

# GRANTEES IN ACTION

## Forward Puerto Rico Fund

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In September 2017, Hurricanes Irma and Maria left Puerto Rico in a state of emergency. The electric power grid totally destroyed, communications around the island was offline, and many roads were totally inaccessible. Nonprofit organizations assumed the role of first responders, tending to the immediate needs of vulnerable communities and organizing relief efforts.

**Through the FORWARD Puerto Rico Fund, key organizations were able to expand their outreach and create special projects to tackle the particular set of challenges these storms left in their wake.**

We share with you the testimonies of some of these organizations and their contributions to Puerto Rico's recovery. Local community-based groups set up collection centers and brigades to distribute water, food, clothing, and basic supplies; worked with children, poor communities, the disabled and the homeless; brought solar power to remote areas; and used the arts and culture to deal with the experience of the disaster. Each organization is contributing in a unique and important way to moving Puerto Rico forward.

# Boys & Girls Clubs OF PUERTO RICO

*Olga Ramos, President*

The passing of hurricanes Irma on September 5th and Maria on September 20th severely damaged three of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Puerto Rico (BG CPR)' s 13 centers in Puerto Rico. Many of the BG CPR staff personally suffered the effects of the storm. But a few days after the Hurricanes, they returned to work to assess damages and determine how best to help their communities. A survey of BG CPR programs participants revealed that 10% of them had lost everything and many others were in need of food and water.

**The BG CPR offers after school programs for kids and teens throughout Puerto Rico through community-based centers. Programs are designed to empower youth to become good citizens, and lead productive and healthy lives.**

Educational programs include bilingual tutors and provide recreational activities in a safe environment. Ninety percent (90%) of children who



participate in these programs live in households with a median income below the poverty level

The town of Loíza is one of the poorest in Puerto Rico. It has the highest proportion of people of African descent. As a coastal town, it suffered the widespread destruction of homes. Electricity and water were not available after the first of the two hurricanes. With the help of volunteers and several civic organizations the BG CPR turned its Loíza location into a community support center, collecting and distributing water, food, clothing, and basic supplies. The Center also organized a crew that cooked and served thousands of hot meals.

BGCPR centers in Vieques, Bayamón, Santurce and Isabela were also used as community support centers. They distributed food and essential items donated by diverse foundations, corporations and individuals they organized medical evaluations by volunteer doctors, and assistance in applying for FEMA support. Resources were available to anyone who needed them, regardless of whether their children are enrolled in the programs or not. All this occurred while still offering their programs.

Public schools were closed, but BGCPR was open. “We did not have to think twice about it,” said Olga Ramos, president of BGCPR. “We are known for ensuring the wellbeing of our children, and it must be so in this moment of historical crisis. Our programs help to give participants a sense of security and allows the parents to return to work while schools are closed. This, in turn, helps the economic recovery.”

“Even before the hurricanes, our participants were already facing a difficult situation since most of the homes we reach are economically deprived,” said Eduardo Carrera, BGCPR chief executive officer. “Our objective has always been to provide youth with the resources to explore their own interests, develop their talents and thrive in the current economy. This crisis will only make us stronger and give us the energy to continue. We will continue to assist our boys and girls to acquire the necessary skills to find jobs or to explore entrepreneurship so that they become economically independent and contribute to their community”.



# Casa Pueblo

*Dr. Arturo Massol Deyá, Executive Director*

Among the many projects and initiatives spearheaded by the community organization Casa Pueblo, located in the town of Adjuntas, those involving solar power have become a priority since Hurricane Maria devastated the island in September. The topic of renewable energy becomes more and more relevant as the months pass and many of Puerto Rico's rural communities, including most of Adjuntas and its neighboring towns, remain without power.

As part of their response to the humanitarian crisis that followed the storm, Casa Pueblo distributed solar-powered lamps to 80% of homes in Adjuntas, as well as in Jayuya, Utuado, Yauco, Castañer, Lares, Loíza, Vieques, Aibonito, Humacao, and other municipalities. The organization's home base, which has been operating with solar power since 1999, became an oasis for people in the southern and central regions of the island to charge their phones and communicate with their loved ones outside of the island.

**Currently, Casa Pueblo is focusing on establishing solar communities. The organization installed solar panels with energy storage and battery systems in 10 homes in Adjuntas, giving priority to those with residents requiring dialysis or respiratory therapy.**

They also installed solar power systems at a nursing home, the Head Start center, and the municipal shelter.

They are now in the process of selecting the first 16 houses that will receive solar powered refrigerators. This initiative is being funded by the FORWARD Puerto Rico Fund and will eventually impact 25 to 30 residences in Adjuntas. The expectation is that these will become energy oasis in their communities, allowing others to also store food and medicines that require refrigeration.





The hurricane also sped up the implementation of two energy-based projects that were already in the works. In January, Radio Casa Pueblo became the first radio station in the Caribbean to operate 100% with renewable energy. And in February, Casa Pueblo will inaugurate a solar-powered cinema.

**Casa Pueblo's long-term goal is to inspire a transition to a renewable energy model across the island, which is why they created the campaign #iLuminarPRconSOL.**

“From an educational point of view we will show the community and the island that there are other ways to handle (the energy crisis),” explained associated director of Casa Pueblo, Arturo Massol Deya.



“Casa Pueblo has been pushing for a long time for a transition to an energetic model that is self-sufficient, where we can leave behind fossil fuels and move towards clean energy sources. This isn't new, it's an agenda that has the conservation of natural and environmental resources in mind. Hurricane Maria emphasized the need to provoke this transition. And since we don't have control or much faith in this happening from the top down, it falls on us to create this change from the bottom up,” he added.



CENTRO DE

# Periodismo Investigativo

Carla Minet, Executive Director

In the aftermath of hurricane Maria, the Center for Investigative Journalism (CPI) has published dozens of high-impact stories. “We were the first to report from the mountainous region, which motivated the commercial media to move outside the metro area,” said Carla Minet, Executive Director of the CPI. “Our team has been reporting with great commitment, a deep sense of urgency and critical vision. We have visited communities in many affected towns such as Utuado, Salinas, Cidra, Cayey, Ponce, Ciales, Caguas, Santurce, Aguadilla, Mayagüez, Dorado, Toa Baja and Maunabo, among others.”

CPI tackled issues such as the undercounting of hurricane-related deaths by the Puerto Rican government provoking an official US Senate investigation. Working in collaboration with the Miami Herald, CPI also published a documented chronological

history of where the emergency operation has failed.

**“We have been at the forefront of the in-depth coverage of health issues and contaminated water consumption, of the social repercussions of the curfew, as well as analysis on how the issue of Puerto Rico’s public debt impacts recovery efforts, among other relevant issues,” said Minet.**

By publishing most of their stories in Spanish and English, CPI’s impact generates international interest in Puerto Rico, and some of their stories have become “breaking news”.

The hurricane has motivated CPI to set new goals. As the director of the CPI explained, “we need to expand our coverage so that our stories and research have the greatest possible impact.





We are recruiting additional journalists, photographers, videographers, translators and data management specialists, and have new expenses such as satellite phones to compensate for the lack of electricity and wi-fi throughout the island, batteries, transportation and food and lodging.” The FORWARD Puerto Rico Fund is providing support to CPI to enable them to advance toward their goals and continue their impressive work.

**“We are convinced, and we are witnessing it happen, that information is a key element in the recovery process of our country.”**

The Center for Investigative Journalism (CPI) is a nonprofit organization founded in 2007 that promotes quality journalism free of political and commercial ties.

Their web page is: [www.periodismoinvestigativo.com](http://www.periodismoinvestigativo.com). CPI has investigated issues including political corruption, favoritism in government contracting, electoral campaign financing, health, environment, and the economy. Its litigation on public

access to information has won national and international recognition.



# Centros Sor Isolina Ferré

*José Luis Díaz Cotto, Chief Executive Officer*

Founded in 1969 in the La Playa sector of the city of Ponce by a catholic nun, Sor Isolina Ferré, the Centers that bear her name belong to a non-profit organization that promotes the full development of the human being. The Sor Isolina Ferré Centers (CSIF) serve over 37,000 people of all ages who reside in 22 municipalities, in the areas of dropout prevention, violence prevention, and community empowerment and development through advocacy, education, and training programs.

After the devastation left by Hurricane María, CSIF has refocused all its resources in the short term, to serve María's victims in 71 low income communities located in the southern and central regions of Puerto Rico, San Juan,

and Canóvanas. As part of operation "A Solidary Embrace for Puerto Rico," CSIF is operating two donation/collection centers. Aid shipments sent from Puerto Ricans from the United States and donations received locally are being distributed to places where no other assistance is being provided. As of November 7, 2017, 12,378 persons had been served by volunteer social workers and individuals who are distributing supplies house by house in low income communities and making an assessment of other needs.

**An estimated 144,290 tons of food, 11,117 gallons of water and other articles such as mattresses and gas stoves have been distributed across the island.**





# ConnectRelief

Michael Fernández, Executive Director

During the crisis that followed hurricanes Irma and Maria, one of the biggest challenges was effective communication, particularly between people with the resources and ability to help and communities in urgent need of supplies and assistance. Responding to this situation, the non-profit organization Caras con Causa, led by executive director Michael Fernández, recruited programmers from the technology company Propel BI to create ConnectRelief, a digital platform for collecting data after natural disasters.

Initially ConnectRelief was meant to assist the Virgin Islands with their recovery efforts after Irma. However, the arrival of Hurricane Maria a week later modified those plans and the platform was launched in Puerto Rico much sooner than anticipated.

In the six months since the storm, volunteers have collected and published data on the ConnectRelief application and website listing materials, supplies and services that are needed, divided by municipal-

ities, communities, shelters, retirement homes, among other categories. This allows the available help to be directed to those who need it the most.

**By collecting all that information in one place, they also seek to avoid duplicating efforts in some communities, leaving other areas that have received less publicity unattended.**



ConnectRelief collaborates with over a dozen non-profit organizations, community groups and other entities that use the platform to maximize recovery efforts, keep their information up to date, coordinate brigades and projects and recruit volunteers.

The person in charge of the ConnectRelief project, María Eugenia Soto, points to the University Sagrado Corazon (USC) in Santurce as an example of how the platform is being used as a tool to organize relief efforts. A group of students, professors, and volunteers used the application to create a census of the needs of the communities surrounding the university, particularly Villa Palmeras where they collected data from 280 families from October to December.

“With the census, we indentified needs house by house. We knew the needs of each street, of the sector, of the community, of the municipality. This strategy allowed for a better distribution of supplies, and the publication of data on the ConnectRelief page allowed people outside of

Puerto Rico to know what type of supplies were needed and where to send them,” says Carmen Chazulle Rivera, director of the USC Community Liaison Center.

**“It’s not just about collecting data to identify affected areas, but to actually figure out how to efficiently distribute supplies in the face of scarcity,” she adds.**

Within the next hurricane season only months away, ConnectRelief’s programmers are making improvements to the application to make it more agile and easier to use. ConnectRelief is also increasing their utility by creating preparation protocols, a training plan for individuals and groups, and protocols for emergency management and reconstruction and recovery. All of these efforts are aimed at creating a public, comprehensive and transparent data base available to the government, the private sector and the nonprofit sector when facing future disaster situations.



