



Save the Children's Anna Hardway helps 18-month-old Ava down the slide at the new ABC Day Care in Moore, Oklahoma. Prior to the May 20th EF5 tornado, ABC owner Kaylene Hilton ran the center at her home, but after her roof caved in, she and her family were forced to move. Thanks to donor generosity, Save the Children was able to help with outdoor toys and other aid so Kaylene could reopen her home-based business in her new neighborhood. *Photo Susan Warner/Save the Children*

OKLAHOMA TORNADOES

Rebuilding Life for Children & Families With Your Support

ONE-YEAR REPORT

May 2014

“Ten minutes before that, the sun was shining.”

A year ago, in May 2013, a series of devastating tornadoes tore through central Oklahoma. One moment, it was a lovely spring day, the next a scene of unimaginable terror, devastation and loss. Children in the impacted areas witnessed destruction on a scale only the worst of tornadoes can deliver – destruction no child should be forced to experience.

Two tornadoes on May 19th were precursors to the massive EF5 tornado that struck on May 20th. More than a mile wide and almost two miles long, the huge twister was on the ground for 40 minutes. The tornado tore directly through two elementary schools and part of one middle school and killed seven young children in one school. In all, 24 people lost their lives, including 10 children. An estimated 13,000 homes, 22 schools and many child care centers were damaged or destroyed, and more than 500 children were displaced in the Moore area alone.

Tornadoes and flooding struck again on May 31st. El Reno and Yukon, situated 20 miles west of Oklahoma City, suffered extensive damage. Twenty-two people died, among them nine children.

The impact of these tornadoes was immense. The lives of 93,000 people, including 25,233 children, were adversely affected. Disruption to children’s lives was exacerbated by the fact that, because of the damage to schools and the proximity to the end of the school year, school was immediately terminated in some communities, leaving many children to cope with the disaster while separated from friends and familiar surroundings.

Save the Children, the national leader in child-focused disaster response and recovery programs, immediately deployed emergency teams to protect and support children and their families. With your help, we have reached almost 18,500 people – more than half of them children – with relief and recovery services. And our efforts continue.



You helped us make a difference.

With the May 20th tornado headed for the Agapeland Learning Center in Moore, Andrea Baird called the center’s Assistant Director, Cathy Wilson, to say she wouldn’t be able to get there in time to pick up her daughter, Aria, before the tornado hit. Promising she would care for the 4-year-old, Wilson made sure all the children and staff followed the center’s emergency plan and took shelter in bathrooms.

Cathy was in the same bathroom as Aria when the tornado ripped the roof off the building. As the suction started pulling Aria up, Wilson grabbed her leg, quite probably saving the little girl’s life. A grateful Andrea later started a Facebook campaign to raise money for Agapeland staff who lost their jobs after the center was destroyed.

As for the center itself, Save the Children gave Agapeland a grant of \$20,000 to replace lost equipment, as well as money for food when it reopened just three weeks later. This spring, we gave the center an additional \$17,000 to build a storm shelter.

But Save the Children contributed more than money, says Agapeland Director Memory Taylor. We also provided emotional support that prevented her from losing hope when faced with the monumental task of rebuilding.

“It’s important,” she says thankfully, “to have people that say, ‘You can do this, and your community needs you to do this.’”

Photo by Brett Deering/Getty Images for Save the Children

Hitting the ground running – our immediate response

One major concern after a disaster is making sure children remain safe and protected. In Oklahoma, our emergency response teams immediately set up Child Friendly Spaces in shelters. We also partnered with local organizations to assess the damage to early childhood programs, day care centers, schools and summer literacy and camp programs. We determined what was needed to get them up and running – and how we could help.



A New Friend and A Summer of Caring

Nine-year-old Tara celebrates her progress on the road to recovery with a woman who helped make it possible – Sherry Peebles, community program specialist for the Girls Scouts of Western Oklahoma.

When tornado warnings sounded on May 31st, Tara and her family sought shelter in a drainage ditch behind their apartment in an Oklahoma City housing project. The tornado never struck the area, but the ditch flooded with massive amounts of water that swept the family away. Tara’s two younger siblings and three other relatives drowned. Although she was not able to swim, Tara survived by floating on her back for a long distance down the river into which the ditch emptied.

Thanks to your support of our recovery efforts, we were able to help Tara and other children attend area summer camps, places where they could relax and recover. Tara went to Girl Scout camp – her first chance to enjoy childhood fun since her family’s tragedy. Peebles, who continues to work with Tara in her local troop, has become a dedicated mentor and friend to this young girl who lost so much.

Photo by Brett Deering/Getty Images for Save the Children

With your support...

