

The Community
Foundation of
Western North
Carolina

WE
RISE

WE RISE
in community.

Dear friends,

When Hurricane Helene struck, CFWNC was able to disburse funds quickly to support relief work and critical immediate needs due to an outpouring of support from people like you. Continued generosity has enabled us to distribute more than \$39.5 million.

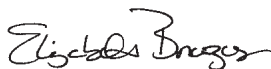
A year later, recovery and rebuilding are ongoing. More than 525 grants to nonprofits, public agencies and schools helped individuals, households and communities. Teams mobilized to undertake initial rescue, to provide water, shelter and food, and to ensure the safety of friends and neighbors. Waves of volunteers arrived to help, and many are still here.

With their commitment and expertise, a coordinated effort is underway to repair our damaged infrastructure, forests and streams; to address an exacerbated housing crisis; and to support people as they rebuild their lives, and communities as they rebuild their economies.

This storm taught us lessons. We are more effective in alliance with others, and we gratefully accepted the extended hands and offers of help. We have come to understand that in times of disaster we focus more on what we have in common and less on what divides us. Our interconnectedness is a strength, and we rise through mutual aid and with trust in each other.

We rise in community, with strength and concern and care for others. The stories included are a snapshot of what we experienced here. We want to share what we've learned with others. We want to show up for others in the way that you all did for us.

We are honored that so many of you gave and chose to do so through CFWNC. We are forever grateful.



Elizabeth Brazas, *President*

cfwnchelenerecovery.org

“This storm taught us lessons. We are more effective in alliance with others, and we gratefully accepted the extended hands and offers of help.”

Elizabeth Brazas and former board member Kate Vogel at a distribution hub in Mitchell County in October 2024.



Photo courtesy of CFWNC



Immediate Emergency Needs

Water/Medicine/
Food/Clothing

First Responder
Equipment/Vehicles

FEMA Application
Assistance

Household Mucking/
Tarping/Gutting

Crisis Communications/
Internet Access

Emergency Heat/Power
Public Health/Safety

As the scale and breadth of Helene's damage became apparent, hundreds of nonprofits, agencies, schools, first responders, churches, and volunteers stepped up to meet needs.

NECHAMA arrived in WNC on October 6 and set up base in Hendersonville. It began accepting volunteers, referred by local and national Jewish organizations and other groups. Originally, intending to deploy for 6 months, NECHAMA plans to remain in WNC through the end of September 2025.

NECHAMA sourced projects from Crisis Cleanup, Buncombe County Sheriff's Office, Henderson County Recovery Group, Habitat for Humanity, and individual pastors. During this deployment, it has mucked and gutted houses, mitigated mold and removed debris at 52 properties in fourteen communities in WNC. Volunteers have partially or substantially rebuilt sixteen houses in Asheville, Black Mountain, Flat Rock, Hendersonville, Marion, Mills River, Old Fort, Swannanoa, Pisgah Forest and Weaverville.

NECHAMA is a valued member of the NC Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster and the long-term rebuild coalitions in Buncombe and Henderson Counties. As a volunteer-based organization, NECHAMA has recruited more than 850 volunteers who provided more than 11,500 hours of labor.

Volunteers play a critical role in recovery. They undertake necessary and difficult work, but also provide important emotional support and hope.

What Your Donations Made Possible





Photo courtesy of NECHAMA

“In the midst of the catastrophe, I received a call out of the blue from NECHAMA, informing me that they were coming in response to my request and need for help. The healing they’ve brought to my life is indescribable, almost unfathomable! NECHAMA not only picked up the pieces of my broken home but all the broken pieces I had become. I am now filled with their love and laughter, their kindness and caring. They helped me prepare my home to be rebuilt and to rebuild my life as well.” NECHAMA Client



Children and Families

Health/Mental Health

Substance Abuse

Youth Support During
Out of School Hours

Support for Schools/
Colleges/Childcare
Centers

Elder Care/Services

Addressing Domestic
Violence/Child Abuse

Helene was profoundly disruptive on so many levels. Working with partners to safely open schools and childcare centers and ensuring services for vulnerable populations was an early focus.

Due to power outages, loss of water and damage to roads and facilities, some WNC schools were closed for weeks. In many rural areas, schools and community colleges served as relief centers and distribution hubs. EDRF donors helped schools, educators, administrators, and childcare workers find stability and access services as they worked to support children and families.

