

MAY 2024

SOUTHERN AND MIDWEST TORNADOES AND STORMS

ONE-YEAR REPORT



**American
Red Cross**

A LETTER FROM

American Red Cross Leadership



In spring 2023, a series of devastating tornadoes and severe weather outbreaks tore through communities in Mississippi, Arkansas and a dozen other states across the South and Midwest.

From the difficult days after the tornadoes struck, through weeks of arduous cleanup and months of recovery, the American Red Cross has been there, delivering relief and comfort across a vast area to residents whose lives were turned upside down by these devastating storms. Working with our disaster response partners, thousands of Red Cross volunteers and employees provided shelter for displaced families, as well as warm meals, vital relief items and sorely needed health and mental health services to thousands of affected residents.

With support from compassionate donors, we have also delivered millions of dollars in financial assistance. These funds helped severely impacted families with some of their most urgent needs, such as paying for food and clothing, home repairs and replacement of lost or damaged belongings, transportation and housing costs, and much more.

Due to the scarcity of available affordable housing in affected Mississippi communities, the Red Cross continued to support more than a hundred displaced residents forced to take refuge in area hotels for months after the tornadoes struck. We have also provided grants to partner organizations supporting recovery needs in some of the hardest-hit Mississippi counties.

Over the past year, our critical relief and recovery assistance has been paired with ongoing comprehensive support and guidance from caring Red Cross caseworkers, who helped affected individuals and families make recovery plans and locate available resources from community and government partners. We know that recovery from these tornadoes is an ongoing process for the affected individuals and families, and we will continue to stand by them for as long as we are needed.

None of this essential relief and recovery work would be possible without the generosity of our donors and the tireless efforts of dedicated volunteers. On behalf of those we serve, thank you.



Brad Kieserman, Vice President
Disaster Operations and Logistics



Jennifer Pipa, Vice President
Disaster Programs



RESPONSE AT A GLANCE



Served more than **860,900 meals and snacks** with partners



Provided than **151,300 overnight shelter stays** with partners



Reached an estimated **80,200 people** with disaster relief and recovery services



Provided relief supplies to more than **21,100 households**

Cumulative figures in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee and Texas, as of March 23, 2024.

Providing Critical Aid in the Wake of Destructive Tornadoes and Storms

Starting in late March 2023 and continuing through much of the spring, powerful tornadoes and storms ripped through 14 states across the South and Midwest — with communities in Mississippi and Arkansas suffering some of the heaviest and most widespread damage. In the wake of these twisters and severe weather outbreaks, thousands of American Red Cross volunteers and employees were quickly on the ground, mounting emergency responses to help tornado survivors with urgent needs.

Working together with government and community partners, more than 2,900 Red Cross volunteers and employees helped shelter thousands of people who were displaced by the storms. They delivered nourishing meals, essential relief items and sorely needed emotional support, both at disaster hub centers and directly to affected neighborhoods in our emergency response vehicles. In the weeks following the storms, the Red Cross provided a first round of financial assistance to hard-hit individuals and families. These funds helped people replace lost clothing, buy food and gas, or meet other critical needs.

Even before the severe weather struck, many area residents were facing the twin challenges of poverty and a lack of affordable housing, challenges that were compounded by the tornadoes. In Mississippi, compassionate Red Crossers continued to support tornado survivors living in hotels for months after the disaster, providing meals, recovery casework and other aid while affected residents sought more stable housing situations.

Above: William Burkey, a member of the Red Cross disaster mental health team, and Jamie Harms, a member of the disaster health services team, work together to bring comfort and hope to Paula Rocha, whose home was damaged by a tornado that struck Little Rock, Arkansas, and nearby towns. Photo by Kevin Suttlehan/American Red Cross

Supporting Ongoing Recovery Needs in Hard-Hit Communities

One year after these destructive twisters upended lives and livelihoods, individuals, families and communities are still struggling to recover. Powered by the compassionate commitment of generous donors, the Red Cross has continued to stand with tornado survivors, providing financial assistance, ongoing support with recovery planning, help locating available community resources and much more as heartbroken residents strive to rebuild their lives, homes and communities.

In addition to our Immediate Assistance funds that were provided shortly after the most widespread and destructive tornado outbreaks in Mississippi and Arkansas, the Red Cross provided additional Bridge Recovery Assistance to many of the most severely affected residents — whose homes suffered major damage or were destroyed — helping them overcome significant recovery roadblocks and begin to rebuild their lives.

