

How New York City Food Trucks Helped Heal Hurricane Sandy Victims



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December 23, 2012 - As most of New York City ventured outside after Hurricane Sandy for the first time, two young guys in Rockaway Park were kicking the tires on their newly renovated food truck. All the businesses in the area - restaurants, supermarkets - were days, weeks, if not months from reopening. [But the truck still worked.](#)

Their neighborhood customers were another story. They had no power, no heat, no access to clean clothes, fresh water, or hot food - the lucky ones still had a place to go home to. It was obvious to these two guys, Terrence McNicholas and Jared Adler of [The Fisherman's Dog](#), what they had to do.

Not long after, their truck was up and running, serving pay-what-you-can meals to their neighbors in the Rockaways.

At the same time, not far away, producers of the [NYC Food Film Festival](#) were mining their deep networks for food, funds, and friends to help get hot meals to fellow New Yorkers in storm-ravaged areas. The first to commit were [Burger Maker](#) with 1,800 fresh patties, [Jarlsburg](#) with cheese and funding, and [Sweet'N Low](#) (made in Brooklyn for over 50 years) with additional funds. With the growing pipeline of donated food secured, [Fisherman's Dog offered](#) to help with prep and distribution, along with local institution Rockaway Taco. It was dubbed [Burger Aid 2012](#).

At the time, the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City was working closely with the NYC Office of Emergency Management and coordinators of the City's Distribution Centers to address vital needs such as food and supplies, and it was clear just how much a simple hot meal meant to storm victims. So we formed a [partnership](#) and added the [New York Food Truck Association](#), which had mobilized its members, many of whom had already begun serving free food on their own time and initiative.

Connecting the real-time knowledge of City Agencies and FEMA working on the ground, the Mayor's Fund ultimately funded over 275,000 free hot meals to New Yorkers in the neighborhoods hardest hit by Hurricane Sandy. As many as 32 trucks were dispatched on any given day, serving over 500 meals apiece. Additional food distribution efforts to date, including Thanksgiving meals, exceed 330,000.

The impact for families was significant and immediate, as we heard in daily reports and tweets and instagrams and blog posts from the trucks on the ground.

"The smile on people's faces when they get warm food and coffee is priceless," one said in a Nov 8 report.

["We are so inspired](#) by the strength of this community," said another.

["Honored to feed 500 ppl at the Redfern Houses today."](#)

"After learning from a community leader that there were many homebound people who hadn't received food, we started driving the truck house to house, knocking on doors and delivering food to people in tears, who begged the truck to return the next day," according to a Nov. 12 report.

"Showing up in a neighborhood that has been devastated to provide a service to the people in need there is no small feat. [It requires a resilience and a thick skin to smile through the long, sad faces, the scent of anger and despair](#), the resentment, the fear of what's coming when it gets colder, and just plain shock and awe that everything these people once loved is now gone. I was raised by a firefighter and grew up around these kinds of situations (emergency fire radio in our house and my father was a first responder) so it gave me an enormous sense of pride to join the many brave workers who have been at the forefront of the recovery efforts."

As the transition from immediate relief to long-term recovery begins, local small businesses are re-opening and eager for customers once again. Each of the trucks who answered the call to action deserves our sincere thanks for the service they provided to their city and their neighbors when they were needed most.