

Fire recovery assistance center opens in old Chico 99 Cent store

ABC 7 KRCR

For the next two weeks, people impacted by the Park, Thompson, and Apache fires can visit a newly established local assistance center.

The center, situated in the old 99 Cent store along Pillsbury Road in Chico, opened Monday morning to a long line of impacted residents.

Companies and organizations present inside included United Policyholders, which help residents navigate the often murky insurance process, as well as PG&E, Allstate, the California Department of Veteran Affairs, Butte County Development Services, United Methodist Committee on Relief, and the Red Cross.

Brandy Grout, who lost her home in the Park Fire, was among the first in line Monday morning.

"Everybody is keeping a positive outlook I think because what else can we do after losing everything," she said. "Now it's time to move forward... and get the ball rolling."

Grout says her family had four homes on their property, all leveled by the fire. They've lived in Cohasset their whole lives and plan to return.

A GoFundMe has been set up to help her family. A link can be found online here. A compilation of other active online fundraisers is also available here.

Annie Barbour, a coordinator for United Policyholders, says the organization only staffs tables at local assistance centers with other fire survivors.

"[It's] simply guiding them, being there for them, holding their hand and letting them know that we know how it feels like," Barbour said.

She lost her home in the 2017 Tubbs Fire in Santa Rosa. She says fire survivors in Butte County often come up a unique set of challenges.

“Insurance right now is a mess, it’s a disaster of its own and we know the rural communities are being dinged more than anything else financially, the availability of insurance when we come in here, quite frankly, we say a little prayer, please a lot of them, the majority of them, please have insurance because that is the recovery,” she said.