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In Neighborhoods

BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

One of a series focusing
on efforts to improve
the health of residents in
the Sacramento region.

Emergency Response

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

When COVID-19 hit greater Sacramento, causing unemployment, hunger and dozens of deaths, one local nonprofit did something about it.

Sacramento Area Congregations Together, or Sac ACT, created a COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund to support low-income families facing financial struggles amid the pandemic. By early May, the fund had nearly \$101,500 – which was distributed among roughly 200 families in Sacramento and Yolo counties, with the neediest families receiving \$500 each.

“We were hearing from a lot of families that they had lost their jobs, and they weren’t going to be able to pay for rent, food, and utilities,” Tere Flores Onofre, Sac ACT’s director of organizing, said recently. “So we decided to start this fund.”

Sac ACT, an advocate for social justice with the support of The California Endowment (TCE), launched the fund in late March.

By then, its member congregations, representing more than a dozen religions across the community, had transitioned to online religious services. They and other community partners learned about the fund mostly through social media and email.

Donations poured in. The smallest: \$8. The largest: much bigger, including a contribution from TCE.

About 340 families applied for grants by an April 3 deadline. Recipients were chosen through computer-assisted lotteries, starting in April and continuing into this month.

“This fund is a blessing,” said Elizabeth, 33, an undocumented immigrant from Mexico who received \$500 in early April. She applied for help at the urging of her sister-in-law, a member of Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church.

The grant allowed the mother of three and Juan, her significant other, to help pay their April bills, including \$1,000-plus in rent for their Sacramento home.

“We’re going through a very difficult moment,” said Elizabeth, whose full name is being withheld for her privacy.

“THIS FUND IS A BLESSING.”

Elizabeth
Undocumented immigrant, recipient
of \$500 emergency grant

In mid-March, after the pandemic materialized, Juan, 38, the father of her two youngest children, lost his job installing bathroom appliances. Soon after, Elizabeth, who cleans offices, also became unemployed.

After almost a month without a job, Juan now works one or two days a week in construction. Like Elizabeth, he too is undocumented. Neither qualified for a stimulus check or unemployment benefits.

Yet, despite being “without papers,” Juan pays state/federal taxes when he works. In late April, he received a federal tax refund – enough for May’s rent. The family also



Clad in a T-shirt that in Spanish reads “No Human Being Is Illegal,” Sac ACT’s Tere Flores Onofre stands in front of the 2324 L Street building, part of which houses the nonprofit’s new office. For now, the office is closed, with its staff working at home during the COVID-19 crisis. Photo by Edgar Sanchez

receives food from concerned relatives and friends.

While the fund benefited immigrants, regardless of immigration status, it also helped native-born Americans of all races.

Sac ACT is accepting donations for families on a waiting list.

BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

In 2010, The California Endowment launched a 10-year, \$1 billion plan to improve the health of 14 challenged communities across the state. Over the 10 years, residents, community-based organizations and public institutions will work together to address the socioeconomic and environmental challenges contributing to the poor health of their communities.

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Your **ZIP code** shouldn’t predict how long you’ll live – but it does. Staying healthy requires much more than doctors and diets. Every day, our surroundings and activities affect how long – and how well – we’ll live.

Health Happens in Neighborhoods. Health Happens in Schools.
Health Happens with Prevention.

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