# CREARTE

Brenda Liz Santos Hernández, Executive Director

The hallways of the CREARTE center in San Juan fill with the sounds of teenagers chatting, teachers calling their classrooms to order, and children running energetically from one class to another. Some parts of the building are well lit thanks to a generator, while others remain dark, but aside from

**“We had to transform, and we’ve added to our operation a project to rescue, to empower, to reconstruct the communities that were most affected by Hurricane Maria”**

*Brenda Liz Santos Hernández, executive director of CREARTE.*

that everything goes on as if it were just another typical school day. In fact, it was to regain something approximating normality that the nonprofit organization decided to resume its educational and recreational programs on October 2nd, without electricity and with some areas damaged by



Hurricane Maria.

CREATE, which has been offering services for 16 years to the community of San José in Río Piedras, even received new participants, since many public schools remain closed.

Enrollment at the San Juan center increased to 125 students at the middle and high school, which offers an alternative educational model based on values. There are also 110 participants in their afterschool program and 22 children and babies in their pre-school center.

“For the people in San Juan the priority is education. In San Juan the difference is that we’ve received five new participants from a school that closed, and their mothers are desperate because their kids aren’t in school. In San Juan we are trying to be an incentive for these students to prevent school dropouts,” explained Brenda Liz Santos Hernández, a psychologist and executive director of CREATE.

In Yabucoa, where CREATE has another center, the response after the hurricane has been much broader and encompasses many of the communities in this southeastern municipality, which



was the entry point of the Category 4 storm. Even though the facilities were severely damaged, CREATE set up a collection center for people to come pick up food, water, and supplies, receive medical attention or speak with one of the psychologists or social workers that work with the organization. Those who visit the collection center are interviewed to assess their particular needs and offer personalized assistance, but volunteers have also visited communities directly. CREATE also resumed its educational programs and has even seen enrollment increase from 60 to over 80 participants.

CREATE’s strategy for working with these communities in the long term is divided into two stages, which are being partially funded by the FORWARD Puerto Rico Fund. “We are still in the first stage of rescue, stabilization,

and food. At the end of November, beginning of December, we begin a more formal stage of visiting and restructuring these communities to help them get organized and to see how the communities themselves can become empowered. And to be an element of support for those people who were most hurt,” described Santos Hernández.

In this new post-Maria reality, serving the communities of Yabucoa has become a new part of CREATE’s mission.

## G-8 Corporación del Proyecto ENLACE del Caño Martín Peña, and Fideicomiso de la Tierra del Caño Martín Peña

Lyvia Rodríguez, Executive Director

For the eight communities that border the Martín Peña Canal, a 3.7-mile-long body of water that connects the San Juan Bay with the San José Lagoon, Hurricane Maria worsened an already dire situation. Extreme poverty, faulty infrastructure and recurring public health issues have plagued the 25,000 residents of this area for generations. The source of many of these issues is years of garbage and vegetation accumulating in the channel,

blocking the flow of water and flooding the communities whenever it rains. For years the nonprofit organizations that work with these communities have demanded that the government dredge the

**Volunteers went house by house handing out “mosquito kits” which included mosquito nets, larvicide, and repellent in order to avoid Dengue, Chikungunya and Zika outbreaks.**

channel.

Now after the impact of hurricanes Irma and Maria, this matter becomes even more urgent. Half of the trees along the channel fell into the water. At the same time, debris and plants blocked the sewage system, causing most of the 8 residential communities to become flooded with dirty water, in some cases for up to four days.

On top of this, over 800 houses lost their roofs either



partially or completely, while more than 75 structures disappeared altogether. The residents are also dealing with a plague of mosquitoes and rats, which were displaced by the floods and now overrun urban areas. The first responders after the hurricane were the organizations Grupo de las Ocho Comunidades Aledañas al Caño Martín Peña, Inc., known as the G-8 and composed of the community leadership; Corporación del Proyecto ENLACE del Caño Martín Peña, an independent government entity; and the Fideicomiso de la Tierra del Caño Martín Peña which oversees the 200 acres of public land ceded by the government. With the help of 150 volunteers, they began removing debris and trees, cleaning houses, giving out tarps, food, and other supplies to residents, while offering other emergency services. In order to avoid a public health crisis, they are also installing 3,500 rat feeders filled with poison, a project sponsored by the FORWARD Puerto Rico Fund. The rat problem becomes particularly



serious now that cases of leptospirosis are on the rise. Volunteers also went house by house handing out “mosquito kits” which included mosquito nets, larvicide, and repellent in order to avoid Dengue, Chikungunya and Zika outbreaks. However, the main long term recovery project continues to be the dredging of the channel in order to remove the blockages. Representatives of the organizations that work with the communities around the Martín Peña Canal insist that “any recovery package legislated on a federal level

must include the dredging project as part of the island’s recovery and in order to maximize economic development,” argued Mariolga Juliá Pachecho, Special Projects Manager for the Fideicomiso de la Tierra del Caño Martín Peña.

# Instituto Nueva Escuela (INE)

Ana María García-Blanco, Executive Director

Instituto Nueva Escuela (the New School Institute) is a nonprofit organization that aims to transform Puerto Rico's public school system through the Montessori teaching method. The number of INE schools has been growing over its 17 years of existence to now include 49 public Montessori schools in 27 municipalities around the island, serving students from 0 to 18 years of age, including special education students.

**The participation of the family in the child's education is an integral part of the child's development. "With every child that comes, we enroll the family," states INE's website.**

INE schools are often located in impoverished communities, including public housing projects. INE boasts a 0% school dropout rate, 0% violent incidents,

0% drug-related incidents, and a 16% increase in enrollment over the past 3 years; all of the schools have waitlists. Its successes have attracted philanthropic support from local foundations that have supported INE's growth over the years. While the damage caused by Hurricane Maria to most of INE's schools was relatively small, the surrounding communities were devastated, particularly the mountain and coastal areas of Barranquitas, Aibonito,



Naranjito, Humacao, and Patillas, and the island municipality of Vieques. Despite this fact, communities came together to clear debris from the schools, empty the floodwater, clean and repaint the facilities so that they could reopen as soon as possible. INE worked with the faculty and staff of each school on community relief projects, setting up collection centers for basic necessity items and organizing brigades that would distribute these around the communities. MIT and the University of Puerto Rico's Architecture School are collaborating to bring solar power to several INE facilities and to build new homes at a number of the municipalities most affected by the hurricane. Members of the community will be involved, allowing them to acquire new skills, such as the installation of solar power systems, with the aim of creating self-sufficient communities.

INE received operating support from the FORWARD Puerto Rico Fund that enabled them to reestablish their operations. Others donated generators and cisterns, allowing them to meet the Department of Education's requirements of having access to power and water in order to reopen after the storm. While the vast majority of public schools on the island remained



closed until early 2018, about 90% of INE's schools reopened before December 2017.

"We continue to use the round table method, and community participation. We give priority to recognizing and serving the community's agenda. The door is always open, the school is a community center. It can serve as a base of support, but also to plan. To plan for happiness, to become free from dependence, to solve things collectively" points out Ana Maria García-Blanco, the executive director of INE.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, public school enrolment in Puerto Rico has decreased by 22,000 (nota: fact check) and Puerto Rico's finances are in a precarious state. The Department of Education has

announced that over 300 public schools will close during the summer of 2018, including some INE schools. The Department of Education is proposing to convert INE public schools into charter schools. This has raised concerns among INE school directors about the viability of these Montessori schools within the proposed new governance structure.

# La Fondita de Jesús

*Socorro Rivera Rosa, Executive Director*

The homeless population in Puerto Rico has shot up significantly since Hurricane Maria's 155 mile per hour sustained winds and the subsequent flooding destroyed or severely damaged many homes.

Facing this new reality, La Fondita de Jesús, a nonprofit organization that has worked directly with the homeless of the San Juan metropolitan area for over 30 years, expanded its services and outreach. On a daily basis, volunteers and staff members now serve 150 to 200 breakfasts and lunches at their Santurce center, and deliver 400 hot lunches to 8 communities: El Gandul, La Perla, Old San Juan, Colectora, Los Peña public housing, Vista Hermosa, Centro Médico and Plaza de la Convalecencia in Río Piedras.

Aside from providing food to these communities, La Fondita de Jesús also provides them with primary and preventive medical services, access to a psychologists and social workers, as well as educational health workshops.

These are areas where many of the houses were vulnerable to the impact of the winds. Many residents are elderly people who are either bedridden or have severely limited mobility, and families with hungry children which La Fondita has assisted directly.

La Fondita anticipates that at the end of November they will conclude their food services to some of these communities but their work there is far from done. The executive director, Socorro

Rivera Rosa, points out that many of the people in these areas don't qualify for federal or state help. "For example, for FEMA they have to own the property and meet a bunch of other requirements that many of the people in these communities, even if they have lived there for 40 or 50 years, don't meet," she added.

**This is why they are now contemplating a new strategy to support the people who might still have the physical structure of their home but are actually homeless because they don't have the means to fix it, as well as the elderly residents who have nowhere else to go. They will also continue to offer medical services and preventive health education to these communities through their program *Conexión Saludable Móvil*.**





# Comerío, P.R.

On top of these initiatives stemming from the crisis, they continue to provide basic food, hygiene and medical services to people without homes that visit their center, as well as those who reside in the over 125 apartments La Fondita de Jesús has available for the chronically homeless and for those with the potential to get back to work and eventually afford their own home.



# MAC PUERTO RICO MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

*Marianne Ramírez, Executive Director*

Less than two weeks after Hurricane Maria brought the island to a standstill, the Puerto Rico Museum of Contemporary Art (MAC by its Spanish initials) opened its gates and celebrated the event Luz Verde a la Cultura. The storm inspired art and creative writing workshops, while live music and dance performances offered a respite from the crisis. This was the beginning of

the MAC's reinvention after the hurricane. An interdisciplinary arts organization founded in 1984, the MAC is using its resources, through cultural projects and events, to contribute to the recovery

**The storm inspired art and creative writing workshops, while live music and dance performances offered a respite from the crisis.**

process. Along with helping the artistic community get back on its feet, the MAC is working with underserved communities in Santurce and Rio Piedras with which it has built ties during the past five years through the community arts program, MAC en el Barrio.

Having suffered minimal structural damage and with electric power restored relatively quickly to their build-



ing in Santurce, the MAC was able to use its facilities to offer services such as collecting basic necessity items and setting up a center where people could fill out FEMA applications. One of their biggest post-Maria projects was a three week Emergency Educational and Cultural Program through which they offered art and social awareness classes to 70 students ages 4 to 16 whose schools were closed after the hurricane; psychosocial services for the elderly and for families to deal with the emotional toll of the hurricane; and events for the general public which included concerts, dance performances, an art auction, among others.

The MAC also extended a hand to other cultural institutions such as the Puerto Rico Music Conservatory, which used the museum as a rehearsal space for several weeks; the literary event, Festival de la Palabra, which could not take place in its originally planned venue; and held fundraising events for Casa Museo Ismael Rivera and La Junta, a cultural and culinary space on Calle Loiza which was destroyed by the storm.



Local artists who lost their workshops were offered space in the museum to continue to work and also given information about emergency grants and funds. The MAC also helps artists become employed through commissions, including working with the MAC en el Barrio program, and by hiring them to offer workshops.

Currently the MAC en el Barrio program is expanding to communities in Cataño and Guaynabo. The museum is in the process of acquiring a second location in the Amelia neighborhood of Guaynabo in order to offer more workspace to artists and service these communities directly.