In October, funds were awarded to Avery, Mitchell and Yancey County school systems to provide each public school in these rural and very hard-hit counties \$25,000 to help meet NC Department of Public Instruction requirements for reopening.

Childcare recovery was critical to the whole recovery ecosystem. The Smart Start Partnership for Children in Hendersonville was able to assist three family childcare homes in reopening, with the support of an EDRF grant. These three facilities serve approximately 20 children. All the parents at one facility are first responders and therefore needed to be on the ground immediately after the storm.

A grant to the YWCA helped transport Mighty Sinks that allowed its childcare programs to reopen without clean/potable running water, as required by state childcare licensing. It also funded some of the salaries of its staff who ran a distribution center that opened only four business days after the storm and served 1,500 of its neighbors.

What Your Donations Made Possible



McDowell Tech

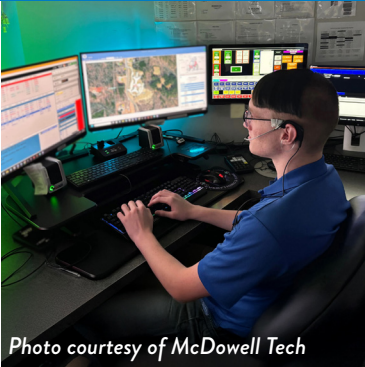


Photo courtesy of McDowell Tech

One of McDowell Technical Community College's Emergency Management students was serving as a dispatcher for the county when Helene struck. He was working 70 to 80 hours per week, balancing intense professional responsibilities while trying to keep up with his coursework. The demands became too great, and he took an emergency withdrawal to avoid damaging his GPA. Thanks to EDRF funding, his outstanding balance was covered, allowing him to return to school and continue his progress toward a career in public safety.

"It was a difference-maker that CFWNC allowed public agencies — including schools and community colleges — to apply for early relief in addition to nonprofits and faith organizations."

Mebane Rash, EdNC

YWCA of Asheville



Photo courtesy of the YWCA

Micaville Elementary



Photo by Michael Oppenheim

"Losing the school was the hardest thing I've done professionally, and it was very hard personally, just to handle the feelings from the loss."

**Melanie Bennett
Former Principal
Micaville Elementary**



Housing

Temporary Shelter/
Permanent Housing

Home Repair/
Remediation/
Demolition

Replacement of
Household Contents

Rent/Utility Assistance

Strong partnerships, volunteers, labor and innovative ideas were funded to address immediate and long-term housing issues. Rebuilding efforts continue, and recovery will take years.

Baptists on Mission was awarded \$25,000 to purchase supplies for urgent home repairs and \$1.5 million to operate sites to mobilize, support and coordinate volunteers to repair homes in Buncombe, Henderson, Mitchell, Yancey and Haywood counties.

More than half the cost of building is labor. With volunteers, Baptists on Mission can double or even triple the number of families returning to their homes.

As of July 5, it has completed 333 home rebuilds, with 363 in progress and a total of 1,204 rebuild requests. It has opened five rebuild centers in Burnsville, Spruce Pine, Clyde/Canton, East Flat Rock and Swannanoa and expects to be working in WNC for the next four to five years. It has been operating a long term rebuild center in Canton since 2021 in response to Tropical Storm Fred.

“Support from CFWNC was a game-changer in our ability to respond to the disaster. Within days of applying, we received funding to stabilize housing for vulnerable people. We assisted families in finding new housing and removed barriers to moving. With other CFWNC funds, Thrive Asheville was able to layer support and invest in collaborative housing work, benefitting residents across multiple agencies by helping them to access new housing or remain stably housed during this time of upheaval. I cannot say enough about the responsiveness of staff and this critical support.” Kate Pett, Thrive Asheville

What Your Donations Made Possible





“When Helene hit, we started feeding people; next came chainsaw jobs, house mud-outs and tear outs; and then we started working to help get people back in their homes.”

– Richard Brunson, Baptists On Mission
Executive Director/Treasurer

“There’s a difference in philanthropy that is tethered to what’s actually happening on the ground, and I think you being in these communities, seeing firsthand what principals and superintendents actually needed, helped inform both the quickness of the response and also the fidelity with which you were able to tailor the grantmaking to individual needs.”

