

Community is Bigger than the Area that Surrounds Us

The rains fell in Houston, but the community rose to support one early childhood school. “It was so encouraging to see so many people from our Houston community, as well as from afar, to come and help,” said Jan Cockbill, infant care director. “We couldn’t have done it without them.”

For more than 20 years, the Evelyn Rubenstein Jewish Community Center of Houston Bertha Alyce Early Childhood School (BAS) has served Meyerland-area families with children who are six weeks to five years old. The school is Texas Rising Star certified and NAEYC accredited.

After the rains came from Hurricane Harvey, child care center directors Bonnie Kasner and Jan Cockbill walked into the water-damaged building to survey what the storm had done. The building was without power for weeks, which meant that some of the classroom materials had molded and the water that had gotten in the building had soaked into the walls. Immediately, they started to plan the next steps on how to serve their families and how to start the clean-up process. Portable storage units were used to collect what could be salvaged. The school was closed for two weeks before being able to operate in a temporary location.

Over the next few months, Bonnie and Jan moved their entire operations three times. Fortunately, the first location was nearby. The tennis courts of the Jewish Community Center had not flooded and had its own power system. They decided to set up 10 areas to replicate each of their classrooms. The infant and inclusion classrooms were set up at The Shlenker School, a nearby Jewish Day School. BAS was able to operate there for a few weeks but found there was some difficulty in having all the infants in one big area.

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The 10 areas on the tennis courts along with the infant classrooms relocated to the Merfish Teen Center, another Jewish Community Center building, leaving the inclusions classrooms at Shlenker. In the teen center,



Pictured are Jan Cockbill (left), infant care director, and Bonnie Kasner (right), early childhood programs director, in a newly renovated classroom at the Evelyn Rubenstein Jewish Community Center of Houston Bertha Alyce Early Childhood School.

they were able to create 13 separate spaces for their children to continue to learn.

Finally on Jan. 8, 2018, the entire BAS was able to be back in their building with the help of Meyerland residents who lent a helping hand to clean and restore the building. Throughout their time of displacement, the school was able to experience a real sense of community but not just from the Houston area.

A synagogue in Philadelphia gathered gifts cards for each student to purchase school supplies. Along with each gift card was a personal note from children of that congregation. “Community is more than the people around us,” said Bonnie. “And our school is more than our walls. It’s about the people who came around to help us. Our staff and the community. We’re a team.”

With the assistance of Collaborative for Children, the school has come back stronger to continue making an impact on the future Houston workforce.