

RED HOOK INITIATIVE: A COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO HURRICANE SANDY



Seven Months After Sandy

When the Red Hook Initiative (RHI) was formed in 2002, it was founded on the belief that people in a community have the power to create their own social change. Over ten years RHI has grown into a community-based organization where individuals are given access to tools and resources both to improve their own lives, and to positively impact the lives of their families, neighbors, and friends.

On October 30, 2012, when Hurricane Sandy left thousands of residents of the NYCHA Red Hook Houses without electricity, heat, or running water, but left our center unharmed, our staff and participants did what they had done every day for the last 10 years—they organized and took action to respond to the needs of their own community. They were quickly joined in their efforts by a flood of support from thousands of volunteers, community agencies, elected officials, corporations, and donors. The response in Red Hook was a testimony to the power of neighbors and fellow New Yorkers caring for each other.

At the peak of the crisis, over 1,200 people were coming through the Red Hook Initiative doors to charge phones, get a hot meal, pick up supplies, receive medical or legal support, and offer to help. Many of these individuals had never been to RHI before the storm, but found a place where they felt cared for and where their needs were met. In the seven months since the storm, RHI has continued to respond to the changing needs of our community in the wake of the disaster.

We are proud to share this report highlighting the response in a time of crisis and our long-term plan to continue to build the strength and resilience of Red Hook residents. It is with your help that we do this vital work.

With deep appreciation,



Jill Eisenhard
Founder &
Executive Director

Lisa Cowan
Board Chair

June 6, 2013

About Red Hook Initiative

RED HOOK INITIATIVE

767 Hicks Street
Brooklyn, NY 11231
718-858-6782
www.rhicenter.org

YEAR FOUNDED

2002

MISSION

We believe that social change to overcome systemic inequities begins with empowered youth. In partnership with community adults, we nurture young people in Red Hook to be inspired, resilient, and healthy, and to envision themselves as co-creators of their lives, community and society.

VISION

We envision a Red Hook where all young people can pursue their dreams and grow into independent adults who contribute to their families and community.

NUMBER SERVED / YEAR:

2,500

FULL TIME STAFF 11

PART TIME STAFF 15

YOUTH / YOUNG ADULT STAFF 65

BOARD MEMBERS 13

STAFF FROM RED HOOK 87

ANNUAL BUDGET

\$2,000,000

AWARDS

Brooke W. Mahoney Award for
Board Leadership, Finalist, 2013
New York Magazine & NPCC Excellence
in Nonprofit Management Award,
Gold Medal, 2012
Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce,
Building Brooklyn Award, 2012
Union Square Award, 2007



@rhookinitiative

tumblr.

@rhookinitiative



www.facebook.com/RedHookInitiative

CRISIS

On October 29, 2012 Hurricane Sandy hit Red Hook—it damaged homes and businesses and left thousands without power, heat, or running water. The Red Hook Initiative’s doors were open 12–14 hours per day for 24 consecutive days, serving the needs of thousands of Red Hook residents. The work described here was the result of extensive collaboration and partnership. There were so many people coming and going, and such a quickly changing landscape of need that it is hard to pin down the exact numbers of people we saw. What follows are our best estimates to describe the community response. Services were run out of RHI and other local agencies, with RHI staff, board and young adults working with scores of volunteers and partner organizations.



Volunteers served and delivered 2 meals a day for up to 1,000 people for 3 weeks.

