



InsideView

FAMILY STABILITY STARTS WITH HOUSING

Reaching higher to keep children safe

JENNIFER'S abusive ex-boyfriend was relentless, following and harassing her at work and at home, night after night. Scared for the safety of Amanda, her five-year-old daughter, she called the Society's crisis helpline in desperation.

That same day, holding Amanda tightly in her arms, this shaken single mom admitted to our Crisis Assistance counselor that she no longer felt safe anywhere in San Rafael. Our experienced counselor listened to her story, then carefully walked Jennifer through some very hard choices about her future.

With the counselor's support, a tearful Jennifer worked up the courage to call her brother in Santa Fe to tell him about her dangerous situation. Without hesitation, he offered his sister and niece the safety of his home. Jennifer knew in her bones that making this move was the right thing to do.

Jennifer left St. Vincent's to carry out this new

plan, filled with purpose and determined to raise her daughter in a home without violence and fear. *You* filled the gas tank and provided food for the 17-hour journey to safety. Calling one last time from Santa Fe, Jennifer thanked *you* for this fresh start, *and* for filling her heart with hope.

FAMILIES FACE MANY CHALLENGES

Every day in Marin, families struggle to endure financial setbacks, changing circumstances and rising housing costs.

For **73 years**, trained Society volunteers have found a way to effectively intervene during a crisis and prevent eviction. Last year **200** Society volunteers made more than **1,700** home visits throughout Marin and prevented homelessness for **4,685** people, including **1,640** children.

INSIDE TODAY



Congratulations, you have made the headlines... Many of us have read recent newspaper headlines such as, “*While homeless population balloons, San Francisco residents use environmental lawsuit to stop homeless shelter*” and “*Hundreds protest against homeless navigation center in Fremont.*” The topic of homelessness continues to be a hot button issue for much of the Bay Area. Whether advocating for the legitimate rights of people without homes, or the legitimate fears of people who do not want change in their neighborhoods, the dialogue continues to be heated while the problems just get worse.

Meanwhile, in Marin County, a quiet wave of encouraging news is making headlines. After three years of rigorous work, launched by St. Vincent’s Homeless Outreach (HOT) Team, our community is telling a different story: **The number of people experiencing chronic homelessness in Marin has dropped by an astounding 28%.** And our work continues each day. As a county-wide collaborative, each month we are committed to housing six more people experiencing chronic homelessness, with a larger community goal to completely end chronic homelessness in Marin. Ending chronic homelessness will mean that when people *do* become homeless in Marin (because of mental illness, job loss or any number of crisis situations), our system of care will ensure that each person is off the streets and re-housed within 60 days.

What accounts for the large incongruities in our Bay Area headlines? If I had to choose one word to explain Marin’s successful response to homelessness, it would be “you.” *Yes, you!* As an “insider” to the issue of homelessness, your support of the Society has driven a system-wide transformation that directed our county’s energy, resources and talents into housing our most vulnerable and critically ill residents, quietly and effectively. With your generosity, we avoided “temporary” solutions, like increasing shelter beds or erecting tents. Instead, your commitment to this cause enabled us to focus on the only data-tested and proven method which actually works: **housing people.** Your generosity helped secure safe, appropriate housing throughout the County, without any particular neighborhood feeling saturated or sacrificed. You saw to it that people once deemed “the other” are now re-engaging in a more stable community life. As an “insider,” you are offering life-long supports to keep people out of taxpayer-supported jails and hospitals and in their own safe homes instead.

With your continued support we know we can do more, help more and save more lives. Together, let us keep the “good news” coming!

With gratitude,

Christine Paquette

Christine Paquette, Executive Director

Nutrition is good medicine

IN TODAY’S ECONOMY, many low-income people struggle to balance the financial demands of paying bills with their family’s nutritional needs. Those on a tight budget may be limited to eating less expensive processed foods. People experiencing homelessness often have little choice when it comes to meals. Without regular access to fresh, nutritious food their health suffers. Yet, many chronic illnesses that are common among homeless and low-income people can be managed or improved with access to healthier meals.

Many of the people who need safety net services have been advised by their doctors to change their diet and eating habits in order to mitigate the symptoms or duration of a health concern. Plant-based diets have been proven to reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease and hypertension and improve levels of cholesterol.

Good news! Thanks to a grant from the Anthem Blue Cross Foundation, our salad bar now offers an abundant selection of fresh foods in a variety of colors, textures and flavors. With daily access to healthier, nutrient-rich foods, dietary changes are possible for all the seniors, veterans, low-income adults and families who rely on our Free Dining Room for 200,000 meals every year.

The vegan salad bar project began with a survey to determine how much access those frequenting the Dining Room had to fresh produce and plant-based dishes, and whether they felt that they were eating a nutritionally balanced diet. As the project progresses, we will also gauge whether having such foods available on a regular basis results in diners eating more servings of heart-healthy foods in general.

