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COMMUNITY BRIDGES
PUENTES DE LA COMUNIDAD

April 2023

Community Bridges CEO Celebrates April Birthday



This month, Community Bridges CEO Ray Cancino celebrated his 41st birthday!

When the Pajaro River levee failed on March 11, flooding the town of Pajaro, Ray leapt into action to help the more than 2,000 residents who were impacted by the disaster.

By that morning, the number of people at the evacuation center at Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds shot up from a few dozen, to more than 300. Ray was there providing essential hygiene items, calling for our mobile laundry trailer to be deployed, and coordinating shelter operations with staff from Santa Cruz and Monterey counties.

"This guy is incredible," said Eduardo Montesino, Mayor of Watsonville said while introducing Ray as the keynote speaker for the 21st Annual Cesar Chavez Community Awards on March 30.

“Ray one of the first on the scene providing support at the evacuation center. He left the comfort of his home and family to be there for the residents of Pajaro and Watsonville in their time of need.”

Birthday Wish for an Equitable Recovery

Ray has one wish for his birthday this year: An equitable recovery for all Pajaro residents. Two proposed bills in the California legislature would help make this wish come true.



AB 513 California Individual Assistance Act

Authored by Assemblymembers Freddie Rodriguez and Robert Rivas, AB 513 would establish a program through the California Office of Emergency Services that would provide direct financial assistance to all Californians, regardless of documentation status, in times of disaster.

AB 513 would provide financial assistance to help families repair disaster-related damages and losses in income not covered by insurance or other assistance programs so that economic assistance can be quickly and equitably distributed following major wildfires, flooding, and other disasters.

The state would work through local agencies and community-based organizations that are already doing the boots-on-the-ground work, such as those at the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds the night of March 10 and at disaster recovery centers and nonprofit partners throughout recent crises.

“These are people that our government and economy depend on,” Ray Cancino told the San Francisco Chronicle. “These are people that pay taxes and contribute to multibillion dollar industries. We should be investing as much resources as we can to protect our California state residents.”

SB 227 Excluded Workers Program

On January 19, 2023, California State Sen. Maria Elena Durazo (D-Los Angeles) introduced SB 227, a three-year pilot program that would extend unemployment benefit eligibility to as many as 1.1 million workers who don't qualify due to immigration status.

This bill would establish, until January 1, 2027, the Excluded Workers Program, to be administered by the Employment Development Department. The bill would allow individuals who are ineligible for existing state or federal benefits to receive \$300 per week for each week for up to 20 weeks.

"Currently, employers are already paying \$485 million into the unemployment insurance system [on behalf undocumented workers.] But unlike every other worker, they never see a cent of that money," said Jenna Gerry, Senior Staff Attorney at the National Employment Law Project.

To help address deep inequities increasingly impacting our community and economy, Ray urges you to contact your state legislatures to support AB 513 and SB 227. This legislation would to rush assistance to millions of Californians impacted by statewide disasters, regardless of immigration status. Please take action now and share with your networks to support this urgent need.

Take Action Now

Together, Anything is Possible



Last month, we asked our supporters to advocate to their local, state, and federal representatives to urge action from Gov. Gavin Newsom and President Joe Biden to declare a major disaster that would bring FEMA resources and services to aid the people of Pajaro and statewide.

Thanks to all of you, on April 3 President Joe Biden approved California's Major Disaster Declaration, making FEMA individual assistance available funding and services to help our community recover.

We were humbled that more than **1,400 people** and **40 nonprofit partners** joined our call to action. We also received hundreds of comments urging support for the people and community of Pajaro. We heard from community advocates, on-the-ground volunteers, and Pajaro residents themselves. Your stories spoke for themselves:

"As a teacher in Pajaro, I worked with families who lost everything when the levee broke in 1995, and now have lost everything again for a second time... My young students have had so much disruption already with COVID and excessive winter rains. Now their families are faced with repairing mud-caked homes and replacing ruined furniture and belongings... They all deserve better."

"Our family is doing what we can to help Pajaro residents with basic needs, like diapers, wipes, bottled water, and other essential items... Our farm worker families are the most vulnerable, least protected essential workers in our community. They are our friends, neighbors, schoolmates & core to the economic, social & cultural fabric of our county. We must not ignore them. It is not the American way."