Section 1

Crisis: A Snapshot of the First Three Weeks

ACCESS

COLLECTING & DISTRIBUTING SUPPLIES

1000s of batteries, candles, blankets, hand-warmers, space heaters, canned food, and other emergency supplies were distributed

OFFERING SAFE SPACE

Our building became a warming station, meeting space, hub for government and emergency responders

PROVIDING CRITICAL HEALTH CARE

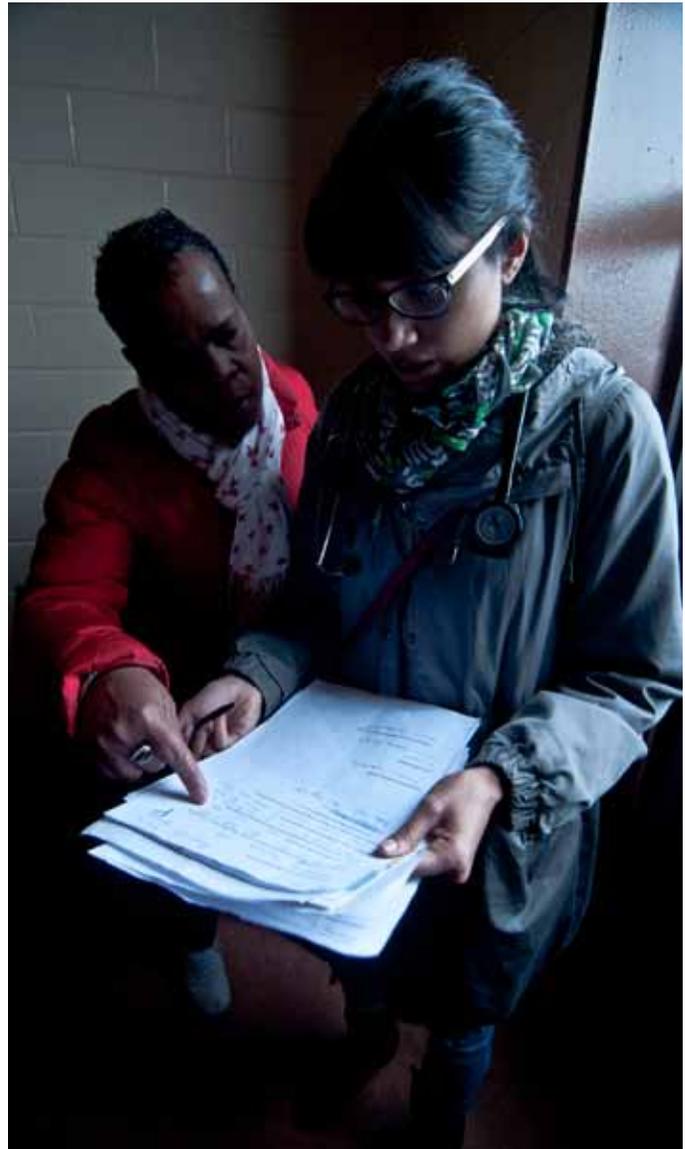
Hosted an urgent care clinic coordinated by a medical student with Occupy Sandy and staffed by volunteer medical professionals

VISITING HOME-BOUND RESIDENTS

293 people received basic health care. We purchased and distributed emergency medical supplies and successfully transitioned all cases to long-term care providers.

PROVIDING SOCIAL WORK SERVICES

Social workers offered crisis counseling, assistance with FEMA applications, and covered emergency costs related to the storm.



Section 1

Crisis: A Snapshot of the First Three Weeks

COMMUNICATION

ASSEMBLING & DISSEMINATING INFO

People came for cell charging, computer access, and info updates

Launched new website allowing for daily blog posts and communications around current needs and resources for volunteers and residents

ADVOCATING FOR A RESPONSE

Staff and volunteers led a canvass 2x/day to assess the status of electricity, heat, water in NYCHA Houses, this info was shared with gov't officials
Gave tours to local and national media outlets and elected officials, raising awareness of the situation