After the two hurricanes (Irma and Maria) we've seen the immense contribution of

culture as a healing project for the country but also as a project for economic development. These are things that have always been there but after the hurricanes I believe our work has demonstrated the importance of culture in all these processes," stressed Marianne Ramírez, executive director and curator in chief of the MAC.

# Museum of Art of Puerto Rico

*falta info nombre....*



During the 51 days following Hurricane Maria, the Museum of Art of Puerto Rico (MAPR), located in Santurce, remained closed to the public. Meanwhile, on the inside the museum's personnel worked tirelessly to safeguard the permanent collection. A generator kept the humidity levels and temperature of the museum stable protecting the artworks, some of which date back to the seventeenth century.

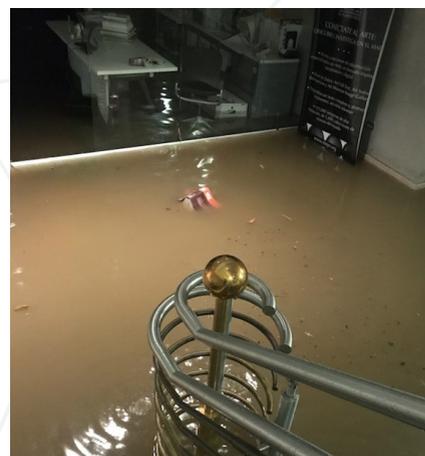
Days turned to weeks and the lack of elec-

tric power on the island became an ongoing issue. Interim director Marta Mabel Pérez was concerned that other museums and cultural institutions didn't have access to the necessary environmental controls to preserve their collections. The work of important Puerto Rican artists including José Campeche, Rafael Trufiño, Carlos Osorio, Joaquín Reyes and Arnaldo Roches Rabell were at risk. In the MAPR they had the space available to house these pieces so they quickly reached out to the several institutions.



**“After the hurricane passed, we were the museum that coordinated the initiative to safeguard Puerto Rico’s cultural heritage, specifically that of the visual arts which tells the story of Puerto Rican art,” Perez said.**

They received over 200 artworks and cultural assets from the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras campus; Sagrado Corazón University; Santa Catalina Palace (La Fortaleza); Museum Casa Roig, Humacao; Caguas Museum of Art; and the Luis Muñoz Marín Foundation, turning the MAPR into a national vault. Sol Rivera, MAPR’s conservationist, and the registrar Sandra Cintrón, who developed the emergency plan for the institution, organized the museum’s team to receive, register, and store the pieces.



# Nuestra Escuela

Anayris Guzmán, Executive Director

Since 2000, the nonprofit organization Nuestra Escuela has tackled the issue of school dropouts through alternative education. Their model doesn't just focus on academic and intellectual development, it also addresses the emotional, social, physical and spiritual needs of the students.

Many young people who attend Nuestra Escuela come from disadvantaged, unstable, and even violent backgrounds, are teen parents, or were simply unsuccessful in adapting to traditional schools. That's why Nuestra Escuela, which is part of the public school system of Puerto Rico and in 17 years has impacted the lives of over 1600 students, adapts to their learning styles and interests. This innovative approach allows them to earn a high school diploma while producing well-rounded citizens in the process.



“Just the fact that these young people say that if it weren't for Nuestra Escuela they would be dead or in jail, I believe is an important contribution to their lives, to their families and to the country,” expressed Ana Yris Guzmán Torres, president y cofounder of Nuestra Escuela.

**There are currently 250 students enrolled in the Caguas and Loiza centers, most between the ages of 13 and 21, and they are the ones that guide the curriculum by selecting individual projects. However, like many projects planned for the second half of 2017, Hurricane Maria changed everything.**

The lack of electricity combined with flooding in the Caguas center caused mold to accumulate in the walls and destroyed all their books and computers. Nuestra Escuela also lost their four gardens, which were used for growing food and as laboratories. One in particular had installed solar panels and a sustainable water irrigation system.

Despite these setbacks, both centers reopened in October. The students decided to put aside their personal projects and work on helping their communities. During the first months after Maria, food was the priority. With the support of the FORWARD Puerto Rico Fund, they established community cafeterias to provide hot meals for the students, their families, and other members of the community, including many



elderly people. These services are still available to those who continue to require them.

In 2018, the Nuestra Escuela students took on new community projects. These include a census of the needs of their communities and the creation of a natural mosquito repellent, in response to the mosquito outbreak that followed the storm. They are also rebuilding the gardens, as well as working on an additional garden run by the organization Urbe a Pie (Walking City) in Caguas.

“After the hurricane, the country changed, and priorities also changed, but one of the things we want to maintain in the organization is the openness to have this project led by the voices of our students, since they are the ones who truly know what they need,” said Guzmán Torres. The students created a natural mosquito repellent.

# Para la Naturaleza

*Fernando Lloveras-San Miguel, Executive Director*



The link between nature and community is central to Para la Naturaleza's tireless and far reaching conservation efforts. Through workshops and events, tours of their visitor centers, and volunteer programs such as Citizen Science, they've spent years educating and actively involving people in their mission to safeguard ecologically and historically significant sites on the island.

After Hurricane Maria, Para la Naturaleza refocused its work to offer much needed services to rural communities, while simultaneously organizing a plan to reforest

the island since many trees were either destroyed or damaged during the storm.

In the weeks following the hurricane, members of Para la Naturaleza visited the more than 50 green areas under the nonprofit's protection. Although some areas suffered serious damages, particularly their properties in Ponce and Manatí and their tree nursery in Barranquitas, they decided to first help the neighboring communities.

Emergency brigades cleared debris from roads and handed out emergency supplies. Now they

are bringing solar powered lamps, water filters, and mosquito nets to the residents of over 30 communities. They are also working to help ecologically-conscious farmers rebuild their agricultural projects.

Simultaneously, massive efforts to replant native trees are also underway, not just in Para la Naturaleza's natural reserves but also in urban areas and around bodies of water.

**The goal is to plant a million trees in five years. Volunteers are also involved in beach clean ups and are rebuilding habitats for displaced species, such as bats.**

"I think that ecological recovery goes hand in hand with human



recovery. We're hopeful that citizens will join our efforts to reforest, restore habitats, and reintroduce species, which we'll be implementing on a massive

scale with the hope that this will help with our own recovery process," expressed Fernando Lloveras San Miguel, president of Para la Naturaleza.



# P.E.C.E.S.

José Oquendo, Executive Director

Hurricane Maria hit land at Barrio Punta Santiago in the town of Humacao with winds reaching at least 185 miles an hour. The combination of rain and wind created a sea surge that flooded this community built by fishermen. Since 1985, this area is the home of Programa de Educación Comunitario de Entrega y Servicio (P.E.C.E.S.) which signals a community education program that emphasizes dedication and service. PECES is also the Spanish word for “fish,” a name that evokes the community’s origins. When José Javier Oquendo, PECES’ president, walked through the neighborhood after Hurricane Maria, he was overtaken with grief as neighbors in tears told him how the water flooded their modest homes taking all they owned. He later recounted, “These scenarios are only lived in horror movies. I didn’t know what to tell them.” But together, the community quickly realized “that what we need is our willpower”. PECES lost all of its facilities



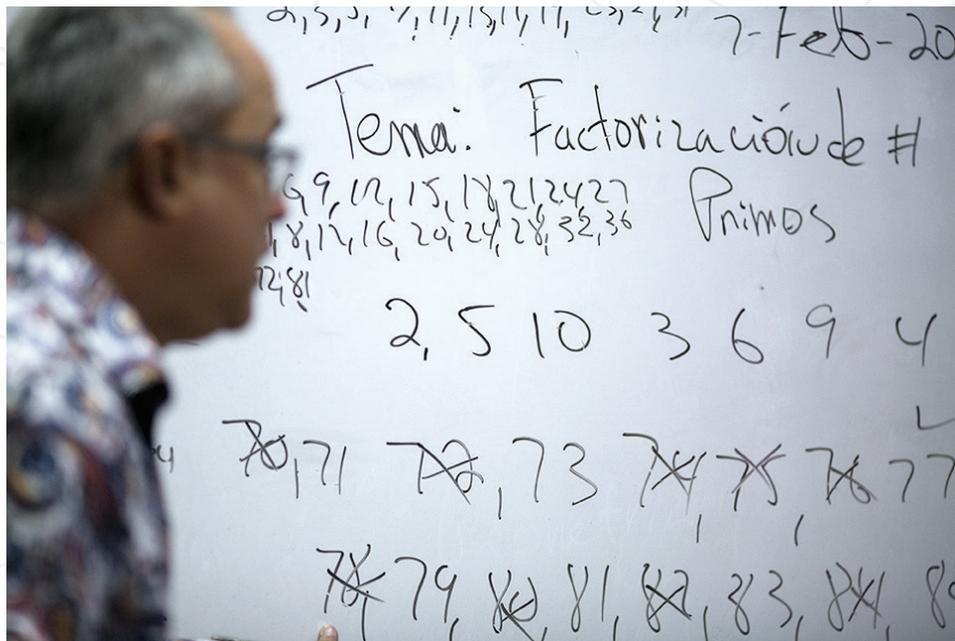
**Local, international and continental United States foundations, as well as individuals from the Puerto Rican diaspora and friends of Puerto Rico throughout the world, have donated over \$1,7 million towards our goal of \$3 million in 2017.**

except for their main building, which houses its headquarters. Before the storm, PECES’s

education and community development activities were already reaching over 25,000 people a year. After Hurricanes Irma and María, PECES quickly became a hub for the distribution of goods and services to the community. Working largely with Puerto Rico’s private and nonprofit sectors, over 100,000 pounds of products such as food, bottled water, cleaning and hygiene supplies were distributed, sometimes house to house, to 10,756 persons in 22 communities, including Humacao,

Fajardo, Juncos, Gurabo, Las Piedras, Naguabo, Salinas and Guayama. Partnering with hundreds of volunteers, PECES has organized deliveries of freshly cooked food, clothes and shoes, home medical services, health fairs, social work and psychological services, as well as drug store services.

As in many parts of Puerto Rico, this area is still without electricity. The storm left debris that clogs the water channels, and recent rains flooded the area again. The PECES community realizes that even as the needs for immediate relief continue, they must think ahead and move toward a sustainable approach to greater community self-management in areas such as energy and water. They are planning new workshops to train community members to rebuild houses, and are considering how to incorporate solar energy in a community-based approach. Under these challenging circumstances, it is heartening to see community members, some of whom lost everything they owned, working hard to serve others. As Oquendo states, "our people are giving their 100% when they have lost everything".



PHOTOS: XAVIER GARCÍA



If you wish to contribute to the FORWARD Puerto Rico Fund, you can do so by visiting our webpage [www.redfundacionespr.org](http://www.redfundacionespr.org). Local, international and continental

United States foundations, as well as individuals from the Puerto Rican diaspora and friends of Puerto Rico throughout the world, have donated over \$1,7 million towards our goal of \$3 million in 2017. Together, we are working to move Puerto Rico FORWARD.

