



ST. VINCENT DE PAUL
SOCIETY OF MARIN

InsideView

2023 NEWS



Photo: KultPlus

Proving That Compassion Always Wins

As the COVID pandemic slowly relinquishes its unforgiving hold on society, we have found ourselves taking a deeper look at these past tumultuous years and looking forward with a brighter sense of hope. Upon reflection, one theme became abundantly clear for how we were able to garner the strength to continue the work of our mission: **Compassion.**

With the COVID vaccine widely available and the return of “normal” within the past year, one would assume we were finally on the backend of this nightmare. However, the aftermath of the pandemic has brought along with it a whole new array of daunting challenges. Born from economic crisis, our clients once again have found themselves in a spot of desperation.

This looming threat is no match for our tenacious organization and our benefactors’ unrelenting compassion for those less fortunate. While nothing about our community is the same as before, St. Vincent de Paul Society of Marin’s mission to end hunger and homelessness in Marin

County remains firmly unchanged.

As the client and program stories we’ve spotlighted in these pages show, compassion and hope live within all of us. Whatever we may face, our community experience tells us there will always be help available to those that seek it.

Compassion is at the heart of our work, the theme of this newsletter, and we propose to all those reading that it be the guiding principle that shapes how they interact with the world around them. Read on to see the remarkable faces of compassion in our community through our eyes.

Compassion

noun com•pas•sion /kəm'pashən/

a deep awareness of and sympathy for another's suffering and wanting to do something about it.

You Believed in our Community

Dear Friends,

In a never-ending time of uncertainty, you blessed the vulnerable families, children, seniors, and Veterans in our community with profound hope and encouragement. Working together with our gracious benefactors, St. Vincent de Paul Society of Marin has been able to strongly continue our critical mission of ending hunger, poverty, and homelessness in Marin County. **Your unwavering support never fails to amaze us!**

After the waning of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing financial crises we have seen emerge over the past year, our clients called out for help. **You answered.**

As you read on in this newsletter, you'll find that our programs are more successful than ever. Our Homeless Outreach Team (HOT) boasts a **94.8% success rate** in permanently housing the chronically homeless in Marin. We have collaborated effectively with local government agencies to promote these crucial programs for the toughest to house individuals in our community. **You made this possible!**

You have helped countless people. While as a benefactor you may not see the faces of those that we help, *we do*, and believe us when we say "life-changing" is not a strong enough word to convey the profound impact you have on those most vulnerable. With your belief in the dignity of all people combined with the ambition of our amazing staff, **together we can do this.**

For a single mother who has never previously known peace, who you'll meet later in this newsletter, you provided a safe and loving home. You turned around the lives of her and her two small children. **This is no small feat.**

We extend our most sincere gratitude to each and every one of you for being part of the solution to feeding the hungry and assisting the homeless and precariously housed. Join us as we look back at our accomplishments with reverence and pride and look to our future with unbridled hope. **We will get there.**

As this letter comes to a close, please read this lovely note that we received from a former client and current donor. **The impact you make is real.**

"Thank you for all that you do for others and for me in my time of need! Thank you and God bless. Your organization will always remind me of the true soul who first told me about you guys. Thank you again!"

Gratitude abounding, we sincerely thank you for your continued support of St. Vincent de Paul. May 2023 be filled with more blessings than we could ever imagine!

With gratitude,



Herb Foedisch
President, Board of Directors



Christine Paquette
Executive Director



Kathleen Lazor Woodcock
Director of Development & Communications

...clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.
—Colossians 3:12

FOCUSING ON THE CONTINUUM OF CARE

STEVEN IS DESCRIBED AS QUIET, POLITE, AND GENTLE. At 40-years-old, he has spent his life in jobs ranging from janitorial to carpentry work. He lived a normal life, until he didn't. Everything was taken from him in the blink of an eye due to his new schizophrenia diagnosis.

He left his home in search of help and found himself hospitalized and then homeless. He spent the next few years on the streets seeking refuge in alleyways. A life defined by cardboard and old blankets, he eventually found his way to our **Homeless Outreach Team (HOT)** four years ago.

HOT is a unique SVdP program that serves the hardest to reach clients. Our HOT case managers house the chronically homeless and have helped cut down this population in Marin by **nearly half in only a few years.**

While SVdP had found Steven in a clear place of need, he was uninterested in help, a decliner. This was an obstacle his SVdP case manager, Jeff Helvig, was well-equipped to handle. Building a relationship and a deep level of trust is critical in these situations.