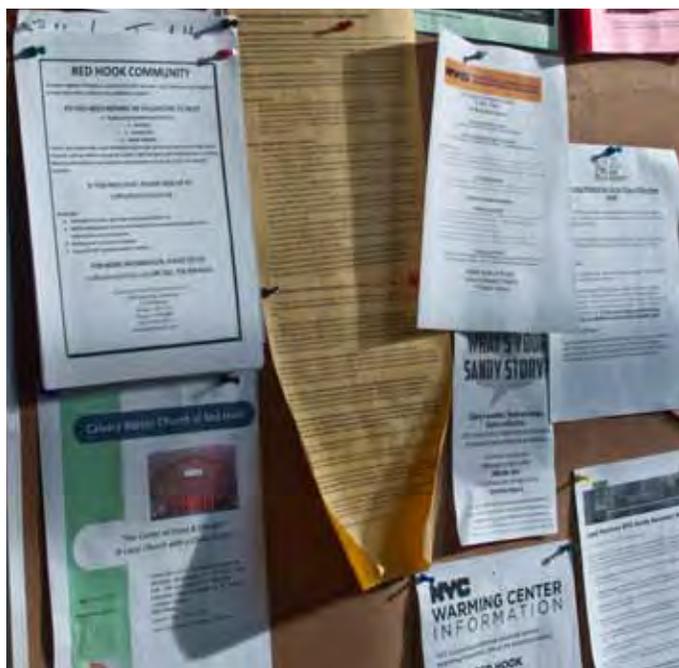
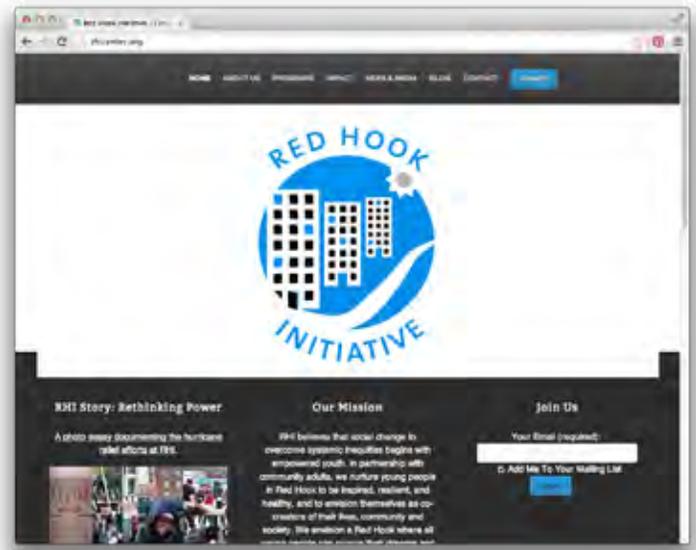
MOBILIZING THOUSANDS OF VOLUNTEERS

1000s of volunteers cleaned up businesses and private homes, made deliveries to the home bound, brought in supplies and staffed emergency stations throughout Red Hook

HARNESSING SOCIAL MEDIA

Used RHI's network to mobilize volunteers, secure emergency supplies and hot meals, and advocate for attention to the Red Hook crisis

(Growth during the crisis: from 350 to 3,700 Twitter followers; from 150 to 2760 Facebook "Likes")



Section 1 Crisis: Timeline



OCT 30

RHI opens as a warming & charging center, serves dinner. Sets up food pantry and distributes supplies. Volunteers begin to show up



NOV 2

Food pantry and supplies move from RHI to Visitation Church and NYCHA Miccio Center.

NOV 4

Marathon cancelled. RHI space heater distribution in NYCHA parking lot with NYPD support. RHI launches new website.

NOV 6

President Obama re-elected. City assigns a Brooklyn borough recovery coordinator

OCT 28

Mandatory evaluation of Zone A, subways shut down.



OCT 27

NYCHA begins shutting down elevators, boilers & electrical systems.

OCT 29

Hurricane Sandy hits NYC.

OCT 31

RHI assesses what community partners are open and functional. Legal Aid services at RHI. Community meeting at the Flagpole.

NOV 3

390 NYCHA buildings in NYC affected by the storm. 287 have power. 4 have heat and hot water

NOV 5

Meals moved to Cavalry Church. Food pantry/ supplies at Visitation Church and Good Shepherd Services. Recycle a Bicycle donates bikes/ repair. Restore Red Hook launched.





