost. Shouts for justice echo throughout the main avenue.

At a spacious building ceded by the local Catholic church, the construction of a memorial for the victims is already underway. “There is space for everyone who died,” says Coelho, who describes an individual corner with photographs, personal objects, and stories told by family and friends.

“I help unearth the life stories of every single victim,” says Coelho, a job she carries out with 30 other volunteers without any political support. “The families are all united. We want the world to hear our story.”

Dangerous dams still exist

Unfortunately, Brumadinho may not be the last mining disaster in Brazil. Several tailings dams in other cities are under red alert, at risk of imminent collapse. In Barão de Cocais, a mining town only two hours away from Brumadinho, residents are paralyzed with fear and very worried.

Last month, a fragment of the dam fell, and the barrier continues to slide by over 40 centimeters every day.

Late at night, 31-year-old resident Maxwell de Andrade walks down to the riverbank with a small group. They watch and wait. “We start the vigil at midnight and leave around 5 am,” says de Andrade, who maintained this routine for months. But with work during the day and the winter months approaching, he can no longer sustain the vigils.

His concerns remain. If the nearby dam collapses, will they have enough time to alert their neighbors and escape before a wave of mining tailings mud swallows their homes?

Local civil defense agencies installed and tested sirens, but de Andrade won’t stake his life on it. In Brumadinho, sirens malfunctioned, costing countless lives.

With a group of other concerned citizens, he is fighting for the evacuation of all the families that live near the river. Barão’s residents are also feeling the psychological impact, so Vale is also being pressured to fund and offer mental health services. But so far, no action has been taken.

“There’s nothing we can do except wait for a tragedy to happen,” de Andrade laments. But he and other citizens are doing everything they can to prevent more lives being harmed.

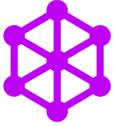




Illustration by Kane Lynch

Inequality, structural racism, and the fight for justice after the Grenfell Tower fire

by Robert Raymond and Tom Llewellyn

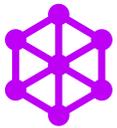
On June 14, 2017, a fire started in a 24-story public housing apartment in West London called Grenfell Tower. The fire raged all night and reduced the building to a shell. Seventy-two people lost their lives, making the Grenfell Tower fire the United Kingdom's deadliest disaster since World War II.

In this episode of The Response, we examine the events that led up to the Grenfell Tower fire and learn how the community has responded

through the voices of survivors, their families, and others who were impacted. We meet 13-year-old Grenfell Tower resident Neila El-guenuni; rescue worker Pedro Ramos who was on the fire response team; local community organizer Joe Delaney who was activated by the tragedy; and many other community members who have come together to increase their resilience while simultaneously fighting for justice and accountability.

Up until now on our podcast, we have focused on incidents that could be considered “natural” disasters — things like hurricanes, wildfires, and earthquakes. But as we’ve learned throughout the series, the word “natural” is a bit misleading as most of these incidents are exacerbated and transformed into catastrophic disasters because of a complex array of social factors. In this episode, we focus on at a disaster that was not only exacerbated by pre-existing inequalities — but one that was entirely created by them.

Listen to this episode [here](#).





All images in this article by Della Duncan

The Grenfell Tower fire community response – Photo series

by Della Duncan

The following photographs were taken by field producer Della Duncan while she worked on The Response podcast episode 5: Inequality, structural racism, and the fight for justice after the Grenfell Tower fire.

The photos were taken around the time of the two-year-anniversary of the Grenfell Tower fire. They feature the tower, the area around the tower, and a few of the bereaved, survivors, and community organizers connected with the Grenfell Tower fire.



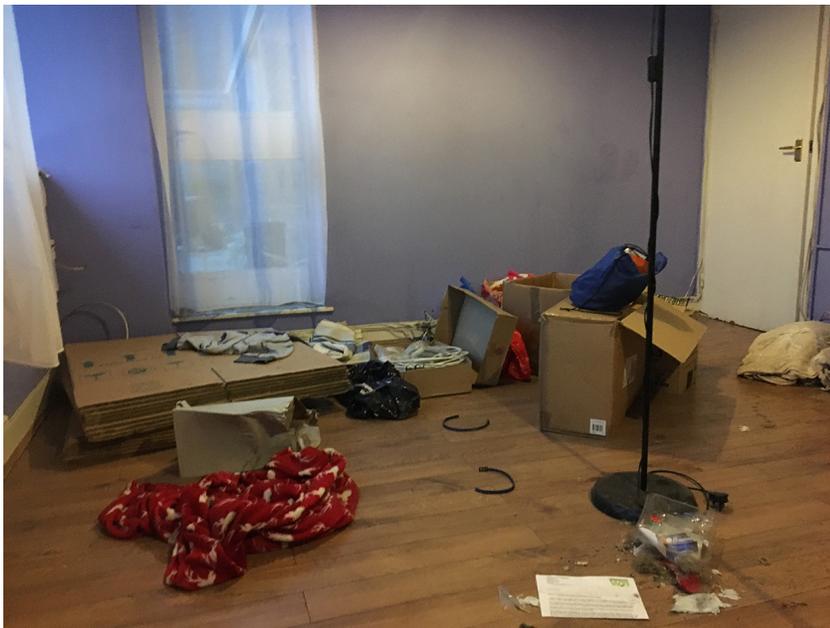
Nabil Choucair a community activist and bereaved man who lost several members of his family in the Grenfell Fire



Pedro Ramos, a police supervisor the night of the Grenfell Fire and his wife Mel Ramos.



Joe Delaney, local resident and community organizer in front of his home that sits right beneath Grenfell Tower.



Joe Delaney has not been able to sleep in his flat after the Grenfell Fire so he has left it abandoned.



Field producer Della Duncan sitting with Neila Elguenuni, 13-year-old survivor of the Grenfell Tower Fire.



Space reclaimed by the Kids on the Green Project to support children affected by the Grenfell Tower Fire.



The Wall of Truth near Grenfell Tower. This was the first place residents came to when they evacuated from the fire.



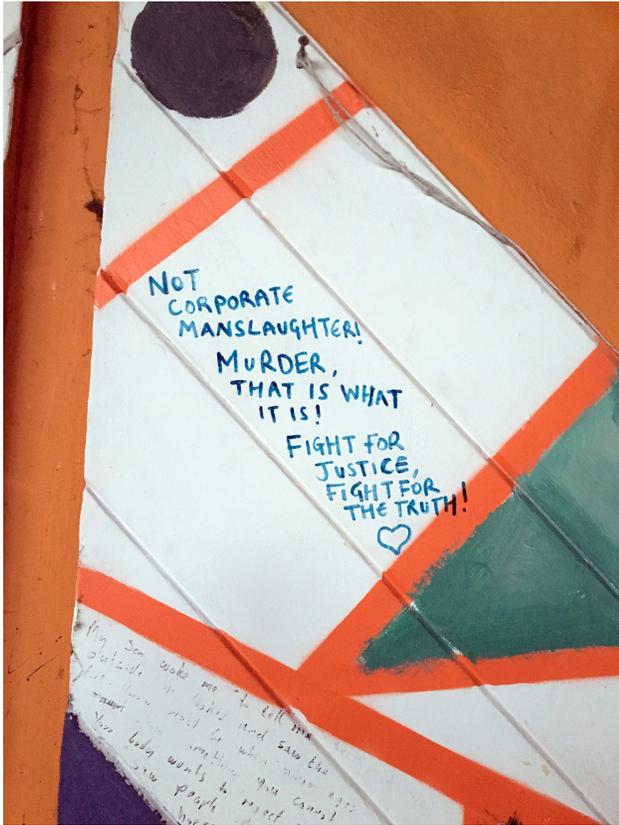
Community art commemorating those who passed away in the Grenfell Fire.



Mural near Grenfell Tower.



Community solidarity for those who passed away in the Grenfell Fire.



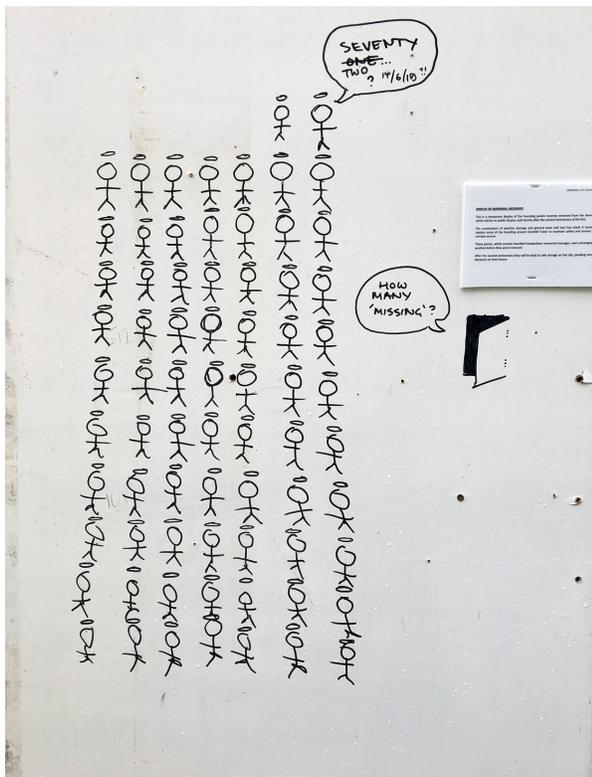
Quote from the Wall of Truth near Grenfell Tower.



Call for Justice near Grenfell Tower. RBKC stands for the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, which refers to the local council authority.



Signs and other messages near Grenfell Tower.



Community notes on walls near Grenfell Tower.



Sue Duggins, Leanna Oliffe and family. Sue and Leanna are volunteer community organizers supporting the Grenfell Tower Community. They are both wearing Grenfell Community T-shirts.

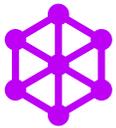




Image by Ian Whitlen at the Broward County training provided by CMBM

Healing population-wide trauma from Gaza to Parkland: Q&A with Dr. Jim Gordon of the Center for Mind-Body Medicine

by Aaron Fernando

As the whole country was reeling from the 2018 Valentine’s Day shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, members of the surrounding communities well beyond the school itself needed to find ways to heal from the violence of that day and find ways to move past the crippling trauma of that day.

This is where the [Center for Mind-Body Medicine](#) (CMBM) came in with its experience in equipping populations with a set of techniques that enable healing after experiencing population-scale trauma, from South Sudan to Kosovo to Gaza and Israel.

Started in 1991 by Dr. James (Jim) Gordon, CMBM focuses on empowering people to direct their own healing from trauma using a somewhat radical approach: by equipping not just medical professionals, but parents, educators, students, and other community members and leaders with a set of techniques they can both use themselves and share with others, allowing healing to occur on a population-wide scale.

Dr. Gordon's new book [The Transformation: Discovering Wholeness and Healing After Trauma](#) (to be released this September) is about the methods used by CMBM, as well as other ways to go about healing after trauma. We spoke with Dr. Gordon about CMBM's community-based methods of dealing with population-wide trauma.

Listen to the full interview [here](#).

Aaron Fernando: How did you start looking at trauma and how did you start thinking about trauma differently from how it's normally treated in Western medicine?

Dr. Jim Gordon: I started thinking about and dealing with trauma long before I knew the meaning of the word. When I was a kid... I could experience, as so many kids can, the distress that my parents were having and taking out on each other and sometimes on me.

I grew up in New York City and worked with patients in the Bronx for three years as a psychiatric resident. I didn't see [people suffering from trauma] as pathological, although their coping mechanisms were sometimes ineffective, strange, or hard to understand. The question for me was not [about] what diagnostic category to put them in, but "how do I help them deal with the trauma?"

Why did you start the Center for Mind-Body Medicine?

I couldn't do what I wanted to do within the conventional psychiatric medical world. I'd been a researcher at the National Institute of Mental Health where I'd spent over 11 years studying these approaches, but studying them, writing about them, helping other people with them is not the same as being in an established institution and trying to get the whole institution to function somewhat differently.

I decided what I would do is create an organization that could work with clinicians, work with educators, work with community organizers, work with people who are trying to make a difference in the world and give them the tools and the support they needed to do their work in a respectful, humane, democratic, hopeful way.

