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another in the near future in order to hear citizens' ongoing concerns.

Resources are increasing

The topic of disaster case managers—who can help survivors connect with resources and navigate the difficult rebuilding process—was met with a collective guffaw from the group of Berry Creek survivors. A few said they're working with case managers or waiting to connect with one.

"Good luck finding a case manager," one woman said. "Even if you do, it's hard to feel like a priority when they have so many other clients."

Disaster case management is funded by FEMA, which contracts with agencies to carry out those services. For the North Complex Fire, case management is delivered by North Valley Catholic Social Service (NVCSS) and St. Vincent De Paul (SVDP).

Stephanie Gregorio, who oversees those services for SVDP, said that the two organizations have a total of five caseworkers dedicated to North Complex survivors.

"A big obstacle is the sheer number of people that need help compared to our staffing," Gregorio said. "For that reason, there are waiting lists for case managers."

For the Camp Fire, the Butte County Department of Employment and Social Services coordinated with FEMA to contract with organizations that did case management. She said that FEMA funded some case workers through NVCSS and SVDP, but the need was so great that her organization successfully appealed to the North Valley Community Foundation (NVCF) to pay for more. However, her department is not involved in this aspect of North Complex Fire.

NVCF has been instrumental to North Complex Fire recovery, supplying more than \$600,000 in grant funding.

On Sept. 8—the one year anniversary of the fire—an organization called California Hope of Butte County, a subset of NVCSS, opened a Wildfire Resource Center near Lakeside market in Oroville, which it hopes will be easily accessible for North Complex fire victims from Berry Creek, Feather Falls and the surrounding foothills.

Cal Hope program manager Jake Fender, who oversees the center, said it offers resources like a computer lab, printing center and some supplies needed to meet immediate needs. Case workers are on site on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Fender said the Bear Fire Long Term Recovery Group—a coalition of more than 50 individuals and organizations dedicated to helping people rebuild—is also hard at work towards recovery. Since May, that group has held monthly "resource round-ups" to connect with survivors and aid in recovery efforts.

Theft and other losses

Some of the Berry Creek folk at Village



Frank Martinez has been doing wildfire relief since 2017 and helped found Berry Creek United along with three survivors of the North Complex Fire.

Market said they were taking a risk even being there, and away from their properties, due to theft.

"We have overwhelming crime and absolutely no police presence," one woman said, explaining that generators are the most common targets. Several of those who gathered believe the thieves even monitor local social media groups to ascertain when people will be attending meetings, picking up supplies or are otherwise away from home.

Connelly also acknowledged theft in the area, saying he's heard from constituents about whole metal buildings being stolen from people's properties. He said that's in part due to a lack of sheriff's deputies throughout the county, which the supervisors have attempted to address through pay increases. He referred any further questions about criminal activity to the Butte County Sheriff's Office; the CN&R did not receive a reply before press time.

"I haven't forgotten about them—I really care about and love the people up there," Connelly said. "It's just really difficult when we have fire after fire after fire."

Perhaps even more troubling than stolen generators is the sense of community that the fire stole from Berry Creek.

"It's really hard to gather people together," Flanagan said. "We tried doing some shindigs in Oroville ... but it's hard for a lot of people up here on the hill to even get gas money to come down there. There's no community center, no grange, no building at all up here for people to meet at. Nobody wants to get together in the dirt and the heat."

"We're really struggling to stay together." □



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