NOV 7

Snow storm, FEMA trucks 4000 blankets into Red Hook, Heating centers opened at the Brooklyn Public Library and the NYCHA Miccio

NOV 8

Portable streetlights in streets, porta-potties arrive & running water back on allowing toilets to be flushed. FEMA Disaster Recovery Center (DRC) opens at IKEA



NOV 10

RHI and Good Shepherd Services awarded City contracts to staff Red Hook Recovery Center in Coffey Park



NOV 11

NYCHA reports that power is back in 6 Red Hook buildings, with 11 to go. Cold water is back in all of them.

NOV 14

Red Hook joins Red Hook Coalition as one of five lead agencies

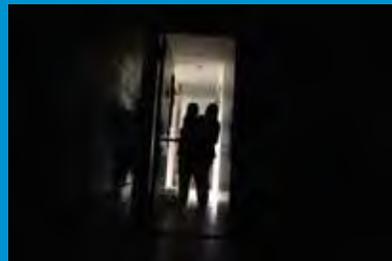


NOV 8

Doctors from NYU arrive to provide door-to-door visits and critical care

NOV 9

19 Red Hook buildings that house 3,635 residents still don't have power. 22 buildings that house 4,015 residents still without heat/hot water



NOV 10

FEMA assists in expanding RHI WiFi network to Coffey Park; use jumps to 1,000 per day

NOV 15

Heat restored for most RH Houses (Day 17)*
(*Sporadic service for rest of 2012)



NOV 12

Power back on for most RH Houses*

Section 1

Crisis: Community Involvement

There were an incredible number of organizations involved in Red Hook's hurricane response. The Red Hook Initiative worked with many of these existing groups in the community who were able to provide basic needs.



WARMTH

Cell charging/
heating centers



FOOD

Organized
and/or distributed
hot meals



SUPPLIES

Collected and
distributed
essential supplies



VOLUNTEERS

Organized
volunteer efforts



MEDICAL

Canvassed
NYCHA homes/
provided medical
assistance



INFORMATION

Provided informa-
tion, legal counsel,
and FEMA application
assistance

• PORTSIDE NEW YORK



NYU MEDICAL CENTER



LEGAL AID SOCIETY



• RED HOOK JUSTICE CENTER



• GOOD SHEPHERD SERVICES



• RESTORE RED HOOK



• VISITATION CHURCH



• RIVER OF GOD CHURCH



• FALCONWORKS



• RED HOOK INITIATIVE



• SWBIDC



• OCCUPY RED HOOK



• CALVARY BAPTIST CHURCH



• NYCHA MICCIO



NYLAG



• RED HOOK LIBRARY



• BUMBLEBEES R US



• DANCE THEATER ETC.



• ADDED VALUE



OCCUPY SANDY



• IKEA BROOKLYN



• RED HOOK FOOD VENDORS



The intent of this diagram is to highlight the community-based response. It does not include government agencies, however there were many representatives from federal, state and city government and city agencies who dedicated many hours to the recovery effort in Red Hook. We apologize for any group that was accidentally omitted. To add to this chart, please email us at info@rhicenter.org.

RESPONSE

Once electricity, heat, and running water returned to the public housing community and a majority of private homes and businesses, RHI began to support residents to handle the emerging issues, shifting from emergency relief work to long-term recovery.



During the storm, we increased our existing infrastructure to provide free WiFi for 1,000 users per day

Section 2

Response: Meeting Community Needs

STAFFING THE NYC RECOVERY CENTER

Alongside Good Shepherd Services, RHI staff provided access to disaster-related benefits to 100s of residents. Trailers were open 12 hours daily, until 1/19/2013.

PROVIDING CASE MANAGEMENT

Supported 47 residents apply for benefits; transitioned 44 home-bound individuals food delivery, and connected 38 seniors to ongoing services with the Department for the Aging.

MOBILIZING UNEMPLOYED RESIDENTS

Connected over 40 residents to employment related to hurricane recovery.

