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**Press inquiries can be directed to Elissa Barrett at (626) 584-7494 ext. 108 or ebarrett@westernjustice.org

Supporting Students, Schools, and Nonprofits After the Eaton Fires: WJC Leads the Way in Healing and Restorative Practices

Pasadena, CA – February 3, 2025 – In the wake of the devastating Eaton Fires, which displaced thousands of residents, including Pasadena Unified School District (PUSD) students and staff, the Western Justice Center (WJC) is stepping up to help schools and nonprofits navigate this unprecedented challenge. With **over 300 PUSD staff members losing their homes in the fires and thousands of students displaced**, WJC has prioritized support for the school community to help students and educators recover, reconnect and heal.

Circles of Healing: Empowering Educators to Support Students



With extensive experience **using restorative justice practices to support school communities through crises** like the pandemic and school violence, WJC brings a unique perspective to **navigating trauma and its impact on student behavior**, ensuring students have the support they need to stay engaged and thrive.

As part of its **ongoing 5-year partnership with PUSD**, WJC recently brought together PUSD community schools and RTI staff to facilitate community-building circles for over 900 educators and administrators. These circles provided a safe space for teachers to process their own grief, anxiety, and challenges, allowing them to rebuild trust, foster healing, and regain emotional presence. **By equipping educators with the tools and support they need, WJC is ensuring they can show up for their students**—helping them navigate their own anxiety, anger, grief, and confusion in the aftermath of the fires.

"**Educators are essential to ensuring that students feel supported and safe**, but they can only do that if they themselves are emotionally present and feel supported," said **Elissa Barrett, WJC's Executive Director**. "By providing this space for educators to heal and prepare, we're helping them meet this tough moment and create an environment where students can move forward with their education despite the challenges."

The circles were also attended by members of the **Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE)**, who are now providing additional mental health counselors to enhance PUSD's capacity to meet the needs of its students.

Being a Good Neighbor to Nonprofits



The devastating impact of the Eaton Fires extended beyond homes and schools to the nonprofits that serve as lifelines for the community. According to the **Center for Nonprofit Management (CNM)**, more than **4,000 nonprofits** are located within the fire perimeters or nearby at-risk areas, with over **1,500 organizations** directly endangered by the Eaton Fire. These nonprofits provide essential services—housing, food

security, education, and disaster relief—and their ability to operate is critical to the recovery of affected communities.

"**The Western Justice Center is proud to serve as the steward of our historic four-building nonprofit campus**," said **Director of Operations, Colin Dueweke**. "Today, we are home to nearly 20 nonprofits and want to welcome everyone we can. Our fellow nonprofits are stretching to do all they can for our neighbors who have been impacted by the fire. We want to do the same for our fellow nonprofits."



Through its campus, **WJC provides office space to nonprofits on an ongoing basis**. "We have already welcomed one new group to the campus that lost their offices in the fire. We have two spaces remaining on campus, and **we're offering the first month rent free to help ease folks through this time of transition**," shared Dueweke. Inquiries can be made at (626) 584-7494 ext. 100 or email colin@westernjustice.org.

WJC has also offered FREE meeting space at its main building, the Maxwell House, to its nonprofit peers whose regular meeting or office space has been compromised by the fires. "At WJC, being a good neighbor means standing with our community in times of crisis," said Dueweke. "Providing this space is one small way we can support the nonprofits that so many rely on to rebuild and recover."

Groups that WJC has hosted or will be hosting include, the California Regional Environmental Education Community (CREEC) Network, Pasadena LINKS, Pasadena Unified School District's Community Schools Coordinating Team, Planned Parenthood of San Gabriel Valley, and Young & Healthy Pasadena.

WJC will also host free legal clinics for FEMA applicants on February 7 and 22 presented by Neighborhood Legal Services of LA County (NLS-LA) and Legal Aid of Los Angeles (LAFLA). To learn more about the free FEMA appeals clinics and other free legal services being offered by NLS-LA and LAFLA, go to NLS-LA Disaster Assistance Project or LAFLA Disaster Assistance.

WJC is even hosting a licensed therapist, Joanne Kiaz-Koegl, LMFT, who reached out wanting to do what she could for her neighbors. Ms. Kiaz-Koegl's free group therapy sessions for those affected by the Eaton Fire have started and will continue on Wednesday evenings at the Maxwell House from 6:30-8:00 pm every week.

Free Meeting Space



WJC is offering **free meeting space** at the **Maxwell House** to nonprofits and community groups in need.

Location: 55 S. Grand Avenue, Pasadena, CA 91105

Availability: Monday–Friday, 9 am–5:30 pm (availability for evening and weekend use on request)

Features: Conference rooms, Wi-Fi, comfortable & collaborative spaces, and AV equipment.

How to Reserve: Nonprofits and community groups can contact **Colin**

Dueweke at **colin@westernjustice.org** to confirm availability and reserve space.

Weekly Group Therapy Sessions

WJC is providing space for **licensed therapist Joanne Kiaz-Koegl, LMFT**, to offer **free in-person and virtual group therapy sessions** for those affected by the Eaton Fires. To join, contact Joan at t **818-395-8066** or email her at **Joannekoegl@gmail.com.**

- **When:** Wednesdays, 6:30–8 pm
- **Format:** In-person and virtual options available
- **Facilitator:** Licensed professional Joanne Kiaz-Koegl, LMFT

Access Additional Resources Online

WJC has curated a comprehensive list of resources to assist schools, nonprofits, families, and individuals recovering from the fires. Visit **https://www.westernjustice.org/eaton-fire-resources** to explore disaster relief funding opportunities, legal clinics, mental health resources, and more.

How You Can Help

WJC is calling on the community to help amplify our efforts:

- **Spread the Word:** Share WJC's resources and services with nonprofits, educators, and families in need.
- **Volunteer Your Expertise:** If you're a mediator, restorative justice practitioner, or counselor, reach out to us to use our campus to support the community.

For more information or to get involved, contact us at (626) 584-7494.

About Western Justice Center

WJC empowers people to strengthen their communities by growing the conflict resolution skills and capacity of youth, educators, schools and community partners. We equip young people (and the adults who support them) with the tools to manage conflict, reduce violence, embrace their differences and navigate complex problems in order to positively affect their future – and ours. Today, WJC is the largest Conflict Resolution Education provider in LA County, working in more than 30 schools across 8 districts and improving learning environments for more than 30,000 students.