

Behind the **HAMMER**

MENNONITE DISASTER SERVICE / FALL 2019



SPECIAL ISSUE

How MDS puts a project together

A step-by-step look
behind the scenes



Church contact person (CCP) Larry Miller stakes the all-important MDS sign at a work site in Mississippi. (Learn about the vital role of CCPs on page 5.)

SPECIAL ISSUE



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ON THE COVER: Volunteers, vehicles and building materials are just a few of the ingredients needed to put an MDS project together like in Pine Ridge, South Dakota, pictured here.

▶ Watch a video of how MDS puts a project together:
youtube.com/MDSMennonite

Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) is a volunteer network of Anabaptist churches that responds in Christian love to those affected by disasters in Canada and the United States. While the main focus is on cleanup, repair and rebuilding homes, this service touches lives and nurtures hope, faith and wholeness.

Our programs, funded by contributions, aim to assist the most vulnerable community members, individuals and families who, without assistance, would not have the means to recover. MDS volunteers — women and men, youth and adults — provide the skills and labor needed to respond, rebuild and restore.



**Mennonite
Disaster
Service**

Behind the Hammer is published quarterly by Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) and is available for free upon request. This magazine shares the stories of MDS work in the U.S. and Canada and of the more than 5,000 annual volunteers who are the core of MDS. The stories are meant to encourage people to continue expressing the love of God through the work of MDS.

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“Thank you for your spirit of service, compassion and giving. We could not help so many disaster survivors without you.”

KEVIN KING, MDS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



MDS ALL-UNIT MEETING

**February 7–8, 2020
Goshen, Indiana**

REGISTER TODAY

U.S.: 800-241-8111 Canada: 866-261-1274
mds.mennonite.net/all-unit-meeting

DIRECTOR'S LETTER

How can I help?

Many people who see tragic footage of a disaster on TV or in a newspaper or on their phone feel compelled to help as soon as they can. But no matter how well-intentioned, often just showing up at a disaster site, or sending items such as used clothing, creates a “second disaster” that’s a burden on an already-suffering community.

In this special edition of *Behind the Hammer*, we explain the careful process MDS goes through when planning a response to a disaster. Though some responses seem immediate, they are, in fact, planned and refined well before disasters even strike. Informed by decades of experience, MDS partners closely with coalitions such as National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (U.S.), emergency management officials, local long-term disaster recovery committees, and disaster survivors themselves. Together, we seek the answer to the question: how can you best help?

Of course the answer is different with every disaster and every community. And you will find that, in the following pages, there are many ways to help. Would you like to swing a hammer? Or work in an office setting? Do you love to cook for a crowd? Or do you have driving experience? There are so many roles you could fill. Each one is essential to the larger purpose of getting disaster survivors back home.

We hope you learn something new about MDS, even if you’ve been loyally contributing or volunteering for years.

And speaking of contributions: if you want to give something during those harrowing days after a disaster, cash is best. Undesignated funds offer voluntary agencies like MDS the most flexibility in obtaining the most-needed resources. That’s often mobilizing staff, equipment and supplies to reach impacted areas.

Most of all, consider this issue of *Behind the Hammer* a “thank you note” for your spirit of service, compassion and giving. We could not help so many disaster survivors without you, whether you are out in the field as a volunteer, providing critical funding, or uttering a special prayer from home. ■

Kevin King
Executive Director

"Everything was completely destroyed. It hit my heart pretty hard."

CAROLYN SHIMPOCK



When a hurricane, wildfire, tornado or other disaster strikes, the people affected are at the heart of every MDS response. From vehicle fleets to cooks, from tool trailers to job cards, all the facets of MDS operations are geared toward helping people restore their lives and get back home.



Herman and Carolyn Shimpock

1 Disaster strikes



Jim and Sue Carlson

Jim and Sue Carlson

In 2017, in northern British Columbia, 4,700 square miles burned and 65,000 people had to be evacuated.

Jim and Sue Carlson thought their home, nestled in the hills outside of Williams Lake, would be safe. But a fire jumped a nearby river, and came roaring over the hillside. "When the trees behind the house lit up, it was time to leave," said Jim, 70, a rancher. They found shelter with friends.

"When the fire was coming, I accepted that God was in control, and whatever happened was in His plan," said Sue. But what to do after the fire was over? Their house was gone, and there wasn't insurance money to rebuild it.



Herman and Carolyn Shimpock

On August 25, 2017, Hurricane Harvey struck Texas, triggering catastrophic flooding that affected an estimated 13 million people.