PROVIDING FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Coordinated gift and food donations for over 1,000 youth during the holidays.

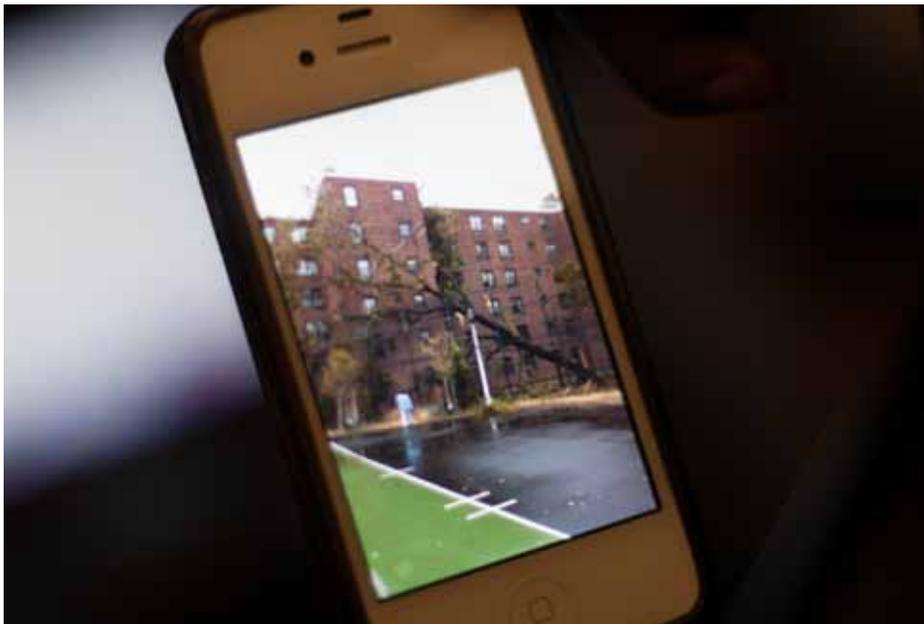
Distributed over \$50,000 in financial support / rebuilding expenses for those facing extreme financial hardship.

Hosted 4 months of free tax prep with Food Bank of NYC to maximize financial resources returning to Red Hook

CREATING COMMUNITY WIFI

Presented at the White House at a FEMA “best practice” roundtable

Hired 5 youth as “Digital Stewards” to build and maintain the network



LOOKING FORWARD

As we look ahead to the long-term recovery from the ravages of Hurricane Sandy, our work will be done in collaboration with young people and their families, and our community partners, as together we rebuild and create a better Red Hook. As we have done for over a decade, RHI will continue to provide people with access to resources, opportunities, and the skills needed to improve their own lives and their community.



At RHI, over 500 youth each year learn to be resilient in the face of life's challenges.

Section 3

Looking Forward: Continuing to Build a Resilient Community

PROVIDING ACCESS TO RESOURCES

Enroll youth in long-term programs focused on education, employment, and health; access to opportunities increases personal resiliency and economic self-sufficiency

Offer intensive coaching and case management to over 250 members ages 14–24 to define a self-chosen path toward independence

Provide paid employment to over 100 youth working at RHI or a local businesses—building personal skills while helping the community recover

IMPROVING NETWORKS & COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS

Expand the WiFi project to cover 80% of open spaces in Red Hook

Hire and train young adults to develop apps, web content and to maintain the network

Participate in tours, discussions, task forces, and coalitions in an effort to share our lessons learned and plan for future disasters

Develop a comprehensive volunteer program

CREATING COMMUNITY-DRIVEN SOLUTIONS

Develop a long-term neighborhood-wide emergency preparedness plan that identifies and trains local leaders to create their own social safety net

Collaborate with organizing groups so residents may advocate for long-term repairs to the NYCHA Red Hook Houses in a way that best prepares for the future

Develop new programs to address poverty alleviation (transportation, safety, medical care, food access, financial literacy, employment).



