Sometimes people aren’t aware of something until they need it. For many victims of disaster, like those of Hurricane Harvey, the aftermath revealed the existence—and critical importance—of community food banks.

Ever since Harvey made landfall on the Texas coast late last month, the Houston Food Bank has taken its place locally — and even nationally — among the names known for disaster assistance, like FEMA, first responders, the Red Cross, and the National Flood Insurance Program.

Thanks to social media, newspapers, and TV news, many more are now aware that food banks stand ready to spring to action when disaster strikes. In Texas, 20 food banks serve local residents in need, and the Houston Food Bank is at the forefront of Harvey relief, sending out trucks packed with food and bottled water across the region.

The same structure that allows the Houston Food Bank to serve 800,000 low-income people throughout the year makes them well suited to feed people in need in the wake of devastating floods: relationships with food donors; a warehouse and coolers stocked with fresh and non-perishable foods; skilled staff and volunteers; a fleet of forklifts and trucks to move the food; and a network of partner agencies on the ground to put the food in the hands of the people who need it.
PVUSD Gives the Gift of Reading

Paso a Paso, Creciendo Juntos, Step by Step, Growing Together Early Literacy Initiative

Superintendent Dr. Michelle Rodriguez is thrilled to introduce Footsteps 2 Brilliance (F2B) and to invite its entire community to be part of this early literacy initiative. On Sunday, September 17, PVUSD will be participating at the City of Watsonville Fiestas Patrias event where we will be introducing Paso a Paso, Creciendo Juntos/Step by Step, Growing Together (Paso a Paso), the District’s efforts to ensure our students are reading at grade level by 3rd grade. A small group of 20 Early Childhood Education families have already read 85,581 in just eight weeks. Dr. Rodriguez will be challenging the entire community to read 2 Million words with their children by January 1, 2018.

Not all students have access to early-readiness social or academic opportunities in our community. Through Paso a Paso, Superintendent Rodriguez and her team seek to improve the academic success of children and families in PVUSD and the community as a whole. F2B provides a comprehensive curriculum of over 1,000 English and Spanish books, songs, and games that are fun for children and easy for parents to access on any smartphone, tablet, or computer with or without an Internet connection.

The District is developing an outreach plan to get this program in the hands of every family in our community through multiple community partners such as Salud Para La Gente, PVPSA, First 5, Encompass Head Start and City of Watsonville Parks and Recreation.

“We are honored to partner with Footsteps 2 Brilliance in this transformative community-wide initiative that gives all children equal access to high quality bilingual English and Spanish literacy instruction. PVUSD believes this is a powerful and effective model to prepare our youngest to be ready for school,” stated Dr. Rodriguez.

Please stop by PVUSD booth on Sunday, September 17, where staff will be pleased to share more about this early literacy initiative. If you would like to be a part of this initiative and be more involved, we will have a way for you to register.

With the recent news about the devastation in Texas and the imminent landfall of Hurricane Irma in Florida, many at Second Harvest and across Santa Cruz County are wondering how they can help.

Given the distance from California, it doesn’t make sense to ship food and supplies, but Second Harvest reached out to Feeding America and offered to send two of their own—their Inventory Coordinator and one of their most skilled volunteers—to whichever food bank needs them most. If the offer is accepted, the Second Harvest will raise funds locally to support their travel.

For those looking to help flood victims immediately, Second Harvest encourages sending monetary donations directly to the food bank(s) closest to the need.

Heuer happened to visit the Houston Food Bank’s new facility last year. “It’s easy to visualize the scale of damage and level of assistance needed to recover,” he said. Recalling the ’89 earthquake, Heuer added, “We come by our empathy honestly.”

Even as Second Harvest Food Bank sources food from across the county and the state and distributes it to local children, seniors, veterans, the working poor, and anyone else in need, it is ever prepared to mobilize after the next natural disaster. After all, the region is subject to fires, floods, landslides, and, of course, earthquakes.

The U.S. Geological Survey concludes there is a 68% probability of a magnitude 7.0 or greater quake in the Bay Area in the next 30 years. (For comparison, the Loma Prieta earthquake was a 6.9.)

Second Harvest has a disaster plan in place, a special inventory of water, MRE’s, and other products, mutual aid agreements with other regional food banks, and plans for coordination with county emergency services.

“It doesn’t matter whether people learn about their food bank through volunteer opportunities, fundraisers, or media coverage of a natural disaster,” remarked Chris Ryan, Second Harvest’s Senior Manager for Communications. “What’s important is that food banks have the community’s support so they’re well positioned to help, in the aftermath of disaster and throughout the year.”

You can learn more about Second Harvest Food Bank at www.thefoodbank.org. To download a family emergency plan for your family, visit www.thefoodbank.org/plan.