Mebane Rash, EdNC



Photos clockwise from above: photo by Derek DiLuzio, courtesy of NC MedAssist, BeLoved Asheville, Laurel Community Center Organization, Helene Multi-Agency Warehouse, Blue Ridge Resource Spruce Pine by Tanya Triber, rescue photo by Colby Rabon



“Climate change is real. We hope this helps you recover.”
EDRF Donor

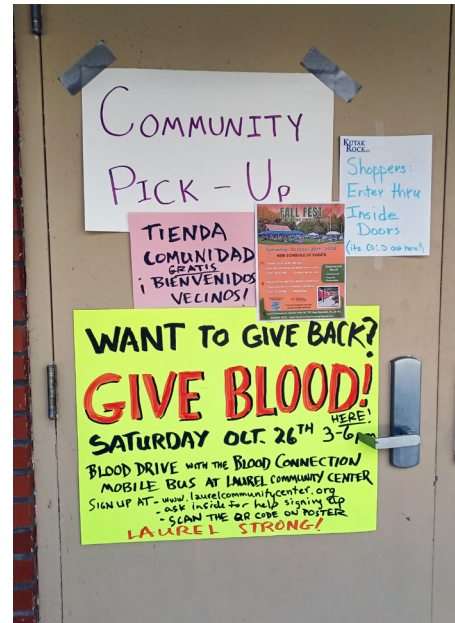




ille by Michael Oppenheim,
Conservation & Development,



“Since October 2024, Just for Him Ministries has been honored to serve as a tool in the hands of this generosity. Together, we’ve completed several hundred disaster recovery projects across Henderson, Rutherford, Polk and Buncombe counties. Our volunteers, over 80 per month from more than a dozen states, were simply the hands. You were the source. Because of your gift, 100% of the materials needed were provided and lives were rebuilt.” Ken McGee, CEO





Environment

Streambank Restoration

Downed Tree and
Debris Removal

Forest Management

Community Garden/
Farm Remediation

Trail Remediation

Conservation
Stewardship

Water Quality
Assessments/
Improvements

Helene caused significant and widespread damage to WNC's forests, waterways and farmland. The heavy rainfall and winds led to flooding, landslides, and debris flows that altered landscapes and disrupted ecosystems.

Your support has been funding key partners addressing the environmental impact and rebuilding WNC's local food systems and outdoor tourism economy.

"We have an active and dedicated network of nonprofits working in land and water conservation and protection. They pivoted immediately to deploy their experienced teams to clear trees, stabilize streambanks, assess water quality, develop plans and engage volunteers," said Vice President for Programs Tara Scholtz.

"Early support gave us the flexibility to act immediately — testing water, wells, and soil when communities needed it most. Larger grants helped us pilot a river restoration program that leveraged significant state funding to clean up and restore waterways across WNC and the Qualla Boundary," said Bob Wagner, MountainTrue Executive Director.

Along the Blue Ridge Parkway, 30 inches of localized rain and peak sustained winds of up to 60 miles per hour caused thousands of downed trees, damage to facilities and multiple landslides that weakened structural integrity and destroyed miles of trails and roadway. The Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the Appalachian National Scenic Trail were also significantly impacted, and their repair is critical to the recreational economy and the well-being of communities.

What Your Donations Made Possible



MountainTrue



Photo courtesy of MountainTrue

Funds are helping MountainTrue re-envision and prepare communities like Swannanoa, Hot Springs, and Marshall — not just to recover, but to thrive in the face of future climate challenges. Their approach is grassroots yet professional and effective, drawing on experience while staying forward-thinking and hopeful.

“It is essential that we ‘make way’ for our waterways to increase flood resilience and reduce future losses. We are engaged in ensuring a science-based, comprehensive approach to our rivers’ and region’s recovery.”
Lisa Raleigh, RiverLink CEO

RiverLink



Photo courtesy of RiverLink

UNCA Steam Studio



Photo courtesy of CFWNC

“It’s just so important that this wood gets utilized in the communities it came from. It certainly is a full circle moment.”

Dave Misson, UNCA STEAM Studio Sawmill Coordinator



Infrastructure

Road and Bridge Repair

Site Stabilization

Nonprofit Facility
Repair/Remediation

Temporary Laundry/
Shower Facilities

Distribution Hubs/
Facility Modification/
Increased Overhead

Damage Assessments/
Resiliency Planning

Preliminary Engineering
Reports

Helene destroyed roads, bridges, power grids, water systems and facilities. Recovery includes repair, rebuilding, resiliency planning and preparation for future disasters.