Section 3

Looking Forward: What People Were Saying

“Word spread that RHI was open, and almost instantly it became the center of a community – the only place anyone knew to turn to.

Staff and board members quickly realized that it was time to step up its range of activity to help the community

that had been depleted of both services and members that evacuated.”

–Georgia Kral, *Metrofocus*

“... You were clearly the most effective entity post-Sandy, and we have been telling everyone we meet that they should

take notes from Red Hook Initiative in terms of ability to make a marked difference in this recovery.”

–Mark Snyder, Red Hook Winery

“... Kraushar and his team also set up a makeshift clinic in the Red Hook Initiative

community center– a place in which medically trained professionals would remain on call in case someone in the neighborhood had a medical emergency... Soon, a comprehensive volunteer medical team was formed, and various doctors were sent out to residents who had reported medical problems.”

–Loren Grush, Fox News

“The epicenter of much of this citizen relief work has been the RHI [Red Hook Initiative], a local non-profit focused on

empowering the young people of the projects to be ‘co-creators’ of their own lives...”

–Tony Karon, *Time*

“Your army showed up en force yesterday as requested. 30-40 people spent their Sunday knee-deep in seawater, helping me clean my distillery. A greater testament to kindness, generosity, and the wealth of the human spirit, I’ve never experienced. With RHIs help, what would have taken us weeks was accomplished in a matter of hours.

I have never been prouder to be part of a community as tightly knit as Red Hook.”

–Jack from Brooklyn

“As much of the rest of New York returned to business as usual, those in the affected areas began to wonder where the help was. Three days after Sandy, with the basements of the Red Hook Houses still flooded and apartments still without light, heat, or working plumbing, resident

Toni Khadijah James summed up the neighborhood’s sense of isolation. ‘This is our Katrina.’”

–Nick Pronto, *The Village Voice*



Section 3

Looking Forward: RHI Staff Reflect on Sandy

ALISA

The [day after the storm] I got a text saying,

‘If you need anything, RHI is open.’

Word of mouth got out to the community. We fed them that day. Supplies arrived. People were in the big room charging phones and laptops. People who live in the community who were going through the same thing, they were coming here to volunteer.



Alisa Pizarro
Lead Community Organizer
Hired at RHI in 2006

Current project: Training Social Justice Fellows to tackle community issues through organizing.

TONY

I knew we had become the hub of activities but until I showed up, I didn’t know exactly what that meant.

It felt like a war zone because people were wandering around looking for stuff and at night when there was no power, it was so dark... you couldn’t see the road in front of you.



Tony Schloss
Director of Media Programs
Hired at RHI in 2007

Current project: Launching a free WiFi network in Red Hook and training youth as Digital Stewards of the network.

RASHEED

Sandy was something tragic to everybody but

I didn’t know how ... a community could get together until Sandy hit.

I [still] see the people that I helped today... I didn’t know I had that much of an impact on people ...it builds up my spirit.”



Rasheed Johnson
Youth Ambassador
Hired at RHI in 2012

Current project: Working toward high school graduation; applying to college in graphic design.

RICKY

During the storm, there were no differences between the people who live in Red Hook.

Everybody came together as a whole. Everybody wanted to come in to RHI and help out. It was as if everyone was a family.



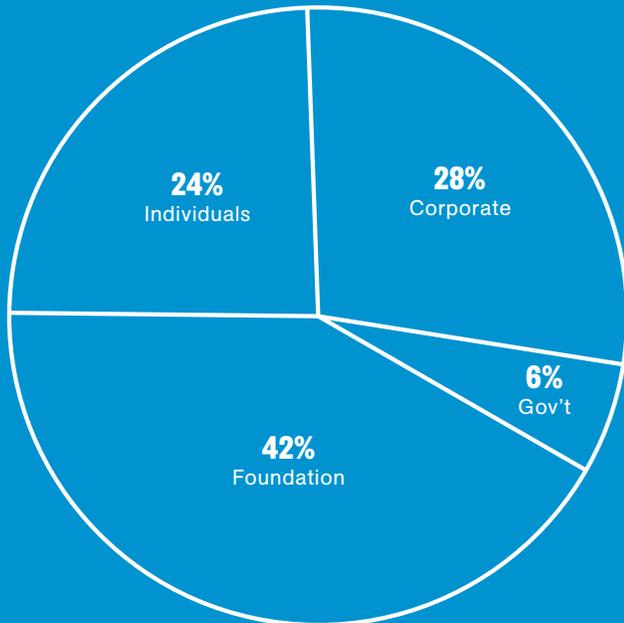
Ricky Santana
Middle School Program Coordinator
Hired at RHI in 2006