One thing that I find really interesting is that it's not just focused on psychologists and psychiatrists, but you're also training teachers and parents and community leaders. Is this method more effective at increasing access to dealing with stress and trauma?

When you're dealing with population-wide trauma, there's no alternative. I was just in South Sudan. There are 12 million people and three psychiatrists. So of course in a situation like that, we have to train leaders of women's groups, aid workers, peer counselors, and so on.

But even here in the United States, we work[ed] in Sonoma County right after the fires they had a couple years ago. It's the whole county that's affected and many of the people in the county have no interest in going to see a shrink. They don't want to take pills... they want an approach that will focus on encouraging them using their own strengths. That's one piece. The other piece is that people want a supportive community and as we train many people within a community, it builds that support.

Do you think that's because there's a shared vulnerability and a breaking down of the barriers that would normally exist?

Exactly. Yes, there is that shared vulnerability and they see, "oh, she's not so different from me. Oh, we have this in common." We all have these ideas, preconceptions about each other, all those things that make us different — when we come together in a small group setting and you listen to other people... or you do some kind of active, expressive meditation... you realize, "my ideas about this person were 180-degrees wrong. I thought she was this, that, or the other thing and she's really not."

When we do the training and we have these small groups, we don't let people argue and we don't let people give advice to each other.

They're there to make discoveries for themselves about themselves, and we're all there to learn from the discoveries that one of us is making.

From your work across Gaza and Israel, Kosovo, South Sudan, and everywhere else, have you seen the methods that you taught being tweaked and tailored to local conditions and cultural norms?

Things change to some degree. For example, we're working on the Pine Ridge Reservation. That's the Lakota people. What's evolved is that we've trained them in a synthesis of mind-body medicine and traditional Lakota ceremony.

I remember I was leading a group with people from another tribe, and then something came up in the group and one of the elders was wrestling with a difficult situation. "So what do you ordinarily do?" [I asked.] She said, "we do some of the dances from the sun dance. Let's do it now." The work changes somewhat, but the basic principles are the same because techniques we are doing are grounded in the basis of human biology and psychology and that we've evolved as a species.

I found the Center for Mind-Body Medicine's approach interesting because it seems to focus on the present rather than the past, as opposed to other methods of treatment and therapy. Is

there some component of this focus on the present that leads to more favorable outcomes?

I think the antidote to trauma — this is a point I make repeatedly in my new book, *The Transformation* — is staying in the present. You can think of trauma as being trapped in the past and still reacting as if the trauma were continuing on a physiological level. You're in a state of ongoing fight-or-flight, anxious, hyper-vigilant, irritable, difficulty sleeping, concentrating or you're in a frozen state: shut down, withdrawn, replaying the events in your head, [and] having flashbacks or nightmares.

That's the major part of trauma. The other part is [that] you're worried about what's going to happen next. You know, "when is the next assault going to come? When am I next going to have to deal with some other physical or emotional or social crisis, or economic crisis?" So you're imprisoned by the past, you're worried about the future, and you're not in the present. So in a deep and meaningful sense, being in a relaxed moment-to-moment awareness of meditation is the antidote.

So we're always bringing people back to that present moment. Yes, of course they can talk about the past and what's happened and the memories that are coming up, and they can talk about their concerns about the future, but the more they learn to stay in the present, the less traumatized, the less biologically disrupted, the fewer psychological symptoms, [and] the more available they are to living their lives.

Are there any hurdles that you're seeing to the Center for Mind-Body Medicine's approach and specific methods being accepted in wider medical circles?

There is much greater acceptance. We're working with the whole VA system. We're working with the largest division of the VA in Florida, South Georgia, and the Caribbean. They have 200 whole-health coaches and many of the leadership in that division is coming through our program. So there's much more acceptance.

But there's still resistance. I think the resistance is, to some degree, the resistance is to self-awareness, self-care, [self-reflection] on what's going on. It's not only medical organizations; Many very fine aid organizations [and] human rights organizations have not taken very good care of their staff. Everybody's trying to do what they think is the right thing to do and they [say] "well put that aside! That's just personal stuff." Well, it turns out not to work very well. So what we're seeing is, increasingly — whether it's in a hospital system or a human rights organizations or aid organizations, they're beginning to see not only the massive trauma of people we work with and that we don't have answers for, but also the trauma of the people who are working in that organization or that institution. So they're beginning to embrace our approach.

For example, at Eskanazi Health, which is the largest healthcare system in Indiana, we trained, initially, 200 of their staff and their healthcare costs for their 4,500 employees were going up at five percent a year before we started — now they're only going up at one percent a year.

It seems like you're doing a lot of work to actually track the progress and impacts of the work you do, as well.

Research is important if you want to know if it works. Most of the research we've published has been on our ten- or eleven-week-long small groups on people who are diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). And those people — in studies we've done in Kosovo and Gaza — 80 – 90 percent of people who begin our groups with symptoms that qualify for PTSD no longer have it after 10 or 11 weeks and those gains hold for three, seven, 10 months.

One of the other things that we found with veterans is that it isn't long enough to do a 10-week group, because the veterans — this is our hypothesis, anyway... they maintain some of the gains over time, [but] some they don't and they need more support because many of these vets are Vietnam vets, they've had PTSD for 20 years, 30 years, 40 years. They need the support on an ongoing basis. The research tells us that the next time we work with vets, we've got to do much more. We've got to work with them for a longer period of time, and we've got to involve their family members, too. So we're learning from the research and the research is showing that this is a very effective way of working with very diverse populations.

Finally, can you talk a little bit about the book you're releasing in September, "The Transformation," and what it's all about?

The book is called "The Transformation: Discovering Wholeness and Healing After Trauma." In many ways, it's putting together 50 years

of my work — work that started long before I started the Center for Mind-Body Medicine.

In the book, there's a step-by-step approach to dealing with the trauma with lots of stories with people just like the people reading the book, showing how they have used these techniques — the same techniques we use and all this work we've done with hundreds of thousands of people with Center for Mind-Body Medicine — and how they can use [these techniques] themselves and how they can use it with their friends and families to help them heal themselves.

This kind of work helps to build community. Once you start learning these techniques for yourself and sharing them with others, you're creating a common language that can be spoken across many differences or politics or ethnicity or age or [anything] else. You're learning a language of self-discovery and self-care.

If you're part of a community that's interested in bringing our work to the community, that's how we start. That's how we started in East Sonoma after the fires; that's how we started in Houston after the hurricanes; in Puerto Rico. People who knew about us said “we'd like you to come.” It required discussions and it required raising the funds to make it happen, but we're starting because in communities are saying, “hey, we need this in our community. How can we bring it here?”

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.





Illustration by Kane Lynch

How Puerto Ricans are restoring power to the people

by Robert Raymond and Tom Llewellyn

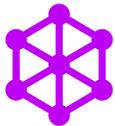
In this episode of our podcast, *The Response*, we shine a spotlight on Puerto Rico. When Hurricane Maria slammed into the island about a year ago, it resulted in thousands of deaths and knocked out power for almost an entire year. The result was what many consider to be the worst disaster in the United States.

Further, the devastation wrought by Hurricane Maria exacerbated the [ongoing debt crisis](#) that has been crippling the country's public

services for years — a crisis that has forced many communities on the island abandon hope that the government will ever come to their assistance. And so when Hurricane Maria hit, it wasn't a surprise to many of these already-abandoned communities when the official response was often nowhere to be seen.

This conversation has been told before by many mainstream news outlets. What you might not have heard, however, is the story of the grassroots response that arose after Maria. In the midst of all the austerity and hurricane-driven chaos, a quiet revolution has been slowly taking place on the island. What began as an impromptu community kitchen meant to help feed survivors in the town of Caguas has since grown into an island-wide network of mutual aid centers with the ultimate aim of restoring power — both electric and civic — to the people. We'll hear from many of those involved in these centers and find out why they are growing so quickly and what they are doing to begin addressing both the acute and chronic disasters that Puerto Ricans are facing today.

Listen to this episode [here](#).





About the film: How to host a screening

by Tom Llewellyn and Courtney Pankrat

Following the devastation in Puerto Rico from Hurricane Maria on September 20, 2017, activists came together to create mutual aid centers for the community. For 18 months, Shareable worked with a team of filmmakers, writers, audio engineers, partners, and funders to share this story with the world.

Our documentary film, “The Response: How Puerto Ricans Are Restoring Power to the People,” offers examples of how the people of Puerto Rico are coming together, sharing resources, and creating a

new community. The lessons learned in Puerto Rico are relevant to communities all over the world that are either currently recovering from disasters or those who may face them in the future.

We have made this film available for anyone to host a public (or private) group screenings.

The toolkit below offers instructions on how to host a screening. Please contact theresponse@shareable.net with any questions.

1. Decide on the type of screening you want to host:

Your first step is to decide if your event is open to the public, and how many people you want to host. Do you want to host a large screening, at a theater, library or community center? Or are you interested in a more intimate gathering with friends or family?

We are offering the film to you at no charge, however, you may choose to charge attendees (we strongly recommend a sliding scale since we don't want to turn people away) to attend to cover your costs. We also welcome [donations to Shareable](#) so we can continue to produce work like this film.

2. Pick a time and location:

Once you've decided on the size of the event you want to host, it's time to figure out where you'll want to host it. Oftentimes, public spaces can be reserved for free or for a small fee. Wherever you host the screening, be sure to inquire about what equipment and supplies will be provided.

3. Register your event:

Register your event at shareable.net/event. This will create an event listing on our event calendar and will indicate to us that we need to send you the link to download the film. We will also help you promote your event, if it is open to the public. Please note that before your event is posted live on our website, it will be saved as a draft until we approve it.

We recommend using Eventbrite to promote your event, manage registrations, and sell tickets (if you choose to do that). If you use Eventbrite, please do Shareable a favor by adding a custom question in the registration form asking participants if they'd like to receive Shareable's weekly newsletter. We'll ask you for the signups afterwards. This helps Shareable grow the movement. Click [here](#) to learn how to add a custom question in Eventbrite.

4. Recruit volunteers:

Depending on the size of your event, you may not need volunteers. However, we've found having a few people available helps keep things running smoothly. The more tasks you can delegate, the more time that opens up for you to be able to answer questions or deal with the unexpected. You may want to consider delegating specific jobs to volunteers such as:

- A photographer: This does not need to be a professional photographer, designating somebody to take photos with their phone could be enough.
- People to help set up and clean up after the event: You'll want to determine how many people you'll need depending on the size of

your event.

- If you are serving food: You may want to designate someone to watch over the food table during the event.
- People to help with promotion before the event: Encourage everyone who signs up for the event to promote the screening.

5. Prepare your event schedule:

The film has a running time of 30-minutes and you may want to host a discussion when it ends, or perhaps have a panel discussion. As you get your event together, confirm any speakers/ panelists as early as possible.

Decide if you will work through the [Resilience Hubs Guide](#) in small groups (the mutual aid centers in Puerto Rico are a great example of how to reimagine existing community spaces into Resilience Hubs). This guide is a great tool for engaging event attendees in a generative conversation about how to support greater community resilience).

Here are some sample discussion questions:

- What are your takeaways from the film?
- Did it spark any ideas on what you might want to do?
- If so, what steps could you take to get started?
- What are the potential disasters or disruptions that your community or region might face?
- What are three things that you can do now (as a neighborhood or with the larger community) to be better prepared?
- What organizations or groups are already working on local initiatives in your community that are increasing general resilience.
- Is there an easy way to partner or otherwise support existing initiatives?
- What existing spaces are there in the community that could become resilience hubs?

6. Promote your event:

How you want to promote your event will depend on the type of event you've decided to put together. Perhaps you'll simply send a group email to some friends. However, if you are hosting a larger event, along with an email, you'll want to create a Facebook event. Other ideas include creating posters, posting on social media.

Here are some materials you'll want to create/ adapt from our templates:

Poster template:

Please take a look at [this template](#), duplicate it and make any adjustments necessary to promote your event. Print out some posters and ask local businesses, restaurants, libraries, community centers, etc. if you can post them.

Sample social post and newsletter blurb:

Facebook/ LinkedIn/ Instagram/ Newsletter:

Following the devastation in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria, organizers self organized across the islands to create mutual aid centers for the community. Shareable's new documentary film, "The Response: How Puerto Ricans Are Restoring Power to the People," offers examples of how the people of Puerto Rico are coming together, sharing resources, and creating new community centers.

