



ST. VINCENT DE PAUL
SOCIETY OF MARIN

InsideView

2022 NEWS



Finding Our Way in a New ‘Normal’

A **S WE GATHERED** stories for this latest St. Vincent de Paul Society of Marin newsletter, one theme kept emerging: **Recovery**. It seems we are all in some stage of it. We're healing from the COVID pandemic, from loss of loved ones, economic hardship, physical ailments, and addiction. Thrown off course or wounded in various ways, we're striving to return to "normal."

COVID has upended our lives for nearly two years. We've found ways to keep our doors open, keep feeding and housing people, and keep combatting social isolation in this new world. When the vaccine came, collectively we breathed a sigh of relief. Most of us in Marin got vaccinated. Now kids have returned to school and workers have returned to the office. Businesses and restaurants are open again.

Yet masks and the threat of COVID still hover over our daily lives. Nothing is the same. We may never return to our old "normal."

As the client stories we've spotlighted in these pages

show, recovery doesn't mean returning to who we were before. Whatever we're healing from, we may never regain what's been lost. Some wounds don't heal completely. They endure and reshape us.

But being in recovery means bringing hope and purpose to our efforts to heal. In doing that, we forge new bonds with others on the same journey, and discover our shared humanity and resilience.

Recovery is at the heart of our work, the theme of this newsletter, and we propose it as a guiding principle for this new year. Read on to see some faces of recovery through our eyes.

Recovery *noun* re-COV•er•y /rə'kəv(ə)rē/

1. A return to a normal state of health, mind, or strength. 2. The process of regaining possession or control of something stolen or lost. 3. The act of combating a disorder (such as alcoholism) or a problem.

You Planted Seeds of Hope



Dear Friends,

This past year we have witnessed the profound strength in working together. With your help, we have moved forward through COVID, with strength, resilience, and confidence. Together we continue to witness the bountiful blessings reaped by St. Vincent de Paul families, children, seniors, and veterans in need in our neighborhood. Your kindness and grace continues to bless others who are less fortunate.

Families needed food and you fed them. Since March of 2020, Over 600 individuals and families made bagged lunches and dropped them off at Vinnie's to be distributed. YOU showed up!

Our homeless veterans needed housing and you believed in the dignity of all people. YOU showed up!

You believed in Aaron; we believed in Aaron. You should see Aaron now. You'll read Aaron's story inside. Again, YOU showed up!

Thank you for being a part of the solution of feeding the hungry, assisting those who are precariously housed and the homeless. 2021 marked St. Vincent de Paul's 75th anniversary of serving Marin's less fortunate. Together we celebrate our accomplishments. Let's continue our work together for another 75 years! Thank you for showing up.

I would like to share this note we recently received on our Vinnies Facebook page from a client:

Thank you for the help that you've given me. You got me off the streets. I got a roof over my head for the past two years. I thank you for everything you've done for me in the past 10 years! You've helped me stay sober for four years now. I couldn't have done it without the staff at St. Vincent de Paul in Marin County!

Thank you again for showing up. A new season is shining upon us all — a season of **Hope!**

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Herb Foedisch". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Herb Foedisch

President, Board of Directors

"MCF joins with so many throughout our community in appreciating and honoring the work of St. Vincent de Paul Society. For 75 years, their focus has been unfailingly on fellow residents who need an extra helping hand and warm heart. St. Vincent de Paul has offered just that, thus making our community stronger and kinder."—Dr. Tom Peters, former CEO of Marin Community Foundation

Aaron's Story

GRACIOUS, WELL-MANNERED, and well-dressed, Aaron appears the consummate professional. “The truth is very different,” he explained, “I struggled throughout my young adulthood with substance abuse. During the day, I put on the suit and tie, but as soon as I got home, I descended into addiction. I was a junkie, and I knew it.”

Now almost three years sober, Aaron has served as Associate Director of Client Services at St. Vincent de Paul Society of Marin since October 2019. “I started volunteering in the kitchen and fielding calls after rehab. I realized I was exactly where I needed to be. Every day here is a blessing, a powerful reminder of where my life was headed.”

The son of two accomplished medical professionals, Aaron attended the University of Chicago for undergraduate studies. Eventually, college partying snowballed into addiction, making Aaron's twenties and thirties a rollercoaster ride of alternating success and self-destruction. After joining a Fortune 500 company, and fueled by new income and status, his downward spiral accelerated.

At the age of 35 and a junior banking executive, Aaron found himself counseled to resign. “My behavior had become unacceptable. I was unbearable to work with.” Living on savings and with no adjustment to lifestyle, things rapidly got worse. “My father passed away unexpectedly. I told my mother at the funeral that I needed help and asked if I could come home, but she just didn't feel safe. Looking back, I can understand why.”