Current project: Overseeing RHI’s middle school program; currently a student at NY City Tech pursuing a bachelors in Mathematics Education.

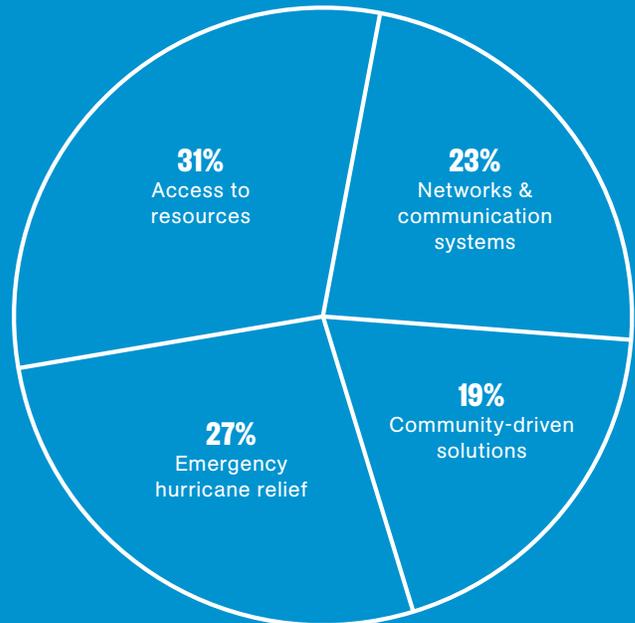
With the Support of Many

RHI received \$1.3M in contributions for Hurricane relief, both short and long-term.

SOURCES OF SUPPORT



ALLOCATION OF FUNDS



*Numbers as of April 30, 2013

RED HOOK INITIATIVE TEAM

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Lisa Cowan
Gregg Bishop
Chris Egleson
Janice McGuire
Jeff Ballow
Dominique Bravo
Millicent Comrie
Phil Halliburton
Brandon Holley
David Ma
Maria Mottola
Gregory T. O'Connell
Eden Wurmfeld

SENIOR LEADERSHIP

Sandy Brockwell
Jill Eisenhard
Jade Elias
Anna Ortega-Williams

OPERATIONS

Naiyma Holmes
Sandy Palacios-Serrano
Sherri Harden
Frances Medina
Shaniqua Smith
Anthony Wooten
Maureen Beaton

MIDDLE SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Danny Aiken
Tiwan Burrus
Deanna Cherry
Ricky Santana
Keyanna Silverman-Maddox
Mary Victor

HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Ryan Daley
Beatrice Gonzalez
Sheryl Nash-Chisholm
Sean Spillane
Tanya Wilson

YOUNG ADULT PROGRAMS

Rebecca Fishburne
Alisa Pizarro
Fabiola Prostenus
Tony Schloss
Carlos Viveros

Photo Credits:

Rachel Falcone, Michael Harlan Turkell, John Moore, kamau ware

Baptist
Church
Serving LUNCH
and Dinner
12 Noon and 5PM

HOT FOOD

10 9 Noon + 5pm

~~Church
BEO~~

RHI is the best of the best. They're God's right hand, not only for me, but for everybody in the neighborhood... there are no words to say thank you.

—A Red Hook resident on RHI's Sandy response