Join us for the screening of the new documentary film, on [insert date] at [insert location]. Sign up here: [insert link]

Twitter:

Join us for a screening of @Shareable’s film, #TheResponse: How Puerto Ricans Are Restoring Power to the People, on [date] at [location]. The film offers examples of how the people of Puerto Rico are coming together & creating community centers after Hurricane Maria. [insert link]

Tag us on social media so we can help spread the word about your event:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Shareable>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/Shareable>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/shareable/>

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/shareable_gram/

Trailer:

To help promote your event, please share the [film trailer](#) in your email outreach, on social media, in any relevant newsletters, etc.

Personal outreach:

Other ways to get the word out include calling, texting or emailing friends directly and then ask them to share the event with their own friends.

Pre-event email:

In your outreach, you’ll want to give people information about Shareable, The Response, and the film you’ll be screening. Don’t forget to include date, time and location and registration information.

Sample pre-event email template (edit as needed):

Join us for a screening of the new film “The Response: How Puerto Ricans Are Restoring Power to the People,” on [insert date] at [insert location].

Following the devastation in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria, activists came together to create mutual aid centers for the community. For the past 18 months, Shareable has been working with a team of filmmakers, writers, audio engineers, partners, and funders to share this story with the world.

Despite the grave nature of this storm, which many believe to be the worst disaster to hit the United States or its territories in the past 100 years, this story is also celebratory. For some, there's a deep joy that has accompanied the sadness; a feeling of solidarity and possibility that didn't previously exist before the storm.

The film also acts as a reminder of how damaging climate-fueled disasters are and urges us to consider how resilient our communities are, how best to adapt for the changes ahead, and how to respond and rebuild in a just and equitable way with extra consideration for the most vulnerable populations.

I hope you'll be able to join us for this documentary film screening. Sign up here [insert link to your registration page] and invite friends to join as well!

7. Prepare materials:

Depending on where you are hosting your screening you may need to supply speakers, a projector, a microphone, or other items. You may also want to consider serving food or hosting your event as a potluck.

Here's a list of what you may need:

- The film: once you have registered your event at shareable.net/

[event](#) you will receive a link to the film on vimeo and access password. You can either stream the film directly from vimeo or download ahead of time and play off of your device.

- You may want to create signs directing people where to go and/or where to park.
- [Sign in sheet](#)
- Pens
- Name Tags
- Clipboards
- Table
- Extension cords
- Microphone
- Screen
- Projector
- Computer
- Food/ Drinks
- Reusable Utensils/ Plates/ Napkins

Access for people with disabilities:

To ensure that your venue is accessible for people with disabilities, use the ADA National Network [planning guide for making temporary events accessible to people with disabilities](#).

8. The day before:

Check in with any speakers, volunteers, or co-hosts to make sure that everyone is on the same page in regards to the logistics and program for the event.

Print out all of the physical materials that you need including: signage, copies of the [Resilience Hubs guide](#), [sign-in sheet](#), etc. From our experience, it's best to print everything you need at least one day before the event.

Send out a reminder to attendees and encourage them to invite their friends if its a public event.

9. The day of:

Make sure to arrive early to make sure everything is set up in advance and give yourself time to troubleshoot any potential problems.

- Recruit a few friends to help you set up.
- Double check that you have all the materials.
- Set up the screen, food, and chairs.
- Make sure to set up a check in desk with a sign up sheet so you can follow up with people afterwards.
- Try to get everything set up as early as possible to reduce stress during the event.

10. During the event:

Encourage attendees to meet each other and find common ground. Screen the film .

Facilitate a panel or group discussion after the film has played. Use or adapt the provided discussion questions – the more interactive the better.

Work through the [Resilience Hubs Guide](#) in small groups.

11. After the screening:

After the event, you'll want to send a follow up email to attendees. This is also a good opportunity to include additional information - especially anything you discussed during the event. You may also want to share photos of the event. Please send your photos to there-sponse@shareable.net as well.

Sample follow up email template (edit as needed):

Thank you for joining us at the film screening of *The Response: How Puerto Ricans Are Restoring Power to the People*.

[Add in paragraph about what was discussed, any commitments that attendees made, and next steps]

Along with the film, Shareable has produced a [podcast series on The Response](#), a [disaster collectivism series](#), and a [live theater performance](#). If you are inspired, follow our podcast as the second season is newly released.



The Response: Building Collective Resilience in the Wake of Disaster

Cultivating Collective Resilience

Vibrant and proactive civil society groups play a vital role in developing the resilience of communities, particularly in the face of climate change and increased disaster risk. Research suggests without social cohesiveness, some communities have a harder time recovering from a disaster.

Moreover, policymakers and scientists in the United States and elsewhere are increasingly aware that riding out future storms and rising sea levels will require significant spending. In many cases, this will be more than cities and governments can afford. As a result, communities, even sizable ones, are bound to be left behind, experts say.

In the face of the growing uncertainty about the extremities of disasters, resident-led initiatives to build resilience in their own communities are gaining momentum in North America, and across the world.

-Aditi Malhotra



Image by Ouishare

Transitioning from competition to collective resilience: Q&A with Sebastien Maire, chief resilience officer for the City of Paris

by Tom Llewellyn

Paris has been on the cutting edge of a world-wide municipal movement dedicated to making cities more resilient to the physical, social and economic challenges that are a growing part of the 21st century.

The steps that they are taking to support the city and all of its inhab-

itants to become more resilient are incredibly necessary. June and July had the two highest global average temperatures on record, during which Paris had its hottest day ever while nearly 1,500 people suffered heat wave related deaths across the nation of France.

I spoke at length with Paris's chief resilience officer, Sebastien Maire, about what that city has been doing in order to build resilience in the face of the climate crisis. Our conversation covered the six main resilience challenges in Paris, their three-tiered approach to meeting those challenges, and how they are empowering residents to directly participate — and in many cases, lead the process.

Along the way, we discussed the 100 Resilient Cities program, community fridges, the role of social cohesion, and his views on the inextricable link between climate change and economic inequality.

Listen to the full interview on [here](#).

Tom Llewellyn: Can you talk a little bit about some of the unique challenges Paris is facing and some of the projects that you've been implementing to address these challenges?

Sebastien Maire: We've identified six main resilience challenges in Paris from the lack of social cohesion to air pollution, climate change, the lack of governance and so on. To address these main challenges, we have established three main pillars. The first one is the people — counting on the people and not only on the public institutions, the politics, and the private sector. Each inhabitant has a power, and our role is to help these inhabitants take their place. So we've been working with actions aimed at training and informing the inhabitants

[of Paris]. We're creating volunteer networks of inhabitants that are ready to act on a daily basis to tackle climate change and to develop solidarity.

The second pillar is infrastructure: the buildings in the city, roads, public spaces, parks, transportation, etc. If we want to be more resilient, we need to radically re-envision how to make a public space.

And the third pillar is governance. If we want the first two pillars to succeed, we need to change and improve our territorial governance; to work together between the public sector, the private sector, and the inhabitants.

Can you give us some concrete examples of some of these pillars in action?

We've been planting trees now in order to provide shade in 20 years, when the trees will have grown up. All the cities in the world have been doing that. Will these trees survive in the climate in 20 years? Most of the cities never thought about that and are planting trees now that are going to die before being tall enough because the climate is completely going to change. Meanwhile, in Paris, we've been doing studies that identify tree species that can survive both in today's climate and in tomorrow's climate.

We also need to enlarge our vision and not think of our policies simply within Paris's borders. All the main issues: air pollution, flooding, terrorist attacks, climate change and so on can find solutions only at a wider scale. Of course, we need to develop more cooperation with the suburbs, but also with the countryside — because the countryside is feeding the city. We've been developing urban farming, of course,

but Paris is too dense and we have limits and it will never be enough to feed the people in the city. So if we want to develop sustainable agriculture, if we want to reduce air pollution, we need to support the creation of new farming lands around Paris, because we'll need that in the future.

June and July were the two hottest months on record globally, shattering the previous records. And in July Paris had its hottest day ever. How is the City of Paris working to help citizens collaborate and support each other to be able to meet the challenge coming from global heating?

Most of the responses to this kind of shock have at first to come from the people themselves. The public authorities and the emergency services will be overwhelmed because we're going to have more and more often these kind of crises. A heatwave is a great example of how to build daily solidarity among people. For example, the public orders communicated to people included things like, 'can you knock at your neighbor's door to check if there is an elderly person that needs assistance? Do you have any idea if there are pregnant women or babies around you that you should look after?'

Another example is that we've been creating a volunteer network everywhere in Paris. During this heatwave we sent materials to the network that they could give to their neighbors, [including] information about where the closest cool spot around their home was, and so on.

I think that's the new way of thinking about public policies regarding

the risks: counting on people. In France, it's completely new. The administrative culture, especially coming from the national government, considers that people don't know how to manage a crisis and that they will create a mess if we involve them. They think the public authorities are the ones who know best. But we're not enough — we need to count on the people.

Speaking of people that need extra support, there are so many marginalized communities that don't have the same resources and that are negatively affected by disasters and disruptions in a greater way. A lot of this stems from inequality that's been manufactured by our economic systems. Can you talk a little bit about how, through your position as the chief resilience officer, you're able to address issues of inequality that are reducing the overall resilience of the city?

Both climate issues and inequality issues are completely related, in consequences and solutions. One example of a solution is that we've been setting up solidarity fridges in the streets in cooperation with local shop owners who agree to set up and maintain a fridge in front of their shop. At the end of the day, they will leave all the unsold food that they won't be able to sell because of expiration dates. Other people can also fill the fridge with their own food and the homeless and the poorest can help themselves to the food in the fridge.

We had a pilot last year and we found that a 120 kilos [265 pounds]

went into a single fridge every day. This 120 kilos would otherwise get put into the trash and would be collected by a truck driving 50 kilometers from Paris to be burned. Instead of this, it's consumed on site without any transportation. It reduces waste, it reduces air pollution, and more than all it feeds the people who need it. It's this holistic approach, just on one simple object: a fridge. It's simple, it's low tech, it's low cost — it's just a way of thinking, a way of envisioning the issues and the solutions.

Creating a sense of place is such an important component of building community and solidarity among people. Is there something that you can point to that is helping to create a sense of place for Parisians?

Paris is one of the smallest capital cities in the world. When most people think about Paris, they're probably just thinking about the city, which has 2.2 million inhabitants. But Paris is much more than that. The Paris metropolitan area has seven million people, and the Paris region, including the part of the countryside where we could grow vegetables, for instance, is 14 million. We also depend on many other regions that are close to Paris, so we've decided that we should stop thinking that we're going to fix these problems by ourselves, as just the city of Paris.

We need to [transition] from the vision that was based on competition. The idea that we need to be more competitive, get more money, more enterprises, and so on, is completely going against what's coming. More than ever, we need to cooperate and not to compete. Because when you compete, you might win, but it means that there

is a loser on the other side. And if the other territory is going to lose something, at the end, you'll have consequences in your own territory. So this framework of competition is really dangerous regarding the challenges we're going to face.

So what we've been doing within this resilience strategy and other projects that are developed by the city of Paris is to strengthen this idea of cooperating, of sharing, of working together, at the city level with the inhabitants, with the private sector and so on, but also with the other territories. This is quite new, especially because the 20th century was the opposite of that. The 20th century was based on competition. And now we've been shifting this and I think that's really positive because there the risks that we can't actually anticipate — we don't know what's going to happen in the coming decades. There are probably some risks that no one has identified yet. And a resilient city is able to face anything because it can count on its population, on the right governance, on the infrastructure that is adapted so that whatever happens, the city is going to be strong enough. That's the idea.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.



