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**COMMUNITY BRIDGES**  
PUENTES DE LA COMUNIDAD



Photo courtesy of the Santa Cruz Sentinel



## Rebuilding Hope



*Family Resource Collective Advocate Suzie Schwilk has helped San Lorenzo Valley families impacted by fires and storms return home, find alternative housing, and obtain federal assistance.*

### Supporting San Lorenzo Valley Families in Times of Crisis

Mountain Community Resources Advocate Suzie Schwilk has lived in the San Lorenzo Valley for 23 years. She has repeatedly seen the tight-knit community unite to face difficult obstacles over her two decades in the Valley, but the past three years have thrust thousands of her neighbors into indescribable hardships that are testing the resolve of the hard-working, self-reliant region of Santa Cruz County.

Three years have passed since the CZU Fire ravaged the San Lorenzo Valley, and since then, Santa Cruz County has pushed its way past San Francisco and Silicon Valley as the most unaffordable rental market in the nation. At the same time, rising inflation has put additional pressure on local families, and the winter and spring storms that hit the Central Coast caused another wave of devastation in the San Lorenzo Valley.

“It’s a really challenging moment for this community,” Suzie says while sitting in her office in Felton, “but when people come to

#### In the news

Community Bridges Family Resource Collective has received headlines for its response to the winter and spring storms:

- [Six months after levee breach, Pajaro residents face difficult road ahead](#)
- [Community Bridges offers ongoing emergency assistance to the town of Pajaro after flooding disaster](#)
- [Slow recovery continues after Pajaro flood](#)

Learn More About our Family Resource Collective sites

- [La Manzanita Community Resources](#)
- [Live Oak Community Resources](#)
- [Nueva Vista Community Resources](#)
- [Mountain Community Resources](#)



Mountain Community Resources, they feel supported.”

### History of Helping

Just last year, Mountain Community Resources celebrated its 40th anniversary. The community resource hub was established in response to the deadly 1982 floods, thanks in large part to the heroic efforts of founder Mary Hammer and many others. It was originally known as the Valley Resource Center before rebranding to Mountain Community Resources and joining Community Bridges’ Family Resource Collective in 2010.

Although the name has changed, the center’s mission has remained resolute.

## 'When people come to Mountain Community Resources, they feel supported.'

- Suzie Schwilk, Mountain Community Resources Advocate

MCR helps the community prepare for and respond to natural disasters while providing essential services and resources that ensure all who walk through our doors feel dignified, respected, and heard.

Last year, Mountain Community Resources provided 1,384 residents with drop-in resources, case management, counseling, food distribution, showers, and more. Over the past year, nearly 9,000 bags of food were distributed to 600 residents, while 800 residents received 2,000 hours (about two and a half months) of crisis support and disaster recovery navigation.

The program distributed over \$400,000 in relief aid to residents affected by winter and spring storms, including direct financial assistance, free clean-up tools, and insurance and FEMA application assistance and workshops. It has also served as one of the lead agencies in helping distribute dollars from Community Foundation Santa Cruz County to meet unmet needs, bridging the gap for San Lorenzo Valley residents who lost their homes in the CZU Fire and have faced financial struggles while making their way through the rebuilding process.

“They’re grateful,” Suzie says of the people who come to the center. “Some are in tears that they’re getting the help they need to move on to the next stage of their recovery.”



*Mountain Community Resources at 6134 Highway 9 in Felton helps more than 1,000 people annually in the San Lorenzo Valley and beyond.*

### Long Road to Recovery

August 16 marked the third anniversary of the CZU Fires. Some families have been able to return home, but many are still weaving their way through the complex recovery process.

“The people I work with are tired and drained,” Suzie says. “They’re dealing with the challenges of rebuilding their lives, and often, it’s a slow and arduous process.”

A significant concern for families affected by the CZU Fire is the impending loss of Additional Living Expense (ALE) funding, a portion of their homeowner insurance coverage supporting their temporary rentals. This loss will force many to seek assistance finding alternative housing, whether it’s yurts, trailers, RVs, or a cheaper rental—a daunting prospect for those already burdened by mortgages.