"It's a no pressure approach, we just keep showing up," Helvig said. "It's about being reliable, dependable, and telling you what I can do to help."

Finally willing to accept help after a particularly brutal rainy season, Helvig immediately worked to secure Steven with our **safety net services.** This included providing Steven with a phone, so he had a readily available line of communication with his new support system, and help with signing up for government protections such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps, and a supplementary security income. **Steven's life was given back to him just as fast as he lost it.**

He was then offered a place to stay in our **Bridge**

Housing Program which provides a temporary living arrangement in one of our seven apartment units located above our Free Dining Room. With a steady roof over his head, Steven was able to commit to medication. After his time in Bridge came to an end, Helvig found an apartment for Steven and got him set up with a housing voucher. Steven was officially permanently housed.

While most would think this is the end of the story,

our **wraparound services** were only just beginning. The continuum of care is critical for high needs clients. Helvig knows this well and made sure to stay in contact with Steven. For three years things were quiet and monthly check-ins were all that Steven required.

"Some people think we did our jobs, we got this chronically homeless person into housing, good job," Helvig said. "That to me is when the real work begins."

Six months ago Steven stopped taking his medication and lost his housing. He was dropped by all other support systems and Helvig was his sole remaining point of contact. If St. Vincent did not

focus so heavily on staying with clients for years, Steven would have no one. Instead, the **intervention was quick.**

Helvig actively moved to get Steven restabilized on his medications and negotiated with Steven's landlord to get his housing back. With increased social engagement through Helvig and approval from the housing unit, Steven got back on track.

Today, Steven is safe and sound in his apartment with SVdP behind him always ready to support him in any way he needs.

"I am so grateful because it's really a blessing to do this work," Helvig said. "To be put in a position where I can help somebody and to be fully supported behind the scenes by St. Vincent's is invaluable."



MARIN'S CHRONICALLY HOMELESS GET NEW LEASE ON HOUSING

BY LIDIA WASOWICZ, CATHOLIC SAN FRANCISCO, DECEMBER 2022 ISSUE

WHEN THOSE seeking shelter come to St. Vincent de Paul Society of Marin, there is room at the inn—and sustenance, services, and support.

In an outreach to the most vulnerable, the nonprofit works with local government agencies and private entities to house, feed, clothe, transport, safeguard, counsel, and comfort the chronically homeless, who are least likely to secure a stable roof over their heads.

The collective aims to assess and attend to their needs in an equitable, unconditional, comprehensive, sustained manner, one person at a time.

The Homeless Outreach Team (HOT) initiative, implemented at SVdP in 2016 and countywide the following year, boasts a 94.8 percent success rate in permanently placing veterans and other clients who have lacked steady housing for a year or more and who experience developmental, physical, mental, or other impairments that impede independent living.

As of August 10, 518 men, women, and children, along with numerous pets, have come in from the cold for good.

Outside, biennial “point-in-time” street canvassing recorded a nearly 30 percent drop in the number of Marin’s chronically homeless between 2017 and 2019, from 359 to 257.

That figure rose to 284 during the coronavirus outbreak, which delayed the one-night count conducted in January of every odd year and

flipped the slide.

The February 17 survey showed a 7 percent pre-COVID-19 decline in the overall unhoused population—from 1,117 individuals in 2017 to 1,034 in 2019—turned to an 8.4 percent increase over the next three years, totaling 1,121 in 2022.

The reversal fell significantly short of dire projections based on pandemic-propelled spikes in rent, inflation and job loss which testifies to the program’s staying power, said Christine Paquette, co-founder of HOT and executive director of SVdP in Marin.

“We continued to offer all of our services during COVID,” she said. “Nothing was interrupted, and, in fact, we were able to house more people... because we had more essential resources, like access to motels.”

The team put in long hours to set and secure its objectives.

“Our secret sauce was intensive collaboration, holding each other accountable, working one name at a time and refusing to accept barriers to housing folks,” said HOT co-founder Howard Schwartz.

The former SVdP director of strategic initiatives, who retired in November 2021, ran into barriers on every front.