“Our hope is that having these choices available

will increase the intake of essential nutrients our diners can’t otherwise afford,” noted Deputy Director Suzanne Walker. “We are grateful to Anthem Foundation for making it possible.” St. Vincent de Paul Society Board member, Roger Cassidy, helped secure the grant from Anthem



Blue Cross Foundation to launch the salad bar upgrade. Community support for this effort has been tremendous. Neighbors with gardens are sharing their harvest. Local merchants are also pitching in with donations and discounts, which will be essential if the project is to continue into next year.

Help expand our “heart healthy” choices for those with limited resources! The Dining Room gratefully accepts donations of fresh produce, non-dairy mayonnaise, dried fruits and nuts, dropped off between 7AM-1PM daily at 820 B Street in San Rafael. Financial gifts for this project are gratefully accepted in the enclosed envelope or online at vinnies.org.

THE HOT TEAM

Prioritizing housing one person at a time

Our Homeless Outreach (HOT) Team does not let the traditional barriers of chronic health conditions, substance abuse, and mental illness stop our community's most vulnerable men and women from securing permanent housing.

Q WHAT CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT THE PEOPLE HOT SERVES?

A HOT helps the most vulnerable people in our community, including veterans, seniors, and chronically ill adults who fell through the cracks into **long-term homelessness**. Many of these people withdrew into survival mode after a string of traumatic experiences with programs they no longer trust. Others lack the skills needed to seek out much-needed treatment on their own. HOT case managers engage with people where they are, knowing that without intervention these individuals will most likely die on our streets.

Q WHY IS THE HOT TEAM UNUSUAL?

A HOT helps these individuals *no matter how complicated their situation or difficult the challenge*. Experienced HOT case managers meet these vulnerable people on their terms, regardless of the circumstances that led to the current crisis. HOT works closely with each person **to find housing**, the crucial starting point for stability that opens the door to wellness and lasting change.



Q WHY IS HOT A GAME CHANGER?

A Life for those experiencing homelessness is scary, a minute-to-minute existence where the next meal and place to sleep always take precedence. When offered a real path to housing, these people find **hope**, sometimes for the first time in many years. Once stabilized, each person can finally move beyond meeting their most basic daily needs to making long-term plans that improve their lives. It can be nearly impossible for someone experiencing chronic homelessness to navigate to stability **without help**, as they often suffer from untreated mental and medical illness or addiction. HOT case managers guide each person toward housing stability by helping connect with primary services such as mental health assessments, finding a primary care physician, or locating a caregiver. The HOT case managers also make sure things go well with the landlord and help each person adapt to living indoors.

Q WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THESE PEOPLE ARE HOUSED?

A The HOT Team provides critically-ill people with wraparound services through the County of Marin's *Whole Person Care* program. This includes connecting with mental health and medical care as well as coaching in basic life skills. Once immediate needs are met, HOT case managers keep "checking in" while developing a personal safety net to help each person *stay* housed. With support, these newly housed people begin to show up to appointments, participate in therapy, choose recovery, and consider doctor-recommended lifestyle changes that aren't possible when people are living on the streets.

Q HOW DO YOU MEASURE SUCCESS FOR A PROJECT LIKE HOT?

A In contrast with neighboring counties faced with rising homeless populations, Marin's chronically homeless numbers have fallen significantly, thanks to our system change. **More than 160 chronically homeless people have been housed since St. Vincent de Paul's Housing Outreach (HOT) Team launched in 2016, with 95% still housed.** To the HOT Team, these numbers are more than just data. Each number represents a real person struggling with unique challenges, who finally has the chance to live a decent life indoors.

Q WITH SUCH A HIGH SUCCESS RATE, WHAT'S THE NEXT STEP?

A St. Vincent de Paul Society of Marin has responded to inquiries from groups across the country, and recently educated a member of Senator Feinstein's staff about HOT's proven best practices, with the hope that similar models can be implemented across the state. **We can't stop now.** Our goal is to house 75 more chronically homeless people in the coming year. HOT is working in Marin, and with the help of our donors, we will continue to *end homelessness one person at a time*.

Many thanks to our Coordinated Entry community partners, including: Buckelew Programs, City of San Rafael, County of Marin, Downtown Streets Team, Homeward Bound of Marin, Marin Housing Authority, and the Ritter Center.

Success equals a 28% reduction in chronic homelessness achieved in only three years!