Carolyn and Herman Shimpock lived in a mobile home in the small city of La Grange, near the Colorado River. A 6-foot wall of water ripped apart hundreds of homes in their community.

Carolyn, who is hearing impaired and spoke through an interpreter, described what she faced. "The cops came and told us we needed to leave, so we did. Later we found out that the water had completely covered our home. Everything was destroyed." Herman added: "It just happened so fast."

Early Response Teams (ERTs)

Trained by MDS before disasters strike, ERTs travel regionally or locally to do immediate clean up – muck out homes, use chain saws to remove trees and limbs, tarp roofs and make temporary repairs.

Local MDS units

Unit-level responses might include ERT deployment, major repairs, cleanup assistance, or simply checking on a neighbor after a storm.

47 local MDS units are active across Canada and the U.S.



2 First contact

Often, an MDS response starts at the grassroots level with a church contact person or unit leader identifying needs and local crews answering the immediate call.

"It is beautiful, the people that we get to know."

OSIAH HORST, MDS ONTARIO UNIT



Church contact person (CCP)

CCPs often have the best information about local disasters. They inform other MDS representatives, share news about MDS with their congregation, and represent MDS in their community. A CCP works a lot like a neighbor, linking congregations and MDS resources with people in need after a disaster.

More than 1,200 churches across Canada and the U.S. have CCPs who advocate for MDS.

What if my congregation doesn't have a CCP? Then you – or someone you know – could step up and serve by contacting your MDS office (p. 2).



THE FOUR PILLARS

Meaningful work

PILLAR #1

There must be enough **MEANINGFUL WORK** to keep volunteers busy. The substance of that work is cleanup as well as repairs and new builds of primary residences for disaster survivors, with a focus on the most vulnerable individuals and families who would not otherwise have the means to recover. MDS usually works with local long-term recovery committees to determine which homeowners will receive help first.



While smaller-scale disasters are often managed at a local level, major disasters signal a potential full-scale long-term recovery project. To initiate any response — and ensure its quality — MDS must have “four pillars” in place. If even one is missing, it does not happen.

3 Assessing viability

“Four days, 12 meetings, seven conference calls, 400 miles!”

That’s a description of what it takes for MDS to assess the needs after a major disaster. By the time you are seeing heart-wrenching footage of a disaster on the news, MDS is already gearing up for some behind-the-scenes work, starting with monitoring needs and damages through daily conference calls, and receiving reports from local MDS units and church contact people.

In addition, MDS collaborates with other partners on the ground including members of the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (U.S.)



and national or regional emergency officials. Of course, MDS also communicates directly with disaster survivors, asking how they are doing, and really listening to the answer!

The assessment process — accomplished by driving to sites, reading reports,

making phone calls, meeting with partners, and listening to disaster survivors — helps MDS determine whether to set up a long-term recovery operation that could be in place from one to three years or more.

Volunteers



PILLAR #2

The backbone of an MDS response: willing, flexible **VOLUNTEERS** dedicated to serving others. Volunteers not only swing hammers but also cook, do office work, and help out in many other ways onsite. (For a look at a typical day on a job site, see pages 10-11).

Scheduling volunteers means balancing their interest and availability with post-disaster needs, explains Deanna Frey, MDS Coordinator for Weekly Volunteers. “With a hurricane, for example, many people know it’s coming and they know when it has hit, so a lot of people are interested in helping out.”

Sometimes, Frey gets a high volume of calls and emails from interested volunteers. “If I can’t schedule them immediately, I take their information, including their possible availability for the future,” she says.

Funding

PILLAR #3

MDS relies on **FUNDING** through donations to provide fuel, tools, food, utilities and other support for volunteers. Funds for building materials are often provided through partner agencies, foundations or the clients themselves.



Accommodations


PILLAR #4


MDS volunteers coming from afar need **ACCOMMODATIONS** — sometimes a church hall, a camp or a community building that has enough room for bunk beds or cots. If there are no shower facilities, MDS arranges to bring a shower trailer. Local MDS units are often a great resource in seeking available volunteer housing.



"You have to be flexible with the fleet because the needs are different after every disaster."

**DOUG NOLT, MANAGER,
MDS WAREHOUSE IN MISSISSIPPI**

 **45 Passenger Vans**

 **24 Minivans**

MDS Canada office
Winnipeg, Manitoba

U.S. REGION 4

U.S. REGION 3

CANADA

U.S. REGION 2

U.S. REGION 1

MDS binational office and warehouse
Lititz, Pennsylvania

MDS regional warehouse
Columbus, Mississippi

 **61 Trucks**

 **13 Bunk Trailers**


 **5 Kitchen Trailers**


 **4 Office Trailers**


How does MDS move equipment?