"My family needs desperate help! This is a nightmare that we wish to wake up from!... Expenses were not only hotels but food as well, and some have no income coming in. US citizens & undocumented need help... My biz lost \$400,000 in the Pajaro flood. Furthermore, OUR essential fruit and veg harvest folks' homes were ruined; wonderful people, that live in Pajaro... Please help us rebuild."

"WE NEED HELP. WE NEED TO FIX A LOT OF THINGS"

Immediate & Long Term Relief



Through last week, Community Bridges had distributed **\$650,000 in direct economic assistance** to residents, in emergency relief grants of \$500 to support **1,300 households** impacted by March floods. Last week alone, La Manzanita Community Resources handed out 211 gift cards totaling \$52,700 in economic assistance. This incredible feat is made possible by Community Foundation Santa Cruz County, Community Foundation for Monterey County, and thousands of individuals, businesses, and organizations who have donated to our Pajaro Valley Flood Relief fund.

To date, Community Bridges has received **\$450,000 in donations** from **1,600 individual donors**, businesses and groups. We are committed to ensuring that 100% of these funds are used for direct economic relief for Pajaro residents through our three-wave flood recovery plan that is founded in equity.

Our three-tiered disaster recovery plan will continue to distribute financial assistance until all flood-impacted families that completed our disaster assessment form have been supported. Going forward, we'll be distributing grants of \$1,000-2,000 to support families to recover household items and vehicles lost to flooding, as so many lost everything they have worked so hard for.

In our third wave, we'll provide long-term recovery assistance to support residents with permitting costs, building materials, contractors, and insurance coverage. We will walk residents through each process to help them navigate their individual needs. This will be especially helpful for families who have been turned away by federal assistance because of their documentation status—and there are many in this situation.

[Learn More](#)

A Community Comes Together



Ultimately, none of this can happen without the generosity of people like yourselves. The residents of Pajaro, and many locations across the county and state, face a long road of recovery from the devastation we have suffered only in the past few months.

The people affected had very few resources and stability before the flooding and storms occurred, and they continue to face enormous barriers to recovery. Community Bridges is honored to continue providing resources and advocacy in upcoming months and years to ensure that every resident has access and support to recover and thrive.

Thanks to our strong community for coming together through so many channels, online and on the ground, to bring food, clothing, shelter, clean-up and financial assistance, advocacy and solidarity, along with the much-needed federal emergency response our community needed.

We would especially like to thank the more than 1,600 generous donors, volunteers and community groups that have donated, volunteered, and organized donation drives and distributions to administer essential aid to families throughout this historic and unprecedented time of need.

You can continue to support the Pajaro community by donating to the community foundations, or directly supporting our services.

Donate to Community Foundation Santa Cruz County [HERE](#).

Donate to Community Foundation for Monterey County [HERE](#).

Donate to support Community Bridges' services [HERE](#).

Support Services Now

Ray's Corner



In his March 28 request for a federal Major Disaster Declaration, California Gov. [Gavin Newsom](#) painted a bleak picture of conditions across California following Late Winter Storms that commenced February 21, 2023, and continued to overwhelm California through March.

Of particular concern is the state's agriculture production, an industry that generates more than \$50 billion annually and employs up to 800,000 people, half of whom are immigrants, and nearly one-third of whom are undocumented.

Monterey County reported agricultural losses exceeding \$450.5 million, including \$324 million in crops that were washed out in the storms, and future crops that can't be planted on schedule as a result. San Benito County reported losses in excess of \$3 million. In the San Joaquin Valley, Kern County estimates losses of approximately \$72 million, and Tulare County estimated losses of \$60 million. This number is expected to grow as historic snowpack begins to melt.

The agricultural commissioner for Monterey County says more than 15,000 acres of farmland was damaged. Romaine lettuce, strawberries, wine grapes, carrots, broccoli and garlic were most impacted. Losses of the county's largest exports, including lettuce, broccoli, and strawberries, will significantly increase unemployment, and perpetuate and exacerbate the socioeconomic conditions individuals and families are already facing.

I urge you to contact your state legislators [here](#) to support AB 513 to ensure that all Californians, regardless of documentation status, receive swift and equitable aid in times of disaster; and SB 227 extending unemployment benefits to workers who don't currently qualify due to immigration status. Let's leverage the longstanding inequities exposed in recent events to push for long overdue equity and justice for our farmworker community.

[Support our Programs](#)

[Sign-up to Volunteer](#)

Community Bridges is an exempt organization as described in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code; EIN #94-2460211. Donations are tax deductible in excess of the value of any goods or services provided in exchange for your contribution.

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