

# Disaster/Recovery Relief Trip to Puerto Rico

In collaboration with the LYNC8 Project

Authors: Morgan DeChene-Arvin, Chandi Mayes, Chad Mayes, Ketrell L. McWhorter, PhD, MBA

Department of Epidemiology and Environmental Health



## BACKGROUND

Puerto Rico is hit by a hurricane approximately 4 times a year. It operates independently with its own government; however, it remains a commonwealth and territory under the US. Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico in 2017, and the Puerto Rican government and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) were unprepared for this disaster due to:

- FEMA's untimely response
- Insufficient resource management
- Failure to communicate to proper authorities
- Inadequate disaster preparation.

This island-wide disaster destroyed the beautiful island, severely impacting its people and communities because it was failed by the public health officials.

## METHODOLOGY

The founders of the LYNC8 Project and Dr. Ketrell McWhorter led an 8-day-long humanitarian trip to Puerto Rico, including 6 students from the College of Public Health at the University of Kentucky, July 2023.

- Flight into San Juan, Puerto Rico, and drove to Aguada, where all the teams stayed.
- Helped renovate a home for a couple who had severe disabilities.
- Teams began construction on a small structure behind the home as another living space for their daughter and son.
- Other team members worked on different projects in the community, including renovating another home nearby and building a community center.

## THE LYNC8 PROJECT

Christian nonprofit organization committed to rebuilding communities and mobilizing volunteer efforts in Latin America and the United States.

Provides people with the opportunity to experience and work in areas of need that include but are not limited to home and school restoration, food distribution, sports camps, etc. <https://www.lync8.org/>

LYNC8 PROJECT



## OUTCOMES

As a team, we cleaned the couple's home, scraped the old paint off the walls, and repainted the interior of the entire home. We power-washed the roof and were even able to purchase some small home necessities. Together, our work allowed for an improved living space, the light color of the paint avoided attracting bugs and opened up the space, and we reduced the couple's stress. In our free time, we were able to bond with the other team members, explore Puerto Rican culture, meet locals, and even explore the beaches.



## INSIGHTS & CONCLUSIONS

Traveling to Puerto Rico was an extremely eye-opening public/global health experience. Not only did I bond with other public health-minded volunteers, but together we were able to change the lives of the most inspirational couple. I also learned to appreciate the little things in life, grow my faith, and expand my path and possibilities within public health.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to LYNC8, Chand and Chandi Mayes, and Dr. McWhorter for giving us the trip of a lifetime. We went on the trip as strangers and came home as a family.