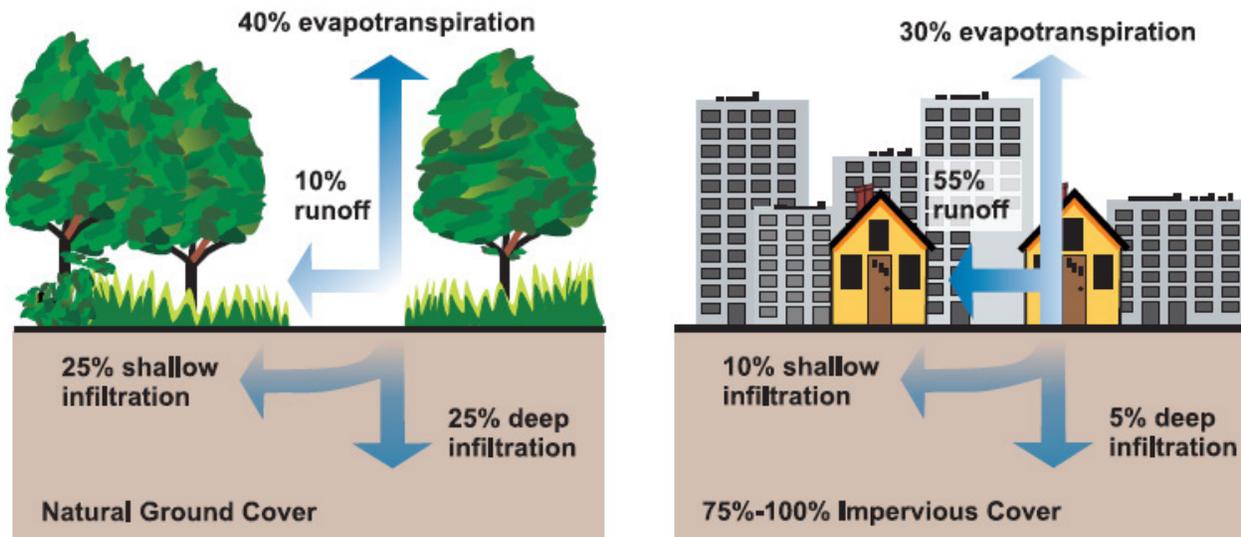


Image credit: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Washington, D.C. "Protecting Water Quality from Urban Runoff."

Green Infrastructure is (de)paving a pathway to resilience

by Casey O'Brien

America is becoming increasingly and dangerously waterlogged. And it's not just rural areas. Cities are especially vulnerable to a phenomenon called urban flooding because they are less permeable than their rural counterparts due to concrete surfaces and inadequate infrastructure.

Runoff overflow can turn streets into rivers. According to the Natural Resources Defense Council, by the end of the century, floodplains could increase by as much as 45 percent, with climate change caus-

ing heavier rains and more storms. Fixing deteriorated pipes and building more infrastructure will help cities, but it's expensive and disruptive. Fortunately, cities have another solution that's cheaper, more sustainable, and can lift up communities and provide jobs: a back-to-nature approach called "green infrastructure."

Green infrastructure is, at its core, about utilizing nature to manage storm-water. Pavement is impermeable, but vegetation and soil have an innate ability to manage water before it ever reaches a city's sewers. Through strategically planted trees, parks, and wetlands, cities can reduce strain on their sewer systems, and reduce pollution at the same time. The [Democracy Collaborative recently released a report](#) recommending the use of green infrastructure as a community-based climate adaptation strategy.

Johanna Bozuwa, who authored the report, said in an interview: "We're seeing the power of nature, every day. Some of our man-made solutions can't stand up to what is happening around us... nature knows how to deal with these things better than we do, and it's been around so much longer. The biomimicry community has found that we can use what is already here for our benefit and it will have positive ramifications."

Green infrastructure is an appealing policy solution because it has benefits far beyond storm-water management — research has long shown that increasing vegetation and green space [increases quality of life](#) in a community. "The exciting thing about green infrastructure is obviously this storm-water management piece," said Bozuwa. "But if we are literally ripping up concrete and putting in trees, or shrubs, or even parks, that is going to have a multiplicity of benefits."

Besides the positive impact on people's health, green infrastructure also has the capacity to lift up communities economically through well-paying, quality local jobs. "So much of the infrastructure [for water] has been disinvested in the United States and as there's a mounting issue of climate change, storm-water infrastructure is becoming more and more apparent as a necessary intervention in order for us to have climate resilient cities," said Bozuwa. "We zeroed in on green infrastructure because we saw some of this potential for job creation and providing jobs to underserved and marginalized communities."

Because green infrastructure is a distributed solution that requires longer-term maintenance but lower upfront costs, it is ideal for [worker cooperatives](#) (democratically owned and operated businesses) and social enterprises (nonprofits that have a fee-for-service component) in low-income communities where jobs are needed. Green infrastructure workers can be trained on the job and the work can offer upward mobility while increasing climate resilience. However, to work as a community resiliency model, Bozuwa emphasized that green infrastructure initiatives will have to be carefully designed to avoid displacement and gentrification: working deeply with the community, coordinating with existing unions, and led by residents.

In her report, Bozuwa mentions several case studies of effective green infrastructure initiatives, one of which is the nonprofit group [Verde's](#) landscaping project in the majority-Latinx Cully neighborhood of Portland, Oregon. [Verde Landscape](#) is a social enterprise landscaping firm with a four-year training program that can lead to long-term employment or prepare participants to start their own businesses. One of the things that struck Bozuwa about the Verde project is that it was started by an existing community group that

works on affordable housing, Hacienda CDC, which is based in the neighborhood.

“One really interesting piece [in my fieldwork] was the persistence with which this activists and community organizers are thinking about the displacement potential of green infrastructure if we don’t design our housing and think of these things as systems,” said Bozuwa. “And that is a reason why the Verde model is so compelling.”

Bozuwa and the Democracy Collaborative were attracted to green infrastructure as a route to long-term, community-led climate resilience. She is hopeful that green infrastructure will continue to be put in place in cities around the United States. Green infrastructure projects are already around the country in cities like Seattle, Washington DC, Oakland, California, Buffalo, New York, and others.

Some U.S. cities are already under consent decrees, agreements with the Environmental Protection Agency to reduce storm-water runoff and sewer overflow. Green infrastructure could be part of that commitment. Green infrastructure can work very effectively alongside traditional gray infrastructure, such as structures made of concrete, and act as a community development tool at the same time. Climate resiliency will require both large-scale infrastructure projects and smaller ones, but greening America’s cities from the ground up is a climate solution worth getting behind.





The Aqua Parklet at The Exploratorium; image provided by Barbara Brown Wilson

Bottom-up politics in urban landscapes: Q&A with author Barbara Brown Wilson

by Robert Raymond

Every element of a city’s design, from street lighting to sidewalk drainage to the shape of the skyline, is influenced by politics. It’s not always clear what that politics is, or who the decision-makers behind it were, but it’s there. You just have to look closely.

When you do look closer, you might realize that the decisions about how a city functions are made behind closed doors. You’ll see how racist and classist legacies shaped our neighborhoods and how they continue in new forms, even when urban planners and designers have good intentions.

In her latest book, “[Resilience for All](#),” author Barbara Brown Wilson uncovers the politics behind our urban landscapes and lays out an alternative to business-as-usual urban design and planning. The book anchors this alternative vision with a variety of case studies that exemplify how marginalized communities are pushing back against the classism and environmental racism that is embedded in the urban design process.

Shareable contributor, Robert Raymond, spoke with Brown Wilson about several of the case studies outlined in her book and why community-led urban design and planning has the potential to create lasting systemic change.

Robert Raymond: Could you broadly explain what makes the case studies that you present in “Resilience for All” important and how they demonstrate an alternative to more traditional models of urban planning and development?

Barbara Brown Wilson: In “Resilience for All,” I’m interested in what land use looks like when communities make their own decisions about what should go in their communities. I’m interested in practices where people are building power, building capacity and thinking with their own systems in mind. This is a real shift from the top-down way that urban planning and many other fields that govern land use typically function.

In the book, I look at small-scale cases because often that is the level in which this sort of extra-governmental work can really happen, where a community can really make shared decisions about shared

space purely. In every case in the book, the communities that I was able to highlight are communities that were thinking with systems change in mind. They were commonly communities of color that had been traditionally disinvested and often were subject to environmental vulnerabilities... having some relationship to environmental or economic classism and racism. And in each of these cases, what they're doing is they're linking social and environmental systems because, of course, they really are completely linked. If you are feeling vulnerable to both, you're innately aware of that.

Another commonality in the case studies is that they model how small systems change could actually make larger impacts. So, for instance, East Biloxi, Mississippi, was an area that was segregated during Jim Crow and is more vulnerable to storms than other parts of the Gulf Coast. What they did post-Katrina was to look at what ecological assets might have been underappreciated — and they found that a particular bayou called Bayou Auguste wasn't being properly maintained by the city. They did what they called the “Bayou By You,” which was a fully participatory revisioning of Bayou Auguste. [They understood that] it was only one bayou, but it was a part of a much larger and important bayou system. [This] allowed for thinking about not only the ecological benefits that one gets from being able to absorb the shock of a storm in terms of ecological resilience, but also job training programs and the support of the fishing industry that comes from doing bayou restoration.

They also found ways to include this into the educational system in some really profound ways that strengthened the public school systems that were neighbors [to Bayou Auguste]. The initiative also allowed for citizen science that connected what high school students were learning with local environmental needs and monitoring

more broadly. And in that case, they transformed this one bayou and modeled a really exemplary practice that was mutually beneficial for lots of different interest groups. The city of Biloxi has now taken this job training infused model and has restored twelve bayous in their system, which is really transformational in terms of both ecological but also economic benefits for the people involved.

Your book is filled with many case studies like this that embody the broader, more theoretical concepts that you outline. Can you talk more about the Ciencia Pública: Agua program in San Francisco’s Mission District?

San Francisco is the home of parklets, along with a notion that with “tactical urbanism” we can think differently about the use of the street. But parklets were not actually something that were beneficial in every community — they didn’t seem to be a part of the lexicon of the urban landscape and existed predominantly in more affluent communities, mostly engaging a certain type of white audience.

The Ciencia Pública project was a really neat partnership between young people and a local museum to try to transform the notion of what a parklet might be to something that’s much more instructive for learning about ecological issues. So in this case, they used water to think about the ways in which young people might engage in making projects and in design — and where they might begin to understand what professions are available to them. The project uses a really cool sculptural form and also involves citizen science in the collection of data about water locally.

Can you talk a bit about the green infrastructure and anti-poverty case study taking place in the Cully neighborhood of Portland, Oregon?

The Cully neighborhood in Portland, Oregon, is the most ethnically diverse neighborhood in Oregon and is a really amazing place filled with strong and creative human beings, many of whom were not feeling heard and seen by the (city). At the time, Portland was creating the notion of supported neighborhood-wide areas called ecodistricts, and Cully began to refer to itself as the Rogue Ecodistrict. They used the same lens of partnership and district wide support that was part of the ecodistrict program, but really took a wealth-building and equity-focused lens to their work.

They are led by a group called Verde, which is all about green infrastructure production and green jobs training towards the hiring of people for high quality jobs. They identified that a lot of areas in the Cully neighborhood were lacking in park space in comparison to other parts of the community. They also knew that the Cully neighborhood was really threatened by gentrification pressures, and so they wanted to build wealth locally while also making sure there was ample community-driven green space. So they did amazing things.

For example, they took one park that was underutilized and underappreciated and they got the city to give them the development rights. They then led a community-driven design process for the vision of what Cully Park could be and then used that as a green jobs training center. They actually built some really beautiful amenities, like a thriving community garden, but also a inter-tribal area and a lot of really beautiful shared spaces that I think are not within the bandwidth of your typical Parks Department to implement.

One exceptional aspect of the Cully neighborhood effort was their leadership program. They have an 11 month leadership program for residents that want to build their voice, their power, and their capacity. Residents are paid for their time and are also supported with transportation and childcare needs — always operating in their native language, because many are Spanish speakers. They're taught about the ways that change is made and the different points of intervention in the systems, so who to talk to, how to give a testimonial, etc. And then they're empowered to do their own work to actually make change as a part of their leadership development.

For example, some of these leadership cohorts identified that it was really hard to bike or walk to school safely because of sidewalk flooding issues and also issues with poor lighting or challenges with feelings of safety. So they started doing neighborhood walks and neighborhood bike rides. This then led to the creation of their own wayfinding signage, which is all really culturally infused in really special ways that most wayfinding is typically not.

