



Kelly DeWolfe (left), impact manager/affordable housing for United Way of Monterey County, gathers with Deb Pyle, Hartnell accounting manager for the ERAP program, and Katy Castagna, CEO for United Way of Monterey County, after United Way received a Change-Maker Award from the Hartnell College Foundation on Dec. 8, 2021. (Contributed)

Local News

Hartnell's rent and utility relief nears \$7 million

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SALINAS VALLEY — In partnership with United Way Monterey County, the Hartnell College Foundation has helped more than 400 low-income households receive \$2.75 million in emergency rent and utility assistance since March 2021 and plans to distribute nearly \$4 million more in 2022.

About half of those served have been Hartnell students or friends and family of students, with the remainder coming from the general Monterey County population. To reach those in greatest need, the Hartnell foundation partnered with community groups Mujeres en Acción and COPA (Communities Organized for Relational Power in Action).

The foundation was among 14 local agencies and organizations selected for the United Way's Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP), which distributed \$28 million in state and federal funds to households that earn less than 80% of the county's median income.

Recipients also had to demonstrate lost or reduced income due to Covid-19 because of such circumstances as job loss, reduced work hours, caregiver obligations and pre-existing health conditions.

Hartnell College Governing Board President Erica Padilla-Chavez said the foundation's role was critical in extending the help to Hartnell students, who otherwise might not have known about it.

"We are grateful to our foundation team and United Way for providing resources to so many people in need, in particular our students," Padilla-Chavez said.

Added Jackie Cruz, vice president of advancement and development and the foundation's executive director, "There is no doubt that this assistance has kept people from becoming homeless."

Thanks to changes in the program, the funds can now apply to past-due and utility payments, and landlords whose tenants take part will be able to recover 100% of unpaid rent. The foundation's ERAP staff has grown to six because of increasing demand, the complexities of reviewing applications and preventing fraud through accounting oversight.

In December, the foundation presented United Way Monterey County a 2021 Change-Maker Award in recognition of "innovative grant-making that is changing the lives of Hartnell College students and the community."

For information about receiving rental-utility assistance through the Hartnell College Foundation, visit hartnellfoundation.org/emergency-rental-assistance-program/.

Article submitted by Scott Faust, Communications Director for Hartnell College.