

Mountain Community Resources Expands Services

by Resource Center Staff

The destruction and displacement from the CZU Lightning Complex fire, coupled with the COVID-19 pandemic left the residents of the San Lorenzo Valley and Scotts Valley with limited options for services to get back on their feet. With many community members needing support, Mountain Community Resources expanded services and created new programs to assist the most vulnerable populations in their community.

"The mountains of San Lorenzo Valley, Felton, Boulder Creek, Ben Lomond are already a very rural, marginalized part of the county with limited resources," says Ray Cancino, CEO of Community Bridges of which Mountain Com-

munity Resources is one of ten programs.

"Many who were already dealing with economic troubles suddenly needed help to recover from the pandemic and rebuild from the fires," he said. MCR staff and volunteers have been on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic and CZU Fire response, and their ability to quickly adapt services to meet the urgent needs of the community has been unprecedented.

"It's been beautiful to see the community come together," Cancino said. "As things open up, the most vulnerable people are going to need ongoing assistance. We've been working to address the needs as they come up, and as people experiencing crisis are informing us about what they need."



This tremendous response is nothing new to these communities. Founded in the wake of the Storm of 1982, MCR continues to remain ready to respond to any crisis at hand. Last year, the center connected more than 850 local residents with essential resources and service support, and distributed 5,463 bags of food at its weekly pantry program.

Continued page 8

Mountain Community Resources - Cont.

When community members, who were already burdened with the economic aftermath of the pandemic and the area was devastated by the CZU wildfires, MCR increased efforts to provide direct financial assistance to 641 families. "It is very disorienting to have to start over from zero—arranging food, clothing and shelter for ourselves while also being in total shock at the scale and scope of what we lost in the fire," said one fire survivor. "The staff at MCR listened patiently as we tried to process this all and figure out what comes next for us."

Within one month of the CZU August Lightning Complex fires, Community Bridges worked with a handful of local foundations and businesses to assemble a free mobile laundry trailer to aid fire victims. The trailer rotated among various SLV locations for months after the fire.

"When you have bad smoke damage, you need to wash your stuff a bunch of times, and it can get expensive doing that at a laundromat. That's when we came up with the idea for the mobile laundry trailer," said outgoing Program Director Roxanne Moore. The program was also able to complete construction on hygiene facilities and storage for individuals who lost homes, and continued the case management program to assist those clients with housing support.

Some come in simply for a cup of coffee, or to use a computer. One client was able to get a cell phone through a state program and collect mail at the center, which helps him manage appointments and find work while on the waiting list for transitional housing. At one

appointment, he told staff it was the first time in years he felt it was worth it to try to get off the streets. MCR's full range of services pre-pandemic included community advocacy, counseling, emergency preparedness, East West Natural Health Clinic, food distribution, parent education workshops, hygiene facilities for houseless and help with public assistance enrollment. Most services have continued to operate remotely or socially distanced throughout the past year. The center is located at 6134 Highway 9 in downtown Felton, and open Monday through Thursday 9am to 4pm (closed 12:30 to 1pm) for drop in services and one-on-one appointments. Food distributions are held every Thursday 10:30am to 12pm. Anyone is welcome to attend. Call 831-335-6600 for information.

As Mountain Community Resources looks to the future, efforts to support community members affected by the pandemic and CZU fires remain underway. The program's annual fund drive occurs each spring, and the center relies on community support and local grant funding for more than half of program services, with the other half offered through government contracts. This year's phone-a-thon fundraiser was limited with volunteers unable to gather onsite. To support these vital services in San Lorenzo Valley, please visit communitybridges.org/donate and designate your support to Mountain Community Resources. "The people here are really nice, really good," said one client. "I was a tree cutter for 25 years, and I go out and pull weeds when I'm here and clean up the yard. I'm not asked to, I just do it. It's a way of saying thank you to Mountain Community Resources."

*****ECRWS-
SEDDM*****

Postal Customer

Boulder Creek CA 95006

May-June 2021

www.SantaCruzMountainBulletin.net