

CrossWalk: A Refuge for Evacuated Seekers

For decades CrossWalk has served as Napa County's first-to-open, last-to-close evacuation shelter. In 2014 my family was jolted out of bed. We turned on the news to learn that an earthquake hit not too far from Napa. My whole gang immediately got dressed and headed to church where we found lots of broken glass in our kitchens. My office was totaled, with furniture thrown around the room. After we knew it was safe to enter the buildings (no gas leaks or structural issues), my son and I worked to get the gym kitchen cleaned up because we knew it was just a matter of time before we would be called upon to open as a shelter. CrossWalkers just showed up to help and make sure the church was okay. One evacuee, Bruno Bardet, found the hospitality so lovely that he began attending church. He joined and is still an active member to this day!

Napa County, City, and nonprofit organizations found out how unprepared they were for a major disaster. At that time, a new organization was conceived in CrossWalk's sanctuary: **Community Organizations Active in Disaster**. The [COAD](#) now fulfills a critical role connecting government and NPO's to serve the needs of Napers. When not activated, the COAD helps the community become more prepared by fostering neighbor-to-neighbor caregiving and training for NPO leaders (and more).

I remember when the fires came in 2017. I got a call in the middle of the night from the County Sheriff's office that we needed to open. Thirty minutes later, we were open and getting ready for hundreds upon hundreds of evacuees. Once again, CrossWalkers simply showed up to help direct traffic and offer assistance as needed. The first folks to arrive were from evacuated resorts who had the means to find other space, so they were only with us a few hours. Then another wave of people came who didn't have the same capacity. Many stayed for a week, others even longer.

In 2020, lightning ignited massive fires that caused widespread damage around Berryessa, into Vacaville and well beyond. Still under the COVID pandemic restrictions and scorching hot temps, we were inundated with hundreds of evacuees from Calistoga. There was no way we could provide social distancing. I was sure it would be a super-spreader. The gym and the sanctuary were packed as people waited to get vouchers for hotel rooms. Eventually, all but

a few got placed – we had a handful who stayed on campus for a while before moving back home. CrossWalk's own, Karen Kenny, lost her house overlooking Lake Berryessa. She noted that the fire didn't spread on the ground but in the air. Her house was no match. Gratefully, she was able to stay with her son, daughter-in-law and granddaughter until she was put up in a hotel for six months until she bought a new home.

We are proud to serve in this capacity, and we have invested significant funds to improve our campus so that we can better serve those who come our way. After the 2020 fires, we recognized that we needed to improve our locker room showers to accommodate neighbors with access and functional needs. We created accessible shower stalls. In our gym lobby, we remodeled our bathrooms to provide accessible stalls. That renovation cost tens of thousands of dollars coming mostly from CrossWalk, but also from the Community Foundation, our denomination, and a memorial gift.

One massive, recent improvement that will allow us to serve more fully is the complete renovation of our gym kitchen. Before, we could only use our kitchen for storage – it was not permitted for food preparation. (Napa County is adamant about food safety with evacuees – nobody is served well if food poisoning makes its way into the meals provided.) Now a fully permitted commercial kitchen, CrossWalk can provide meals prepared onsite. The funds for this project came largely from Federal grants channeled through [Feeding It Forward](#) (who have full access to the kitchen for their purposes), CrossWalk funds, our denomination, memorial gifts and donor-restricted contributions.

Why do we work so hard and invest so much for people we will likely never see again? *Because that is the Way of Jesus.* The Good Samaritan came across a beaten up, left-for-dead victim of a robbery and chose to sacrifice his time and money to care for him, even though he knew the unconscious man likely reviled him. We do it because it's the right thing to do, the loving thing to do, the Jesus thing to do. Our hope is that the improvements we make with this [Capital Campaign: A Shelter in Life's Storms](#) will allow us to continue to serve fully and well for decades to come.



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