Mainly through volunteer drivers who have a commercial driver's license or experience pulling trailers. In the U.S., most equipment originates from MDS warehouses in Pennsylvania and Mississippi. In Canada, the MDS Canada office manages some of the fleet, but the units also trade vehicles back and forth as needed.

"MDS has taken me through all fifty states. This is my life's calling." – Steve Campbell, Volunteer Driver

 **57 Cargo Tool Trailers**

 **18 Flat Deck Trailers**

 **22 Dump Trailers**

 **8 Shower Trailers**

 **16 Semi Tool Trailers**

 **19 RV Travel Trailers**

4 Mobilizing the fleet

MDS began dramatically expanding its fleet of vehicles and trailers in 2005 after Hurricane Katrina struck. By 2018, the MDS fleet collectively traveled more than 600,000 miles to respond to disasters in a single year.



"The fleet is never all in one place, so sometimes it's hard for people to realize how large it is."
– Darrin Yoder, MDS fleet & logistics manager

"Sometimes the love that we show just in doing our work can be a very powerful kind of message to the people we're working with."

JAY GOERIG, VOLUNTEER



Wake up – and gear up

A volunteer's day begins early, climbing out of the bunk trailer and heading to the dining room to pack a lunch before breakfast. The cooks rise even earlier to ensure breakfast is ready on time, and then begin pre-planning for the night's dinner as well.

Before volunteers even arrive, an office manager and project director have set up registration, a tracking system for supplies, and many other facets of planning – ensuring the site is fully equipped with vehicles, tools, housing and meaningful work.

Spiritual gear, too

Did you know that every MDS project has a spiritual component? After breakfast, a morning devotion and sometimes a song help send volunteers off to work with a spirit of camaraderie and a sense of purpose.



On the crew

Weekly volunteers rely on guidance from experienced leadership volunteers who stay on a job site for a month or two, or even longer. Project directors and crew leaders direct weekly volunteers to the houses they'll be working on and may also fill them in on a homeowner's story and the characteristics of a community.

Volunteers may fan out and work on repairs for several different houses, or they may all converge on a wall-raising at just the right time. Sometimes volunteers get a chance to meet the homeowner and share stories.

End of day clean up

MDS volunteers return tools to the trailer, sweep the site, and ensure everything is in order so the next day's work can begin smoothly.

Vehicles are regularly maintained and, if there's a breakdown, they are repaired or replaced as soon as possible.

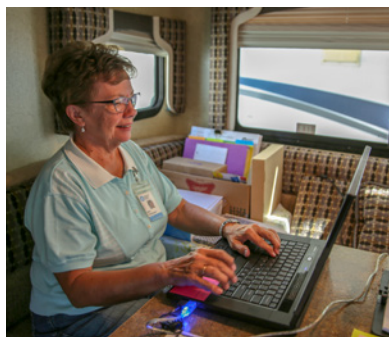
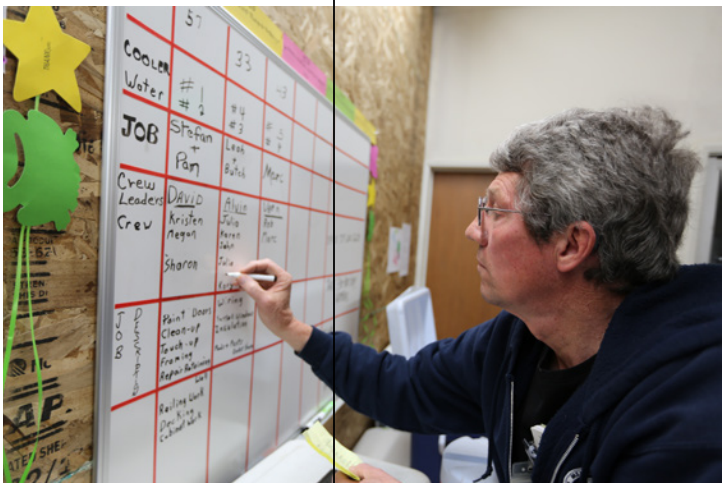
Sharing and bonding

After eating dinner together, volunteers report on the work they've done each day. Weekly volunteers help wash dishes then enjoy some free time, while leadership volunteers meet to plan the next days, weeks and months ahead.



5 Project in action

Welcome to the MDS volunteer worksite: a one-of-a-kind, busy, thriving place. Here's a glimpse of a day in the life of a volunteer — and all the people who make that blessed day possible.





