

Every little helps: cash transfers bring relief to families in Dominica

BARBADOS, 9 January 2018 - Yvonne Hill Williams is a very busy woman. She has her hands full with a lively bunch of five grandchildren and foster children who call her cosy house in Bath Estate, Roseau, home. Ranging in age from 6 to 16, Kaioh, Khamylia, Roxy, Seth and Ishman love to play on the banks of the nearby river. But the river was not so kind last September when it overflowed during Hurricane Maria, washed right into their residence and caused their guardian to lose all the merchandise in her shop.

Still, life is slowly getting back to how things were. "I find everything is not how you would like it to be but we are catching up since the hurricane. We've cleaned up already and people wouldn't even think that the river came into my house. I find we did well," says Yvonne, adding. "We don't have electricity but we've got a generator from a friend, so that gives us a little light."

Helping the Hill Williams family on the path back to recovery is an innovative cash transfer programme run by the Government of Dominica with support from UNICEF and the World Food Programme and funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). It provides 8,300 of the most vulnerable families affected by Maria with a payment of between EC\$ 240 (US \$90) and EC\$ 645 (US\$ 239) per month depending on the number of children in the household.

Families are free to spend the money on what they feel they need. Those eligible include people already receiving public assistance, those who have lost their main source of income and have to support others who are vulnerable, and foster carers like Yvonne.

In addition, UNICEF has targeted 6,000 children among the families who will receive a child-related top-up. For the UN children's agency, using cash transfers is a key way of assisting people to get back on their feet after a humanitarian emergency like Hurricane Maria.

Yvonne welcomes the initiative which was officially launched in December 2017 and will run for three months. "The cash transfer programme is working well. We bought clothes, shoes, and a little shopping and groceries. It gives us a little bit extra to stretch... It comes in handy. You feel that you can buy certain things in town. It's a good feeling... I appreciate it very much." She is pleased, then, that her family is getting a little help: for her, family is everything. "After all Maria has done with Dominica I'm thankful that I still have my little children with me. I'm happy I'm here. Knowing I'm still with them makes me feel a joy in my heart."

According to Muriel Mafico, UNICEF's Deputy Representative for the Eastern Caribbean Area, "It is gratifying to hear that the cash transfer is giving Yvonne and many other families in her situation choice to decide what is best for their children and a chance to slowly return to normality."

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