

Americans give aid, hope to tornado victims

by [Haleluya Hadero](#) in the [January 12, 2022](#) issue



Volunteers, mostly from the Mayfield Consumer Products factory, help salvage possessions from a home destroyed by the storm. (AP Photo/Gerald Herbert, File)

Some removed broken tree limbs from the ground. Others prepared hot meals and shelters for those who have nowhere to turn. And many collected cash, toothpaste, soap, and other items for the many who need them.

In the days after December 10, 2021, when tornadoes ravaged the South and Midwest, killing at least 90 people and displacing hundreds, people across the country pitched in to help.

Glenn Hickey, 67, was one of them. Hours after the tornado, the retired funeral director received a call from the Southern Baptist Disaster Relief team in Kentucky asking him to help with recovery efforts in Mayfield, which saw some of the worst

damage.

Hickey, a regular volunteer with Kentucky Baptist Disaster Relief, has gotten used to these calls and stays “packed up.” So he kicked into high gear the day after the storms and helped gather more volunteers. He drove four hours from his home in Monticello, Kentucky, to Mayfield, where he and other volunteers removed tree branches from roads and driveways and patched damaged roofs.

“I have seen devastation as bad from tornadoes, but I have never seen such widespread damage,” said Karen Smith, the Southern Baptist Disaster Relief’s feeding coordinator for Kentucky, who volunteers to organize and cook meals.

“It’s kind of overwhelming because it’s from one end of the state to the other,” she said. “With that kind of damage, sometimes you just don’t know where to start.”

President Joe Biden announced on December 15 that the federal government would pay for the first 30 days of tornado recovery in Kentucky, the worst-hit state by far in a swarm of twisters that devastated entire communities. Kentucky governor Andy Beshear said more than 100 people remained unaccounted for a week after the storms. Deaths were also reported in Illinois, Arkansas, Missouri, and Tennessee.

Along with the Southern Baptist volunteers, the American Red Cross, churches, and other charities have mobilized to set up shelters and distribute meals, water, and snacks in the affected areas. But some people have chosen to help on their own.

Jim Finch, of Clarksville, Tennessee, went viral on social media after he hauled his meat smoker to Mayfield to cook for residents. Abbigayle Rawls, a medical student at the University of Kentucky’s campus in hard-hit Bowling Green, has collected more than \$152,000 through a GoFundMe fundraiser.

Not long after the emergency alerts blared on her phone and she emerged from taking shelter, Rawls says she and her fellow students realized the urgent need for help for people in the affected towns.

“Things on the ground are pretty bad, and we’re going to need some help and it’s going to take a while to rebuild,” she recalled saying to colleagues. Someone in her class suggested they find a way to help, which led them to launch the fundraiser.

Donations to Rawls’s appeal have come in from as far away as the United Kingdom. The effort is entirely student run, but the university administration signed off on the

medical students using the college's name in the post.

"It's been incredible to just watch the entire world come together and just help out," Rawls said.

Requests for supplies were coming into her in-box about two to three times an hour, she estimated, and within days, supplies had already gone out to people. Rawls's peers, for example, cleared as many bandages and wound-care supplies from a store's shelves as they could when a request for those items came in from Dawson Springs, Kentucky, another devastated town. Someone drove the supplies out to people who needed them, she said.

As for most of the money, Rawls said she and her peers are putting a group together to determine how best to use it to help people in the long run. (Experts say people should practice caution when donating through crowdfunding sites, since private fundraising organizers aren't required to disclose how they spend the money.)

In Missouri, Randi McCallian, 35, began collecting essential items, such as wipes, trash bags, soap, and pet food, to deliver to Hayti, a city that saw some damage about 200 miles away from her home in Newburg. The stay-at-home mom, who moved to Missouri with political aspirations after a failed bid for the Colorado state senate last year, said four people have given her \$190 to get more stuff.

Kevin Cotton, the mayor of Madisonville, Kentucky, said that while donated supplies are great, it's overwhelming in a small area to find a place to temporarily store them. Most of his town went unscathed by the tornado, but nearby Dawson Springs was hit hard, so he pitched in to help.

"What we need the most right now is a lot of prayer for this community," Cotton said. "We have a lot of volunteers. We have a lot of supplies that are coming in. We have donations from all over the country. The big thing that we need is for people to be patient with us." —Associated Press