# Proyecto Matria

Amarilis Pagán, Executive Director



Inside a small classroom in a church located in the Miraflores sector of Orocovis, about 20 people, mostly women, graduated from the first empowerment workshops of the Casa Solidaria program, created by the non-profit organization Proyecto Matria. They stepped outside to pose for a photo -- smiling and enthusiastically holding up their certificates with the mountains as the backdrop -- which is later published on social media with the hashtag: *#MirafloresEsElFuturo. Miraflores is the Future.*

Miraflores was one of the places Matria visited after Hurricane Maria. There they assisted about 35 families, which even before the storm were living in poverty. Many residents of the community are unemployed, have speech and hearing problems, some are illiterate, and even those with a minimum level of education do not have the skills to find employment. That is why Matria chose Miraflores to implement Casa Solidaria,

its pilot recovery program. The residents were very receptive to being part of this project which aims to give them the tools to create small businesses and rebuild their community.

What distinguishes Matria's business incubation model is that

**“it’s a holistic and empowering model, and contrary to traditional incubators that almost always focus on populations with a higher level of professionalism, even previous business experience, our model focuses on people who are entrepreneurs by necessity. “**

“Their economic situation forces them to generate some kind of economic activity because there are no jobs and they have no other options”, explains Amárilis Pagán Jiménez, executive director of Proyecto Matria.



The first group has already started a process that will last a minimum of one year and will include entrepreneurship workshops, individualized technical assistance, search for seed capital and consultations that will help them take their first steps in setting up their businesses. The project will also offer psychosocial support, free legal advice, and after school programs for their children. Under Casa Solidaria they will also work on housing reconstruction and getting materials for people who lost their roofs, agricultural development and a community kitchen. It's a long-term and multi-faceted project that will last between three to five years.

For Matria this program is historic because in its 14 years of existence it's the first time they have men participating in their workshops. Matria is a feminist organization that was founded to assist survivors of domestic violence and female heads of family. Over the years they expanded their reach to include members of the LGBTQ community and now under Casa Solidaria they are working with entire families, including men.

“They have responded so well to the workshops that it confirms what we always thought, that our model, though created for women in extremely vulnerable situations, is



applicable and helps any other person who is in a situation of vulnerability,” reflects Pagán Jiménez.

That's why they created the hashtag #MiraflorEsElFuturo, the participants of this program are paving the way for future Casas Solidarias in other communities around the island.

# SER de Puerto Rico

*Dra. Nilda Morales, President and CEO*

Consistent treatment is essential for children with a disability or with autism. This is why a week after Hurricane Maria struck the island, SER de Puerto Rico's therapists were already offering their services at the organization's centers in Ponce and San Juan.

"If our kids' conditions aren't treated, they worsen," explained Nilda Morales, president of SER de Puerto Rico, a nonprofit that annually works with 4,600 children and adults with special needs.

"That's why we're very punctual with our interventions. Because as you optimize their development, you give them the possibility of being independent, productive, and self-sufficient," she pointed out.

The electric power services at SER's facilities in the southern part of Puerto Rico were restored the third week after the hurricane, even though most of the Island remained dark. They were able to resume normal operations. In San Juan, on the other hand, the walls of the building were covered with mold because of flooding and lack of electric power.

While they were able to disinfect the school and resume classes, the rehabilitation wing still needs more work. So, the therapists continue to do what they've been doing from the beginning: offering therapy in an outdoor court and in exterior classrooms powered by small generators, within a limited schedule.



**"We have also sent our specialists to communities where we identified people with disabilities," continued Morales, adding that this has been a joint effort with FEMA and other entities.**



SER's expanded effort began with the island municipalities, Vieques in particular, which SER has visited on a weekly basis. There they found cases of bedridden elderly people, children with developmental issues, and disabled people being cared for by their families without any external support. Through FEMA they were able to obtain equipment such as wheelchairs, while also offering primary medical services and access to psychologists and social workers for family members. Currently they are in the process of preparing a school that's not being used in Fajardo in order to serve the people of the east coast and island municipalities.



SER de Puerto Rico is also establishing a model of remote rehabilitation services in Vieques and Culebra that they will then replicate in other underserved municipalities such as Villalba, Maricao, Ciales, Orocovis and Morovis. This consists of training a family member, nurse or therapy assistant to give therapy under the supervision of a doctor or therapist that will provide an evaluation of the patient's needs and give recommendations via Skype or Facetime.

**“This is a new scenario for us but our families teach us every day how to face adverse events that can affect your day. Because they live with disability or autism, we who give them these services to develop their skills can't do less. They have been our guides and our inspiration and we have to be there for each of them,” concludes Morales.**



# Beta-Local

Pablo Guardiola, Co-Director -Sofía Gallisá, Co-Director



Even before hurricanes Irma and Maria passed over the island, the independent art and culture scene of Puerto Rico was in a state of chronic crisis. Austerity measures have long limited the state's economic support of the arts. Alternate sources of funds generally establish that projects must have an educational focus or generate economic activity, not those that simply have an aesthetic or artistic purpose. On the other hand, the need to work in advertising and other industries hinders the ability of local artists to focus their energy and resources on their own projects.

To counteract this scenario, the non-profit organization Beta-Local has been a resource for cultural agents since 2009, providing grants, programs and workshops, coordinating events, and lending their space to generate projects, ideas and connections between local producers.

After Maria, the situation was exacerbated, especially when the new reality of the island forced many people to emigrate. The co-directors of Beta-Local, Sofía Gallisá Muriente, Pablo Guardiola and Michael Linares immediately sought emergency funds in order to help cultural agents and artists continue to work, rebuild their lives, and stay in Puerto Rico.

**“As a result of the hurricane, we were able to start an emergency fund for cultural workers who, in a certain way, was tied to the work we had been doing since the organization’s inception and it expanded and amplified that work,” says Gallisá Muriente.**

Funds raised through the Puerto Rico Funder's Network (FORWARD PUERTO RICO Fund) and United States-based foundations, such as the Andy Warhol Foundation and the Hispanic Federation, allowed Beta-Local to provide grants that were distributed from November 2017 to January 2018. Participants could apply for “El Resuelve,” a \$500 mini-grant that was awarded weekly by the directors of Beta-Local, or “El Serrucho,” a grant of up to \$10,000, emitted by a selection committee every three weeks. They distributed around 95 scholarships for a total of just over \$350,000, according to Gallisá Muriente.

The grants were not limited to specific projects. In the case of Juanto Arroyo, a musician and sound engineer, his recording

studio and rehearsal space were unusable for two months. “I had no way to make money, I was just sitting and waiting for power to come back. That’s when I had the idea of creating a portable studio that did not need electricity,” says Arroyo. He obtained a grant to buy recording equipment and a computer that he can carry in a backpack, equipment that allows him to continue working with just a battery.

Another example of Beta Local’s support is the case of Mickey Negrón, an actor and performance artist. “I live in La Perla and the sea came in. I am on a second floor and the window broke. I lost my wardrobe, my bed, my television, books. I was able to save some paintings. I was totally uncertain of what was going to happen,” narrates Negrón. With the Beta-Local fund, Negrón was able to replace much of what he lost, pay rent, and even began

to work on a project that he had been contemplating for several years.

“This is the first time that I feel supported in my country and at the time I most needed it, not only as an artist but as a citizen,” he says. Beta-Local has received new funds since the grant window closed, which they will put towards high-scoring applications for “El Serrucho” that were not selected in the first round.

“What has been allocated in grants up to this point is more than double what our annual budget was last year. It implies a significant expansion of the scale of work we have been able to do. We were able to respond very quickly because we had been advocating for years for this type of support (for the artists),” says Gallisá Muriente.

# Boys & Girls Clubs OF PUERTO RICO

*Olga Ramos, President*

The passing of hurricanes Irma on September 5th and Maria on September 20th severely damaged three of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Puerto Rico (BG CPR)' s 13 centers in Puerto Rico. Many of the BG CPR staff personally suffered the effects of the storm. But a few days after the Hurricanes, they returned to work to assess damages and determine how best to help their communities. A survey of BG CPR programs participants revealed that 10% of them had lost everything and many others were in need of food and water.

The BG CPR offers after school programs for kids and teens throughout Puerto Rico through community-based centers. Programs are designed to empower youth to become good citizens, and lead productive and healthy lives.

Educational programs include bilingual tutors and provide recreational activities in a safe environment. Ninety percent (90%) of children who participate in these programs live in households with a median income below the



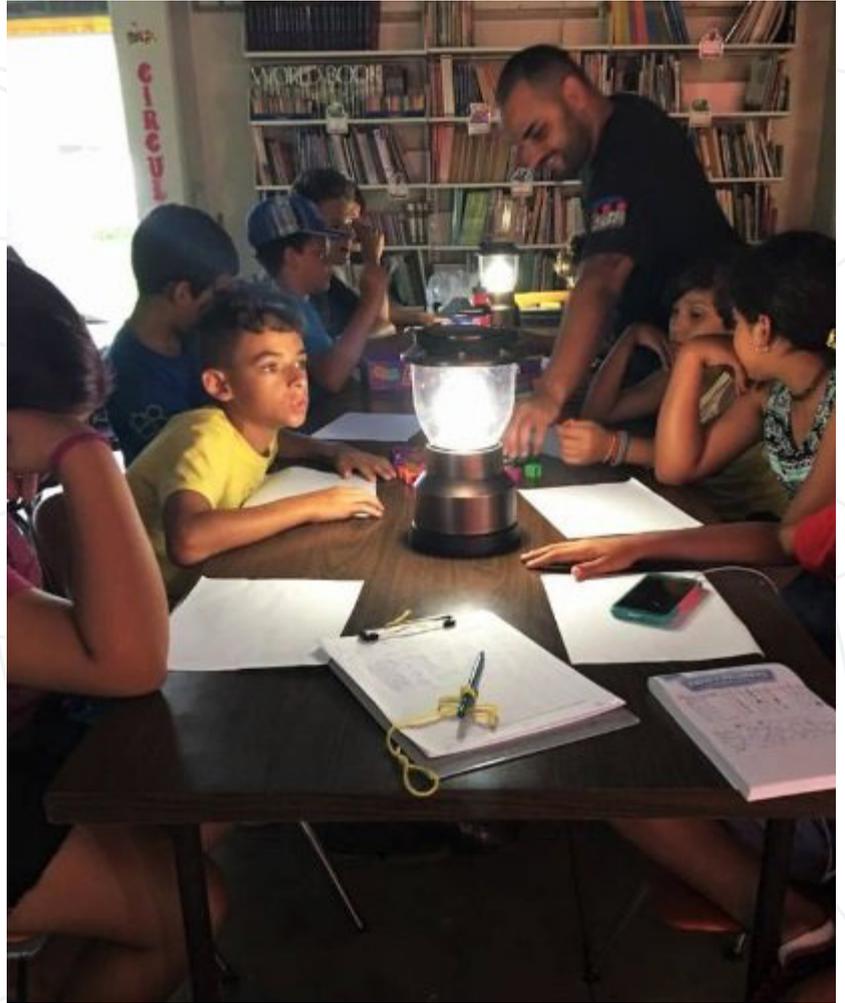
poverty level

The town of Loíza is one of the poorest in Puerto Rico. It has the highest proportion of people of African descent. As a coastal town, it suffered the widespread destruction of homes. Electricity and water were not available after the first of the two hurricanes. With the help of volunteers and several civic organizations the BG CPR turned its Loíza location into a community support center, collecting and distributing water, food, clothing, and basic supplies. The Center also organized a crew that cooked and served thousands of hot meals.

