Hurricane Dorian was an addition to the brutal hurricanes that have hit the Caribbean and Southeastern United States in recent years, although this one may have been the worst. One of the most heavily affected countries was the Bahamas, particularly Grand Bahama Island and the Abaco Islands. On August 31 and into the early days of September, the Bahamas were demolished by 185-220 mph winds by the Category 5 hurricane.

Estimates in the storm’s wake showed $74 million worth of debris needing to be removed, 53 people dead, and 1,300 people missing. Thousands of homes were irreparably damaged and about 70,000 homeless people left on the island, with others who have fled to neighboring islands and the United States in hopes to find refuge.

The devastation was so wrenching that the brothers of the Psi Delta Chapter of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc., decided that they needed to act. A phone call from one of the fraternity’s brothers to a high school friend who lived in the Bahamas brought the desperation into full focus.

“I had a friend from the Bahamas who I called after the storm hit,” said Douglas Chen-Young, a junior Economics major and treasurer of the fraternity. “I asked him, ‘Do you need food, clothes, money?’ and he said, ‘we need all of them’.

The personal connection created a sense of urgency for Chen-Young, and he realized that an effort needed to be organized quickly. “When he said that, it really hit home,” Chen-Young said. “It’s one thing hearing it in headlines, but another thing when you hear it directly from someone you know.

Chen-Young then worked with fraternity brother Myles Brown, a senior Exercise and Sports Science Major, to organize the drive. The two created fliers, found an organization to donate to, and made contact with them to handle distribution of donations. The actual relief effort began the next day.

An initial social media post by the fraternity immediately drew requests to pitch in on the effort. Within hours of posting about the drive, the fraternity was contacted by members from the executive teams from the UNC-Chapel Hill Caribbean Students Association, Carolina Cupboard, and Carolina Closet with offers to expand the drive even further.
The work culminated in a week-long fundraiser and donations drive held in The Pit, with logistical and marketing help from the Carolina Union.

This was a great student run effort and the results showed how effective campus organization collaboration can be. After a two-week drive, the fundraiser collected 689 lbs. (yes, 10 large FedEx boxes) worth of clothes, food, and toiletries and shipped it to the Grand Bahama Relief Foundation for them to distribute to those in need. We also collected $1,729.07 of donations that will be sent to the foundation to help rebuild the damaged islands. This was an extremely successful event in both how the student groups were able to collaborate and the community effort to help those in need.

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