"My heart is so full. I want God to bless every single person who touched this house. We just love and appreciate everything that God has done. We love you all so much."

HERMAN SHIMPOCK

"I really appreciate everybody coming for the blessing of our home. It really touches my heart in a way that I don't know how to describe. It's just so beautiful, this home. I pray that God blesses you. He poured out His Blessings on us."

CAROLYN SHIMPOCK



6 Home dedication

Attending an MDS home dedication is a life-changing experience. Though every one is unique, there are some longstanding traditions MDS observes to bring deeper meaning to the moment, including the gifting of a quilted wallhanging.



"I'm not a person who easily accepts help. Now I'm asking the Lord to help me be a gracious recipient."

JIM CARLSON



A time of celebration

The home dedication brings together MDS volunteers, partners, family and neighbors to celebrate the completion of a project.

First, MDS presents the homeowner with a Bible, accompanied with a prayer for God's blessings on a new home.

Then, the homeowner receives a quilted wallhanging, made of many pieces, representing the many volunteers and supporters who contributed time, money and prayers.

MDS leaders ask the homeowner to sign a "job card," or an agreement first signed by both parties at the start of the work, then again upon completion.

Finally, MDS presents the homeowner with the key, officially beginning their new life story.

I've always wondered ...

Does MDS do anything to mitigate future disaster damage?

MDS volunteers not only help repair and build homes, but they also help make those homes more "disaster-proof." From better-built roofs, to hurricane straps, to special drywall that can withstand floodwater, MDS practices disaster prevention whenever possible.

What if I have no construction skills?

MDS depends on volunteers with all levels of skills, from beginners to those with extensive homebuilding expertise. Weekly volunteer crews are combined and balanced so that people with fewer skills are paired with those who can teach them onsite.

What if MDS sees a disaster survivor in great need while working on another person's home?

MDS can connect that survivor with the local long-term recovery group, organization, or individual who keeps a detailed list of people in need. This ensures a fair process for deciding where MDS volunteers will go and when.

Will I get to meet the homeowner?

Sometimes. Whether a homeowner is able to be present or not, MDS volunteers work with the same amount of effort, care, and spirit of service. When a homeowner is present, a listening ear is often appreciated.

Where does MDS's funding come from?

Most funding comes from grassroots donors like you. Those funds go primarily toward supporting volunteers. Partner agencies, particularly in the U.S., often fund the cost of building materials. Additional resources may come from the homeowner or from state, provincial or federal agencies.

Do MDS volunteers take away work from local contractors and construction workers?

No. MDS provides free labor and project management for disaster survivors who are unable to pay private contractors for their work. MDS volunteers also help the local economy by purchasing goods and services locally.

Why doesn't MDS require people to put "sweat equity" into their homes?

The disaster survivors MDS helps are often unable to repair or rebuild their homes because of physical disabilities, childcare issues, long work hours, and other life challenges that have been exacerbated by a disaster. Rather than require or judge a homeowner on how much he or she is able to contribute, MDS volunteers adopt a spirit of service that brings God's love into a home, regardless of whether a homeowner is helping, or even present at all.



What if I'm not 18 years old and I'd like to volunteer?

MDS has many opportunities for young volunteers, including youth-oriented summer projects and opportunities for young people to work alongside their family members.

How does MDS decide where to work?

No matter how large or small the disaster, MDS assesses where to work based on the four pillars (see pages 6-7). MDS focuses efforts on helping the most vulnerable people.

Do I get to choose which project I serve at?

Sure! MDS has a user-friendly volunteer scheduling calendar that shows all slots available at various project locations. Keep in mind that MDS also highly values volunteers who are willing to go to any location they are needed.

Does MDS help only Mennonites?

MDS helps the most vulnerable disaster survivors regardless of background. Some may be Mennonite, while other homeowners come from a variety of faith communities or have not yet found a faith community. MDS does not proselytise or try to convert people, but MDS volunteers work with Christian presence as "the hands and feet of Jesus."

What if a volunteer wants to drive to a disaster site and just start pitching in?

While compassion and service are always commendable, it's better to connect with an Early Response Team (see page 5), or to get yourself on the MDS volunteer wait list before a disaster even strikes. That way MDS can use your energy and skills in the most efficient way possible.

When does MDS close a project?

Most often an MDS project closes once disaster survivors are finally back in their homes. Sometimes, projects close seasonally, particularly in areas where weather is a factor. Other times, one or more of the "pillars" (see page 6) are no longer in place, so MDS moves its focus to projects that will be sustainable and stable.





Menonite Disaster Service

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help MDS get disaster
survivors back home