They continue to do really exceptional work. They've built a base of resident power that allows them to advocate for change. So they've been able to advocate to help the residents in a mobile home community retain ownership rights, for example. They've also been able to advocate for a bond for affordable housing as part of a citywide team in Portland. They've partnered with Habitat for Humanity to have a neighborhood-focused structure that's much more about meeting people where they are and helping with their needs — not just building new housing, but actually helping people stay in their homes and build wealth via that homeownership. They've continued to implement the lens of anti-gentrification, anti-poverty, and green infrastructure through a political measure in Portland called Nature

for All. They seem to continue to push the limits of insisting that environmental rights are human rights and that you should be able to stay in place and enjoy the benefits of improvement in your own neighborhood without feeling threatened by the positive change.

Despite the fact that we're in the midst of some pretty turbulent and tumultuous times, you conclude your book on a positive note. What's one lesson you find particularly salient?

The lessons that felt most important when I reflected on all this amazing work happening across the country were really about the gaps in the way practice happens right now — and how we might fill those gaps with this wisdom. Some of it is just honoring this intractable relationship between social and ecological systems. We are seeing this more in activism than we ever have before — that even just to have terms like climate justice allows us to think completely differently about these intersections between different parts of people's identity. It also demonstrates the many possible ways that we might collaborate and might be innovative and find shared interests along the lines of both a love of environmental resources but also of social justice. I'm very hopeful about the future of that work because it's already happening in really exciting ways in all sorts of activism.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.





Sea level rise image by HPapendick via Flickr (CC BY 2.0)

Addressing sea level rise through citizen science

by Casey O'Brien

Coastal communities across the United States are experiencing tangible impacts of climate change as sea level rise worsens. “Sunny day flooding” and “king tides” range from annoyance to serious danger in cities like Miami, San Francisco and Seattle.

Coastal commissions and city planners are working against the clock to calculate and prepare for a future in which entire neighborhoods may disappear. In order to create effective plans, sea level rise and

flood rates need to be carefully documented. But the sheer scale of the problem makes it difficult to track for scientists and lawmakers; researchers simply can't be everywhere. In California, advocacy groups have found a solution: citizen scientists from impacted neighborhoods can track rise themselves, and their findings gathered into public-facing data bases that can be utilized by thought leaders to understand the state of sea level rise in their community.

The King Tides Project, run by the California Coastal Commission, is a successful example of a citizen science tracking project. The project's map (available to the public) tracks sea level rise all over the state through photos submitted by local citizen scientists. To participate, citizens just need a camera or smartphone — they take photos of rise in their area and submit it to the commission to be inputted into their database. Whitney Berry is the climate change program manager for the Ocean Protection Council, a close partner of the commission that utilizes the project and hosts it on its website. She says citizen science is immensely useful for research like hers. Citizen Science “advances scientific research by providing extra hands or eyes, and it includes everyone, so you get participation from folks who might not have a PhD or a Master's degree, but they have years of local knowledge and have a closer relationship with the area.”

Citizen science projects help researchers, but they are also beneficial for communities who participate. The King Tides Project and those like it are an opportunity to increase scientific literacy and foster critical thinking about climate change through the lens of local needs. “Citizen science allows a better engagement with local people. Just by getting engaged they raise awareness and become a bigger part of the scientific discussion... it gives people a glimpse into the field,” Berry explained.

Sea level rise tracking lends itself particularly to citizen science, because participants don't need specialized knowledge or training, and they can take photos of whatever they feel drawn to, since impacts can be seen in a variety of ways. Pictures might be of flooded sidewalks or higher-than usual tides, erosion, and other visible signs of the changes that sea level rise can enact on a place. Photos taken before and after king tide season, to show the impact that tides have, are particularly helpful, Berry explained. "One of the great parts about the sea level rise project is that it's really easy to access. We have other projects, like one where we train scuba divers. But for that project, you need to know how to scuba, have the equipment, [and] the time to learn," Berry said. "With this, anyone can do it with their phone and we get photos of what people care about... I often tell people to take photos of areas that are impacted which have a special connection to them emotionally, like a favorite park, so we can see that."

Once the photos are taken, they are used in databases and reports to help guide policy. Photos from the King Tides Project were used to develop the [Ocean Protection Council's \(OPC\) Sea Level Rise Guidance](#), currently being updated. The OPC also uses the photos to drive home the realities of climate change through community engagement. "Sea level rise is one of the most obvious manifestations of climate change, and it helps people to see that it is real and it is going to impact them," Berry explained. "When you show people photos of these areas that they are used to seeing, like San Francisco, it is huge."

For those interested in participating in the project in their own community, safety is paramount — Berry advised to make sure to stay away from areas that are too risky to walk or where waves are

dangerously high. She also recommended that participants be aware of delicate species that could be in the area, since during high tide events animals will often be seeking shelter themselves. Interested community members can also attend local city council meetings or coastal plan meetings and advocate for action on sea level rise in their community.

The photos taken through citizen science projects like the King Tide Project are invaluable to researchers and policy makers. “It serves as a living record of change,” Berry said.





Rockaway Youth Task Force at the Far Rockaway subway station in Queens, New York, 2012 © RYTF

The Rockaway Youth Task Force

by Aditi Malhotra

In the fall of 2012, when hurricane Sandy made landfall in the Rockaway peninsula in Queens, New York, the Rockaway Youth Task Force (RYTF) was ready to lead rescue and recovery efforts.

Remarkably, the volunteer group was less than a year old. But members of this [youth-led task force](#) were reportedly among the most [efficient responders](#) to the crisis that followed Sandy.

The group was ready because earlier that year, Milan Taylor, the 21-year-old founder of RYTF, and friends, started mobilizing young

people in Rockaway’s neighborhoods to get them more involved in local politics and civic life.

Taylor had been appointed to a community board in 2010 and the lack of representation of people his age unsettled him. There were many problems such as inequity in schools, discriminatory practices in the criminal justice system, and low voter turnout in Rockaway that needed young people to engage and lead solutions, Taylor said. Far Rockaway in the Rockaway peninsula is also a federally-labelled food desert. An entire generation of future leaders needed nurturing.

Once organized, the group began implementing solutions — from neighborhood cleaning drives to a meticulously planned campaign to increase voter registration. “We realized there were like-minded young people all around wanting to participate,” said Taylor. “They just didn’t know how.”

By the time hurricane Sandy hit in October, this youth volunteer brigade was 50-members strong. There was a leadership team in place and the expanding team met every week.

Nearly seven years after Sandy, the organization continues to support recovery efforts through several programs including running New York City’s largest urban farm, youth-led community garden, and farmers market. RYTF has also built out well-linked networks of young adult advocates to address discriminatory policing practices that target young people, especially those of color. They are a full-fledged nonprofit offering internship and volunteer opportunities. But most importantly, they’re trusted members of the community.





Creating fire resilient landscapes is important in the Wildland Urban Interface, CC Pacific Southwest Region 5

Mobilizing the community in Flagstaff, Arizona, to build resilience towards wildfire risk

by Aditi Malhotra

The city of Flagstaff in Arizona sits in the midst of the world's largest ponderosa pine forest putting its community of 65,000 at a high risk of wildfires.

In 2006, when the Flagstaff Fire Department began campaigning for the city's communities to unite in [adopting its version of Wildfire Urban Interface](#) (WUI) code, it was among the first few wildfire-prone cities in the U.S. to take the lead on adoption of policies. The WUI is designed to mitigate the risks from wildfire to life and property.

Over a decade later, in 2018, Paul Summerfelt, Flagstaff’s wildfire management officer, told the New York Times how he had slowly seen the perception of fire among Flagstaff residents shift from “scary” to “necessary.”

It took 18 months of extensive outreach efforts in Flagstaff for standards around infrastructure, vegetation management, and other compliance clauses within the WUI code to be adopted and enforced. The stakeholders in this process included home builders’ associations, real estate and insurance agents, community leaders, engineering firms, and developers, among others.

Research suggests that the diversity in the land management community in Flagstaff presented a unique challenge to the city in the design and planning stages of wildfire policy making. It involved bringing into the fold members of the U.S. Forest Service that manages the areas of the Cococino National Forest. In addition, two national monuments in the region — Walnut Canyon and Sunset Crater — are managed by the National Park Service. The Arizona State Land Department manages the nearby State trust lands.

Recent news reports say that the WUI code has been highly effective in guiding and driving all members of the community — from homeowners, to businesses and local agencies — to comply with the requirements such as using fire-resistant building materials for homes, clearing small fuels away from homes and buildings, and designing neighborhoods for fire engine access. This has reportedly been helpful for firefighters in combating wildfires since the adoption of the code.





Climate-resilient peri-urban agriculture, © GEAG

Learning to build flood resilience in Gorakhpur, India

by Aditi Malhotra

Sitting at the confluence of India’s Rohini and Rapti rivers is Gorakhpur, a city with more than 650,000 people. Gorakhpur has long been vulnerable to flooding and waterlogging, including areas that flood in 24 hours even after relatively small amounts of rain. The city is also susceptible to severe and periodic drought.

Voluntary organizations like the [Gorakhpur Environmental Action](#)

Group (GEAG) have been steadily working with farming communities, particularly marginalized women farmers working on farmlands on the city's borders.

Between 2012 and 2016, GEAG led programs in villages and districts around Gorakhpur, encouraging farming communities to adopt practices like growing flood-resistant crop varieties, diversifying their produce, and using techniques like multi-tier cropping that could allow them to grow vegetables on platforms above heavily water-logged soil.

By mitigating the risk of crop loss and simultaneously working with the urban farming community in Gorakhpur to expand agricultural land under cultivation, GEAG's resilience-building efforts led to more than doubling of the average agricultural income of some of the farmers it worked with, according to one evaluation report.

Similar to GEAG's work in Gorakhpur, anti-poverty charity Concern Worldwide has been helping farmers in South Sudan adopt flood-resistant crop varieties. In Uganda, an international development organization called Mercy Corps is supporting farmers in building diverse sources of income that they can rely on during crop failures.





Members of the KBNERR during a community monitoring program examining European Green Crabs, an aggressive invasive species known to disrupt natural habitats and threaten native crab populations in the Kachemak Bay region © KBNERR

Building skills to adapt to climate change in Homer, Alaska

by Aditi Malhotra

Despite a small population of about 5,500 people, the southern Alaskan city of Homer has been on a decade-long mission to set a precedent in climate mitigation and adaptation.

The inspiration to craft a national model for climate protection seeped into Homer's social and political fabric in 2006 after James Hornaday, the city's mayor at the time, attended a national conference on climate change about 200 miles north in Girdwood, Alaska. There, he heard from climate science and policy experts about the

role local governments can play in helping communities better prepare for unavoidable climate fluctuations.

Upon his return to Homer, Hornaday immediately started work on creating a Global Warming Task Force in his town. Once formed, the city council officially commissioned the 12-member task force to make recommendations on reducing greenhouse gas emissions. By the end of 2007, the community was ready to draw up and adopt the [Homer Climate Action Plan](#).

During the initial phases of identifying climate risk in Homer, the city's agencies faced challenges due to gaps in knowledge about the finer details of climate impact at the local level. At the time, most of the scientific models focused on global and regional changes in climate. Still, city authorities proactively used available state projection data and [identified local impacts of climate change](#), from disruption to commercial fisheries to infestation of spruce trees by bark beetles.

More recently, federally-funded scientific research collectives in Homer, like the [Kachemak Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve](#), have been designing education programs to translate complex and evolving climate science in the region local students and adult decision-makers.

Since 2014, KBNERR has been organizing trainings and workshops bringing together local residents of the community, science experts, and state government representatives under an outreach initiative called the [Coastal Training Program](#).

A couple of years after the program was underway, Syverine Abrahamson, a program coordinator said that the local dialogue began to

shift to adaptation as people started seeing increased impacts from climate stressors in their area.





Snapshots from Kenya: Women Climate Defenders © madre.org

Women finding solutions in drought-ridden Kenya

by Aditi Malhotra

In agricultural communities most vulnerable to climate change across the world, men are being forced to move to cities to find work, while the women stay behind to care for children, the elderly, and themselves. Many women are leading households in increasingly precarious environments.

In Kenya, for instance, farming communities around Mount Kenya, the country's highest mountain, have lost a crucial source of water

for agricultural activities since snow caps on mountain tops started disappearing. As a result, women from these communities have to reportedly walk miles in search of water, firewood, or charcoal for domestic use. Women are worst hit by an ongoing drought in the country that has put at least a million Kenyans at risk of starvation.

