

Helping Houston Rebuild Homes, Lives Faster

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Four months after Hurricane Harvey made landfall, the streets in Houston are still littered with signs of the historic storm's destructive force: drywall stacked up on curbs, children's toys mangled and water damaged, a favorite couch splintered across a front yard.

The storm is estimated to have damaged or destroyed nearly 300,000 homes in Texas, with many of those homes in the Houston area. Rebuilding is a massive task, and recovery will take a long time, but armed with the tools of the Toyota Production System, national non-profit SBP hopes to speed up that process.

"The need throughout Houston is enormous, particularly for the most vulnerable," said Zack Rosenberg, SBP co-founder and chief executive officer. "We are driven by the idea that there is a human toll to a delayed recovery, one that can bring victims to their breaking point."

SBP serves low- to moderate-income homeowners who cannot afford to rebuild, with a focus on families with small children, the elderly, disabled persons, veterans, and the under- and uninsured.

"We are sharing our knowledge gained from responding to natural disasters nationwide, and what we have learned from the Toyota Production System, with local non-profits and government institutions, so that we can collectively serve more people faster," added Rosenberg. "Helping people achieve normalcy is not just good for their wellbeing, it also helps the local economy."

Partnering to Scale Impact

In the days following Harvey's landfall, SBP deployed staff and AmeriCorps team members to Texas. Since the floodwaters receded, SBP has held information sessions with homeowners, began mucking and gutting in a hard-hit neighborhood, and established a permanent field office in the Houston area. It is also working with local organizations to scale up their capacity to rebuild homes.

Toyota provided SBP with \$1 million and 11 vehicles for the Houston recovery effort. Additionally, together with Gulf States Toyota, is further supporting the rebuilding through volunteers.

"SBP has stepped up to help with a critical need here in Houston and is doing much more than just rebuilding homes," said Marvin Odum, Houston recovery czar. "The organization brings many lessons learned stemming from Katrina and other disasters, and they are sharing that experience and training other non-profits. In addition, SBP is also providing expertise to the City of Houston on how to put a plan together to navigate and expedite the recovery process."

SBP applies philosophies of the Toyota Production System—also known as TPS—to disaster preparation, response and recovery. The Toyota Production System is an organizational culture that engages people to continuously make improvements, and is based on Toyota's 70 years of manufacturing experience.

"Baked into SBP's culture is the philosophy that if it works well, you must share it. It's something we adopted from Toyota, and their efforts to share knowledge with society," added Rosenberg. "SBP has an obligation to share effective solutions so that greater numbers of people can benefit, thereby shrinking time between disaster and recovery."

Together with Toyota, SBP was able to cut the time to rebuild a house left uninhabitable by disaster by almost half – reducing the average number of days from 116 to 60 days.

Beyond construction, SBP also uses TPS for everything ranging from client intake, to case management and volunteer recruitment. SBP tracks everything from volunteer/worker schedules to inventory to status reports on homes being rebuilt to continually improve and serve more people faster.

Welcome Home

SBP is currently working on about a dozen Harvey-damaged homes in Houston, and this week welcomed the first family back home following Hurricane Harvey.

“This is the best Christmas present,” said Sylvia Garcia, homeowner and SBP client. “The holiday season is so important to us, and after such a tough year, we could not be more thankful to SBP, their partners, and all the AmeriCorps members and volunteers for rebuilding our home. After the storm, we felt lost; we didn’t see a path forward. We can restart our lives now that we’re back in our home.”

Garcia, 26, bought the home three years ago so she could take care of her parents, both of whom face health issues and cannot work. Her sister, niece and nephew also live in the home. In addition to having their home mucked and gutted, mold remediation completed and rebuilt by SBP, their home was furnished through a donation by Holly Gregor, an interior designer from Louisville, Kentucky.

“What’s great about today is that the Garcias are the first of many families who will return to their homes,” said Chris Reynolds, executive vice president and chief diversity officer, Toyota Motor North America. “However, there is still a lot to be done because many families are still displaced because of the disaster. But because of organizations like SBP, Sylvia and her family get to return home, which gives us all hope.”

Rosenburg made it a point to highlight the importance and effectiveness of AmeriCorps, a national service program where people ages 18 and up invest ten months of their lives serving American communities. Rosenburg said, “AmeriCorps is a testament of what is best in our country: Americans selflessly serving those who they have never before met, speaking to the deep ties that bind our country. AmeriCorps is the engine that allows hard-working and proud community members to recover in a prompt, efficient and predictable manner.”

“Through AmeriCorps’ long-term partnership with SBP, we’ve provided thousands of workers to help recovery efforts following disasters across the U.S.,” said Kim Mansaray, Corporation for National and Community Service, acting chief executive officer. “Our members learn a variety of skills while working with SBP, including problem solving through TPS, which will benefit them for years to come.”

Formed in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, SBP has grown from a rebuilding organization to a team committed to doing everything possible to shrink the time between disaster and recovery. Each year, SBP works with more than 25,000 volunteers and 320 AmeriCorps members as it rebuilds homes, counsels non-profits, corporations, and government entities as to best practices for a quicker recovery.

“I’m still amazed that all these people came to help our family get back on our feet,” Garcia said. “We will be forever grateful.”