



## The Impact and Opportunity of Our Nonprofit Sector

# Just Do it Now: Impact Through Foundation

Just an hour outside of Houston lies the rural town of Wharton, Texas. Tucked in the heart of Wharton's Westend is Just Do It Now (JDIN). This small, faith-based nonprofit serves as a true cornerstone of the community, providing robust youth programming, and much more, for the town's most disenfranchised residents. There are 460 houses in the Westend, most of which are home to Wharton's minority residents. Unlike the Eastside of Wharton, the Westend flooded four times from 2012 to 2017. Hurricane Harvey was responsible for the latest devastation, though this time flooding affected the entirety of Wharton. Nearly a year later, the town is still recovering. People remain displaced, and homes are still at varying levels of disrepair. However, hope is not lost. The spirit of resiliency that grounds this community is embodied in organizations like JDIN.

**"All we are able to do can be attributed to God's grace. We continue to thrive despite obstacles because God continues to provide. I don't think we could overcome as many obstacles as we have, I know we could not have, without faith in God."**

**~ James Perez, Board President**

Just Do It Now operates out of a former school building, the Dawson Community Center. Before Hurricane Harvey, JDIN offered youth programming, GED classes, financial counseling, as well as drug and alcohol recovery meetings at the Dawson Center. The organization also operated out of two nearby homes. The first was the Golden Opportunity House, which was used to help individuals or families get back on their feet after crises. The second home was a recovery and reintegration house for adults who were formerly incarcerated or recovering from addiction. Hurricane Harvey destroyed approximately 65 percent of the Dawson Community Center and damaged both homes. Board President, James Perez, describes the work the organization is doing now as the bare minimum.

Today, Just Do It Now is in the process of rebuilding the Dawson Community Center. The restored Golden Opportunity House is now serving a single mother and her four children, three of whom attend the Dawson Community Center for afterschool programming. Running the community center at 35 percent capacity is not easy, but JDIN is making it work. Staff have converted the library into a cafeteria and multipurpose room. There are still a handful of operational classrooms along with a gym and outdoor play area. With these resources and the support of dedicated staff, Just Do It Now is currently serving 85 to 90 children each day in their afterschool program. These students receive homework help, active recreation time, and a meal before being bused home from the center. Just Do It Now serves even more children with its summer programming, which includes a football team and cheer squad, as well as elite basketball and track teams.

In addition to this "bare minimum" programming, Just Do It Now partners with nearly 30 organizations to bring rich programming to those they serve and help meet the needs of the surrounding community.

## Key Partners and Outcomes



When Hurricane Harvey struck in 2017, the community experienced a significant loss. Just Do It Now referred people to other programs where possible, but there was no other organization that could take on monthly food distributions. Food insecurity in the area nearly doubled after the hurricane. Just Do It Now could not allow this need to go unmet, so staff gathered at a public park nearby to manage meal distribution. JDIN will continue meal distributions at the park while the Dawson Community Center undergoes renovation. Interim Executive Director, Barbie Fortenberry, notes that the need for all services has increased since Harvey. The community is depending on the organization more than ever.



Just Do It Now served **1,000** Wharton families dinner the first Thanksgiving post Hurricane Harvey.



Just Do It Now truly is the foundation of the Westend community, as is seen in the unquantifiable impact it makes every day. Wherever there is a need in the community, JDIN steps up to help. Despite the setbacks it faces, JDIN strives to offer a safe place for children, families, and individuals to learn, grow, and find support.<sup>1</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> In the severe flooding that accompanied Hurricane Harvey Just Do It Now lost a considerable amount of program data. As of June 2019, the organization had 158 children registered for programming serving 85-93 each day. Interim Executive Director, Barbie Fortenberry also reports that enrollment numbers during the school year increased after Harvey. It is challenging to determine the impact to families and the community had JDIN not been able to serve these children and facilitate partnerships to provide additional services such as food distribution.