“When I started working for the City of San Rafael three years ago our community was extremely polarized, no one could agree on next steps for addressing homeless issues. It was St. Vincent's that led the charge and got us to expand our thinking about what was possible, showed us the value of focusing on people who are the most vulnerable, and brought us all to the table to make it happen. Now, we're all rowing in the same direction and our community can see positive results.”
—**Andrew Hening**, *Director of Homeless Planning and Outreach, City of San Rafael*

“After we successfully got permanent supportive housing for our first few people, and they stayed housed, it changed everything. Today, our team eagerly attends meetings and many others are now investing in this humane approach to ending suffering.”
—**Howard Schwartz**, *Director of Strategic Initiatives, St. Vincent de Paul Society of Marin*

“Your work to reduce barriers, serve the most vulnerable, and dogged demand that systems serve people while simultaneously managing a one-person-at-a-time approach are in large part responsible for the results we're celebrating.”
—**Ken Shapiro**, *Director of Whole Person Care, Marin County Department of Health and Human Services*

“I think that all of us at St. Vincent's have a passion for this work. We will always reach higher and do just one more thing when we know that it will make a difference. This makes us great problem solvers. Thanks to support from our generous contributors, we have the flexibility and encouragement to think outside the box, so bringing the rest of the system of care along with us has been very exciting.”
—**Christine Paquette**, *Executive Director, St. Vincent de Paul Society of Marin*

Serving up joy in the Dining Room

WHEN NOVATO RESIDENT Steve Ward retired from State Farm Insurance 12 years ago, he looked for some hands-on volunteer work to benefit his neighbors in need. Steve liked the local impact that his contributions to St. Vincent de Paul Society had made over the years, creating a safety net for struggling Marin families. When Steve came on board as a

this for us!" but I am also thankful for what they do for me. I get a lot out of these exchanges.

I've learned so much. These relationships over the last eleven years have expanded my vision of how valuable St. Vincent's Dining Room really is. Beyond just the nutrition, it's a safe space to be, where everyone is treated with dignity.

I'm here every Tuesday, and many people recognize me since I do a short, non-denominational prayer at the beginning of lunch. I keep it positive and motivational, and

"St. Vincent's is where I feel most proud of the impact of my service."

sometimes address concerns they've brought me.

It's a special feeling we share week to week, knowing that every Tuesday we will see one another in this special place. When diners smile or clap after we share the blessing, or if they approach me afterward, I know that we are reaching them. When I'm here in service to others, it seems God's spirit is channeling through me, and there is a real joy in that.

We are grateful to Steve and the hundreds of dedicated Dining Room volunteers dishing out kind words and nutritious meals to men, women and children every day of the year.

weekly volunteer in the Free Dining Room, he saw the power of generosity with his own eyes.

In his own words: Folks at the Free Dining Room taught me that on the street you can feel invisible. You may not have anyone greet or engage with you. So, I like to strike up conversations in the Dining Room, ask people what they're reading, check in briefly and just have a chat.

I get a lot of joy from interacting with people here. They often start with a heartfelt, "Thank you for doing



The A Team: John, Martha, Steve, and Nancy serve meals every Tuesday, with more than 3,500 volunteer hours between them.

You reached higher for this family with special needs

GLORIA SHARED her home with her adult daughter, Sonya, a single mom, and her 11-year old grandson Jacob, who has autism. For a long time, Gloria gladly dedicated most of her time to supporting Sonya and the special needs of her grandson. Unfortunately, as Gloria aged, she developed some serious health problems which forced her to leave her precious family and move into senior housing with critical medical support.

Sonya's life was turned upside down during this difficult transition. The apartment where they lived cost more than she could afford on her clerk's salary. Sonya was devastated when she and her son were evicted. Her mom had always been there, helping her.

For the first time, Sonya and Jacob were on their own and had become homeless, bouncing from couch to couch when invited by friends, but more often sleeping in their car. These constant changes were upsetting for Jacob, causing his behavior to regress.

A co-worker brought Sonya to St. Vincent's Housing Help Desk. A housing counselor met with Sonya and agreed that stabilizing Jacob's home life was the top priority, then located a support group designed by parents specifically for families with children on the autism spectrum.

Sonya's Help Desk counselor helped reach out to this support group. The network of caring parents rallied around Sonya and her son, helping her find a shared housing opportunity

with an experienced autism parent and son, a perfect match. You provided the deposit and first month's rent

"I never imagined we could make it without my mom."

for the room, then took Jacob shopping to pick out his bunk bed with a desk underneath. Now, Sonya is back on her feet and happily taking Jacob to visit his grandmother regularly. Sonya says, "I never imagined we

could make it without my mom. Now we've got our own community cheering us on. Thank you!"





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Bequests Provide Housing

Many donors who want to leave a legacy of caring choose St. Vincent de Paul Society of Marin to receive a percentage or specific dollar amount in their will or trust.

Bequests of any size are encouraged and appreciated as they *allow us to do more*. This legacy takes the form of food, housing, and crisis intervention services for older adults, veterans, individuals and families into the future.

For more information, or to receive a complementary Estate Planning Organizer, please contact Deputy Director Suzanne Walker at 415-454-3303 x 17 or swalker@vinnies.org.

**We have lots of exciting
news. See inside!**

St. Vincent de Paul Society