- We opened six Child Friendly Spaces that provided 518 children with safe places to play and begin the recovery process, leaving parents free to start rebuilding their lives.
- We supported 35 child care centers that were damaged or destroyed by the tornadoes, providing food, toys, furniture, supplies and outdoor equipment that enabled them to reopen more quickly than would otherwise have been possible.
- We partnered with more than 30 local organizations, including the Potawatome Nation and Absentee Shawnee Tribes, to prioritize and address children’s immediate and long-term needs.
- We worked with local groups, including the YMCA and Girl Scouts, to enable 245 children affected by the tornadoes to attend summer camps, a welcome respite to those who lost their homes and saw their neighborhoods and playgrounds destroyed.

These immediate response efforts set the stage for our longer-term recovery work, which we continue to carry out thanks to the extraordinary generosity of our donors. We are pleased to share highlights of that work with you.

Staying the course – our long-term recovery initiatives

When emergencies strike, Save the Children is unique among responders in that we're committed to providing ongoing recovery programs for children and families.

Decades of experience have taught us that, while immediate help is critical, girls and boys also need long-term physical and emotional support to help them cope with the trauma caused by a frightening event. That's especially true when the loss of homes and possessions is accompanied by the disruption of normal school and child care routines as it was for so many of the children of central Oklahoma.

Ongoing programs

Thanks to the outstanding generosity of our donors, we've continued working to help children and families in the tornado-damaged communities through 2013 and into 2014. In accordance with our two-year response and recovery plan, we will continue programming through the 2014-2015 school year.

Conducting a Journey of Hope



Finding Comfort through Sharing

As the massive May 20th tornado tore through Moore and battered her junior high, Audrey, 14, sought shelter under her desk. When she returned to school, this sparkling teen participated in Save the Children's *Journey of Hope* program, which, she said, helped her cope with her ongoing fears and emotions.

Now able to relax at home with her mom, Sara, and brother, Ryder, Audrey found relief by sharing with other teens and discovering she was not the only student still struggling with her experience.

Photo by Brett Deering/Getty Images for Save the Children

One of Save the Children's top priorities after any U.S. emergency is to offer emotional support to children and their caregivers through our signature *Journey of Hope* program. *Journey of Hope* uses art, discussion and relaxation exercises to teach children coping skills and support their natural resilience. An adult version of the program helps parents and other caregivers recover so they can better support the children in their care.

Through *Journey of Hope*, children in the devastated Moore school district are receiving the support they needed to relieve stress and regain a sense of normalcy.

In the first year of the recovery, we partnered with Moore Youth & Family Services to provide *Journey of Hope* to all the Moore public schools. During the second year, we will expand the program to reach the additional school districts that were affected by the tornadoes, including Norman and Shawnee.

Low-income tribal families are often the most vulnerable populations in a disaster because of a lack of access to recovery services. In Oklahoma, the Absentee Shawnee Nation, Cheyenne and Potawatomic Tribal Nation communities were severely affected by the tornadoes, with many homes damaged or destroyed. Our expanded *Journey of Hope* programming will reach these children and families. We are also bringing our emergency preparedness programs to their communities.



A Young Hero Rediscovered Hope

With the EF5 tornado threatening their home on May 20th, 15-year-old Hunter helped his mom rush his four younger siblings to a neighbor's shelter. Then, when the family emerged into a sea of devastation, he immediately ran to help free neighbors trapped in another shelter nearby. Later, this brave young man helped his parents care for his brothers and sisters as they set about rebuilding their lives. Their home was destroyed, forcing the family to move to a rental and leaving Hunter to come to terms with his experiences in unfamiliar surroundings without the support of neighborhood friends.

Fortunately, the teenager who helped so many others did have a place he could turn for support. He joined Save the Children's *Journey of Hope* group at his school. With the help of group leaders and classmates, he says, he was finally able to work through the feelings of despair that had been so hard for him to shake. With new coping skills, Hunter rediscovered his naturally upbeat nature.

Photo by Brett Deering/Getty Images for Save the Children

Replacing teacher and classroom materials that were damaged or destroyed

To help reestablish comforting routines for children, we facilitated the reopening of schools for the 2013-2014 school year, providing funding with which they could replace lost resources. The Moore Public School District was devastated by the tornado. Two elementary schools were completely

destroyed, and 20 other schools sustained damage. Save the Children worked with 75 teachers and 30 special education teachers to replace classroom and emergency response materials that were not covered by insurance or by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). To date, we have donated \$38,000 to the Moore Public School Foundation for classroom and teacher supplies, and we have an additional \$38,000 ready and waiting if they require further materials.

In addition, with the 2014 tornado season upon us, Save the Children is providing grants to some of the child care centers we helped last year so they can build storm shelters that comply with FEMA standards for the protection of children and staff.

Strengthening Oklahoma's ability to protect children in emergencies



Preparation Pays

Nancy Goodrich, owner of the All About Kids Learning Center in Moore, rode out the May 20th tornado in her “rain room,” along with 162 children and staff and parents.

