

Theme 9: Getting through it together

The mental burden posed by the fire and the recovery process was significant, and often shared across survivors.

Sharing the burden with neighbors

I think people are more close knit now. Because there's a camaraderie, there's a bond. **We all survive something. And we all chose to stay**, like in this neighborhood, so many people chose to stay. Then we all have this bond. We've been through it and we're all still here, you know. So, when we run into each other, there's almost a little more a little more friendliness and then there was. It's almost a feeling family. And I think...that's one of the reasons why I stayed just because the area is beautiful, but because I really like my neighbors. And I'm really happy that so many of them came back.

Lake County



It struck me, you know, our whole fire support group got together about the time of the five year anniversary...and it was sort of an interesting thing that most of us had gotten to the point that we felt we had a life again, you know, that our lives were going on and, you know, that we had connections and, that stuff was, you know, that we were really living again...it's amazing because I could contrast that with sort of how I felt like, there was nothing, you know, my life

was... just had disintegrated. I, I thought, you know, this is, this is amazing how resilient humans are, but you can, once you fill in stuff and you have a time interval and you've sort of recreated some experiences and so on, you know, it all sort of starts filling in and becomes, becomes your life again.

Sonoma County

I think the thing too is that you come back and for the most part everyone's on the same page. I think that helped the community come back as a community because we all went essentially through the same thing... It's exciting to see the construction. It's interesting, its now nice to see trucks and the cement trucks and all the construction going on. And I know people are frustrated with, with the construction. **But I just see it on the flip side where like, No, it's progress. The goodness gracious, it's going to take a long time, but they're at least making the attempt to do something about it...** Again

it was that connection of these people know what I went through, they know what I went through because they went through it with me.

Butte County



Paying it forward



I saw the mayhem that was happening [in Paradise]... I knew that there were going to be thousands, if not tens of thousands of people congregated in this part of Chico. **And so once I realized I had the resources, within 48 hours, we had the first load of relief supplies there.** And the next day, the people at Big Lots Chico pulled out a couple of their barbecue grills that they had there. And they raided their food supply and they just made hot dogs. And boy, for a refugee who hadn't had a hot meal in two or three days, a hot dog is a banquet. Yeah, that's all you need. Something hot, something sweet, something that's comfort food...

Plumas County

But what we did was there was a Facebook group to raise the money and it was people all over, like I was saying, the Sonoma people and other people that had been affected by fire and other wildlife rescue people. **Just so anybody who wanted to be involved and contribute to this helped to raise the money.** It was really a woman down in Sacramento who spearheaded the whole thing. She came to one of our PASH meetings and told us about her project. We immediately jumped on board and gave them what money we could to make it happen. We had a big event when it went up, when it was installed. And we invited all the people to come and to paint rocks memorializing their animals.

Butte County



So, I think that fire after ours was probably the fire that burned in Santa Rosa, so big town, and you know, there's not supposed to be forest fires in big towns... that town and decimated a couple of their communities. So, there was this Facebook group that was started so that people down there could connect with us and ask questions, and you know, how do you do the inventory and you know, things like we didn't know we were kind of one of the big first fires really in in our area, in California... we felt like in some ways we were kind of the Guinea pig. **So, we wanted to be able to help other communities.**

Lake County



Paradise is very involved right now with Lahaina. We had a big meeting actually with a bunch of their like public Works, our public works, our municipalities... **This is healing for us to do, we have to like pay it forward.** ...the five-year anniversary has taken on this life of like being another part time job for all of us right now because reporters are calling, there's stuff to do and there's this and everybody wants to know that whatever it's like got to get back and doing all this stuff.

Butte County

Looking towards tomorrow

But like I thought they did a fantastic job with [the Welcome to Paradise] sign of really honoring the old but still modernizing it, making it more fire safe and representative of what we went through. **To me that's the future that I want to see is like, yes, honoring the past but not getting stuck in it.** You know, I was really like, I went to all those meetings right after the fire...I'm super inspired by all that. That was exciting to me, so I hope some of it comes to fruition.

Butte County



Then just going to have another beauty that you're going to see beyond this. So when you start, you've got to think of the beauty rather than the hard sweat. You can't be oblivious to this, but you got to look. **So I think this is okay, this is where our town is right now.** You see that? I don't have pictures, purposely didn't take pictures of the new houses that are there, but it's neat. A lot of the houses along Main Street coming up this way were all from mining camps. They were just put on a flat bed and brought down. A lot of people here were living in mining camps. I mean 1800s, early 1900s. And so the town had this ragged look to it, **but now you see these new houses going in and it just has a different patina to it. And so that's encouraging.**

Plumas County