

DOH-PALM BEACH RUNS SUCCESSFUL SPECIAL NEEDS SHELTER THROUGHOUT HURRICANE DORIAN



The Florida Health Department in Palm Beach County was proud to execute a successful Special Needs shelter throughout Hurricane Dorian. The goal was to provide necessary aid and shelter specifically to special needs individuals in the county. “The Special Needs Shelter is a wonderful example of our community partners working in unison to achieve the objective of protecting our most vulnerable populations,” said Dr. Alina Alonso, Director of Florida Department of Health in Palm Beach County.

According to Connie Upshaw, Shelter Manager and Community Health Nursing Consultant for DOH-Palm Beach, “Everything went smoothly because of staff, team work, health providers, clerical support and help from county agencies.”



Clerical and Administrative staff provided for a huge gap usually seen at shelters. Normally, clerical tasks get assigned to nurses which bogs down workflow. With the help of these dedicated team members, nurses and practitioners were able to quickly see patients and maintain a happy pace. “Logistical help set up in 3 ½ hours which is record time,” said Upshaw. Without their help, administrators think the shelter wouldn’t have been the same.

“The Emergency Support Function-8 (ESF-8) staff did a phenomenal job planning, preparing, and coordinating a response to Hurricane Dorian with Shelter Manager Connie,” said Shamilla Lutchman, Public Health Preparedness Program Manager. The shelter opened at 1PM Monday, September 2nd and closed 9PM Wednesday, September 4th. Shamilla felt proud to be in the public health

field because being there made her proud of what she does. “We have to take care of our residents and visitors in Palm Beach County,” said Lutchman.

The max number of clients was 247 and Children’s Medical Services (CMS) was there as well as pediatric support. “The Alzheimer’s Association was there for patients with Alzheimer’s which was a great help,” said Upshaw. Palm Beach County Fire Rescue also provided key support and Bill Johnson, Director of Emergency Management for Palm Beach County assisted as well.

The new strategic layout of the shelter provided for more cots which totaled 490. This made Connie feel like the shelter was a good trial run. Palm Beach County was lucky to not be hit directly by Dorian but regardless, the DOH-Palm Beach Special Needs Shelter was ready. The new Mayor of Palm Beach County, Mack Bernard, was there and visited Connie at the Nurse Station.

