



HOSPICE &
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TODAY

One Year After Hurricane Helene: Lessons in Resilience, Recovery, and Renewal

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At this time last year, *Hospice & Palliative Care Today* brought you a series of articles reporting on the devastating impact of Hurricane Helene across the Southeast, focusing on hospices in the North Carolina mountains. We remain deeply grateful for the many ways you—our readers and colleagues—rallied in support of those hospice organizations and their communities during their time of urgent need. This Saturday, September 27, 2025, marks the one-year anniversary of that epic disaster. To reflect on what has been learned and how recovery has unfolded, Vern Grindstaff (CEO of [Compassionate Care WNC](#), Burnsville, NC), Millicent Burke-Sinclair (President and CEO of [Four Seasons](#), Flat Rock, NC), and Chris Comeaux (President and CEO of [Teleios Collaborative Network](#), Flat Rock, NC) gathered in conversation with Cordt Kassner (publisher) and Joy Berger (editor-in-chief). The insights that follow honor the hospice employees who persevered to provide urgent patient care. We celebrate their spirit of compassionate community and courageous problem-solving from the onset one year ago through ongoing recovery.

Organizational Recovery: Rebuilding with Strength

At [Compassionate Care WNC](#), Vern Grindstaff reported that facility restoration is now complete, with only final parking lot work pending. Patients who had been evacuated during the storm are fully resettled in their communities. Remarkably, staff members who once lived in campers have transitioned to permanent housing—including innovative tiny homes built by a local high school carpentry program.

[Four Seasons](#) continues to serve across 14 counties, where infrastructure recovery has been uneven. Millicent Burke-Sinclair described how transportation challenges and even a secondary wildfire evacuation forced the team to create and test new emergency protocols. Yet through it all, patient care never faltered. Staff adapted routing, supply positioning, and even warehousing strategies to ensure continuity.

[Teleios Collaborative Network](#) marked its own milestones—completing infrastructure repairs, celebrating economic resilience with Hendersonville's Apple Festival, and investing in advanced disaster readiness tools like Starlink satellite systems and a new emergency manual. Chris Comeaux described the multi-layered recovery processes for communities, businesses, and homes.

Critical Lessons: Communication, Cash, and Culture

All three leaders agreed: communication breakdowns were the greatest operational failure. Traditional phone and internet lines collapsed. Teams operated on adrenaline, driving directly to one another's homes and facilities. Today, redundant systems and satellite backup have become standard practice. Financial systems also proved vulnerable, as banking failures left credit cards and ATMs useless.

Now, each hospice maintains cash reserves, rapid-response emergency funds, and flexible reimbursement systems. Beyond logistics, a deeper cultural shift has taken root. Hospice staff, often focused outward on patients and families, learned to care more intentionally for one another. Peer support, mental health awareness, and trauma-informed practices are now woven into organizational culture.

Community Resilience: Kindness as Infrastructure

The storm reshaped not only buildings but also relationships. "Kindness and community cooperation transcended traditional boundaries," Burke-Sinclair reflected. Local nonprofits, national relief agencies, faith-based groups, and even high school students created innovative solutions—from tiny home villages to creative fundraising for long-term housing. The community also reclaimed its identity. Large gatherings, such as the Apple Festival and preparations for the fall leaf season, signal both economic recovery and emotional healing.

Still, reminders remain: heavy rains trigger anxiety, and many live with renewed awareness of how fragile daily life can be.

Transformation: Treasuring Each Moment

Perhaps the most profound legacy of Helene is a reframed philosophy of care. Across organizations, leaders describe a sharpened focus on relationships, presence, and kindness. "Treasuring each moment" has become not just a personal sentiment but an organizational mantra. The storm is now recognized as a defining moment—transforming not only infrastructure and emergency preparedness, but also how hospice and palliative care teams understand their work at the bedside and in the community.

Tiny Homes, Big Hope

When [Compassionate Care WNC](#) staff lost housing, the local high school carpentry program stepped in. Students built permanent tiny homes, turning classrooms into lifelines. This innovative partnership continues today as a model for community-led recovery.

The Apple Festival Returns

In downtown Hendersonville, the Apple Festival drew 150,000 attendees just months after the storm. For [Teleios Collaborative Network](#), this event symbolized more than tourism—it was a tangible sign of resilience, community pride, and the return of joy.

A New Culture of Care

[Four Seasons'](#) staff trauma counseling has grown into a permanent cultural shift. Peer support and proactive mental health awareness are now woven into daily operations, ensuring caregivers are cared for as deeply as the patients they serve.

Prepared for Tomorrow

Satellite internet backup, cash reserves at every site, waterproof fire-retardant storage, and hard-copy documentation—these are just a few of the new emergency measures now in place across western North Carolina hospices. The next disaster may look different, but the teams are ready.

Looking Ahead: For Hospice Leaders Nationwide

As hospice and palliative care leaders across the nation read these reflections, one truth is clear: disasters are not a question of *if*, but *when*.

Whether hurricane, wildfire, flood, or earthquake, every organization can learn from western North Carolina's experience:

- **Prepare redundantly:** communication, documentation, and financial systems must have backups.
- **Support staff deeply:** trauma-informed practices and peer support help caregivers remain resilient.
- **Lean on community:** innovative partnerships can transform crisis response into long-term recovery.
- **Embrace transformation:** disasters can sharpen mission and remind us of the sacred work of treasuring each moment.

"Treasuring each moment has become more than a lesson—it's the way we live and serve every day." — Millicent Burke-Sinclair

"From campers to tiny homes, our staff's housing recovery shows what resilience and community creativity can build." — Vern Grindstaff

"Seeing 150,000 people return for the Apple Festival reminded us that recovery is not just physical—it's cultural and economic, too." — Chris Comeaux

"Kindness became our infrastructure when everything else was broken." — Collective reflection