

## Support Pours In for Pajaro Flood Relief



### A Rude Awakening

The community of Pajaro, our farmworkers, our families, and our friends have lost so much as a result of last week's flood, when nearly 2,000 residents were awakened after midnight to find their homes submerged in up to 3 feet of flood water.

Community Bridges has been doing the boots-on-the-ground work since late Friday night and early Saturday morning, March 11, when we donated thousands of essential hygiene and personal items to evacuees at the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds shelter. On Sunday, we set up our mobile laundry trailer at the Fairgrounds to support flood victims who awoke to knee-high flood water and had to leave all of their belongings behind before donations arrived. That same day, staff from our Family Resource Collective centers began meeting with families to do disaster damage assessments to establish a system in which we can efficiently and equitably distribute financial assistance to help them in the months or years-long recovery.

This week, La Manzana Community Resources, our Family Resource Center located in downtown Watsonville just a short walk from the community of Pajaro, has met with anywhere from 50-85 participants per day. We are connecting people with resources and ensuring we discuss future FEMA applications, analyzing insurance policies to see if they are covered for shelter, hotels or repair needs as well as analyzing their situation on their future long-term needs to provide larger funding levels. After meeting with more than 500 flood-impacted families this week, we've realized that more resources and support will be needed to help the Pajaro Valley truly rebound. The need is substantial, and the hurdles for these families to access federal funds are significant.

### The Time For Leadership

The community of Pajaro includes a large number of Mixteco and Spanish speaking families, multigenerational groups of children, seniors and parents under one roof. These residents have

experienced complete devastation and total loss. Due to impact of storms it could be a couple of weeks to gain access to their homes, and months for recovery and repairs to occur.

Agricultural workers are the backbone of the farming community, and many have been impacted and a large portion are not eligible for the federal aid and will depend on limited philanthropy dollars to recover. Many of the impacted families will not qualify for FEMA support federal assistance. A good portion of these families are farmworkers, and a sizeable number are undocumented.

There is a great deal of uncertainty for the more than 350 evacuees staying at the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds, and hundreds more spread out throughout the Pajaro Valley and Central Coast. We need state intervention to support community members who are undocumented. The state must take action to ensure that all Pajaro Valley residents have an equitable recovery. Now is the time for our elected leaders to show up for those in need.

We urge you to contact your elected officials and ask Gov. Gavin Newsom to work with local lawmakers and bring aid to the Pajaro Valley. Every time you share our links and tag the governor and other local elected toward action, we move toward making additional funding a reality. This single act may result in more money than any mutual aid or fundraising effort.

### **Community Support Pours In**

Community Bridges wants to thank the hundreds of businesses, groups, and individuals that have donated to us, other nonprofits and mutual aid groups, and the community foundations to ensure that help is available to evacuees in their time of need. We are overjoyed by the outpouring of philanthropic support we have seen over the past week.

More than 1,500 individuals, businesses, and organizations have donated more than \$100,000 to Community Bridges to help Pajaro Valley residents recover. Many others have donated supplies as well as an outpouring of love and solidarity. We were thrilled by the generosity of Mexican pop stars Maná and Alejandro Fernández who will be donating a portion of the proceeds of their Bay Area shows to Community Bridges.

As one of the leading health and human services providers in Santa Cruz County, Community Bridges is pre-positioned to answer the call when needs emerge. By supporting these frontline services, you ensure that Pajaro Valley residents' needs can be met today as well as for the foreseeable future throughout the upcoming recovery process.

### **How You Can Help**

If you can donate, we ask that monetary donations be made to the community foundations for Monterey and Santa Cruz counties to continue supporting the boots-on-the-ground work being done by many community groups.

### **Community Foundation Santa Cruz County**

<https://www.cfsc.org/funds/disaster-fund>

## Community Foundation for Monterey County:

<https://www.cfmco.org/impact/montereycountystormrelieffund/>

## If you want to support our work, donate at

<https://communitybridges.org/donate/>

Donation items (clothing, supplies, food) for Pajaro Valley flood relief should NOT go to the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds. Please take all items to the locations below:

- Westview Church: 118 1st Street, Watsonville
- Church of the Nazarene: 710 Green Valley Road, Watsonville
- The Salvation Army: 214 Union Street, Watsonville

La Manzana Community Resources is accepting donations of diapers, wipes and formula to support evacuees with small children. We are also collecting cleaning supplies (contractor bags, gloves, sponges, disinfectant, etc.) in bulk in preparation for supporting families to safely return home.

These items can be brought to our center at 521 Main Street, Watsonville, CA 95076 Monday through Friday, 9am to 5pm. If you want to donate food to our participants at La Manzana, please message us on social media or send us an email at [info@cbridges.org](mailto:info@cbridges.org).