BGCPR centers in Vieques, Bayamón, Santurce and Isabela were also used as community support centers. They distributed food and essential items donated by diverse foundations, corporations and individuals they organized medical evaluations by volunteer doctors, and assistance in applying for FEMA support. Resources were available to anyone who needed them, regardless of whether their children are enrolled in the programs or not. All this occurred while still offering their programs.

**“We did not have to think twice about it,” said Olga Ramos, president of BGCPR. “We are known for ensuring the wellbeing of our children, and it must be so in this moment of historical crisis. Our programs help to give participants a sense of security and allows the parents to return to work while schools are closed. This, in turn, helps the economic recovery.”**

“Even before the hurricanes, our participants were already facing a difficult situation since most of the homes we reach are economically deprived,” said Eduardo Carrera, BGCPR chief executive officer. “Our objective has always been to provide youth with the resources to explore their own interests, develop their talents and thrive in the current economy. This crisis will only make us stronger and give us the energy to continue. We will continue to assist our boys and girls to acquire the necessary skills to find jobs or to explore entrepreneurship so that they become economically independent and contribute to their community”.



# Casa Pueblo

*Dr. Arturo Massol Deyá, Executive Director*

Among the many projects and initiatives spearheaded by the community organization Casa Pueblo, located in the town of Adjuntas, those involving solar power have become a priority since Hurricane Maria devastated the island in September. The topic of renewable energy becomes more and more relevant as the months pass and many of Puerto Rico's rural communities, including most of Adjuntas and its neighboring towns, remain without power.

As part of their response to the humanitarian crisis that followed the storm, Casa Pueblo distributed solar-powered lamps to 80% of homes in Adjuntas, as well as in Jayuya, Utuado, Yauco, Castañer, Lares, Loíza, Vieques, Aibonito, Humacao, and other municipalities. The organization's home base, which has been operating with solar power since 1999, became an oasis for people in the southern and central regions of the island to charge their phones and communicate with their loved ones outside of the island.

**Currently, Casa Pueblo is focusing on establishing solar communities. The organization installed solar panels with energy storage and battery systems in 10 homes in Adjuntas, giving priority to those with residents requiring dialysis or respiratory therapy.**

They also installed solar power systems at a nursing home, the Head Start center, and the municipal shelter.

They are now in the process of selecting the first 16 houses that will receive solar powered refrigerators. This initiative is being funded by the FORWARD Puerto Rico Fund and will eventually impact 25 to 30 residences in Adjuntas. The expectation is that these will become energy oasis in their communities, allowing others to also store food and medicines that require refrigeration.





The hurricane also sped up the implementation of two energy-based projects that were already in the works. In January, Radio Casa Pueblo became the first radio station in the Caribbean to operate 100% with renewable energy. And in February, Casa Pueblo will inaugurate a solar-powered cinema.

Casa Pueblo's long-term goal is to inspire a transition to a renewable energy model across the island, which is why they created the campaign #iLuminarPRconSOL.

**“From an educational point of view we will show the community and the island that there are other ways to handle (the energy crisis),” explained associated director of Casa Pueblo, Arturo Massol Deya.**



“Casa Pueblo has been pushing for a long time for a transition to an energetic model that is self-sufficient, where we can leave behind fossil fuels and move towards clean energy sources. This isn't new, it's an agenda that has the conservation of natural and environmental resources in mind. Hurricane Maria emphasized the need to provoke this transition. And since we don't have control or much faith in this happening from the top down, it falls on us to create this change from the bottom up,” he added.



CENTRO DE

# Periodismo Investigativo

Carla Minet, Executive Director

In the aftermath of hurricane Maria, the Center for Investigative Journalism (CPI) has published dozens of high-impact stories. “We were the first to report from the mountainous region, which motivated the commercial media to move outside the metro area,” said Carla Minet, Executive Director of the CPI. “Our team has been reporting with great commitment, a deep sense of urgency and critical vision. We have visited communities in many affected towns such as Utuado, Salinas, Cidra, Cayey, Ponce, Ciales, Caguas, Santurce, Aguadilla, Mayagüez, Dorado, Toa Baja and Maunabo, among others.”

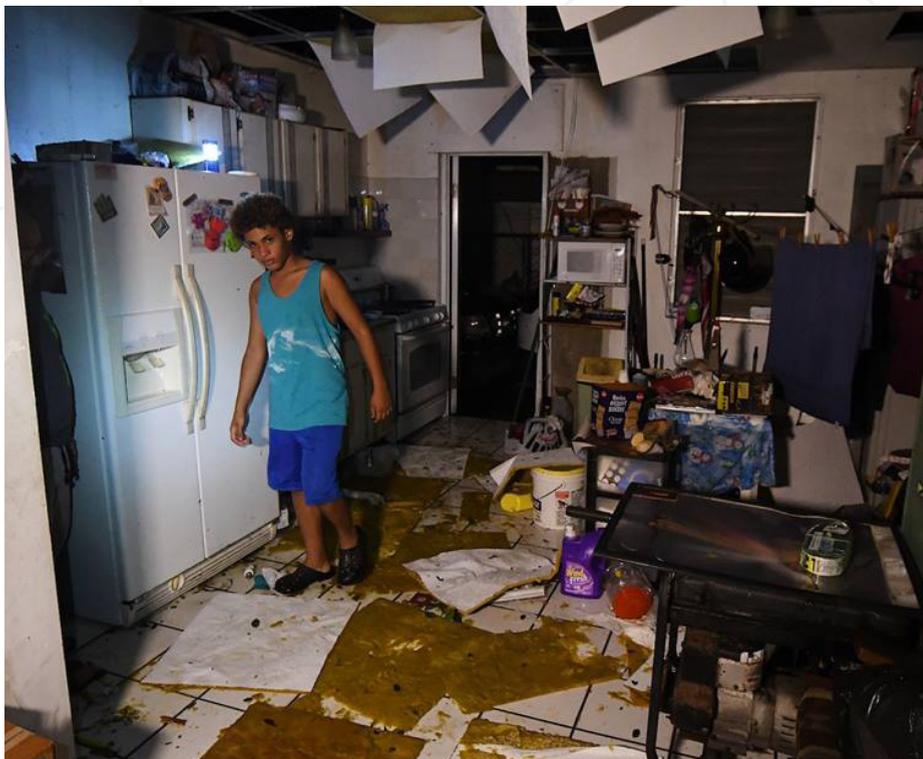
CPI tackled issues such as the undercounting of hurricane-related deaths by the Puerto Rican government provoking an official US Senate investigation. Working in collaboration with the Miami Herald, CPI also published a documented chronological

history of where the emergency operation has failed.

**“We have been at the forefront of the in-depth coverage of health issues and contaminated water consumption, of the social repercussions of the curfew, as well as analysis on how the issue of Puerto Rico’s public debt impacts recovery efforts, among other relevant issues,” said Minet.**

By publishing most of their stories in Spanish and English, CPI’s impact generates international interest in Puerto Rico, and some of their stories have become “breaking news”.

The hurricane has motivated CPI to set new goals. As the director of the CPI explained, “we need to expand our coverage so that our stories and research have the greatest possible impact.





We are recruiting additional journalists, photographers, videographers, translators and data management specialists, and have new expenses such as satellite phones to compensate for the lack of electricity and wi-fi throughout the island, batteries, transportation and food and lodging.” The FORWARD Puerto Rico Fund is providing support to CPI to enable them to advance toward their goals and continue their impressive work.

**“We are convinced, and we are witnessing it happen, that information is a key element in the recovery process of our country.”**

The Center for Investigative Journalism (CPI) is a nonprofit organization founded in 2007 that promotes quality journalism free of political and commercial ties.

Their web page is: [www.periodismoinvestigativo.com](http://www.periodismoinvestigativo.com). CPI has investigated issues including political corruption, favoritism in government contracting, electoral campaign financing, health, environment, and the economy. Its litigation on public

access to information has won national and international recognition.



# Centros Sor Isolina Ferré

*José Luis Díaz Cotto, Chief Executive Officer*

Founded in 1969 in the La Playa sector of the city of Ponce by a catholic nun, Sor Isolina Ferré, the Centers that bear her name belong to a non-profit organization that promotes the full development of the human being. The Sor Isolina Ferré Centers (CSIF) serve over 37,000 people of all ages who reside in 22 municipalities, in the areas of dropout prevention, violence prevention, and community empowerment and development through advocacy, education, and training programs.

After the devastation left by Hurricane María, CSIF has refocused all its resources in the short term, to serve María's victims in 71 low income communities located in the southern and central regions of Puerto Rico, San Juan,

and Canóvanas. As part of operation "A Solidary Embrace for Puerto Rico," CSIF is operating two donation/collection centers. Aid shipments sent from Puerto Ricans from the United States and donations received locally are being distributed to places where no other assistance is being provided. As of November 7, 2017, 12,378 persons had been served by volunteer social workers and individuals who are distributing supplies house by house in low income communities and making an assessment of other needs.

**An estimated 144,290 tons of food, 11,117 gallons of water and other articles such as mattresses and gas stoves have been distributed across the island.**





# ConnectRelief

Michael Fernández, Executive Director

During the crisis that followed hurricanes Irma and Maria, one of the biggest challenges was effective communication, particularly between people with the resources and ability to help and communities in urgent need of supplies and assistance. Responding to this situation, the non-profit organization Caras con Causa, led by executive director Michael Fernández, recruited programmers from the technology company Propel BI to create ConnectRelief, a digital platform for collecting data after natural disasters.

Initially ConnectRelief was meant to assist the Virgin Islands with their recovery efforts after Irma. However, the arrival of Hurricane Maria a week later modified those plans and the platform was launched in Puerto Rico much sooner than anticipated.

In the six months since the storm, volunteers have collected and published data on the ConnectRelief application and website listing materials, supplies and services that are needed, divided by municipal-

ities, communities, shelters, retirement homes, among other categories. This allows the available help to be directed to those who need it the most.

**By collecting all that information in one place, they also seek to avoid duplicating efforts in some communities, leaving other areas that have received less publicity unattended.**



ConnectRelief collaborates with over a dozen non-profit organizations, community groups and other entities that use the platform to maximize recovery efforts, keep their information up to date, coordinate brigades and projects and recruit volunteers.

The person in charge of the ConnectRelief project, María Eugenia Soto, points to the University Sagrado Corazon (USC) in Santurce as an example of how the platform is being used as a tool to organize relief efforts. A group of students, professors, and volunteers used the application to create a census of the needs of the communities surrounding the university, particularly Villa Palmeras where they collected data from 280 families from October to December.

“With the census, we indentified needs house by house. We knew the needs of each street, of the sector, of the community, of the municipality. This strategy allowed for a better distribution of supplies, and the publication of data on the ConnectRelief page allowed people outside of

Puerto Rico to know what type of supplies were needed and where to send them,” says Carmen Chazulle Rivera, director of the USC Community Liaison Center.

**“It’s not just about collecting data to identify affected areas, but to actually figure out how to efficiently distribute supplies in the face of scarcity,” she adds.**

Within the next hurricane season only months away, ConnectRelief’s programmers are making improvements to the application to make it more agile and easier to use. ConnectRelief is also increasing their utility by creating preparation protocols, a training plan for individuals and groups, and protocols for emergency management and reconstruction and recovery. All of these efforts are aimed at creating a public, comprehensive and transparent data base available to the government, the private sector and the nonprofit sector when facing future disaster situations.



