



NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Heart of Florida United Way Announces Launch of Housing Program to Assist Hurricane Maria Evacuees

Hurricane Maria Housing Assistance Program Will Address Critical Barrier to Securing Stable Housing

(Orlando, Fla.) – March 29, 2018 – Through its work at the Orlando International Airport Welcome Center and then the Multi-Agency Resource Center (MARC), Heart of Florida United Way (HFUW) is witness to the barriers to affordable housing for Hurricane Maria evacuees in Central Florida. In light of the MARC closure on March 30, HFUW is launching a program designed to help working families who have relocated to Central Florida due to Hurricane Maria overcome one of the barriers to securing stable housing.

United Way's Hurricane Maria Housing Assistance Program provides one-time assistance for working families to get over the barrier of first and last months' rent and utility deposits required to secure an affordable rental unit in Central Florida. This program specifically targets those displaced by Hurricane Maria who fall into the ALICE population – Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed. On average, these upfront costs can range from \$2,500 to \$3,500, making the transition from hotel to more stable housing very challenging.

“For many evacuees who have been able to find consistent employment, paying the monthly rent is not the immediate challenge to securing an affordable unit – it's the upfront deposits,” said Jeff Hayward, President and CEO of Heart of Florida United Way. “If that initial deposit is the only thing keeping a family devastated by Hurricane Maria from leading a more stable life in Central Florida, we want to help them overcome that barrier.”

To qualify for the Hurricane Maria Housing Assistance Program, the following criteria must be met:

- Documentation of FEMA status in relation to Hurricane Maria
- Sustainable household income to cover rent and basic needs after receiving one-time assistance
- Identification of an affordable rental housing option in or around Orange, Seminole or Osceola counties
- Documentation of current residence in Orange, Seminole and Osceola counties

To apply for the Housing Assistance Program individuals must call United Way's 2-1-1 for assistance. Individuals can access 2-1-1 by phone, email, chat or text (just text your zip code to 898-211). 2-1-1 is free and completely confidential, available 24/7.

Heart of Florida United Way has partnered with Catholic Charities in order to provide additional wrap-around support to families who qualify for the program to ensure they are stable and remain housed.



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Over 371,000 passengers have traveled from Puerto Rico to or through Florida according to Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College. Since beginning operations, the Orlando International Airport and MARC assistance centers have seen over 34,000 people and Heart of Florida United Way has assisted over 1,034 by providing emergency housing assistance. More than 2,999 hotel nights have been booked through Heart of Florida United Way for FEMA's Transitional Shelter Assistance (TSA) program.

As specified in the ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) Report in 2017, Central Florida has a shortage of 74,457 affordable housing units, these numbers reported before the arrival of evacuees in need of housing. Although available inventory of affordable housing will remain a challenge, Heart of Florida United Way will continue to advocate for the thousands of evacuees trying to start a new life in Central Florida.

“Our community has seen an influx of thousands as a result of Hurricane Maria,” added Hayward. “Among them are stories of heart-breaking adversity, unimaginable tragedy and devastating circumstances. But with our community’s support, we are rewriting those stories into remarkable journeys of resilience, determination, courage and hope for tomorrow.”

About Heart of Florida United Way

Heart of Florida United Way (HFUW) is Central Florida's most comprehensive health and human services charity and the largest provider of funds to the region's most critical health and human service programs. Last year, it raised and managed \$28 million throughout Orange, Osceola and Seminole counties. HFUW fights for the health, education and financial stability of every person in Central Florida. It operates United Way 2-1-1, Central Florida's information and assistance, crisis, suicide and referral helpline; Volunteer Resource Center; Gifts In Kind Center; Emergency Homelessness Services; and the Ryan White program, which administers nearly \$4 million to provide HIV/AIDS services and referrals. HFUW impacts more than 450,000 individuals annually through its direct service and funded programs. United Way partners with local businesses, government, other charities to increase awareness of local health and human service issues and to inspire hope, provide options and create possibilities for people in need. Visit www.HFUW.org for more information, or call (407) 835-0900.

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