Skilled volunteers and crews were deployed to rebuild roads and bridges and to repair nonprofit facilities. Some came pulling laundry and shower facilities, while others set up distribution hubs in isolated and difficult to reach communities.

In November, \$2 million was awarded to NC Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Churches of America to partner with Mennonite Disaster Services in rebuilding private bridges destroyed by Hurricane Helene.

The bridges are designed to be built by volunteers in about a week's time. Wooden-decked steel beams are placed over concrete abutments, with steel pilings driven to bedrock, to span streams and prevent catching debris or disturbing ecology. The structures are more easily maintained, and more resilient than the bridges they replace.

The project prioritizes the hardest hit areas in Avery, Mitchell, Yancey, Madison, Rutherford, and Buncombe counties and bridges that impact multiple families or critically vulnerable persons.

EDRF grants for assessments and planning support a comprehensive approach to reconstruction that prioritizes strengthening communities, infrastructure, and buildings to withstand future events caused by climate change and extreme weather.

What Your Donations Made Possible





Photo courtesy of Chimney Rock Village

The Southwestern Commission Council of Governments received \$1.5 million to contract engineering firms to produce PERs, Preliminary Engineering Reports, required to apply to state and federal grant programs. Each PER evaluates feasibility, scope, and cost, essential components of a competitive application. This technical assistance is critical, as many small and rural governments lack the capacity or financial resources to develop PERs independently.



Economic Impact

Staffing Costs for
Hurricane Response

Financial Assistance to
Farmers/Craftspeople/
First Responders
FEMA-Ineligible/
Hospitality Workers/
Educators and
School Staff

Small/Rural
Business Support

Car Repair/Car
Replacement/
Transportation

Offset Costs for
Volunteer Groups
Assisting in Recovery

Helene devastated small businesses, leaving many with extensive damage and severe, extended closures and losses. The impact to infrastructure and the economy has been staggering, with artists and creative businesses hit especially hard.

According to FEMA, 40% of small businesses do not reopen after a disaster, and those already facing barriers are more vulnerable to permanent closure. With the support of donors and funders, CFWNC made grants to nonprofits providing financial assistance to hospitality workers, artists, teachers and school staff, rural businesses, first responders and volunteer groups assisting in recovery.

The storm hit during the peak tourism season, forcing extended closures and cancellations, and significantly reducing foot traffic and tourism-dependent sales. Mountain BizWorks launched a program providing immediate financial support through direct grants to help businesses reopen, retain jobs and stabilize operations. Through grants to the Center for Craft and Arts AVL, aid was delivered to creative workers across the region including to arts nonprofits not supported through other small business grant opportunities. The awards addressed business interruption, income loss, and job retention.

In addition to lost income, organizations and businesses faced rising operational costs from emergency staffing, marketing, and equipment replacement, while redirecting resources to community needs. Recovery has been slow and uneven, with some still unable to reopen or resume full operations, and long-term financial impacts are expected well into 2026.

What Your Donations Made Possible



Mountain BizWorks



Photo courtesy of Mountain BizWorks

“Funding came at a critical moment for us,” said Nathan Smith of Seeker Coffee in Old Fort. “With this, we’ve been able to retain staff and start some slated build-out storage space for our shop that had been delayed. Thanks from all of us!” Nathan’s story is just one example of how Mountain BizWorks’ Rural Rebuilding Together Grant Fund supported 149 small businesses in 15 rural communities, awarding \$2.39 million total to help WNC towns recover forward post-Helene.

The first phase of the Center for Craft’s Futures Fund helped 820 artists meet immediate needs after the storm. The second phase is focused on longer-term recovery for 40 individual craft artists through the WNC Craft Futures Cohort. Woodworker Kwado Som-Pimpong, below, is a member of the cohort.

Center for Craft



Photo courtesy of the Center for Craft

“I cannot overstate how important this support has been to many school staff members. It came at a critical time for both physical and emotional recovery. I don’t know if some of the educators out there would still be in our schools, or even still in our region, if it weren’t for this opportunity. It has been a lifeline.”

