

Giving Back to My City

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by Debbie Calderon

When you hear about disasters like Hurricane Katrina, you feel terrible. But many people don't do anything to help if they're not directly affected. And I'll admit, I was one of them. Hurricane Sandy changed all that. It's the reason I'm here in Queens today volunteering.

Although I live on Long Island, I'm still a New Yorker. The city is part of my extended community and Sandy hit home for me. I wanted to contribute, to make a difference, no matter how small. Being here is an opportunity for me to lend a hand to people whose lives have been turned upside down by this storm.

Earlier this morning I helped sort donated products and now I'm packing emergency pantry bags with non-perishable food, water and other supplies to give to families in need. It's been a busy and hectic day, but the experience is much more rewarding than I ever imagined. It feels great to be able to give back, and I've met wonderful people who are here for the same reason as me—to help others.

This experience has given me a whole new perspective and has changed me on a very deep level. If another disaster happens in the future, I'll think back to this moment and I'll respond differently than I did in the past. I'll volunteer or donate money—I'll do something. The one thing I won't do is sit on the sidelines feeling bad about what's happened. I'm going to get involved and make a difference!

Debbie Calderon, 22, is a college student from Long Island who spent a day volunteering at the Community Church of the Nazarene in Far Rockaway, one of Food Bank For New York City's partners for Hurricane Sandy relief.