# CREARTE

*Brenda Liz Santos Hernández, Executive Director*

The hallways of the CREARTE center in San Juan fill with the sounds of teenagers chatting, teachers calling their classrooms to order, and children running energetically from one class to another. Some parts of the building are well lit thanks to a generator, while others remain dark, but aside from

**“We had to transform, and we’ve added to our operation a project to rescue, to empower, to reconstruct the communities that were most affected by Hurricane Maria”**

that everything goes on as if it were just another typical school day. In fact, it was to regain something approximating normality that the nonprofit organization decided to resume its educational and recreational programs on October 2nd, without electricity and with some areas damaged by



Hurricane Maria.

CREATE, which has been offering services for 16 years to the community of San José in Río Piedras, even received new participants, since many public schools remain closed.

Enrollment at the San Juan center increased to 125 students at the middle and high school, which offers an alternative educational model based on values. There are also 110 participants in their afterschool program and 22 children and babies in their pre-school center.

“For the people in San Juan the priority is education. In San Juan the difference is that we’ve received five new participants from a school that closed, and their mothers are desperate because their kids aren’t in school. In San Juan we are trying to be an incentive for these students to prevent school dropouts,” explained Brenda Liz Santos Hernández, a psychologist and executive director of CREATE.

In Yabucoa, where CREATE has another center, the response after the hurricane has been much broader and encompasses many of the communities in this south-eastern municipality, which



was the entry point of the Category 4 storm. Even though the facilities were severely damaged, CREATE set up a collection center for people to come pick up food, water, and supplies, receive medical attention or speak with one of the psychologists or social workers that work with the organization. Those who visit the collection center are interviewed to assess their particular needs and offer personalized assistance, but volunteers have also visited communities directly. CREATE also resumed its educational programs and has even seen enrollment increase from 60 to over 80 participants.

CREATE’s strategy for working with these communities in the long term is divided into two stages, which are being partially funded by the FORWARD Puerto Rico Fund. “We are still in the first stage of rescue, stabilization,

and food. At the end of November, beginning of December, we begin a more formal stage of visiting and restructuring these communities to help them get organized and to see how the communities themselves can become empowered. And to be an element of support for those people who were most hurt,” described Santos Hernández.

In this new post-Maria reality, serving the communities of Yabucoa has become a new part of CREATE’s mission.

# ESCAPE, Centro de Fortalecimiento Familiar

Yadira Pizarro Quiles, Executive Director

During the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, mental health professionals observed that emotional and social reactions to a catastrophic event manifested fully a year or year and a half later. In Puerto Rico, seven months after hurricanes Irma and Maria, symptoms of stress and anxiety are starting to surface, particularly in children and in certain vulnerable families.

**“After the hurricane, the triggers that provoke violence in the family increased: savings ran out, one of the parent who worked lost their job, or maybe the mother was the only one working and is now unemployed. These families were fragile before the hurricane and after the hurricane that fragility became a ticking time bomb set to detonate,”** explains Yadira Pizarro Quiles, executive director of ESCAPE, a non-profit organization specializing in the intervention, treatment and prevention of child abuse and family violence.

Since September, when the two storms passed, ESCAPE received a significant increase in service requests at its three centers. These services include educational seminars for schools, churches, community centers, private companies, and municipalities on a variety of topics such as healthy parenting, discipline, prevention of abuse and domestic violence, balancing family and work, how to prevent bullying,



how to prevent sexual abuse of minors, among other topics. They added psychological services to address anxiety caused by the hurricanes, and new seminars for adults and children on issues related to the prevention and management of stress and anxiety after disasters.

Additionally, at the San Germán center, which also covers the municipalities of Sabana Grande, Hormigueros, Mayagüez and Cabo Rojo, from September to April they assisted 915 children and adults in child abuse and domestic violence situations. These families received specialized counseling services, coordination of services, and support from volunteers, as well as psychological and educational services. The center also offered free psychological services to the community.

At the Gurabo office, they ended the month of April with 389 adults and children receiving services at their Early Head Start center. This included 120 children from two months to three years of age and their families who received day care, early intervention, nutrition, social work and health services. In addition, 15 pregnant women and their families received counseling, guidance and support in the pre, post and peri-natal stages.

The Metropolitan Area center in Santurce, on the other hand, was destroyed during Hurricane Maria and currently operates from a space in the Gurabo center. It serves the municipalities of San Juan, Carolina, Guaynabo, Trujillo Alto, Bayamón, and Caguas offering education and prevention services, parenting courses, and seminars. Even without an official headquarters they reached 873 children and adults as of the end of April through their education services. They hope that by relocating back to San Juan they can resume offering specialized counseling and service coordination while working directly with families.

Thanks to emergency funds such as the FORWARD Puerto Rico Fund, ESCAPE hired new resources, such as a service coordinator for San Germán, increasing the number of people they can help. They also created a reserve fund to give continuity to their services in case other funding is delayed or absent.

**ESCAPE's work is only beginning. During the next months the emotional consequences of the hurricanes will be more pronounced. Pizarro Quiles has already observed an increase in the lethality and intensity of violence and aggression towards children.**

“Organizations like ESCAPE that work with prevention have to be ready for everything that's coming, because undoubtedly there will continue to be an increase in requests for services and that's good. It's fantastic that people are looking for help. The challenge for organizations and the island is for those services to be available to the people looking for help,” she points out.



## G-8 Corporación del Proyecto ENLACE del Caño Martín Peña, and Fideicomiso de la Tierra del Caño Martín Peña

Lyvia Rodríguez, Executive Director

For the eight communities that border the Martín Peña Canal, a 3.7-mile-long body of water that connects the San Juan Bay with the San José Lagoon, Hurricane Maria worsened an already dire situation. Extreme poverty, faulty infrastructure and recurring public health issues have plagued the 25,000 residents of this area for generations. The source of many of these issues is years of garbage and vegetation accumulating in the channel,

blocking the flow of water and flooding the communities whenever it rains. For years the nonprofit organizations that work with these communities have demanded that the government dredge the

**Volunteers went house by house handing out “mosquito kits” which included mosquito nets, larvicide, and repellent in order to avoid Dengue, Chikungunya and Zika outbreaks.**

channel.

Now after the impact of hurricanes Irma and Maria, this matter becomes even more urgent. Half of the trees along the channel fell into the water. At the same time, debris and plants blocked the sewage system, causing most of the 8 residential communities to become flooded with dirty water, in some cases for up to four days.

On top of this, over 800 houses lost their roofs either



partially or completely, while more than 75 structures disappeared altogether. The residents are also dealing with a plague of mosquitoes and rats, which were displaced by the floods and now overrun urban areas. The first responders after the hurricane were the organizations Grupo de las Ocho Comunidades Aledañas al Caño Martín Peña, Inc., known as the G-8 and composed of the community leadership; Corporación del Proyecto ENLACE del Caño Martín Peña, an independent government entity; and the Fideicomiso de la Tierra del Caño Martín Peña which oversees the 200 acres of public land ceded by the government. With the help of 150 volunteers, they began removing debris and trees, cleaning houses, giving out tarps, food, and other supplies to residents, while offering other emergency services. In order to avoid a public health crisis, they are also installing 3,500 rat feeders filled with poison, a project sponsored by the FORWARD Puerto Rico Fund. The rat problem becomes particularly



serious now that cases of leptospirosis are on the rise. Volunteers also went house by house handing out “mosquito kits” which included mosquito nets, larvicide, and repellent in order to avoid Dengue, Chikungunya and Zika outbreaks.

However, the main long term recovery project continues to be the dredging of the channel in order to remove the blockages. Representatives of the organizations that work with the communities around the Martín Peña Canal insist that “any recovery package legislated on a federal level

must include the dredging project as part of the island’s recovery and in order to maximize economic development,” argued Mariolga Juliá Pachecho, Special Projects Manager for the Fideicomiso de la Tierra del Caño Martín Peña.

# Instituto Nueva Escuela (INE)

Ana María García-Blanco, Executive Director

Instituto Nueva Escuela (the New School Institute) is a nonprofit organization that aims to transform Puerto Rico's public school system through the Montessori teaching method. The number of INE schools has been growing over its 17 years of existence to now include 49 public Montessori schools in 27 municipalities around the island, serving students from 0 to 18 years of age, including special education students.

**The participation of the family in the child's education is an integral part of the child's development. "With every child that comes, we enroll the family," states INE's website.**

INE schools are often located in impoverished communities, including public housing projects. INE boasts a 0% school dropout rate, 0% violent incidents,

0% drug-related incidents, and a 16% increase in enrollment over the past 3 years; all of the schools have waitlists. Its successes have attracted philanthropic support from local foundations that have supported INE's growth over the years. While the damage caused by Hurricane Maria to most of INE's schools was relatively small, the surrounding communities were devastated, particularly the mountain and coastal areas of Barranquitas, Aibonito,



Naranjito, Humacao, and Patillas, and the island municipality of Vieques. Despite this fact, communities came together to clear debris from the schools, empty the floodwater, clean and repaint the facilities so that they could reopen as soon as possible. INE worked with the faculty and staff of each school on community relief projects, setting up collection centers for basic necessity items and organizing brigades that would distribute these around the communities. MIT and the University of Puerto Rico's Architecture School are collaborating to bring solar power to several INE facilities and to build new homes at a number of the municipalities most affected by the hurricane. Members of the community will be involved, allowing them to acquire new skills, such as the installation of solar power systems, with the aim of creating self-sufficient communities.

INE received operating support from the FORWARD Puerto Rico Fund that enabled them to reestablish their operations. Others donated generators and cisterns, allowing them to meet the Department of Education's requirements of having access to power and water in order to reopen after the storm. While the vast majority of public schools on the island remained



closed until early 2018, about 90% of INE's schools reopened before December 2017.

"We continue to use the round table method, and community participation. We give priority to recognizing and serving the community's agenda. The door is always open, the school is a community center. It can serve as a base of support, but also to plan. To plan for happiness, to become free from dependence, to solve things collectively" points out Ana Maria García-Blanco, the executive director of INE.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, public school enrolment in Puerto Rico has decreased by 22,000 (nota: fact check) and Puerto Rico's finances are in a precarious state. The Department of Education has

announced that over 300 public schools will close during the summer of 2018, including some INE schools. The Department of Education is proposing to convert INE public schools into charter schools. This has raised concerns among INE school directors about the viability of these Montessori schools within the proposed new governance structure.

# Hogar Cuna San Cristóbal INC.

Ivonne L. Vélez Castro, Executive Director



Even before Hurricane Maria, many of the children at Hogar Cuna San Cristobal had already lived through traumatic events. Many were taken from their families, often on multiple occasions, because of abuse or neglect, and placed in foster care by the Department of Family of Puerto Rico. For them Hogar Cuna is their fourth or fifth stop in the system, and hopefully their last.

Fourteen children, none older than 7 years old, felt and heard as Hurricane Maria's Category 4 winds ravaged the island, housed in the safety of Hogar Cuna San Cristóbal, an orphanage tucked away in the mountainous region of Caguas. Staff members explained to the children that after the storm, things weren't going to be the same as before.

“The day after Hurricane Maria passed, the children observed how the storm destroyed the trees around their school, their gardens, how the roof of one of the rooms had collapsed. But it was the adults who felt truly afraid and worried as they surveyed the damage. There was no power and no water. Their food stores would eventually run out and the electronic card system they used to buy groceries wasn’t working.”

