

SUNY Stands with Puerto Rico – Recovery and Rebuilding Initiative (Summer 2018)

Student Testimonial from **Andy Diaz, NCC student:**

To hear the powerful stories from the native Puerto Ricans have forever changed my entire understanding of the world. It felt awful to hear Puerto Ricans tell of their subpar living circumstances and know that even I, as a foreigner from New York was given the luxury of a University residence during my stay in Puerto Rico. It felt awful to know that each day I volunteered myself to Puerto Rico, I'd find three meals guaranteed while many natives are malnourished. Attached is a picture of myself and Marta. Marta is the most solemn epitome of tenderness and love. I shed heartfelt tears through our conversation as she told me of the effect of Hurricane Maria. It must be mentioned that FEMA sent her a \$500 check - and that was all. This is a homeowner whose entire second floor was torn off the foundation. Can you imagine? As though it was enough to cover the damages, even I was insulted. Helping repair her roof through the rain was made easy by how lovely of a person she was. I cut my lunches short to volunteer all that I could. I learned a sad belief held by Puerto Ricans. It is said in Puerto Rico that the reasons behind the lackluster aid offered by the federal government in response to Hurricane Maria are because of the shortcomings involving the late 90s government in PR. The administration during the Hurricane Jose in 1999 either partook in the corruption or couldn't prevent it when the federal government sent funds to Puerto Ricans. At a time when the people desperately needed access to capital to rebuild their homes, the PR political machine funneled the funds to the greedy and politically well-connected. In the many conversations I broached with the natives in PR, one cannot deny the feeling of their resilience. Here are a people who went without electricity in their homes for 5 months. I learned of how the community came together during this tragedy as extension cords ran through home after home for miles, in the effort so that the neighborhood could be lit up. If a person was finally able to acquire a generator, neighbors were assured they would be taken care of. The industrial areas of town distributed electricity to their locals as far as the electricity could go. I walked into one home we repaired where everyone who lived there was refugees who came together, from their destroyed home 9 months ago. The stories are endless, and I am glad to know that I was able to have an individual effect on several families (and thank you Prof. Darren Petronella for helping me to apply and guide me through the application process). More help is due, we already failed when it is said that 8 months have gone by and these conditions still persist. This conversation should not be happening on the year one-year anniversary of the hurricane, but it unfortunately will.