Shortly after, Aaron's family offered to get him into treatment. “I was relieved, desperate, and exhausted. I'd been sick for such a long time. Going to rehab was without question the best decision of my life. *But going to a sober living environment immediately after was just as important.*” It was during that time that Aaron found St. Vincent de Paul Society of Marin.

“I'm not a client in the classic sense, but Vinnie's has

been no less a house of miracles for me. They gave me a purpose, a reason to keep the path. Now I provide others with the same opportunities.” While at Vinnie's, Aaron founded The O'Leary Fund to provide financial assistance with securing sober living environments post-treatment. “If I had not had a safe space to continue the work, I wouldn't have made it. It isn't enough to detox. You need a safe, supportive environment in which to heal. Behind every addiction, there's a deeper pain, trauma, or

mental health challenge—those things don't heal overnight. It takes time—and time costs resources. The only difference between me and most of our clients is that I had family *with both the resources and willingness to give me another chance.*”

The O'Leary Fund, named in loving memory of Professor Stephen D. O'Leary, Aaron's close friend and sober living roommate, has been an ongoing source of support for Vinnie's clients. Take the story of Josie, a 19-year-old woman struggling with fentanyl and heroin addiction. She had resorted to prostitution to feed her habit and contacted



St. Vincent's looking for a new beginning. Following treatment, Josie entered a sober living home through an O'Leary scholarship where she received much-needed counseling and trauma-informed care. “She stayed clean,” recalls Aaron, “and eventually got a job at a major retailer, even becoming an assistant house manager at her home.”

“There are so many who desperately want help, but absolutely need the support structure of a sober living environment to heal the roots of their addiction. That costs real time and money. The O'Leary Fund provides that support structure for people looking to take that next step in their recovery. My hope is to give them the same opportunity that Stephen and I were given. Not just a second chance at life, but a chance at a new life, one with dignity and purpose.”

Good News in Marin about Veteran and Chronic Homelessness

MARIN COUNTY'S PROGRESS WITH THE HOMELESS CRISIS MAKES IT A MODEL FOR OTHER COUNTIES

For people struggling with long-term homelessness in Marin, the existing system wasn't working. St. Vincent de Paul Society's Executive Director Christine Paquette knew someone had to shake it up. A better system was needed to not only get people off the streets with a roof over their heads, but to give them a dignified, decent place to live.

Many view homelessness as an intractable problem that seems too big to solve. In the Bay Area, it's just gotten worse and worse, increasing by double digits in most places in 2019. But not in Marin. Incredibly, the number of chronically homeless people on the streets in Marin has gone down by 28%.

Has St. Vincent de Paul Society and the county's Marin Alliance to Solve Homelessness (MASH) found a cure for chronic homelessness that could be a model for the rest of the country?

The tide began to turn in 2016 when Paquette and her colleague Howard Schwartz helped launch the Homeless Outreach Team (HOT), a collaborative effort that got various nonprofits, law enforcement and government agencies all working together to end chronic homelessness "one person at a time," beginning with the most hard-core cases. The approach brought to Marin some innovative practices that had begun to show significant results in other cities.

In a recent interview, Christine Paquette answered some questions about Marin's success:

Q The new approach prioritizes helping the neediest people first, the "chronically homeless." Wasn't that always the case?

A In the past, agency workers said, "It feels almost impossible to help the people hardest to serve, so we'll do our best to help everyone else." The hardest cases often entail complex mental and physical health issues such as combined bipolar disorder, alcoholism and PTSD from abuse, all compounded by life on the streets. Those people are the least capable of getting themselves off the streets and their cases actually place the greatest demands on health care, law enforcement and human services. So, we turned the system upside down. Now the cases we help first are those who are the hardest to serve. And, by coordinating closely between agencies and focusing our collective energies on them, MASH has permanently housed more than 329 people that everyone said were too tough to help. It turns out, just getting these people housed enables them to resolve other problems, take medication regularly and live healthier. In Marin, those we've housed are staying housed at a 94% success rate, higher than the nationwide average of 85%.

Q How often does the collaborative meet and who's involved?

A We meet every week for at least two hours with more than 12 agen-

cies, including Marin County Health and Human Services. We also have a whole team focused on housing veterans. St. Vincent's has a full-time person focused on veteran's outreach every day, funded by a grant from Kaiser Permanente. As a community, we're on the verge of actually ending veteran homelessness in Marin.

Q During the lockdown, were you able to serve meals at your free Dining Room?

A When the governor said to go home, I worried what that would mean for the vulnerable people who rely on us. But by the next day, we were serving takeout meals and the County was helping with emergency food until we were able to supply hot to-go meals ourselves.

Q The pandemic was hard on everyone, particularly people experiencing homelessness. But were there some silver linings? I'm thinking of the state's Project Homekey, which turns motels into shelter for homeless people.

