

Social work alumnus leading Hurricane Matthew response

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Joseph Halm newwave@tulane.edu



Social work alumnus Jonathan LaMare, third from left, who graduated in 2011, was working in Haiti when Hurricane Matthew made landfall. As country director for a nonprofit, he's already helping people rebuild. (Photo provided by Jonathan LaMare)

As millions of dollars of aid and disaster workers pour into Haiti to assist in the recovery from Hurricane Matthew, social work alumnus Jonathan LaMare, who graduated in 2011, is already helping his neighbors recover.

LaMare is no stranger to hurricanes, so when the storm turned toward Haiti for an Oct. 4 landfall, he knew what to do even if his Haitian neighbors didn't.

"It was certainly a long week," said LaMare, who serves as the country director for the [Be Like Brit Foundation](#) in Haiti. "It was a slow-moving storm, and Haiti has no notification system. So we went around notifying neighbors that they could shelter in place here, and people just didn't believe us. They thought we were nuts, so that was challenging. Of course, a lot of the same people came running when the storm hit."

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The foundation employs 100 people and operates a 19,000-square-foot earthquake-proof orphanage about two hours from Port-Au-Prince. The group also runs a residential program with 66 children along with a 1,200-square-foot on-site medical facility serving 300 people per month.

While the hurricane-force winds and rains reached the orphanage, they were spared much of the flooding and destruction experienced on the southern tip of the country. Starting on Oct. 11, LaMare’s foundation committed to building a home a day for those who lost their homes in their region.

LaMare said his experiences at Tulane informed his organization’s disaster response.

“We want this to be a community-driven response and not a top-down kind of event,” he said. “We want the local people to drive this recovery. That’s our focus right now. Everyone here is so resilient and willing and able to work to rebuild and improve their country. It’s inspiring to see during a far-reaching disaster.”