Jeff McDaris Ed.D.

**WRESA Emergency Services
Retired Superintendent**

\$1 million was awarded to provide direct financial assistance to school system staff in counties devastated by Helene that experienced housing or transportation loss.

WE RISE

through the kindness of
friends and strangers.

Your contributions encouraged us and made a significant difference on the ground. As you have seen in the preceding pages, our region was changed by this storm. Needs were immense and immediate. Your donations supported people and communities as they came together to clean up, restore and rebuild. An inspiring spirit of determination and mutual aid developed through need and was strengthened through collaboration, partnership, and your support.

The work is ongoing, and it will take years. But funding for quick, early grants and recovery meant that nonprofits and organizations could move forward knowing that resources were there. Your donations were a lifeline in a time of deep, extended crisis in WNC.

The fundraisers you hosted, the concerts you attended, the supplies you purchased, the care and concern you have shown to this region, the funds you have so generously given – these all lifted our morale and spirits and helped us move forward.

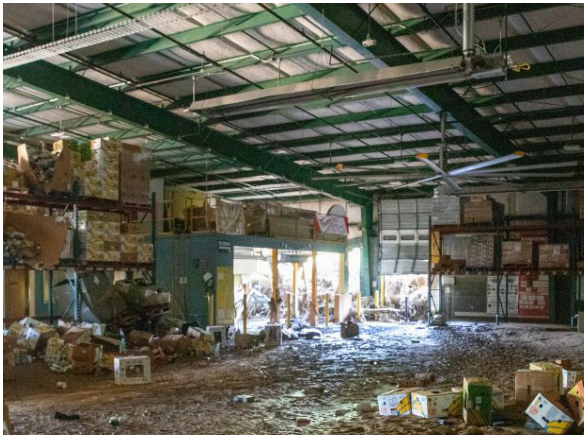
CFWNC is not charging a fee on donations to the Emergency and Disaster Response Fund, meaning that every dollar is supporting recovery. As long as people continue to give, we will direct the funds out to fund ongoing work. The North Carolina Community Foundation is making grants to support longer-term recovery.

nccommunityfoundation.org

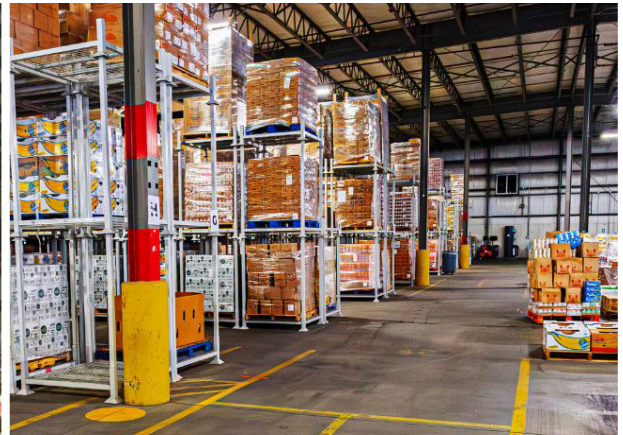
We are deeply grateful to the funders that contacted us in the days immediately following the storm to check on us, to offer emotional support, and to commit funds for our response. We were profoundly supported by our community foundation colleagues in NC and around the country, along with many of their fundholders. Our WNC funding partners, Dogwood Health Trust and WNC Bridge Foundation, have stood with us from day one. As always, we remain grateful to CFWNC's fundholders, who continue to support our work, and our Board of Directors for their guidance and commitment to CFWNC's role as a philanthropic first responder.

People requested donations in lieu of wedding gifts, because they love to hike and kayak here, perhaps they remember a vacation or summer camp, or maybe they see what happened here and think of their own homes and communities. The reasons for giving are as varied as the people, businesses and foundations that made contributions, but the impulse to help is universal.

We did rise through the kindness of friends and strangers. We are inspired by you and offer our heartfelt thanks.



MANNA FoodBank is the food distribution hub for 16 of CFWNC's 18 counties. The damage to its facility was complete and threatened food access for potentially hundreds of thousands of people.



A \$7 million grant, made in partnership with the North Carolina Community Foundation, will help MANNA complete the upfit at a new facility.

Photos courtesy of Manna



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WE RISE TOGETHER.



Photo above by Michael Oppenheim; cover photo by Derek DiLuzio