However, the challenges don’t end with the CZU Fire. The community has also had to endure the destructive force of the winter and spring storms. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) assistance has been crucial in many families’ recoveries, but there have been challenges to receiving funds from the federal agency.

Mountain Community Resources and the “unmet needs” funding from the Community Foundation have stepped in to bridge the gap.

In one case, a family who lost their home during the CZU Fire had made progress toward recovery only to have trees topple into their rebuild during the bomb cyclone. FEMA would not cover the damages because they were not living on the property during the storm.

“We were able to help them,” Suzie says. “It’s hard for some folks that have now been affected by all three disasters. People are like ‘Oh, God. I can’t believe I’m going through this again.’ It’s been traumatic for them.”

### **A Growing Need for Assistance**

With many families still facing uncertain futures and the loss of ALE funding on the horizon, the demand for assistance is expected to rise. Suzie reveals that she currently has 11 open cases related to the CZU Fire, two for the winter storm, and five for the spring storm. On top of this, she’s trying to help five families work their way through the arduous FEMA assistance process.

This demonstrates that the need for aid remains significant, even years after the initial disaster first struck. The long road to recovery continues, and many families are still in dire need of support.

As San Lorenzo Valley residents continue to navigate the complexities of disaster recovery, there are ways you can help. Suzie recommends donating to Mountain Community Resources to fund disaster case managers like herself. These professionals play a pivotal role in helping families overcome the hurdles they face in recovery and in preparing for future disasters.



Suzie Schwilk (left) was honored with the Green Heart Award at the Mountain Affair in 2021.

Mountain Community Resources' annual fundraiser returns to Ristorante Casa Nostra in Ben Lomond on Friday, October 20th.

On October 20, Mountain Community Resources is hosting the 38th annual Mountain Affair at Ristorante Casa Nostra in Ben Lomond.

The Mountain Affair features fine cuisine, local wines, live music, and a silent auction showcasing valley businesses. All proceeds from the Mountain Affair help Mountain Community Resources to build a warm, friendly, safe place for San Lorenzo Valley residents to access lifesaving and life-building services, including emergency preparedness, disaster recovery and crisis support services.

Join us to support vital resources and services for the San Lorenzo Valley.

[Donate to Mountain Community Resources](#)

[Buy Tickets to 38th Annual Mountain Affair](#)



## Keeping Pajaro Prepared

With winter fast approaching and possible heavy rain and storms on the horizon, Community Bridges' Family Resource Collective is hosting a series of emergency preparedness events in Pajaro over the next two months to help residents prepare for natural disasters.

The first will be Sunday, October 1 at 2pm at Our Lady of Assumption Church at 100 Salinas Road in Pajaro.

Learn from emergency response experts how to prepare yourself and your community to respond to emergencies and disasters. We will also distribute emergency preparedness kits, known as 'go-bags,' to participants who sign up for emergency alerts through Alert Monterey County during the event.

[MORE INFORMATION](#)

## Join the FRC Team!

Community Bridges envisions a thriving community where every person has the opportunity to unleash their full potential.



Our Family Resource Collective Advocates and Program Managers work collaboratively with community partners, residents, businesses, foundations, donors, supporters, volunteers, and the Community Bridges family of programs to provide our participants with access to resources that offer stability and hope for the future.



Current open positions:

- [Program Manager - Mountain Community Resources](#)
- [Advocate - La Manzana Community Resources](#)
- [Program Coordinator - La Manzana Community Resources](#)
- [Advocate - Nueva Vista Community Resources](#)
- [Advocate - Live Oak Community Resources](#)

These are full-time, 40-hour per week positions with competitive starting wages and a robust benefits package.

APPLY NOW



Show your support of Community Bridges and the Family Resource Collective by shopping at our TeePublic storefront! A portion of the proceeds of every sale go toward Community Bridges and the FRC!

SHOP COMMUNITY BRIDGES MERCH



Local advocacy makes a difference. The Family Resource Collective can not sustain its services without strong backing from local elected officials. Contact your representatives, ask questions, and advocate for our programs.

CONTACT YOUR SUPERVISOR



The Family Resource Collective's work would not be possible without our dedicated volunteers. From helping with food distributions to conducting community outreach, our FRC centers have a plethora of volunteer opportunities.

LEND A HAND TODAY

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