

From The Ground Up: Rebuilding after the storm

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BURGAW, N.C. (WNCT) - In Pender County, it isn't uncommon to see piles of debris sitting on the side of the road, full of things lost in Hurricane Florence.

There are several piles in front of Jacqueline Hand's home.

Some of the debris in them is from materials stripped from her home.

"Everything is completely gone," said Hand. "So, everything has to be replaced."

Hand estimates that she has more than \$100,000 dollars of damage.

"As big as this home is (it will cost) about \$150,000 to replace this home and everything that was in this home," said Hand.

She is one of the thousands of homeowners in North Carolina impacted by Hurricane Florence.

Hand's community is near the Cape Fear River in Burgaw.

It was flooded after the storm.

"It's just like you're out in the middle of the desert, and you have nowhere to turn to," said Laretta Murray, who lives down the street from Hand.

Murray and her husband also lost everything in the flood.

"Even at that rate when we got back here, it was still about another week and a half before we could get back in," said Murray. "Once we did, we got inside everything was just gone, gone. Clothes, nothing, nothing left."

9 On Your Side was able to document members of AmeriCorps as they worked on Murray's home, along with a neighboring one.

"What crews are seeing is a lot of water damage in the homes and very high levels of water damage," said Nadine Hacker, planning chief for the AmeriCorps disaster response team. "What I mean by that is that the water wasn't just in the lower part of the home. A lot of these homes are needing a complete floor to ceiling muck and gut of getting all that out of the house."

The AmeriCorps provides the service for free to help impacted homeowners start their recovery process.

"Our mission assignment currently covers Duplin, Jones, Pender, as well as Lenoir and Onslow," said Hacker. "Currently, we're focusing on Duplin and Pender, but we are beginning to reach out to the other counties as well."

"They have been instrumental from day one," said Murray.

Many of the homeowners who talked to 9 On Your Side said they were impacted by Hurricane Floyd in 1999.

They raised their homes above flood level to keep this type of devastation from happening again.

"There's Floyd; we had 15 inches of water in the house," said Millard Murray. "It didn't come over the receptacles or anything this time, 4 and a quarter feet, which is roughly chest-high."

Murray said thanks to the kindness of volunteers that showed up on his doorstep, he is now further ahead in rebuilding than he anticipated.

In the wake of a storm like Florence, it may be difficult to think about how to move forward, especially in terms of protecting you and your family from the next storm.

But, that's exactly what experts are hoping you'll do.

Charlie Fisher is a senior managing director at Witt O' Brien, which is a crisis management firm based in Washington, DC.

Fisher visited the 9 On Your Side studios.

"It's important that organizations, individuals starting at the family level, think about these issues," said Fisher. "The frequency and intensity of these events are increasing. It's important people take this seriously."