Although women are disproportionately impacted, they have the potential to lead the way in finding innovative to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

In drought-ridden Kenya, international women's rights organizations, like MADRE, are collaborating with women-led local agencies, like the Indigenous Information Network, to help [organize indigenous and rural women to find solutions](#) to climate-related problems.

Through MADRE's efforts, [women farmers like Paulina](#) have access to training about rainwater harvesting that she's been able to apply to her farm. The stored water has also saved Paulina and her daughters the effort of walking miles away to source water for drinking and domestic use. With stabilized yields come a steady income that has given Paulina something even more precious to her: an education for her daughters. Self-sustaining and financially-independent women like Paulina become leaders in their communities equipped with the knowledge of grassroots solutions.

[Shibuye Community Health Workers](#) is another women-led and focused community-resilience initiative in Kenya that began in 1999 in response to an HIV/AIDS epidemic in Kenya's Kakamega county. Today, through its well-established network, SCHW is able to help women and children retain land, a shrinking asset due to climate change, by stopping illegal evictions based on gender.





New Zealand, Top of the South Island (Nelson), Skydiving, CC Alex Proimos [image has been cropped]

Individual action in New Zealand to stay resilient in a changing environment

by Aditi Malhotra

In 2014, the Tasman District Council, a regional authority under New Zealand’s local government, organized a meeting at a memorial hall in the coastal town of Motueka to connect with the community about the growing risk of climate change and mobilize towards adaptation.

“We are experiencing it now, but it will become more frequent. However, if we plan for it we will be more resilient,” said Rob Smith, the council’s environmental information officer to the 50 people that met

in Motueka. The town and Tasman Bay are highly vulnerable to sea level rise. Since then, Motueka has seen many community efforts to adapt to the changing climate and growing hazards such as flooding.

Perhaps the people who stand out the most are residents and small business owners who are moving towards sustainability. For example, in 2015, [Mathew Galvin and Ruth Sicely](#), opened the KaiWaka cafe in Motueka with the intent to ensure sustainable practices in every aspect of their small restaurant business. Some of these included:

- Sourcing within 100 nautical miles of the cafe to cut down their business' carbon footprint
- Managing not only food waste, but also packaging waste by making food and drink on site— using reusable glass bottles while sourcing milk and boxes with no plastic for other produce
- Selling water in glass and bio plastic bottles
- Choosing a 100 percent renewable electricity supplier

KaiWaka [closed its doors](#) in 2018, but it is one among many efforts being made by small- and medium-sized food and drink businesses in Motueka and the surrounding Nelson-Tasman region to adapt to climate change.

If you're interested in learning how to keep a small food business eco-friendly, here are some [tips](#) from [EcoFind](#), a New Zealand non-profit that provides information for and about the sustainable business community across the country.





Photo by Phytology

How to set-up a mobile mutual aid herbal apothecary

by Shumaisa Khan

Herbalists, growers, community organizations and plant-loving people of all kinds are increasingly joining together to develop mobile apothecary projects to bring free herbal medicine — a holistic approach which has been a part of every culture in the world for as long as humans have been around — to people for whom this type of healthcare (or any healthcare) remains inaccessible.

In the U.S., herbal clinics and [self-care stations](#) may be the only form of healthcare some people can access; in the UK and Ireland, conventional healthcare is free at the point of contact, but generally does not include herbal medicine. In all of these countries, the most vulnerable people face barriers in accessing any healthcare.

Although free herbal medicine clinics exist — often associated with herbal medicine schools — the advantage of mobile apothecary is in reaching vulnerable populations where they are. In addition to providing care, these projects also provide education about herbal medicine, increasing people's capacity to care for themselves, their families and their communities.

Beyond herbal medicine

The impetus for community herbal projects is the provision for some form of healthcare for those less able to access it, but there is much more to these projects than herbal remedies. Greater valuing of local plants — many of which are often considered weeds or invasive plants — raises awareness about more regenerative land practices. It also strengthens people's relationships with the plants, soil and nature that they are a part of, improving mental and physical health.

This is also crucial because as interest in herbal medicine has exploded, [unsustainable harvesting of medicinal plants](#) has also increased, causing exploitation of people and land globally and locally. When people learn about local, abundant, nutrient-rich plants, they can mindfully harvest and use these vitamin- and mineral-rich plants as supplements, reducing the amount of packaging and energy-intensive recycling or waste associated with supplements purchased off the shelf, which are often less potent and less bio-available.

In Washington state, [Canoe Journey Herbalists](#) (CJH) — a project which grew after its inception as a medic bus which provided care for [Water Protectors at Standing Rock Reservation](#) — is also looking to decolonize herbalism and cultivate indigenous-led herbal care (and wider care) for intertribal people on their lands and waterways, according to founder, Rhonda Lee Grantham.

For two weeks in July, the [Intertribal Canoe Journey](#), the largest intertribal gathering of indigenous people in the US, paddle cedar canoes down the ocean together, stopping along the way to be hosted by each tribe for an evening.

Although the bus itself serves as the clinic where more in-depth assessments take place, provision of other types of care enables CJH to serve the approximately 15,000 paddlers, as well as allowing for intergenerational connection. Indigenous healing circles and ceremonies, herbal foot baths that younger generations give to elders, and provision of tea, salves and sunburn sprays, are some of the different ways that non-clinician indigenous people participate in care-giving.

While non-indigenous people may now be far removed from their ancestors' harmonious relations with plants and the natural world, community herbal projects serve as an anodyne for this disconnection, helping heal the isolation associated with atomized living prevalent in western societies.

Setting up a mobile apothecary

Atlanta-based herbalist Lorna Mauney-Brodek pioneered several mobile apothecary projects in the US, then took the tried-and-tested models to Ireland, inspiring projects in the UK as well. Her website, herbalista.org, provides a wealth of resources about a variety of com-

munity herbal projects, complete with set-up guides, recipes and widely used and accessible herbs.

Below is an outline of general guidance for setting up a mobile apothecary project in your community. Please note: The sequence is not fixed — there is some overlap between the steps below, and each project is unique. For example, the mobile apothecary project in [London](#) organically arose from an ad-hoc community medicinal root-harvest event organized to transform overabundant plants into cough medicine. That event was centered on supporting refugees living without shelter in France. The partnership which drove it — [Phytology](#), [Herbalists Without Borders London](#), and [St. Margaret's House](#) — then resolved to set up a longer-term project to support local street homeless and other vulnerable people.

1. Clarify your objective:

Who are you trying to serve? Where do they hang out? What kinds of issues do they face that simple herbal remedies can help? Answers will undoubtedly evolve over time, but it's useful to have a focus.

2. Find a few partners for your mobile apothecary:

It's easier to go down this path with one or more people committed to actualizing a community herbal project. If you don't already have a few potential people, reach out once you are fairly clear about your objective.

3. Do a resource audit and reach out:

Think about assets that already exist in your community. Some community assets to consider are:

Community gardens, private gardens and local farms:

Those who can supply herbs and medicinal foods. Make sure to source sustainably grown herbs or wild herbs growing in clean, pollution-free areas that are harvested responsibly. Herbalista has established a Grow a Row scheme where local growers can set aside some land to grow specific herbs for the community herb projects.

Venues that can offer free space:

For medicine-making sessions (if you plan to hold them to make remedies for your stock).

Venues that can store preparations:

This may be in someone's home, the mobile unit (bus, cargo bike, etc.), or in a locked drawer in a collaborating organization. Security, access, and convenience in terms of loading up and transporting around are important considerations.

4. Form strategic community collaborations:

Collaboration can help with the financial side of receiving donations, as well as for hosting the herb station, harvesting or medicine-making sessions, or for storage. Homeless shelters or support organizations, women's shelters, refugee or immigrant advocacy organizations are all possible collaborators. These organizations may also provide useful information on what kinds of health issues are prevalent and guide what products you provide in your project. Some community collaborations to consider are:

Suppliers:

Those who can provide dried herbs, supplements such as vitamin C, vinegar, honey, sugar, bottles, jars, beeswax or vegan alternative. Much of this depends on your particular project.

Herbalists:

Those who can lead medicine-making sessions. It is not necessary for people to have years of training and qualifications to be skilled in herbal medicine-making and able to lead such sessions. Canoe Journey Herbalists has started an 'Adopt a Remedy' scheme where a community organization can take on the production of a particular herbal remedy with detailed instructions and supplies provided by CJH. Another way schools, community groups, or individuals can support the project by volunteering to grow a particular plant needed by the project throughout the year. The donations of plants and products according to their specification enables the indigenous people driving the project to focus their efforts on the intertribal canoe journey, while ensuring a degree of quality control.

Various health and social work professionals:

When working with vulnerable populations, it can help to have people skilled in mental health and social services involved or available to consult.

Translation and graphics support:

Depending on who you're trying to reach, it may be important to have signage and labels in languages besides English; in some cases, using universally recognized images may also be useful. For herbal care in informal refugee camps in France, where [Herbalists Without Borders London](#) provides support, labels are prepared in Farsi, Arabic, Pashtu, French, and Kurdish because of the diversity of people served.

Funding sources:

Identify local grants, ethical business sponsors, and other creative fundraising possibilities. Ask around in your networks, too. There

may be people who work or volunteer at places and can advocate for the project to access resources.

5. Decide on the location for your mobile apothecary

Even though your setup might be mobile, it's good to decide on a regular, fixed location for a period of time. This allows you hone your procedures and processes, and get to know and establish relationships with the people in that area. It takes time for people to find out about new projects and to feel comfortable enough to try something new. The location will also inform the needs of your project. For example, if you locate outside without any heat or electricity supply, you'll want to consider if serving hot tea is feasible as this will require transporting large flasks.

Mauney-Brodek of Herbalista recommends initially setting up a self-care station with safe herbal preparations and teas (ones that do not interact with medicines people may be taking and are safe for folks who may be pregnant). In Dublin, the system of community herbal projects that she helped start began with a self-care station at an occupation of Apollo House, an empty office building taken over by housing activists in the midst of a homelessness crisis. Later, the Dublin Herb Bike was developed, which moves between a few locations. Self-care stations located inside an appropriate venue do not need to be staffed and can easily be built upon as capacity increases. Herbalista has shared guidance on setting up a self-care station [here](#).

The Mobile Apothecary in London has set up alongside of [Refugee Community Kitchen](#) (RCK), which serves free, hot meals outside of an underground station every Sunday. RCK already had a presence there which helped people engage with the Mobile Apothecary.

While the Mobile Apothecary operates out of a cargo bike, and may in the future set up at more than one location, it has been running monthly sessions next to RCK. As a staffed project providing a small range of safe products, the Mobile Apothecary is a step above a self-care station, as people can speak to an herbalist or team members. Often, it's the human connection that transmits the most potent medicine, so this is a really valuable service to provide, even if the capacity to run a full clinic is not there.

6. Organize a team

There are many hands involved in even the most basic of projects. Find people who are interested and have the capacity to help in ongoing roles. Have enough people in your team to rotate staffing or cover absences, and if you plan to run longer sessions, to allow individuals to take breaks. Some of the responsibilities may include: organizing publicity; creating labels; organizing medicine-making sessions; organizing donations of materials/fundraising; keeping track of stock; keeping track of budget; organizing harvests; setting up and taking down the station; staffing the station; washing up cups (if reusing); and documenting feedback.

7. Develop a plan

Based on the above, come up with a plan that is feasible to implement with your initial resources and capacity. For many projects starting up, it may be more sustainable to run sessions monthly with a small range of products. Consider how you will have enough products to set up a station consistently over a period of time and if outdoors, how you will operate in different weather situations. The project in Dublin only started distributing herbal remedies after several community medicine-making sessions had generated a good amount of stock.

You'll also need to consider how to generate funding as even with donated supplies and ingredients, there will inevitably be some expenses. Many projects running medicine-making sessions follow the pay-it-forward scheme developed by Herbalista, in which people pay on a sliding scale basis for learning about medicine-making at the session. The money helps to support the project, in addition to other material and in-kind donations.

