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[00:00:26] **Speaker 1** With FEMA in Wisconsin following those devastating floods in and around Milwaukee, the American Red Cross of Wisconsin is issuing what it calls an urgent call for disaster action team volunteers to help families both locally and nationwide. Catherine Halverson with the Red Cross of Wisconsin joins us with more and thanks very much for being here. Absolutely, happy to be here. Thanks for having us. So I know that the Red Cross responded to Milwaukee. What kinds of work did people with the Red Cross do there?

[00:01:00] **Speaker 2** Yeah, absolutely. We have had volunteers responding around the clock to Milwaukee. Originally, we had opened. Two shelters and then consolidated to Milwaukee Marshall High School down to one centralized location that was more accessible to the clients that we were serving there. And we were offering everything from a place to stay and eat, to charge your phone, people can stay as long or as little as they needed. And then on top of that, we were always offering our wraparound services. So mental health support. Disaster support, casework recovery, resources outside of us. It takes a huge effort and partnership in the community to be able to help those that needed us most. How many people availed themselves of your services? Unbelievable, we had 100 local Wisconsin Red Crossers respond. So we started as a level three disaster which is basically still managed by the Wisconsin region. And then we upped it to a level four disaster response operation. So now we're starting to see that national leadership support because the need is so great. So it's great that now we have that national leader supporting us.

[00:02:14] **Speaker 1** That sounds as though the Red Cross maintains a presence in Milwaukee.

[00:02:20] **Speaker 2** Absolutely. Like I said, we've got seven levels for disaster and when you hit that four level four disaster, we got folks from national that are really stepping in now to support us and offer guidance and leadership to our regional team. Of course, we don't want anyone to get burnt out at the regional local level. So I believe in total we have over 150 volunteers helping with Milwaukee still.

[00:02:46] **Speaker 1** And now you're putting out an urgent call for disaster volunteers. Why are you doing that?

[00:02:53] **Speaker 2** Yeah, you know, we respond to 65,000 disasters every single year. And in the Red Cross there's a saying and it's we're in continuous disaster response. With disasters happening more frequently, we're responding to a disaster, new disasters within 15 days. So just to mention too, while we had this flooding happening in Milwaukee, we also had to open a third shelter unrelated to the floods. Because of an apartment complex fire that displaced more than 40 people. So this is nothing new to the Red Cross. It's just about building that capacity now. We need more boots on the ground helping us be there for clients when it's needed most.

[00:03:38] **Speaker 1** What would volunteers expect to be doing if they signed out?

[00:03:43] **Speaker 2** Yeah, so we have a really great process. When you sign up through redcross.org slash volunteer, we have volunteer services team that is fielding all these new applications. And then they go through the process with you of determining where you think your talents will be utilized best. So I will say first and foremost, our biggest needed position is disaster action team. So you're the first people helping families after a home fire or flood. Aside from that, we have so many other positions, sheltering positions, casework, mental health care. It's really an endless opportunities available to those who are looking to make a difference and it doesn't require any previous training. We offer all the training available through our volunteer connection portal.

[00:04:33] **Speaker 1** And so, if you're a volunteer for the Red Cross and the phone rings, you've got to go right then.

[00:04:41] **Speaker 2** Not necessarily. So you can say no. So we have, how it works is we work closely with our fire departments and they call us to notify us of a home fire. So in terms of the disaster action team position, this is, and you can decline if you aren't able to go. But we usually always have a volunteer willing to go and this could happen in the middle of the night. So I like to say too we we don't allow anyone to go to a home fire response alone. We work in teams of two and then as far as deployments, those are a little bit more of a commitment for national deployments. It is two weeks. But for something local like this, we did open up flexibility for volunteers to insert the days that they could help out.

[00:05:32] **Speaker 1** Well, Catherine Halverson, we leave it there, but thank you and thank you for your work.

[00:05:37] **Speaker 2** Absolutely. Thank you so much for giving us this platform to talk about our response.

[00:05:48] **Speaker 1** You were great. I see why they gave you to us. Thank you.

[00:05:53] **Speaker 2** There's so much to cover in such a short time, thank you so much.

[00:05:55] **Speaker 1** Yeah, you did a really nice job. Thank you.

[00:05:59] **Speaker 2** Thank you. Have a great rest of your weekend.