As of February 23, 2024, we have provided **financial assistance totaling approximately \$4.7 million**, reaching thousands of households reeling from these powerful tornadoes and storms. This financial assistance will allow people to make their own decisions and address unmet recovery needs, such as ongoing housing and transportation costs, job-related expenses, childcare, and access to health and mental health services.

Financial Assistance Helps Tornado Survivors Get Back on Their Feet

Powered by the compassionate donors who supported vital aid for people devastated by these destructive tornadoes and storms, the Red Cross delivered financial assistance and more to help some of the hardest-hit residents get back on their feet and begin to recover.

Betty Sinegal has been volunteering with the Red Cross for more than eight years, and the feeling she has when providing financial assistance for someone in need is the same today as it was when she first started.



Red Cross volunteer Terry Smith, who deployed from Tampa, Florida, visits with Justin and Jonah. Terry and his team delivered warm meals to tornado survivors in Rolling Fork, Mississippi, one of the hardest-hit communities. Photo by Scott Dalton/American Red Cross

“I still see tarps on houses, so people are still recovering, and that financial assistance the Red Cross offers to help them find a place, get food or anything to help in their recovery is a good feeling.”

**BETTY SINEGAL,
RED CROSS VOLUNTEER**

“When you’re packing up your bag to leave your husband, grandkids and kids, it just makes you feel good to be able help people who really need it,” said Betty. “I still see tarps on houses, so people are still recovering, and that financial assistance the Red Cross offers to help them find a place, get food or anything to help in their recovery is a good feeling.”

AMY’S STORY: On the afternoon of March 31, 2023, a tornado touched down in Little Rock, Arkansas, carving a 34-mile path of destruction through nearby communities. Unable to get in touch with her kids, Amy Dougherty rushed home. She was relieved to learn that, although the house took a direct hit, everyone was okay. “But as it all sank in,” Amy said, “my thoughts turned to, ‘What’s next?’”

“Within a week, I was contacted by a Red Cross volunteer. We just kind of talked through things,” Amy said. “She connected me with another Red Cross volunteer who was a counselor and wanted to make sure things were well and that we were standing up under the heavy load. It was really comforting, and I’m truly grateful for all of the efforts of the Red Cross.”



The Red Cross also provided immediate financial assistance for Amy and her family, which paid for new mattresses in a rental house as they begin rebuilding their lives. In the weeks and months that followed, the Red Cross offered the family additional bridge financial assistance, which Amy used to purchase a new couch and replace clothing lost in the tornado. “There were just so many things we needed, things you don’t think of,” she said.

Nearly one year later, Amy reported that the family’s recovery is going well. “If I had the chance to speak with a donor to the Red Cross,” Amy said, “I would tell them it was such a warm feeling to be able to have the support, the care, the understanding — and truly the love — we felt during that time. The support we received from the Red Cross at such a difficult time made such a difference.”

FRED’S STORY: Fred Gilmore, his wife and two children were briefly displaced when their Arkansas home was damaged by the tornadoes, but it took much longer to repair the damage from a “big, heavy tree” that fell on the roof. Fred was grateful for the Bridge Assistance he received from the Red Cross to cover “things the insurance didn’t pay for.”

With the Red Cross funds, Fred was able to have the tree removed and make the necessary repairs. Fred told us that Red Cross Bridge Assistance was “wonderful” and helped speed his family’s safe return home.

Above: When a tornado severely damaged their home, Red Cross financial assistance helped Amy Dougherty (right) and her children (L to R) Rowan (15), Penn (14) and Eleanor (6) pay for critical recovery needs. Photo courtesy of Amy Dougherty
Right: In Jacksonville, Arkansas, Red Cross volunteer Betty Sinegal opens a recovery case for tornado survivor Fred Gilmore. In a matter of minutes, he was approved for financial assistance. Photo by Jason Colston/American Red Cross



“[Red Cross bridge assistance] helped a great deal, a huge help toward financial obligations I didn’t even know I had.”

WILLIAM FELLARS

WILLIAM’S STORY: William Fellars was grateful when he was approved for Red Cross financial assistance after his house was damaged by a tornado in March 2023. He knew firsthand the importance of relief and support after disasters, based on his experience volunteering with the Red Cross to help people affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005.

Thanks in part to Red Cross financial assistance, he was able to pay bills and even afford additional repairs on the house. “I’m extremely grateful,” he said. “[Red Cross bridge assistance] helped a great deal, a huge help toward financial obligations I didn’t even know I had.”

One year later, his recovery is going well. His house has been repaired, and he’s moved back in. “I look back at it almost daily, reminded how incredibly fortunate I am,” he said.