Some projects hold periodic fundraising events or sell a resource. For example, [Bristol Herbalists Without Borders](#) sells a calendar featuring botanical art and recipes. Local grants can also help. Although these projects are heavily dependent on volunteers, some projects compensate for a portion of the labor involved. In Atlanta, people leading educational activities are paid for contact time; however, it has taken years to get to the point of paying educators. The Mobile Apothecary project in London started with the help of a grant to acquire a cargo bike and another small grant to help cover other costs.

Ensure that the related issues of hygiene and safety issues are addressed in the setup, both for the people staffing the station (if applicable) and for those the project serves. Safety is another reason it is useful to set up with another organization. For example, the Mobile Apothecary project in London currently runs in a very busy area that has a pub and street homeless, and sometimes tensions flare up. Having people from the Refugee Community Kitchen alongside makes it easier to mutually support each other at these pop-up stations.

Be sure that any prepared medicines are labelled clearly, including the date of production, and are stored appropriately. If setting up an unstaffed self-care station, signage and information sheets are especially important.

Consider what's appropriate for the climate and season. Hot teas are simple and really nurturing, but are not so appropriate in a sweltering situation. It's good to plan ahead for the year and create or obtain stock accordingly.

8. Implement and evaluate

Start small — but do start! Lessons will be learned and your project will continually improve. Collect feedback and document which products are more popular at which times, what kinds of issues people seek support for, and what additional support the project may need to combat challenges.

Periodic review and reassessment will help improve your service. As more people become interested, the capacity to scale up with stock, frequency of sessions, multiple locations, or integrating reuse/refill will also grow.

Community herbal projects provide immensely rewarding and nourishing ways to do [solidarity work](#) by bringing people together and cultivating deeper connections for them with plants and nature around them. Medicine created by many hands provides healing not only to the recipients, but to all the people involved in the project.





Image provided by Samantha Montano

Preparing for climate chaos now: Q&A with disasterologist Dr. Samantha Montano

by Robert Raymond

When discussing climate change these days, it's no longer suitable to simply imagine its impacts on "future generations." It's also not exactly appropriate to imagine the result of climate change as being some kind of apocalyptic, end-of-the-world scenario.

Climate change is happening right now, and its impacts are going to

absolutely devastate some communities while leaving others relatively intact.

Of course, there are a number of environmental and geographic factors that will determine how impacts are spread, but perhaps the most important factors are things like class, race, gender, or immigration status. The human rights community has come up with a term for this phenomenon — “climate apartheid.”

In this Q&A Shareable contributor Robert Raymond spoke with Dr. Samantha Montano, an assistant professor of Emergency Management & Disaster Science at the University of Nebraska, Omaha. Dr. Montano’s research focuses on a wide scope of topics within the field of emergency management, including community organizing, emergent groups (particularly during recovery), preparedness for recovery, and disaster volunteerism.

Listen to the interview [here](#).

Robert Raymond: One of the main themes that we try to unpack in our documentaries is the idea of disaster collectivism — how community response to disasters is almost often marked by unique forms of solidarity and kindness. We focus particularly on vulnerable communities that are impacted disproportionately by disasters — communities that don’t have access to adequate relief and recovery resources. We saw disaster collectivism in play during Hurricane Katrina

in New Orleans, and we've produced episodes [of The Response podcast] on Occupy Sandy in the Rockaways and the Mutual Aid Centers that popped up all over Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria, for example. I'm wondering if there are any examples of disaster collectivism that you find especially compelling or inspiring?

Dr. Samantha Montano: The area that I specialize in within emergency management is disaster volunteerism and nonprofit involvement in emergency management, particularly during response and recovery efforts. So these are exactly the types of groups that I've spent a lot of time talking to. And honestly, all of them are compelling and inspiring to me. It's difficult to pick one. I think it's useful for people to know that this coming together of different groups — oftentimes spontaneously and by improvising a response to a disaster — this happens during every single disaster. This is a worldwide phenomenon that happens. It's tied to how humans react to disasters — we're prosocial in how we respond. When a disaster happens, we turn to one another, we help one another. And so really, these groups that you mentioned, they are a product of that human behavior.

I also think it's also important to reflect on the way that our approach to emergency management has evolved over the past hundred years in this country. The more formal emergency management system that we have of aid through government is by design limited. The approach from the federal government is to be as limited in their involvement as possible. This runs counter to what the general public wants, because when a disaster happens, you want government to come in and help and address the needs in your community to get

the roads back up and running, for example, or to get electricity turned back on, to get people back in their homes. There is a real mismatch between what the goal of government is, especially the federal government, when a disaster happens, and what the public perceives that role to be.

Furthermore, we also have to think about the history of this system and how it was designed and importantly, who it was designed for. Our emergency management system really dates back to the civil defense era in the 1950s, and it was really designed for a traditionally nuclear, white, middle class American family — that was who was in mind when it was created, and the people who were creating it were from that demographic. And so the way they conceptualized what it means to help before, during and after disasters comes from that mindset. And of course, it wasn't true at the time and especially isn't true now, that's not what the American public looks like. We're not all white middle class nuclear families. So that's another way that we really start seeing certain groups of people having way more needs than other groups during disaster. And we see that there's an inability of that formal system to really address those needs. It's in those instances that I think we more clearly see groups like Occupy Sandy and whoever else come to the forefront as they work with people that are in those demographics.

The way you describe your interests in the bio on your [blog](#) is interesting because it brings together topics that one might not always see as being directly connected. One example of this sort of intersection is disasters and gender. I'm

wondering if you could explain how you approach exploring that particular intersection?

Something unique about disasters is that all parts of life are affected by disasters in various ways. And so when we study disasters, we really need to be studying all parts of life, which can be very overwhelming. So we like to zero in on topics as much as possible.

One of the areas that really interests me is gender and disasters in particular. But so too with other demographics and disasters, such as race and class, for example. In the same way that we each go through the world every day with our identity, our gender, our race, our class, our education level — all of those things are influencing how we experience the world. And it's also influencing how the world experiences us. The same is true during a disaster. The way that we are experiencing disasters is going to be different from one another based on the resources that we have, the help that we're able to receive, or our social networks. So it's really important for us as researchers to make sure we're being careful about talking about groups of people as one whole group. We have to recognize how those different demographics intersect with one another — how a woman of color is going to experience a disaster differently than a white woman, for example. While still recognizing that we're all in the same boat in the sense that we're all experiencing this disaster. But the way that we experience a disaster is going to vary based on these other factors.

We've explored the intersection of disasters with things like class and immigration status in our podcast, for example. But we've yet to really

explore the intersection with gender. I'm wondering if you have any examples that might help to illustrate that specific intersection?

One example that I use pretty frequently is the increase in domestic violence and reporting of domestic violence after disasters. Of course, any gender can be a victim of disaster violence, but they tend to be women. We see that there is this increased need among women and domestic violence survivors for needing a safe place to stay, for needing resources to keep themselves safe. The disaster itself very often can drive women who have been able to get away from their abuser to go back because they don't have the resources for housing and funding and transportation. It's also connected to the stress of recovery and financial constraints of that situation.

We also see an increase of new domestic violence cases during the recovery time period. And so one thing for us in emergency management that is really important is to recognize as one that this is a problem in the first place. Most people don't know about this increase in domestic violence post disaster — so if you know about it, you can do something about it. We can make sure that in emergency management, a local emergency management agency is reaching out to domestic violence shelters in their community long before disaster even happens, for example.

Moving forward, what do you think will be some of the biggest challenges that communities will face as a result of climate-driven and societally exacerbated disasters? What can communities do to increase their resilience or to ensure they

are given adequate resources for relief and recovery?

The biggest challenge and most immediate challenge is going to be funding. We're already seeing how our emergency management system is overtaxed and losing its capacity to respond. Right now we don't have a plan for how to increase the capacity of the system. One thing I don't think people have really come to realize yet is how expensive the cost of inaction on climate change is actually going to be, not just as a globe or as a country, but in individual communities. At the local and state level, governments are really dependent on the federal government for disaster related funding. And in the absence of the federal government seriously increasing that funding, a lot of communities are headed for a pretty uncertain future.

My best advice for communities who have a really clear view of how they're gonna be affected by climate change specifically is to start organizing now. If you're on the coast, even if you think you have another 10 years before flooding becomes a real problem for your community, start organizing now. Getting funding to do adaptation, to do hazard mitigation, takes a long time. We're talking years and decades in many cases to get the funding for these kinds of projects. And so the way that you navigate through this huge bureaucratic system to get this funding is by applying public pressure and getting your representatives in Congress to fight for your communities specifically. And so the sooner that you begin organizing, the sooner that your neighborhood can start grassroots organization to start that advocacy work, to start building the relationships, to start understanding the process that you're going to need to go through to get that funding.

Of course, some communities have more political power, more political sway than other communities — this is particularly true if you're looking around and you're in a small community that tends to be ignored. But the reality of the situation is that that begins and ends with us. And so we need to organize and be ready for what the future brings and to navigate those systems.

That's my number one recommendation for people in terms of climate change broadly.

But more specifically for disaster policy issues: you've got to vote. And you need to be paying attention to who you're voting for. Not just at the national level, but in local elections. It really matters who your mayor is, it matters what they think about the climate crisis and it matters how they understand disasters, how they envision your community needing to change in the future. These are really hard questions, and so you need as many leaders and advocates for your community as you can possibly get. So with local politics, that's at least one place to start.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.





Image screenshot from the LES Ready! Disaster Plan

LESReady! brings New York disaster preparedness to the neighborhood level

by Casey O'Brien

Disaster preparedness is becoming a centrally important issue for cities around the world as climate-related disasters become more common. Many major US cities have released emergency response plans to prepare for extreme weather and other disasters both natural and man-made.

However, the most effective forms of emergency preparedness are often hyper-local, focused on the needs of an individual community or neighborhood. This ethos has been put into practice in New

York's Lower East Side, where community partners came together as the LESReady! Coalition to create the [LESReady! Disaster Plan](#), a comprehensive emergency preparedness plan focused on the unique needs of this tight knit urban village in the heart of New York. The plan is highly visual, with graphics and images throughout, and is focused on specific contingencies in the case of various disaster levels.

The plan focuses on the four core areas that the coalition addresses: Preparedness, Communications, Short- to Mid-Term Resiliency and Community Response and is updated annually. The plan serves as a model for other neighborhoods and cities to prepare for disasters partially because of its accessibility. With its clear language and image heavy instructions it provides necessary information without jargon that wouldn't be usable by ordinary business owners, community groups and citizens in the Lower East Side. It also provides for each phase of a disaster response in great detail, meaning that when a disaster does arrive, member organizations of the LESReady! Coalition will know what to do.

Natural and man-made disasters can be devastating to a community, but the truth is that many neighborhoods have important resources already available to them through businesses, nonprofits, and residents. The more that communities can lift themselves up in a disaster situation, the less damage there will be. In order to utilize their own resources, community initiatives like the LESReady! Coalition are creating guides and reports so that in the event of a disaster, the community has already been mobilized and is prepared to care for itself. Disaster preparedness can and should happen on a broad scale, but it starts local.





Image by Danny Spitzberg

How to turn community spaces into hubs for resilience and mutual aid

by Danny Spitzberg

How can we make our neighborhoods more resilient to disasters and other disruptions? What initiatives and communities can we learn from? How can we turn existing community spaces into resilience hubs that can serve the community in an uncertain future?

We created "[The Resilience We Want: A guide to making your community space into a hub for local resilience & mutual aid](#)" to help groups all over the world develop answers to these basic questions.

As we learned from friends in Puerto Rico rebuilding after Hurricane Maria, and in places around the world, people take pride in their neighborhood by organizing around a wide variety of community spaces. Resilience comes from the social cohesion that forms when people organize in response to real needs.

However, we found a blind spot: most communities approach resilience in terms of disasters and what-if scenarios and they don't consider current situations. "Disasters give us urgent problems to solve, and we're comfortable with that," said Willow Brugh, a community response strategist formerly with [Geeks Without Bounds](#) and [FEMA's Field Innovation Team](#). "But resilience is about realizing that there are more important problems we can choose to solve. Talking about disasters is boring, compared to resilience!"

This 12-page guide introduces the vision and model of a resilience hub, a place where neighbors can deepen a sense of belonging, learn new skills together, provide for basic needs, prepare for disasters, and build a more inclusive and joyful community.