A Yes, there have been a lot of silver linings in the homelessness services arena because of COVID. This is the first time we've been able to put groups of people experiencing homelessness into motel programs. Sometimes we look at each other and say, "Can you believe we're buying motels?" We never thought we'd get that kind of support.

Q There has also been some community confusion and opposition to programs like Project Homekey. Is there pushback from people who say, “Fine, we want to end homelessness, but we don’t want homeless people living in our neighborhood?”

A Sure, that’s understandable. But when we launch housing programs in Marin, they’re exceptionally well-run. Once we get the chance to show residents how people can live together without conflict, we see neighbors creating welcome baskets for our clients, because they realize that nothing terrible is happening and it feels good to give people a new chance for a decent life.

Q Let’s put a human face on this issue. Is there a particular case that stands out in your mind as an unlikely success story, one that really moved you?

A There are so many! But there is one story of a woman who was mentally ill and on the streets screaming every day. The police knew her, businesses knew her. Our case manager was able to locate a place in Nevada for her to live on her \$1,000 monthly disability income. We paid our dining room staff to help truck her stuff in a U-Haul. She showed up to our office on moving day with a little goldfish in a plastic bag, ready to go. She’s been living in her own apartment and paying her own bills for many years now. With a roof over her head, she was able to turn things around.

Q Let’s say you end chronic homelessness in Marin. Wouldn’t that make Marin a magnet for every homeless person who wants to be housed by you?

A There has actually been a lot of research on that very topic, including

researchers who have put GPS trackers on people experiencing homelessness to understand how people move around. When they become homeless in Marin, they stay in Marin because it is the area they know. When they become homeless in Sonoma County, they stay in Sonoma County. We can end chronic homelessness in Marin without worrying about a migration. Our work can be a model for other communities to end homelessness in their own areas.

Q All of this sounds expensive when you first hear about it. How much does all of this cost? Or does it actually save money?

A Studies show it costs about \$60,000 a year for a person to be homeless on the street due to hospital, incarceration, and other costs. We have seen people with 20 ambulance rides a year needed from downtown San Rafael to Marin General at \$2,000 per ride. And that’s not even counting the cost to area businesses. Keeping a person housed costs only about \$20,000. So, we’re actually saving millions of dollars by doing it this way. And we’re saving lives at the same time.

Q It sounds like you’ve come up with a winning formula.

A After a while, we got to the point where we could say, “Wait a minute, we’ve identified the client, we can get them an ongoing case manager, a landlord is willing to house them and, thanks to the Marin Housing Authority, we have a housing voucher so they can afford to stay housed.” It was an amazing moment when we realized that together we may have found the answer. So far, very few communities across the country have been able to put together a formula like this.

Q When you speak to groups, I imagine a question you often get asked is how can I help?

A When residents understand the complexity of homelessness, it’s enormously valuable. If you want to volunteer, that’s wonderful. If you can send us a donation, we promise to use it wisely. But, in the end, just by understanding that Housing First is the solution, we know we can count you as part of our team. While there’s more work to be done, we invite everyone to join our effort to end this terrible suffering in our community forever.



A Wish for William

HOW DO YOU TALK about losing a child, and end with a message of hope?

It must have taken great strength for Karen Gundry Smith and Frank Gundry to sit on a park bench in Fairfax and share details of why they established a memorial fund at St. Vincent de Paul Society in honor of their son.

William passed away tragically at the young age of 21 after a battle with addiction that included a year in recovery and an ill-fated relapse. He died 12 years ago in 2009, but in our conversation, he seems large as life and the wound of his loss feels fresh.



William Gundry in Burma

William was a tall, good-looking kid with a magnetic personality and a great sense of humor. Will, as he was known to his friends, had a natural, outgoing manner and he was, as a classmate once remarked, “the glue that held a large group of different friends together.” He and his older brother Michael were very close. Karen fondly remembers seeing William in the kitchen at Vinnies washing the big soup pots. William was involved with Vinnies through community service hours for Drake High School, and became his class liaison to SVdP. With his easygoing nature and quick-wit, William brought a lighthearted and friendly spirit to the job. He engaged with everyone and clients and staff loved him.

William was a promising young man with the true makings of a leader. Unfortunately, he began smoking

pot and progressed to using other drugs. He was later introduced to Oxycontin through friends in high school, and quickly spiraled into addiction.

In 2008, William began a journey of recovery with a stay at the Alta Bates residential program, followed by seven months in a sober living residence in the East Bay. Having returned to Marin for a summer job, William went to San Francisco with some friends on June 7, 2009 to hear a band play. Following the show, he escorted an acquaintance home and headed off to where he had planned to stay with friends. Finding himself alone in the early morning hours, he relapsed and fatally overdosed.

