

UC Berkeley

Cal-in-Sac Undergraduate Research Products

Title

Guaranteed Income Program for the Pajaro, California Community

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9k6752p8>

Author

Rocha, Jenny

Publication Date

2025-08-12

Guaranteed Income Program for the Pajaro, California Community

By Jenny Rocha

Carla Escutia and her three children are just one family of about [3,000 people that were displaced by the Pajaro Flood that was caused by a levee that collapsed on the Pajaro River in 2023.](#) The flood completely ruined their home and their cars, forcing them to find a new place to live that would fit in their budget and be on higher ground to avoid being impacted by future floods. This proved to be incredibly difficult for them due to the incredibly high rent prices in Pajaro and Monterey County, [some apartments costing as much as \\$4,000](#) per month. After moving to a house shared with twelve other people which cost \$1700 away from Pajaro, the Escutias decided to move back to Pajaro to an apartment on their own for \$1,900.

The Escutias' story is one that many other Pajaro residents can relate to. The flood [damaged 273 homes and destroyed five.](#) According to an assessment done by Danielle Zoe Rivera, Assistant Professor of landscape architecture and environmental planning at UC Berkeley, [very few people may have moved from Pajaro after 2023 due to the high cost of living, and many chose to stay in the flooded homes due to the high need for immediate housing.](#) It has been too costly for people to move away from Pajaro, so they take the risk of being impacted by flooding again for cheaper housing.

Another common story among Pajaro residents is experiencing barriers in accessing aid from government programs. [About a third of Pajaro residents speak little or no English, many speak indigenous languages,](#) and [about 88% of residents primarily speak Spanish.](#) This barrier has been discouraging people from applying for aid, while also expressing that [the excessive requirements of receipts is too confusing and time consuming.](#)

After reading different news articles highlighting the experiences of Pajaro residents struggling financially two years after the flood, one thing became clear: any help that they may have received from government programs was not enough to actually make a difference in their financial recovery and access to housing and other basic needs. According to the latest report by the National Low Income Housing Coalition, [a family like the Escutias would need a household hourly wage of \\$77.96 to afford a two-bedroom rental in the area without spending more than 30% of their income on housing.](#) Statistics like these make it clear that the Pajaro community affected by the floods would benefit from a guaranteed income program, and that it should be a priority for the state government to implement one.

[Guaranteed Income programs provide regular and unconditional payments to low-income individuals or households.](#) They aim to reduce poverty and homelessness by empowering recipients to meet their basic needs, such as food and housing. These programs have become more widely supported since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. [During the pandemic, there was a need for financial assistance for those who were not eligible for one time stimulus payments from the federal government, such as undocumented immigrants.](#) After interviewing staff from [Destination: Home, a non-profit dedicated to ending homelessness in Silicon Valley.](#) I learned that they, as part of a coalition with other organizations, were able to

develop the Silicon Valley Guaranteed Income Project in 2022 which is open to people regardless of their immigration status. They also said that after witnessing the need for financial support during COVID-19, many government officials were less resistant to these types of programs, and collaborated with organizations such as Destination: Home to make them happen. Something that stood out to me was that this program had a “no strings attached” approach on how the money could be spent, giving people the freedom to best decide how to use it to meet their basic needs. They also made a very important point: that what most people struggling financially simply need to avoid homelessness is long-term financial support.

Although we have seen that these projects work and that they have been helpful to people since COVID-19, the same type of effort has not been exercised for natural disaster relief programs. There has been funding directed for aid for the Pajaro community, [such as the \\$20 million included in the state budget in 2024 for the purpose of aid and infrastructure improvements](#). However, only \$10 million was being directed to aid, and as stated previously, there have been barriers for people in accessing these funds. Additionally, this funding provides one time payments, and although payments can be up to \$15,000, it is not likely for people to receive that amount due to the strict requirements. This program is still not meeting the long-term needs of Pajaro residents.

A guaranteed income program would address these long-term needs in Pajaro, allowing people to choose what needs to be spent on. An example of a possible program is a 2 year long program, providing \$2000-\$3000 monthly to families most in need in the community. [According to the Red Cross, people impacted by natural disasters “may also face financial challenges in the days, weeks, and even months or years ahead” \(Red Cross\)](#). A guaranteed income program would ensure that people have consistent income to pay for housing, transportation, repairs on their homes, businesses, and more.

It is crucial that California provides funding solely for guaranteed income programs for those impacted by natural disasters, and a good way to start is by collaborating with local Pajaro organizations that could help address language barriers and support in better multilingual outreach, to implement one specifically for the Pajaro community impacted by the flood in 2023. This could be extremely beneficial in keeping people housed, recover losses from the flood, and boost their local economy after years of continued struggle and systemic neglect since the disaster.