The guide includes:

- Six key strategies for co-creating a vision and plan for your space,
- Six case studies of people are building resilience hubs in different ways,
- Instructions on how to co-host your first and second gatherings, and
- A checklist to collaborate with your neighbors.

We made this guide as a companion to watching "[The Response: How Puerto Ricans Are Restoring Power to the People](#)," our documentary

film about people restoring power after Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico. It can also be used alone to plan resilience hubs.

This guide is mainly for people with access to spaces they love:

- Independent spaces (social clubs, art studios, and urban farms)
- Public facilities (libraries, schools, athletic clubs, and civic centers)
- Religious centers (places of worship and meeting houses)
- Small businesses (cafes, bookshops, and storefronts)

By using this guide, community groups can:

- Co-create a vision for the resilience we want,
- Connect with inspiring people and stories,
- Embrace different points of view in the community, and
- Identify assets and resources that your community space can share!

[Get the guide now](#)





Shareable readers share their stories about community-led disaster relief efforts

by Tom Llewellyn and Courtney Pankrat

We asked. You answered.

Throughout the publishing of this series we've asked readers, like you, to share their own stories of disaster relief or preparation efforts in your local community. We encouraged people to contribute their stories no matter how small or large the disaster was or what their level of involvement in recovery or resilience efforts. Sharing personal narratives about how people collaboratively uplift their communities in the aftermath of natural disasters have the power to inspire many others to do the same.

Personally, I've been interested in the unique experience that takes place when people come together during disasters for a long time. I grew up in a small semi-autonomous 'unintentional community' of about 200 people in California.

It feels strange to say it, but some of my fondest memories are from times when things were going wrong. Any disruption meant that for at least that day or week, everyone in the community seemed to forget about whatever else was going on in their own lives (or more often the conflicts between each other) and came together to work towards a common goal.

This happened when a culvert got jammed and a pond emerged in the middle of our main access road, when the creek rose so high that it washed out the bridge, or when my friends' home caught fire and many of us ran around the hillsides putting out spot fires that would have otherwise engulfed our entire community.

But it's not only during disasters that this collective response occurs. We also come together as a community to pave our roads, manage cooperative water systems, and make community decisions. We've also started a self directed initiative to mitigate the spread of potential wildfires which includes a monthly brush clearing day, a night-watch during high winds, and we even have a shared herd of goats to clear the underbrush.

I know that my experience is more than a little unique, but below are excerpts from the narratives we received from readers in Florida, Vermont, New York, Puerto Rico, New Orleans, and New Zealand (published with permission). We really appreciate everyone who participated in this project. If you would like to contribute your story,

please fill out this [questionnaire](#) — or send a note to info@shareable.net.

Tamara Shapiro was the central coordinator for Occupy Sandy after Hurricane Sandy hit New York in 2012:

“I helped coordinate a crisis convening this July. We brought together folks from Puerto Rico, NYC, New Jersey, Miami, Houston and other places to share learnings about community led disaster relief. It would be really great to have a podcast with a bunch of folks from the convening to share what we learned.”

Wendy Brawer was also involved in Occupy Sandy relief efforts:

“I took part in the bike-based support to Occupy Sandy Relief, and in 2016, co-created the [Bike Ready video](#) to encourage cyclists to plan a bit before the disaster happens. Like most cities, New York City Emergency Management does not include bikes in their planning yet, but that’s part of my current lobbying. My organization is also part of [LES Ready](#), the Lower East Side response and now resiliency network. Together with three partners, we have proposed a new kind of community climate action lab for a former NYC Parks recreation center and are pitching it as a socially inclusive complement to the green infrastructure in parks ([and we are making headway!](#)). I took part in Public Lab’s Barn Raising in August.

I’m on a local study group for the Big U (now called the ESCRB) which is shifting from a ‘live with water’ to [‘let’s put up a wall’](#) unfortunately, and support disaster design students in BC & NYC etc.

Some of this is at [my site](#) and my interest dates back to the NE Black-out of 2003, when I got the idea to make an Energy-themed Green Map for NYC and after researching for three years, [published this map with climate change, efficiency, renewables, etc.](#) So glad you are covering this timely topic.”

Greg Bloom [helped organize volunteers](#) after Hurricane Irma slammed into South Florida in 2017. He also lead the [open referral](#) initiative. It is:

“Super-relevant to the kinds of data infrastructure needed to support large scale distributed disaster response. I’ll also note that I spent most of my time trying to prevent well-meaning volunteers from doing inadvisable and potentially unwittingly dangerous things. These kinds of networks can be helpful, but we need a stronger practice that establishes accountability to local communities.”

Tenali Hrenak was involved in relief projects following the immense damage caused by Hurricane Katrina on Southeastern U.S. in 2005:

“Since Hurricane Katrina in 2005, myself, and others have spear-headed disaster relief field kitchens and distribution, sometimes reaching as high as 5,000 meals served per day. We are a grassroots, by-the-bootstraps operation that is supported by Organic Valley, Dr. Bronner’s, et al. In some sense, our kitchens have helped be a community hub where folks can come grab a warm meal, some basic supplies, and network. My role has been various kitchen and logistic duties, as well as, networking between storms. We are currently

forming a nonprofit called Grassroots Aid Partnership, which recently responded to Hurricane Florence.”

Ricardo de Soto participated in relief projects after various disasters hit Puerto Rico:

“Bootstrap cleaning, breakfast clubs, and taking-privatizing of Coastal Commons after experiencing hurricanes, disastrous coastal construction, and vessel groundings in Puerto Rico.”

Pat McGovern participated in a clean up day at Hurricane Flats after Irene in 2011:

“The aftermath of Hurricane Irene in 2011 brought flooding to many of the river valley farms in Vermont. Hurricane Flats, an organic vegetable farm situated on the White River in South Royalton, VT was hard hit. The flood waters were contaminated and the 8-acres of vegetables in late August were deemed unfit for consumption. Initially, the owner/farmer, Geo Honigford, stunned by his losses, joined forces with others to help dig out neighboring farms. It was Geo’s friends who put out a call for a clean up day at Hurricane Flats. At least 120 people showed up decked out in work clothes and gloves, with buckets, shovels, and rakes and potluck food in hand. Those that could do the muck work headed to the fields, while others made their way to the kitchen to organize a communal meal. The clean-up task was to pull up the mud-embedded plastic mulch and irrigation lines and ready the fields for plowing and planting of a cover crop. [My photo album on Facebook](#) tells much of the story.

The day was both heartbreaking and heart-filling. Such damage and loss... and a beautiful spirit of generosity, camaraderie, and good will.”

Preston Hegel is the director of [Exchange Christchurch](#) (XCHC), an organization set up after the earthquakes to provide affordable space for creatives and social entrepreneurs to connect, exchange ideas, work together, showcase work, and provide a place for the general public to engage with these emergent ideas.

Founded in August 2014, I've been Operations Manager since May 2016, now Director and looking at scaling across NZ. For the last few years, we've learned so much not only about the power of community, but also the importance of place. People having a place they can go and find like minded people where they can feel comfortable expressing themselves creatively, testing new ideas/projects, failing, and learning because of the supportive community that resides there. We've built a culture of practice and process that enables us to find and build communities around our passions.



Conclusion

As we face the reality of an increasingly chaotic climate, we must examine the situation through a social, economic, and political lens. With that being said, we can't afford to let the nearly unfathomable scope of the problem stop us from taking action in our daily life. Maybe the best thing we can do in the wake of a disaster is to cultivate closely knit, organized, and empowered communities. We can become more resilient during catastrophes and better able to demand the resources we need. Through the process of increasing our collective resilience we will not only be better positioned to survive acute disasters, but also to rebuild in a more just and sustainable basis.

And just like Judith Rodriguez, who we interviewed in Puerto Rico, says, "We're a community. Whether we want it or not, human beings are a community. If we're in China, in Puerto Rico, in Japan, wherever, we're a community. We have to help each other... If this boat sinks, we all sink. I don't sink alone, we all sink".

Ready to take the next step? Bring your community together, host a screening of our short-documentary film, and explore a growing list of resources on Shareable's website that we encourage you to use, share, and contribute to [here](#).

Key resources from Shareable and our partners include:

- [Shareable How To Guides](#): A growing collection of over 300 guides to building resilient communities through sharing time, skills, and other resources.
- [Think Resilience](#): Self-directed course that explores the interre-

lated crises of the twenty-first century, and what we as citizens, students, and community leaders can do to respond to them from [Post Carbon Institute](#).

- [Ready Together](#): A Neighborhood Emergency Preparedness Handbook from [Transition US](#).
- New Stories: Their purpose is to help people, organizations, communities and systems navigate the tides of change towards well-being, compassion and deep collaboration ([Essential Knowledge Hub](#) is a great place to start).
- [Resilient Hubs Initiative](#): Grassroots community-based approach to help scale up home and neighborhood resilience from the [Norcal Resilience Network](#).
- [Mutual Aid Disaster Relief](#): Mutual Aid Disaster Relief is a grassroots disaster relief network based on the principles of solidarity, mutual aid, and autonomous direct action (especially the [Community Training Facilitation Guide](#)).





About Shareable

Shareable is an award-winning nonprofit media outlet, action network, and consultancy. Our mission is to empower communities to share for a more resilient, equitable, and joyful world. We inspire social change by publishing solutions-based journalism, running campaigns, and helping our consulting clients achieve their goals through sharing.

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Additional Publications from Shareable



How Racism Shaped the Housing Crisis & What We Can Do About It (2019)

Our very latest ebook is hot off the presses, so to speak. This free ebook is a compilation of all of the articles in our series: “How Racism Shaped the Housing Crisis & What We Can Do About It.” We explore the history of land use and housing policy in the United States, solutions to the housing crisis with a focus on how to increase equity, and conversations we’ve hosted about it.

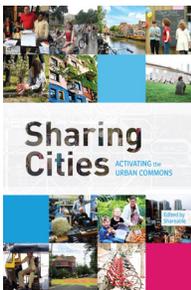
<https://www.shareable.net/how-racism-shaped-the-housing-crisis-what-we-can-do-about-it/>



Community Solutions to the Loneliness Epidemic (2019)

“Community Solutions to the Loneliness Epidemic” is divided into four sections offering a global context before exploring what people, organizations, and governments are doing to address this challenge in the U.S., U.K., Japan, South Korea, and more. Stories range from an op-ed calling for a change in the social climate to get climate change to solutions-focused pieces about time banking, libraries of things, senior centers, coworking, meal sharing, and innovative city policies.

<https://www.shareable.net/community-solutions-loneliness-epidemic-book/>



Sharing Cities: Activating the Urban Commons (2018)

“Sharing Cities: Activating the Urban Commons” showcases over a hundred sharing-related case studies and model policies from more than 80 cities in 35 countries. It witnesses a growing global movement and serves as a practical reference guide for community-based solutions to urgent challenges faced by cities everywhere. This book is a call to action meant to inspire readers, raise awareness, and strengthen the sharing movement worldwide. “Sharing Cities” shows that not only is another world possible — but that much of it is already here.

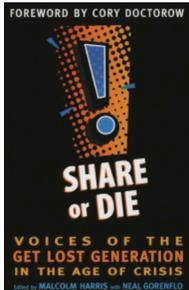
www.shareable.net/sharing-cities



How To: Share, Save Money & Have Fun (2016)

A collection of insightful guides on sharing housing, transportation, food, education, music and more. This book shows you how to lead a more enjoyable life, with your family and in your community, while saving money.

www.shareable.net/how-to-share-save-money-have-fun



Policies for Shareable Cities (2013)

The guide curates scores of innovative, high-impact policies that US city governments have put in place to help citizens share resources, co-produce, and create their own jobs. It focuses on sharing policy innovations in food, housing, transportation, and jobs – key pocket-book issues of citizens and priorities of urban leaders everywhere. The guide is meant to help cities develop more resilient, innovative, and democratic economies.

www.shareable.net/new-report-policies-for-shareable-cities



Shareable Futures (2010)

In this collection of short stories and speculative essays, literary futurists imagine a world to come where technology has changed the rules of ownership and access, and people are able to share transportation, living spaces, lives, dreams, everything and anything. These are futures in which we are surviving and even thriving, largely by learning to share our stuff.

www.shareable.net/shareable-futures