William is one of many tragic casualties of addiction that we see too often at SVdP. A chronic and progressive disease, addiction wreaks havoc on the lives of some truly bright extraordinary people and families. In their grief, Frank suggested reaching out to SVdP because of William’s connection there.

“I will never forget the day Karen called to tell me about the loss of William and how she and Frank wanted his life to be remembered,” reflected Christine Paquette, Executive Director of SVdP. They both felt deeply that the mission of St. Vincent’s reflected William’s heart and knew that so many hurting people could be helped in William’s name. And that is exactly what has happened over these last 12 years. With Karen and Frank’s tireless efforts, the William Gundry Memorial Fund has raised more than \$200,000 from 250 donors. These gifts have resulted in more than 100,000 meals distributed to hungry seniors, families, veterans, and people experiencing homelessness.

“After all these years, people are still giving donations in his name. It confirms that SVdP was the perfect vehicle to honor and remember William.” Because of William’s influence, Karen has also contributed hundreds of hours volunteering for the Free Dining Room. She reflected, “where are you going to go with this kind of grief? No human can give you what you need. There’s no place to turn except to a great big God. Just you and God. He finds the way to work through your pain and suffering and use it for good. After a while, you slowly begin to see what it truly means to live.”

To see photos of William and read the full article, or donate to the William Gundry Fund in honor of a loved one, go to <https://www.vinnies.org/william>.

Meet Kathleen

PLEASE JOIN US in welcoming a valuable new addition to the Vinnie's team. Kathleen Lazor Woodcock started with us in June as Vinnie's new Director of Development and Communications, bringing deep roots in the Marin community, decades of fundraising experience, and, as we have seen, incredible resilience in the face of adversity.

Born and raised in beautiful Marin, Kathleen now lives just two doors away from the home in which she grew up, where her parents still reside. She attended Greenbrae Elementary, Kent Middle and Redwood High Schools. She earned an undergraduate degree at Dominican University and later attended Golden Gate University for her master's degree. "Yes, I have stayed awfully close to home," she says, "...while traveling the world in my spare time!"

She and her late husband Keith have three beautiful children of whom they are incredibly proud, and 2021 marked a big one for them: Their eldest son Robb got married in September and bought a new home in November, their youngest son, Daniel, recently earned a large management promotion with Vail Resorts in Tahoe, and their daughter Kristina and husband Andy welcomed Madeleine Rose Victor on December 8th weighing 6lbs, 11 oz, twenty inches. "Little Madeleine is a precious blessing from our Lord. And I am a Mimi!" says a very youthful-looking Kathleen. Kathleen considers their children their greatest accomplishment.

2021 was also an especially sad and difficult year for the family: In July, Kathleen's husband Keith passed away unexpectedly. Kathleen's first days in her new role at the St. Vincent de Paul Society entailed a flurry of emergency room and ICU visits, followed by the sudden and unexpected loss of her husband, and the surreal exercise of acclimating to a new job while walking through an ocean of grief.

Through it all, Kathleen managed to raise a record total of more than \$800,000 for Vinnie's annual Pennies from Heaven gala, selling out the event just as the Save The Date postcard reached mailboxes. This year's gala

was a magical evening featuring touches like a Silent Auction, Oyster Bar, wine, and spirits tastings, along with a fabulous Cigar and Cognac Lounge.

In an extraordinary twist, Kathleen also brought with her an entire Auxiliary Board of volunteer leaders, close friends who arrived ready to donate their time, talent, and treasure to raise money for St. Vincent de Paul Society's mission. She calls them "the women



Kathleen (far left) and "Vinnie's Angels"

beneath my wings" and "Vinnie's Angels." The group's focus is curating and hosting Vinnie's annual Pennies from Heaven Gala. In March of 2022, Kathleen and the Auxiliary board will be introducing a new event to benefit Vinnie's (get ready for The SVdP Ladies' Boutique, Luncheon & Fashion Show!). This event is already close to sold out! See the back page of this newsletter for more information.

"I am humbled to have such incredible friends. And absolutely honored to be working with the amazing, dedicated team at St. Vincent de Paul Society of Marin," says Kathleen. "The acts of kindness and compassion that I witness every day are simply wonderful. I feel blessed to be here."

We are delighted to have Kathleen on board. She has thrown herself into her work and looks forward to personally meeting "each and every one of you who supports the great mission of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, for we cannot do our work without you."



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You are invited to join our Legacy Giving Circle

Many of our supporters join our Legacy Giving Circle by choosing 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. Your legacy gift will provide housing, emergency food and crisis intervention services for vulnerable children, older adults, veterans and families into the future.

FEDERAL TAX ID #94-1207701

For questions, please contact Kathleen Lazor Woodcock, kwoodcock@vinnies.org
or 415.454.3303 x 17.



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