Thank you for joining us in supporting our community. All of us are stronger with thanks for your partnership. Please stay tuned for ongoing updates throughout the recovery process as we communicate through email, social media and press coverage at [communitybridges.org/news](https://communitybridges.org/news).

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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.

Support Services Now

Sign-up to Volunteer

519 Main Street, | Watsonville , California 95076  
831-688-8840 | [info@cbridges.org](mailto:info@cbridges.org)

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### **Act now to support Pajaro disaster recovery**

It's been two weeks since nearly 2,000 Pajaro residents were forced to evacuate following the breach of the levee that stood between their homes and the Pajaro River. For more than 12 days, residents were unable to return home. Nearly 400 residents found temporary shelter at the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds, where they depended on community donations of hygiene supplies and laundry utilities for three days before portable showers arrived.

Compare this to when, within 20 days of rain that started December 27, the President of the United States declared a Major Disaster in Santa Cruz County. Federal grants for temporary housing and home repairs were made available, along with low-cost loans to cover uninsured losses to help individuals and business owners recover from the effects of the storms. Within 24 days, the President himself touched down and visited, enjoying a sunny day at the beach.

What is the difference between these two events? When FEMA opened three different disaster recovery centers in Santa Cruz County, but near total devastation in Pajaro has yet to yield any

federal or direct financial state assistance. When residents and business owners in Santa Cruz County were able to apply for federal financial assistance, Pajaro residents may not even be eligible due to the high number without appropriate citizenship status even qualify if offered the opportunity. The difference can be summed up in one word: disenfranchisement

### **Glaring disparities, Needless suffering**

The California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) says the levee breach on March 11 does not qualify for Federal Emergency Management Agency assistance because the value of property in Pajaro, San Ardo and other impacted areas does not meet the criteria. Despite Pajaro Valley, San Ardo and Monterey County agriculture generating upward of \$5 billion per year on the literal backs of these resident farmworkers and families, and despite the fact that the flooding of Pajaro was a long anticipated failure of manmade infrastructure well known to be insufficient for the past nearly 70 years it is unconscionable for government both state, local and federal to not act.

The lack of FEMA presence means no grants for temporary housing. Pajaro residents are paying \$100-\$200 per night to stay in hotels, with no promise of financial assistance nor even future housing or employment. No funding for home repairs or cleanup efforts. Residents arrived home after 12 days to find their homes blanketed in thick and toxic mud, with nothing but calls for donations and volunteers to help them recover from a major disaster. And for several more days, not even running water let alone potable water.

The disparities occurring before our eyes in less than 90 days is simply unacceptable. As a community and as a region, we must demand immediate legislative action to ensure the enfranchisement of all residents of our community and region. Please join us in demanding equity and enfranchisement for residents of Pajaro, San Ardo and Monterey County as much as was received for residents of Santa Cruz County in the Major Disaster declared by President Biden in January 2023.

We urge you to contact your elected officials to ask Gov. Gavin Newsom to work with local lawmakers and bring aid to the Pajaro Valley. Every time you share this link and urge others to take action, we move toward securing more support the people of Pajaro. This single act may result in more resources for the community than any mutual aid or fundraising effort. The residents of Pajaro deserve the full support of federal, state and local governments to recover from the levee breach to return home to their community.

### **Immediate solutions we propose:**

- We urge the Governor of California, CalOES, and the President of the United States to push forward a major disaster declaration that allows financial support for the residents impacted by failed infrastructure that has for decades been overlooked because of discriminatory government funding practices.

- ☑ We urge CalOES to focus financial support for all residents regardless of citizenship in California impacted by disaster with a bare minimum of \$1,500 per household. We urge that the Governor to change policies to provide support for undocumented residents unable to receive federal support systemically and not just one time.
- ☑ We urge the Governor to deploy tiny trailers and homes to increase immediate affordable housing options and minimize displacement and compaction of housing availability across the region already experiencing a housing crisis.
- ☑ We must ensure that Community Based Organizations (CBO's) are equitably included in the work of state, local and city disaster response under the Office of Emergency Services. We must ensure that funding and resources are available to allow community programs to respond and have the resources needed to operate sustainably outside of disaster and not solely dependent on philanthropy.
- ☑ We must expedite the repair and construction of the Pajaro Levee Project to protect residents of failed infrastructure, and urge congress to expedite other projects which are known to be susceptible to failure.

We urge you to contact your elected officials to ask Gov. Gavin Newsom to work with local lawmakers and bring aid to the Pajaro Valley. Every time you share this link and urge others to take action, we move toward securing more support the people of Pajaro. This single act may result in more resources for the community than any mutual aid or fundraising effort. The residents of Pajaro deserve the full support of federal, state and local governments to recover from the levee breach to return home to their community.

Take Action Now

## Contact Us

info@cbridges.org | 831-688-8840



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