

**For Immediate Release**

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# Media Release

## **CCSD's Jack Shawley returns from Hurricane Helene relief efforts in WNC**

Office of Communications

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**Charleston, SC** - Those who possess a servant's heart often feel a compelling pull to help when needed. Such was the case when Jack Shawley saw the devastating destruction Hurricane Helene left in her wake. Helene tore a deadly path through the mountains of Western North Carolina, dumping extreme rainfall and causing catastrophic flash flooding. Shawley is an assistant grounds manager with Charleston County School District (CCSD). As he watched the news and saw videos of the crippling effects the hurricane had, he felt called to assist in the relief efforts.

Shawley used his CCSD vacation days and headed to the hard-hit areas to assist with search and rescue efforts. He and several men from his church joined the effort through Samaritan's Purse, headquartered in North Carolina. At a base camp in the hard-hit town of Burnsville, including Mitchell and Yancey Counties, Shawley and his church's team spent four days cutting away trees from homes and access roads, mudding out homes, removing debris, and tarping roofs. Having extensive knowledge of heavy equipment, Shawley was certified to run the machines to clear private driveways and roads.

They arrived at the beginning of recovery efforts when there was still very little communication between families and resource providers. As the hours ticked by and communications began to be restored, work orders for those in need began pouring in.

### **A servant leader**

Shawley was raised in a family that practiced the principle of leading by example. That meant serving others in their time of need.

"I am a man who puts others above myself," said Shawley. "I credit my father for instilling that in me and I watched him lead by example knowing that's exactly the path I wanted to follow. He never asked anyone to do anything he wouldn't do."

Shawley has a machinist background and is a former firefighter with the City of North Charleston. His knowledge and experience, combined with his leadership at CCSD, made him a perfect candidate to be a boots-on-the-ground volunteer.

The group left with a U-Haul and a trailer packed with supplies for the families in the affected area. They brought their own equipment and tools and drove to Mitchell County, one of the communities farthest away from where relief efforts had begun.

“It was important to me to help those who might not be receiving help yet,” Shawley explained. “I know from witnessing people in crisis that by the third or fourth day of a catastrophic event, people begin to panic when resources aren’t coming, and then desperation sets in.”

Shawley said the situation was dire. Many people were barricaded inside their homes because large trees had trapped them. Some were buried alive. Many succumbed to drowning, having been swept away as water raged down the mountain. Many had no access down the mountain. At any given moment, private helicopters circled the skies, looking for places to land in an attempt to evacuate folks.

It was four long days of hard work. Some of it rewarding and some of it devastating. They came upon people’s personal belongings, such as pictures. One picture was posted to social media and returned to its rightful owner. Shawley arrived at a homestead where the house had been completely washed away. The only thing that remained was the carport. He went to work mucking the concrete slab so that the couple could find some semblance of normalcy. Later that night, when he came back down the mountain, Shawley saw the couple sitting in the carport having a meal under a dim light powered by a generator.

“The smallest relief efforts had people in tears,” Shawley explained.

At another home, everything was destroyed by flood waters and mud, except one rose bush with one rose blooming through the muck. The homeowner said it was a bush planted by her now-deceased parents.

“It was amazing that the rose bloomed amongst all this destruction,” Shawley said.

In Shawley’s professional life, he leads, intending to always go above and beyond what is required. He said a team must always work in sync to do that.

“No chain moves without all the links working together and with a sense of purpose,” said Shawley. “We were lucky to have a team like that.”

### **Thankful to be of service**

The needs of the people in Western North Carolina are evolving daily, and many face a long journey back to normal. Shawley left thankful for what he has and grateful he possesses the knowledge, drive, and heart to make an effort to help.

“Every extra set of hands is needed,” said Shawley. “They are in dire straits. I hope that people set aside their own needs, and if they are able, go and do for others.”

Despite often being in danger, Shawley never thought about the risks he was taking. He said he just continued to work purposefully so that the families he served could find hope in a desperate situation.

After four long and grueling days, it was time to let a new set of volunteers take over. The journey home was almost uneventful. Shawley and his friend Steve tried to decompress from the weight of what they had just accomplished. But their work wasn't done.

The pair came upon a terrible car accident where a woman had been ejected from the van she was a passenger in. First responders had not yet arrived, and Shawley pulled onto the median to assist. He managed to apply a tourniquet to the woman's badly injured leg and bandaged a laceration to her forehead. The woman was severely injured, but Shawley has kept in touch with her husband, who reports that she is home now and in recovery.

"I am grateful I am skilled at disaster and emergency response," said Shawley. "It has benefited me in many ways, particularly in this effort and ironically on our way home. It was a heck of a journey, that's for certain."

For more information, contact the Office of Communications at (843) 937-6303.

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#### **About the Charleston County School District**

Charleston County School District (CCSD) is a nationally accredited school district committed to providing equitable and quality educational opportunities for all its students. CCSD is the second-largest school system in South Carolina and represents a unique blend of urban, suburban, and rural schools spanning 1,300 square miles along the coast. CCSD serves approximately 50,000 students in 88 schools and specialized programs.

CCSD offers a diverse portfolio of educational options and specialized programs delivered to the students of CCSD through neighborhood, magnet, IB (international baccalaureate), Montessori, and charter schools and programs. Rich educational opportunities for students include programs in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM); music and other creative and performing arts; career and technical preparation programs; military; dual credit; and many more.