Three months before the deadly tornado, Goodrich woke up in the middle of the night realizing she wouldn't be able to fit all of the center's children and staff in her existing safe room. The next day, she had her builder start putting in a shelf to create two levels of seating and increase the capacity of the room. She also purchased rolling cribs to ensure speedy passage of infants and toddlers to safety in case of an emergency.

Goodrich holds regular drills to the rain room so everyone knows just what to do. When the tornado struck, All About Kids was ready. Nancy's students sang, read books and stayed calm as the winds blew. Thanks to advanced planning and preparation, no one was hurt although the tornado battered the center and tore the roof off one building. Goodrich was able to reopen quickly using rugs, toys and supplies we helped her purchase.

Photo by Brett Deering/Getty Images for Save the Children

Our third major activity focuses on preparing Oklahoma communities to keep children safe in the event of future emergencies. We know that the tornado-prone area of central Oklahoma is likely to face more weather-related emergencies in the future. Therefore, we're committed to partnering with emergency managers and child-serving programs, such as child care centers and schools, to strengthen their preparedness planning and help safeguard children.

Our efforts are designed to engage local communities, but we're also working with emergency management leaders at the state level to strengthen central Oklahoma's capacity to protect children if – and when – another emergency strikes the area.

We're providing this comprehensive emergency preparedness program through our “Get Ready. Get Safe.” initiative. Programs that have been or will be implemented by Save the Children include:

- **Get Ready. Get Safe. Workshop** for 2,000 children in grades K-6 to raise their awareness of the importance of emergency preparedness. To date, 1,270 children have participated in our workshops.

- **Child Care Emergency Preparedness Training** for more than 1,000 child care personnel throughout the state
- **Child Friendly Spaces Training** for 100 shelter managers, employees, volunteers and caregivers tasked with supporting children in times of emergency
- **Awareness-raising and Information Briefings** for 200 parents and teachers, covering best practices in emergency preparedness planning and benefitting approximately 500 children
- **State and Community Assessments** in collaboration with Columbia University and community leaders to facilitate a state-level, community self-assessment that will detail gaps in child-focused emergency preparedness across sectors, programs and services affecting children and families.
- **Stakeholder Engagement** through the establishment of a Children in Emergencies Working Group for the State of Oklahoma

Among the actions noted above is the establishment of a **Children in Emergencies Working Group** across state-level agencies in Oklahoma. This group will identify gaps in the ways in which the state meets the needs of children in disasters and formulate plans to address those gaps. We are also partnering with the city of Norman to help them create a **Children’s Annex** to their city’s Emergency Operations Plan. In addition, we worked with the city of Norman to pilot **Save the Children’s Community Preparedness Index (CPI)** in April 2014. The CPI is a self-assessment tool that will enable communities to gauge how prepared they are to meet the needs of children in disasters. The online tool will be available nationwide later this year.

And more...

With summer vacation approaching, Save the Children is supporting the Moore public schools’ Super Kids Days that mark the end of the school year. Last year, Super Kids Days activities were cancelled after the tornadoes caused an abrupt ending to the semester. This year, Save the Children will use these fun-filled days to help 1,200



Advocating for Kids

LuAnn Faulkner-Schneider (left), program administrator, professional development and quality initiatives for the Oklahoma Department of Human Services and Lesli Blazer, director of child care services for the Oklahoma Department of Human Services, helped change state regulations to better protect children in times of disaster. The change will require every child care center in the state to create an emergency plan for children with special needs. The new regulations make Oklahoma one of a minority of the states to meet all four minimum standards for protecting children in emergencies as tracked in Save the Children’s annual disaster report. Here, LuAnn and Lesli review our latest report in front of the Oklahoma State Capitol in Oklahoma City.

Photo by Brett Deering/Getty Images for Save the Children



girls and boys at two elementary schools celebrate a year of resilience and rebuilding by introducing them to our “Get Ready. Get Safe. Prep Rally.” A component of our preparedness programming, the Prep Rallies are engaging, energetic events used to educate children and families about emergency preparedness and provide them with the resources they need to be safety advocates for their friends and communities.

We couldn't have done it without you!

While there is no way to prevent natural disasters like these frightening tornadoes, with your help Save the Children was there for the children of Oklahoma, and we will be there to support children and families the next time disaster strikes.

We'll ensure that children's special needs are not overlooked in the short term, and we'll stand with communities for the long term, too, supporting children's emotional recovery and helping families rebuild.



Finally, because we know preparedness is key to saving lives, we're mobilizing to make sure children and families have emergency plans in place. We'll continue to advocate at the national, state and local levels to ensure day care facilities and schools are prepared, as well.

The generosity and caring of Save the Children donors underpins those activities and everything else we do. On behalf of all the children and families in whose lives you enable us to make such an enormous difference, thank you!