



Newsletter 1

nbhigherground.org

Re / Building for the Community

June 2012

It is now 9 months since the devastating flooding due to Tropical Storm Irene made it necessary for our neighbors in The Spruces Mobile Home Park to be evacuated. Only 64 dwellings have been reoccupied while 153 homes are condemned and will have to be removed, as illustrated by this photograph taken at a recent workday sponsored by MCLA, the Spruce's Tenants Association, Higher Ground, and the COOL Committee. Generous support from many, many people in and around Williamstown – and others farther away – has made it possible for our volunteers to help in the following ways:



- With the Community Fund for the Spruces and other donations from townspeople, churches and organizations, we provided vouchers for gas and groceries in the months before monies from FEMA were available.
- Arranged and funded motel stays for over 75 evacuees, some for weeks, some for months.
- Provided counseling and arranged support groups led by Riverside Trauma Center.
- Provided small grants for debris removal, appliance purchase, and repair work not covered by FEMA.
- Organized clean-up efforts and work days with local groups, including Gale Hose Fire Company, students from Williams College and MCLA, and many others.

Higher Ground Established in October, 2011

Higher Ground was incorporated as a non-profit to continue the work begun by the Northern Berkshire Interfaith Clergy. The Community Fund for The Spruces, set up at Williamstown Savings Bank at the same time, took donations for direct aid to flood victims. When it ceased operating, it transferred to Higher Ground its remaining funds, knowing that Higher Ground would carry on its work.

Our two staff positions, Coordinator and Case Management Supervisor, have been funded largely by church-related disaster relief agencies that have gladly supported such important work. Our staff works alongside our dedicated board of directors, experienced and hard-working volunteer advisors, and a steadfast team of volunteers at our office at 906 Main Street.

Volunteer Case Managers

It became apparent that once immediate needs were met, many Spruces residents would need help navigating the FEMA maze. In response, Higher Ground established a case management program. Our volunteer case managers have partnered with 50 families on their road to recovery, offering advocacy and emotional support and accessing appropriate services as needed.

Through this case management and a survey of Spruces residents, we have identified a number of Spruces residents who have not yet found permanent housing that they can afford. Higher Ground is building a housing fund and is actively pursuing private and public sector funding for permanent disaster replacement housing for those whose homes were lost. We have identified several organizations with whom we might partner to create replacement housing. Please contact us if you would like to help with this effort.

"I would like to thank everyone involved for your help and continued support. It means a lot to me just to know someone cares. I never expected the outpouring of concern that not only your program has shown but that the town's people as well. Again, please accept my sincere thank you."

A Spruces
resident

Higher Ground has been able to carry on the good work done by The Community Fund for The Spruces, to which over \$90,000 was donated and which allocated over \$80,000 in direct aid. As of the end of May, we have received the following:

Community Fund for The Spruces	\$11,345
Individuals	39,397
Organizations	6,874
Grants	48,418

Allocations of funds spent to date:

82% Program support (direct relief and assistance, and for seeking sources of disaster replacement housing)

9% Disaster preparedness

9% Administrative costs

With remaining funds, we continue to respond to and assist those affected by TS Irene with needs that are unmet, even nine months later.



HG coordinator, Robin Lenz, helps organize volunteers who want to reach out to The Spruces community. Junior Girl Scout Troop 40036, led by Julie Gill, hosted a community supper on June 1, 2012. The 4th graders planned a festive party, complete with songs and prizes, for their neighbors affected by the storm. More than 60 residents and former residents of the Spruces attended. (See photo above)

Because of your generosity, we have assisted over 200 households. We evaluate requests and partner with other agencies to allocate small grants to replace essential items for those who lost everything. We work with our town committees to consider creative housing solutions for our former neighbors who cannot find replacement housing in our town. Since only 27 of the 153 families whose homes were condemned have found housing in Williamstown, Higher Ground is investigating the possibility of building replacement housing with the help of other non-profit disaster organizations. Finally, we are learning from this experience and will not have to “build the airplane as we are flying it” the next time disaster strikes.

Your generous support has enabled Higher Ground to continue recovery assistance. Though pending lawsuits mean that The Spruces still faces an uncertain future, we are proud of the upbeat, committed and persistent way that survivors of the storm have worked toward re-creating their lives and their community. Your help has been essential and reminds us that our village is truly beautiful. THANK YOU.

Our Boards of Directors and Advisors

The Rev. Carrie Bail, President
 Bilal Ansari, Muslim Chaplain, Vice-President
 Catherine Yamamoto, Treasurer
 Mark Lincourt, Assistant Clerk
 Gail Burns
 Penny Devereux
 Van Ellet
 The Rev. Peter Elvin
 John Law
 Harry Montgomery
 Brian O’Grady
 Tom Pfeiffer
 Ron Turbin
 Margaret Ware
 Carol Zingarelli

Advisory Board
 Al Bashevkin
 James Kolesar
 Stephen Pagnotta
 Thomas Sheldon



Our staff and volunteers

Staff
 Robin Lenz, Coordinator
 Susan Puddester,
 Case Mgmt. Supervisor

Volunteers
 Dolores Lovegreen
 Samantha Murray
 Ginny Sheldon

HOW CAN I HELP?

- Call for volunteer opportunities
- Organize an event to help the Spruces
- Contribute to Higher Ground
- Stay informed, visit our website for updates on replacement housing

Higher Ground, Inc.
 906 Main Street
 Williamstown, MA 01267
 414.458.5714
nbhigherground.org

In loving memory of Matt Jenkins,
 Higher Ground volunteer.