

# Two Community Organizers Remember the 2021 Texas Winter Storm

In February of 2021, Winter Storm Uri raged through Texas, leaving millions of people without heat, electricity, or running water. The storm exposed incredible failures in infrastructure—as well as extreme inequities residents experienced in the disaster response.

Rebecca Sanchez and Kellee Coleman both live on the east side of Austin, where a majority of residents are people of color and where there is far less access to grocery stores, pharmacies, and health clinics than in other parts of the city.

Rebecca and Kellee belong to the same coalition—Communities of Color United (CCU)—and have been organizing to advance racial and economic justice in Austin for years.

They sat down to remember the impacts of the storm, and how their community responded.

## Transcript:

**Kellee Coleman:** What did you notice on your drive home that first night of the storm?

**Rebecca Sanchez:** I drove in to see the west side of downtown, everything lit and then seeing the east side just completely black. I don't know how much more in your face Black and Brown people can be told we don't care about you.

**Kellee:** Me and the kids, we were okay 'cause we had lights. It was cold, but people brought us water. But there's a young man that lives on the first floor in my apartment. And I was worried about him because he has cerebral palsy. His mom was concerned about water to clean his trache. You can go without food for a little while, but you need water.

I knew people who had babies who were in really cold houses who had to go to somebody's house that they didn't know and risk catching COVID because the babies were turning blue.

**Rebecca:** Our apartment didn't have any electricity. You could not get warm enough. Just seeing everybody bundled up for days underneath a hundred covers, it was terrifying. And heartbreaking.

And there was nobody coming by to make sure people were alright. No one was coming.

**Kellee:** How did CCU step up the next few weeks?

**Rebecca:** We really went to work. So many folks within the group that did not have water or food themselves, but they were like, we're able bodied. We can figure this out.

**Kellee:** The people who were in the most dire circumstances were the folks that were doing everything. 'Cause we know what it's like not to have what you need. People were bringing us stuff. We were bringing people stuff, feeding people, getting people warm.

**Rebecca:** So many mommas who have experienced cooking for large groups were like, I'll make a meal for twelve, we can pass them out.

We ain't got no other choice, but to figure it out for ourselves.

**Kellee:** There's research around who benefits from natural disasters and who loses; Black people, other people of color and poor people, are hit in a bad way. I think it just highlights who has choices, who doesn't have choices.

**Rebecca:** Climate change is impacting everybody. I don't know how it's not connecting.

And how do we change it? Oof. We really have to see ourselves as each other. And that is hard for a lot of people to do for some wild reason.

But we will be here, and we will try to figure it out together.

There are pillars of a community, there are pillars of work. And Kellee, you're a pillar girl. I love you so much, and I've learned so much from you.

**Kellee:** I appreciate you. And I'm glad we got to do this together.