**Ivonne Vélez, executive director of Hogar Cuna San Cristóbal explained, “The kids that are removed (from their homes) by the Department of Family arrive with an adoption plan. So the child that comes to us must’ve lived through a very difficult situation for adoption to be considered as an alternative,” explained Vélez.**

Along with taking care of their basic necessities, Hogar Cuna also educates the children and offers them treatment plans for various health and mental health conditions. All of those programs were affected by the hurricane, as well as all the fundraisers the organization relies on to continue operating since they don’t receive government funding. Emergency funds kept the organization operating.

Little by little the center’s operations have gone back to normal, with the notable exception of the adoption program. Seventeen adoption applications were withdrawn after the storm and so far they’ve only received two new applications. After the hurricane, two babies were surrendered and another mother is in communication with the center to give over her baby once its born.

As Velez observed, “it’s for these children that Hogar Cuna San Cristobal continues to keep going. To give them the opportunity to eventually find a safe and loving home.”



# La Fondita de Jesús

Socorro Rivera Rosa, Executive Director

The homeless population in Puerto Rico has shot up significantly since Hurricane Maria's 155 mile per hour sustained winds and the subsequent flooding destroyed or severely damaged many homes.

Facing this new reality, La Fondita de Jesús, a nonprofit organization that has worked directly with the homeless of the San Juan metropolitan area for over 30 years, expanded its services and outreach. On a daily basis, volunteers and staff members now serve 150 to 200 breakfasts and lunches at their Santurce center, and deliver 400 hot lunches to 8 communities: El Gandul, La Perla, Old San Juan, Colectora, Los Peña public housing, Vista Hermosa, Centro Médico and Plaza de la Convalecencia in Río Piedras.

Aside from providing food to these communities, La Fondita de Jesús also provides them with primary and preventive medical services, access to a psychologists and social workers, as well as educational health workshops.

These are areas where many of the houses were vulnerable to the impact of the winds. Many residents are elderly people who are either bedridden or have severely limited mobility, and families with hungry children which La Fondita has assisted directly.

La Fondita anticipates that at the end of November they will conclude their food services to some of these communities but their work there is far from done. The executive director, Socorro

Rivera Rosa, points out that many of the people in these areas don't qualify for federal or state help. "For example, for FEMA they have to own the property and meet a bunch of other requirements that many of the people in these communities, even if they have lived there for 40 or 50 years, don't meet," she added.

**This is why they are now contemplating a new strategy to support the people who might still have the physical structure of their home but are actually homeless because they don't have the means to fix it, as well as the elderly residents who have nowhere else to go. They will also continue to offer medical services and preventive health education to these communities through their program *Conexión Saludable Móvil*.**





# Comerío, P.R.

On top of these initiatives stemming from the crisis, they continue to provide basic food, hygiene and medical services to people without homes that visit their center, as well as those who reside in the over 125 apartments La Fondita de Jesús has available for the chronically homeless and for those with the potential to get back to work and eventually afford their own home.



# MAC PUERTO RICO MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

*Marianne Ramírez, Executive Director*

Less than two weeks after Hurricane Maria brought the island to a standstill, the Puerto Rico Museum of Contemporary Art (MAC by its Spanish initials) opened its gates and celebrated the event Luz Verde a la Cultura. The storm inspired art and creative writing workshops, while live music and dance performances offered a respite from the crisis. This was the beginning of

the MAC's reinvention after the hurricane. An interdisciplinary arts organization founded in 1984, the MAC is using its resources, through cultural projects and events, to contribute to the recovery

**The storm inspired art and creative writing workshops, while live music and dance performances offered a respite from the crisis.**

process. Along with helping the artistic community get back on its feet, the MAC is working with underserved communities in Santurce and Rio Piedras with which it has built ties during the past five years through the community arts program, MAC en el Barrio.

Having suffered minimal structural damage and with electric power restored relatively quickly to their build-



ing in Santurce, the MAC was able to use its facilities to offer services such as collecting basic necessity items and setting up a center where people could fill out FEMA applications. One of their biggest post-Maria projects was a three week Emergency Educational and Cultural Program through which they offered art and social awareness classes to 70 students ages 4 to 16 whose schools were closed after the hurricane; psychosocial services for the elderly and for families to deal with the emotional toll of the hurricane; and events for the general public which included concerts, dance performances, an art auction, among others.

The MAC also extended a hand to other cultural institutions such as the Puerto Rico Music Conservatory, which used the museum as a rehearsal space for several weeks; the literary event, Festival de la Palabra, which could not take place in its originally planned venue; and held fundraising events for Casa Museo Ismael Rivera and La Junta, a cultural and culinary space on Calle Loiza which was destroyed by the storm.



Local artists who lost their workshops were offered space in the museum to continue to work and also given information about emergency grants and funds. The MAC also helps artists become employed through commissions, including working with the MAC en el Barrio program, and by hiring them to offer workshops.

Currently the MAC en el Barrio program is expanding to communities in Cataño and Guaynabo. The museum is in the process of acquiring a second location in the Amelia neighborhood of Guaynabo in order to offer more workspace to artists and service these communities directly.

After the two hurricanes (Irma and Maria) we've seen the immense contribution of

culture as a healing project for the country but also as a project for economic development. These are things that have always been there but after the hurricanes I believe our work has demonstrated the importance of culture in all these processes," stressed Marianne Ramírez, executive director and curator in chief of the MAC.

# Museo de Arte de Ponce

Alejandra Peña, Executive Director



One week after Hurricane Maria, the Ponce Museum of Art (MAP by its Spanish initials) opened its doors to the public, offering free admission, as well as guided tours, art workshops, and storytelling for children. It became a space for recharging and relief in the midst of the crisis that followed the storm. Of the almost 3,600 people who visited the MAP that month, about a third didn't participate in any activities. They simply sat down to contemplate the art or walked through the halls of the museum.

**“They just wanted to be in a place felt normal, to feel inspired and get the strength to go on,” says Sofía Cánepa, Chief of Information and Community Outreach for MAP.**

Access to the museum had a positive effect on the residents of Ponce. The community initiatives that have followed emphasized the importance of art as a means to face and

process difficult moments and the value of making art accessible to all people, regardless of their background.

After the hurricane, the MAP established an alliance with the Ricky Martin Foundation and the Department of Recreation and Sports to bring recreational and family programming to different municipalities of Puerto Rico. As part of this project, the museum offered art workshops in the public squares of towns such as Florida and Loíza. Support from the FORWARD Puerto Rico Fund enabled the MAP to conduct art workshops, which include materials and teachers, to communities in Ponce and the surrounding towns. All of these activities provided the space to children and families to express creatively the diversity of emotions associated with Puerto Rico's current situation.

“It made us feel much closer to the people. It gives greater meaning to our work. We are

doing something tangible for communities that were already totally disadvantaged since before the hurricane,” affirms Cánepa.

**The MAP also resumed two projects that began before the hurricane. One includes bringing minimal security inmates under the custody of the Department of Correction to the museum for an art workshop. Another project with the Albergue Cristo Pobre de Ponce, takes art workshops to the homeless.**

“(This work) has been tremendously significant and has made us rethink our importance. Hurricane Maria has led to a profound and enriching change for all of us who work here,

posing new challenges, new ways to do our work. It has given new relevance to cultural organizations and what they are doing to reach those people they haven’t reached before,” explains Cánepa.

In addition to these initiatives, the MAP also served as a testing site for the Department of Education and as a space for a training seminar on emergency management offered by the FEMA Heritage Emergency National Task Force and The Smithsonian Institution. Also, the MAP Annual Gala, held in December 2017, was dedicated to the reconstruction of Puerto Rico and part of the funds were donated to the organizations *Caras con Causa* and *Hogar San Miguel*.



# Museum of Art of Puerto Rico

Marta Mabel Pérez, Interim Director



During the 51 days following Hurricane Maria, the Museum of Art of Puerto Rico (MAPR), located in Santurce, remained closed to the public. Meanwhile, on the inside the museum's personnel worked tirelessly to safeguard the permanent collection. A generator kept the humidity levels and temperature of the museum stable protecting the artworks, some of which date back to the seventeenth century.

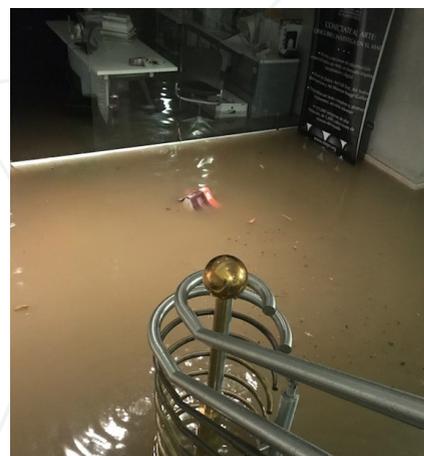
Days turned to weeks and the lack of elec-

tric power on the island became an ongoing issue. Interim director Marta Mabel Pérez was concerned that other museums and cultural institutions didn't have access to the necessary environmental controls to preserve their collections. The work of important Puerto Rican artists including José Campeche, Rafael Trufiño, Carlos Osorio, Joaquín Reyes and Arnaldo Roches Rabell were at risk. In the MAPR they had the space available to house these pieces so they quickly reached out to the several institutions.



**“After the hurricane passed, we were the museum that coordinated the initiative to safeguard Puerto Rico’s cultural heritage, specifically that of the visual arts which tells the story of Puerto Rican art,” Perez said.**

They received over 200 artworks and cultural assets from the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras campus; Sagrado Corazón University; Santa Catalina Palace (La Fortaleza); Museum Casa Roig, Humacao; Caguas Museum of Art; and the Luis Muñoz Marín Foundation, turning the MAPR into a national vault. Sol Rivera, MAPR’s conservationist, and the registrar Sandra Cintrón, who developed the emergency plan for the institution, organized the museum’s team to receive, register, and store the pieces.



# Nuestra Escuela

Anayris Guzmán, Executive Director

Since 2000, the nonprofit organization Nuestra Escuela has tackled the issue of school dropouts through alternative education. Their model doesn't just focus on academic and intellectual development, it also addresses the emotional, social, physical and spiritual needs of the students.

Many young people who attend Nuestra Escuela come from disadvantaged, unstable, and even violent backgrounds, are teen parents, or were simply unsuccessful in adapting to traditional schools. That's why Nuestra Escuela, which is part of the public school system of Puerto Rico and in 17 years has impacted the lives of over 1600 students, adapts to their learning styles and interests. This innovative approach allows them to earn a high school diploma while producing well-rounded citizens in the process.



“Just the fact that these young people say that if it weren't for Nuestra Escuela they would be dead or in jail, I believe is an important contribution to their lives, to their families and to the country,” expressed Ana Yris Guzmán Torres, president y cofounder of Nuestra Escuela.

**There are currently 250 students enrolled in the Caguas and Loiza centers, most between the ages of 13 and 21, and they are the ones that guide the curriculum by selecting individual projects. However, like many projects planned for the second half of 2017, Hurricane Maria changed everything.**

The lack of electricity combined with flooding in the Caguas center caused mold to accumulate in the walls and destroyed all their books and computers. Nuestra Escuela also lost their four gardens, which were used for growing food and as laboratories. One in particular had installed solar panels and a sustainable water irrigation system.

Despite these setbacks, both centers reopened in October. The students decided to put aside their personal projects and work on helping their communities. During the first months after Maria, food was the priority. With the support of the FORWARD Puerto Rico Fund, they established community cafeterias to provide hot meals for the students, their families, and other members of the community, including many



elderly people. These services are still available to those who continue to require them.

