

## **Provider Stories from the Fire – September 2020**

### **Hercilia's Story**

My name is Hercilia (Cesi) Nufio Torres.

It is horrible as I had kids in care. The flames were high and I had to evacuate.

On September 8th I was caring for children in my mobile home in Medford/Phoenix. I was working. I had gathered the kids when suddenly I heard a loud noise and a loss of power. I thought it might just be a crash. But a neighbor called to get out as there was a fire near.

I grabbed the kids to get out, with my children and husband and all were saved.

I had a child there who was a special needs child and recently had surgery. I needed to get to her. It was horrible.

My parents saw the smoke and called and were worried. We were able to get all of them out. I didn't get anything of my own out. Not even any ID. I lost everything. My children didn't even have shoes, as we are barefoot inside our home.

A woman called to let me know that that her grandson was alone in one of the mobile homes. He stays alone and I ran to get him out. Calling his name as I saw him in the doorway of his mobile home. I told him to run to me. We got him in the van and took him with us.

My husband ran back to knock on other doors, especially a man they call Grandpa. He was asleep but my husband kept knocking and got him out.

We were reunited with Grandpa at the EXPO days later. He was in search of our family to thank us for knocking on his door and getting him out.

I went by my mobile home park. There is nothing left of my home except ash. I have nothing, but I have my family.

Translated by Jill Ramirez

September 10, 2020

### **Alba's Story**

My name is Alba Martinez. I am a Family Child Care Provider. I am a wife and mother of four children, ages 6-17. I also work with my husband as a pastor in our community.

On Tuesday, September 8, I was caring for children. I woke up early, as I do every morning to have everything ready for the parents of the eight children in my care. I notice the smell of smoke in the air, but continued my morning as usual. We did our group activities and songs indoor as the smoke was strong, and I thought it would be hazardous for the children.

At about 12:30 a parent texted me to check on her child and I asked if she had heard anything about the smoke. She said she had heard about evacuations in Ashland and Talent. She had also heard about fires in Portland. She asked me what I would do if our program should have to evacuate. I said I would run

out, still thinking it was a joke. Then she asked what was my plan for the children? I thought about it and responded that I would;

1. Call parents to come to pick up their children
2. If there was not enough time, I would take the children with me
3. I would be in contact with everyone to meet up in another location, as the lives of the children is the most important thing to me

At this time we started seeing that things had taken a turn, and conditions were not normal. I asked my children to hose down the area around our mobile home. We kept watching the conditions, and by 3:30 I contacted all of the parents to please come and pick up their children as we were being evacuated. Some parents were able to come right away, others were not able to get there in time for us to evacuate. In that moment I asked my older children to help me get the rest of the children in the van.

My neighbor called me and told me that she had gone to work and left her children, (6 yr old and 10 yr old), home.....alone. She was trying to make it back to her home, but there was too much traffic. She asked me to get her two children and three dogs. I did.

We put some of the children in my oldest son's car and left. I didn't think of getting anything of mine out of my house as I was just focused on getting the children out. I am so thankful I had my own children there with me and we all helped get the children out. My husband came home in time to get the others out. Most of the time no one but me is at home. The parents were unable to get to my home in time.

I told them to meet at the Walmart parking lot. They came and I was able to reunite them with their children. There were so many families there in need. We ended up taking 40 people to the church. Some of the families had lost everything.

Since Wednesday, September 9, I have been in a hotel. I told the parents I would not be able to care for their children because I didn't have a place to live, and to forgive me. I feel bad to not be able to help them.

What I really need is a home so I can continue providing care. Not just a home for me, but for all of the providers who are displaced so we can continue doing what we love. And also for families who work in restaurants, hotels, agriculture. Even through this, my own children haven't missed school.

I thank God for all of their work helping to make sure we all we able to evacuate.

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