William Fellars was surprised and grateful to learn that he was eligible for Red Cross Bridge Assistance to help him make home repairs after the 2023 tornadoes in Arkansas. Photo by Jason Colston/American Red Cross

Grants to Recovery Partners Helping Impacted Communities with Unmet Needs

Along with critical financial assistance, the Red Cross is also supporting recovery needs in some of the hardest-hit Mississippi counties by funding grants to local partners, including the Community Foundation of Washington County, Disaster Services Corporation of St. Vincent de Paul and the Mississippi Annual Conference of the United Methodist Conference on Relief.

These grants have supported the hiring of disaster case managers, who help connect survivors with available resources, as well as a part-time coordinator to advance recovery efforts in Carroll County. We are also supporting unmet needs roundtables, which play a key role in recovery, fostering collaboration among nonprofits, community organizations and local governments to address ongoing needs in their communities.

Generous Supporters Power Relief and Recovery Assistance

Thanks to generous donors, the Red Cross has raised \$17.1 million in designated funds for our response to the 2023 tornadoes and storms across the South and Midwest — including the value of critical donated goods and services — to help people affected by these disasters.

As of February 23, 2024, the Red Cross had spent or made commitments to spend approximately \$33.9 million on emergency relief and recovery efforts for the Southern and Midwest Tornadoes and Storms. To fill this gap, we have used donations to Disaster Relief, and some specific expenses have been reimbursed by the states of Arkansas and Mississippi.

| Southern and Midwest Tornadoes and Storms Expenses ^{1,2} (in millions) | | | | | | |
|---|--------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------|---------------|-------------|
| as of February 23, 2024 (\$17.1 million raised) | | | | | | |
| Expense Categories | Food, Shelter and Relief Items | Health and Emotional Support | Financial Assistance | Community Recovery & Resilience | Total | Expense % |
| Financial assistance, food and other relief items | \$12.2 | \$0.6 | \$4.7 | – | \$17.5 | 52% |
| Deployment of volunteers and staff (includes airfare, lodging, meals and vehicles) | \$3.7 | \$0.6 | \$2.1 | – | \$6.4 | 19% |
| Full-time Red Cross employees | \$1.5 | \$0.1 | \$0.4 | – | \$2.0 | 6% |
| Temporary disaster hires | \$1.4 | \$0.1 | \$0.3 | – | \$1.8 | 5% |
| IT, communications and call centers | \$0.5 | \$0.1 | \$0.9 | – | \$1.5 | 4% |
| Freight, postage and warehousing | \$0.8 | – | – | – | \$0.8 | 2% |
| Equipment, maintenance and fueling of Red Cross emergency vehicles and rented trucks | \$0.3 | – | – | – | \$0.3 | 1% |
| Kitchen, shelter and other logistics that enable service delivery | \$0.1 | – | – | – | \$0.1 | 0% |
| Long-term recovery programs to help with unmet needs and support community resilience | – | – | – | \$0.1 | \$0.1 | 0% |
| Total Program Expenses | \$20.5 | \$1.5 | \$8.4 | \$0.1 | \$30.5 | 90% |
| Management, general and fundraising ³ | | | | | \$3.4 | 10% |
| Total Spent and Committed⁴ | | | | | \$33.9 | 100% |

¹Dollar figures are rounded to the nearest \$100K; therefore, expenses \$49,999 and below are represented as zero.

²Includes approximately \$9.5 million in specific expenses reimbursed by the states of Arkansas and Mississippi.

³Management, general and fundraising expenses support our work at its core and are indispensable to running the organization and helping people in need. They include the people and systems to maintain our enterprise-wide computer and telecommunications, HR and payroll systems to support our nearly 18,000 employees and approximately 275,000 volunteers, fundraising and communications functions, and other support services across all program lines. Ninety cents of every dollar spent for Southern and Midwest Tornadoes and Storms will support delivering care and comfort to help people affected by these disasters.

⁴In addition to Southern and Midwest Tornadoes and Storms donations, the response is being supported through donations to Disaster Relief.



Thank you!



**American
Red Cross**

Your Help Made a Real Difference

Generous donations from the public helped thousands in need after the devastating 2023 tornadoes in the South and Midwest. To learn more about our response and the people we've helped, please visit our **Southern and Midwest Tornadoes and Storms Story Map** at redcross.org/southern-midwest-tornadoes-2023.

The Red Cross must be ready for every disaster, big or small, and we respond to about 65,000 disasters each year — including home fires, severe weather, floods and wildfires. Those in need turn to the Red Cross in their darkest hours because they know they can depend on us right after the disaster and throughout their recovery. Your donation helps us fulfill this promise. We are grateful for your trust.