In 2018, the Nuestra Escuela students took on new community projects. These include a census of the needs of their communities and the creation of a natural mosquito repellent, in response to the mosquito outbreak that followed the storm. They are also rebuilding the gardens, as well as working on an additional garden run by the organization Urbe a Pie (Walking City) in Caguas.

**“After the hurricane, the country changed, and priorities also changed, but one of the things we want to maintain in the organization is the openness to have this project led by the voices of our students, since they are the ones who truly know what they need,” said Guzmán Torres. The students created a natural mosquito repellent.**

# Para la Naturaleza

*Fernando Lloveras-San Miguel, Executive Director*



The link between nature and community is central to Para la Naturaleza's tireless and far reaching conservation efforts. Through workshops and events, tours of their visitor centers, and volunteer programs such as Citizen Science, they've spent years educating and actively involving people in their mission to safeguard ecologically and historically significant sites on the island.

After Hurricane Maria, Para la Naturaleza refocused its work to offer much needed services to rural communities, while simultaneously organizing a plan to reforest

the island since many trees were either destroyed or damaged during the storm.

In the weeks following the hurricane, members of Para la Naturaleza visited the more than 50 green areas under the nonprofit's protection. Although some areas suffered serious damages, particularly their properties in Ponce and Manatí and their tree nursery in Barranquitas, they decided to first help the neighboring communities.

Emergency brigades cleared debris from roads and handed out emergency supplies. Now they

are bringing solar powered lamps, water filters, and mosquito nets to the residents of over 30 communities. They are also working to help ecologically-conscious farmers rebuild their agricultural projects.

Simultaneously, massive efforts to replant native trees are also underway, not just in Para la Naturaleza's natural reserves but also in urban areas and around bodies of water.

**The goal is to plant a million trees in five years. Volunteers are also involved in beach clean ups and are rebuilding habitats for displaced species, such as bats.**

"I think that ecological recovery goes hand in hand with human



recovery. We're hopeful that citizens will join our efforts to reforest, restore habitats, and reintroduce species, which we'll be implementing on a massive

scale with the hope that this will help with our own recovery process," expressed Fernando Lloveras San Miguel, president of Para la Naturaleza.



# P.E.C.E.S.

*José Oquendo, Executive Director*

Hurricane Maria hit land at Barrio Punta Santiago in the town of Humacao with winds reaching at least 185 miles an hour. The combination of rain and wind created a sea surge that flooded this community built by fishermen. Since 1985, this area is the home of Programa de Educación Comunitario de Entrega y Servicio (P.E.C.E.S.) which signals a community education program that emphasizes dedication and service. PECES is also the Spanish word for “fish,” a name that evokes the community’s origins. When José Javier Oquendo, PECES’ president, walked through the neighborhood after Hurricane Maria, he was overtaken with grief as neighbors in tears told him how the water flooded their modest homes taking all they owned. He later recounted, “These scenarios are only lived in horror movies. I didn’t know what to tell them.” But together, the community quickly realized “that what we need is our willpower”.

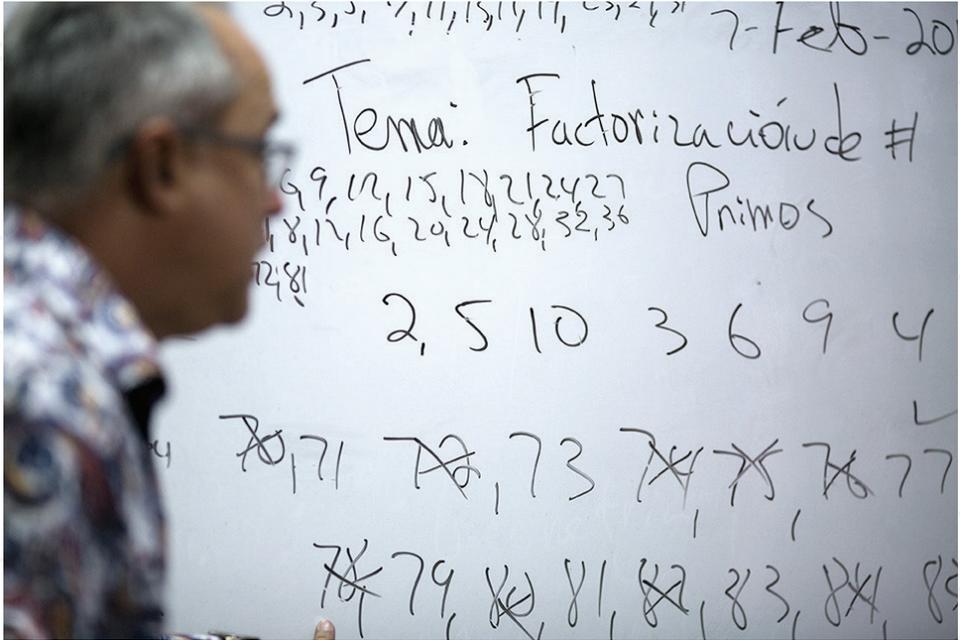


PECES lost all of its facilities except for their main building, which houses its headquarters.

Before the storm, PECES’s education and community development activities were already reaching over 25,000 people a year. After Hurricanes Irma and María, PECES quickly became a hub for the distribution of goods and services to the community. Working largely with Puerto Rico’s private and nonprofit sectors, over

100,000 pounds of products such as food, bottled water, cleaning and hygiene supplies were distributed, sometimes house to house, to 10,756 persons in 22 communities, including Humacao, Fajardo, Juncos, Gurabo, Las Piedras, Naguabo, Salinas and Guayama. Partnering with hundreds of volunteers, PECES has organized deliveries of freshly cooked food, clothes and shoes, home medical services, health fairs, social work and psychological services, as well as drug store services.

As in many parts of Puerto Rico, this area is still without electricity. The storm left debris that clogs the water channels, and recent rains flooded the area again. The PECES community realizes that even as the needs for immediate relief continue, they must think ahead and move toward a sustainable approach to greater community self-management in areas such as energy and water. They are planning new workshops to train community members to rebuild houses, and are considering how to incorporate solar energy in a community-based approach.



PHOTOS: XAVIER GARCÍA



towards our goal of \$3 million in 2017. Together, we are working to move Puerto Rico FORWARD.

**Under these challenging circumstances, it is heartening to see community members, some of whom lost everything they owned, working hard to serve others. As Oquendo states, “our people are giving their 100% when they have lost everything”.**

If you wish to contribute to the FORWARD Puerto Rico Fund, you can do so by visiting our webpage [www.redfundacionespr.org](http://www.redfundacionespr.org). Local, international and continental United States

foundations, as well as individuals from the Puerto Rican diaspora and friends of Puerto Rico throughout the world, have donated over \$1,7 million

# Proyecto Matria

Amarilis Pagán, Executive Director



Inside a small classroom in a church located in the Miraflores sector of Orocovis, about 20 people, mostly women, graduated from the first empowerment workshops of the Casa Solidaria program, created by the non-profit organization Proyecto Matria. They stepped outside to pose for a photo -- smiling and enthusiastically holding up their certificates with the mountains as the backdrop -- which is later published on social media with the hashtag: *#MirafloresEsElFuturo. Miraflores is the Future.*

Miraflores was one of the places Matria visited after Hurricane Maria. There they assisted about 35 families, which even before the storm were living in poverty. Many residents of the community are unemployed, have speech and hearing problems, some are illiterate, and even those with a minimum level of education do not have the skills to find employment. That is why Matria chose Miraflores to implement Casa Solidaria,

its pilot recovery program. The residents were very receptive to being part of this project which aims to give them the tools to create small businesses and rebuild their community.

What distinguishes Matria's business incubation model is that "it's a holistic and empowering model, and contrary to traditional incubators that almost always focus on populations with a higher level of professionalism, even previous business experience, our model focuses on people who are entrepreneurs by necessity. "

**"Their economic situation forces them to generate some kind of economic activity because there are no jobs and they have no other options", explains Amárilis Pagán Jiménez, executive director of Proyecto Matria.**



The first group has already started a process that will last a minimum of one year and will include entrepreneurship workshops, individualized technical assistance, search for seed capital and consultations that will help them take their first steps in setting up their businesses. The project will also offer psychosocial support, free legal advice, and after school programs for their children. Under Casa Solidaria they will also work on housing reconstruction and getting materials for people who lost their roofs, agricultural development and a community kitchen. It's a long-term and multi-faceted project that will last between three to five years.

For Matria this program is historic because in its 14 years of existence it's the first time they have men participating in their workshops. Matria is a feminist organization that was founded to assist survivors of domestic violence and female heads of family. Over the years they expanded their reach to include members of the LGBTQ community and now under Casa Solidaria they are working with entire families, including men.

“They have responded so well to the workshops that it confirms what we always thought, that our model, though created for women in extremely vulnerable situations, is



applicable and helps any other person who is in a situation of vulnerability,” reflects Pagán Jiménez.

That's why they created the hashtag #MirafloresEsElFuturo, the participants of this program are paving the way for future Casas Solidarias in other communities around the island.

# SER de Puerto Rico

*Dra. Nilda Morales, President and CEO*

Consistent treatment is essential for children with a disability or with autism. This is why a week after Hurricane Maria struck the island, SER de Puerto Rico's therapists were already offering their services at the organization's centers in Ponce and San Juan.

"If our kids' conditions aren't treated, they worsen," explained Nilda Morales, president of SER de Puerto Rico, a nonprofit that annually works with 4,600 children and adults with special needs.

"That's why we're very punctual with our interventions. Because as you optimize their development, you give them the possibility of being independent, productive, and self-sufficient," she pointed out.

The electric power services at SER's facilities in the southern part of Puerto Rico were restored the third week after the hurricane, even though most of the Island remained dark. They were able to resume normal operations. In San Juan, on the other hand, the walls of the building were covered with mold because of flooding and lack of electric power.

While they were able to disinfect the school and resume classes, the rehabilitation wing still needs more work. So, the therapists continue to do what they've been doing from the beginning: offering therapy in an outdoor court and in exterior classrooms powered by small generators, within a limited schedule.



**"We have also sent our specialists to communities where we identified people with disabilities," continued Morales, adding that this has been a joint effort with FEMA and other entities.**



SER's expanded effort began with the island municipalities, Vieques in particular, which SER has visited on a weekly basis. There they found cases of bedridden elderly people, children with developmental issues, and disabled people being cared for by their families without any external support. Through FEMA they were able to obtain equipment such as wheelchairs, while also offering primary medical services and access to psychologists and social workers for family members. Currently they are in the process of preparing a school that's not being used in Fajardo in order to serve the people of the east coast and island municipalities.



SER de Puerto Rico is also establishing a model of remote rehabilitation services in Vieques and Culebra that they will then replicate in other underserved municipalities such as Villalba, Maricao, Ciales, Orocovis and Morovis. This consists of training a family member, nurse or therapy assistant to give therapy under the supervision of a doctor or therapist that will provide an evaluation of the patient's needs and give recommendations via Skype or Facetime.

**“This is a new scenario for us but our families teach us every day how to face adverse events that can affect your day. Because they live with disability or autism, we who give them these services to develop their skills can't do less. They have been our guides and our inspiration and we have to be there for each of them,” concludes Morales.**



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