He first ran into them in trying to find affordable housing for an 82-year-old woman who spent her entire government check on a motel room. His search yielded only 20 out of 30,000 San Francisco Bay Area units with any potential openings, and each had a long wait list.

He ran into barriers in attempting



Photo Credit: Debra Greenblat, Catholic San Francisco

to relieve the “unbearable” plight of an 83-year-old woman with addiction and mental-health challenges sleeping in a city park every night. It took a host of HOT hands and hearts to help her switch a bench for a bed, where she has laid her head for the past five years.

He ran into barriers in his efforts to make a home for a middle-age construction worker who turned to the bottle and the streets for two decades after losing part of his hand in an industrial mishap.

By the time the Vincentians leased an apartment for him, he was so used to living outdoors, he would not close his door.

“He was in his 50s when he passed away, indoors, not on the street, and with an improved quality of life and far fewer visits to the emergency room,” Schwartz said.

“He was in our top 20 of the most vulnerable”—considered the highest priority for housing—during an initial meeting of the Marin collaborators gathered to start implementing their version of a HOT venture they had observed in San Mateo.

The approach caught their attention during tours and on-site visits in search of solutions to an increasingly polarized debate and growing public outcry in San Rafael that reached “a crescendo” at the start of 2016, said Andrew Hening, the city’s former director of homeless planning and outreach.

The local leaders’ and service providers’ efforts shifted focus with their “critical realization that the vast majority of these public concerns was generated by a small minority of the overall homeless community—the chronically homeless,” said Hening, who recently wrote a book and founded a consulting company to share the best practices he discovered in Marin.

“Not only did we know most of them by name, we had been serving many of them year after year, in many



Photo Credit: Debra Greenblat, Catholic San Francisco

LEFT TO RIGHT: Former HOT Case Manager Debra Walker, Senior HOT Case Manager Jeff Helvig, Executive Director Christine Paquette, Director of Development and Communications Kathleen Woodcock, Block Ambassador Montell Totty

cases decade after decade; for whatever reason, they were not getting back inside.”

To get them back inside, the group adopted the “housing-first” model, which secures stable shelter without such stipulations as employment, sobriety or adherence to other requirements mandated in so-called “treatment-first” plans.

The “most vulnerable individuals, the ones constantly falling back out on the street” are housed first, with support for handling everything from paperwork to daily indoor living skills, Schwartz explained.

Convening frequently, “we work to solve the total needs of one chronically homeless person at a time.”

Those needs are met in ways Jesus would approve.

“We never feed anyone anything we ourselves wouldn’t eat,” stressed Fredy Esquivel, manager of the SVdP dining room in San Rafael.

“And we wouldn’t house anyone anywhere we wouldn’t want our daughter or son to live,” added Paquette, recipient of the Heart of Marin Excellence in Leadership

award, which noted the program she champions **saves taxpayers some \$6.4 million annually in emergency room, medical, mental-health and judicial costs.**

“This doesn’t have to be difficult,” Paquette said. “Treating others as you would have them treat you makes it simple.”

Failure often stems from complex systems too complicated and convoluted to navigate, she said.

“If we address homelessness when a person first becomes homeless, then chronic homelessness and all of the horrors that go with it are not going to proliferate,” Paquette said.

Confident in the strategy, the coalition has set its goal at eliminating veteran homelessness and halving the number of the chronically unhoused by May 2024.

“When we put our efforts and dollars toward ending chronic homelessness, then catch newly homeless people and serve them immediately, this will change the landscape of every community battling this issue,” Paquette concluded.

PERSEVERING THROUGH THE PAIN

BY ANONYMOUS ST. VINCENT DE PAUL CLIENT

THIS IS ONE of the biggest events of my life to date. Where I have been in life isn't a dream of anyone's. Since turning 18, I have been housed for three of 11 years, and of those years, I was in a treacherous state: **abused, exploited, abandoned, and forgotten.**

I soon became a mother. My relationship with my daughter's father began while I struggled living with my parents, who were drug enthusiasts. Our daughter came to us after a year of living in this situation.

Things started to take a turn when the **stress of parenthood in poverty became apparent.** Hardships ensued and his drinking problem amplified. He assaulted me in front of our child when she was about two years old. We left the only home she had known and were admitted to the Center for Domestic Peace.

“I struggled for years coming to see my daughter when I could and providing her with what I had. I slept at houses of friends, family, and in my car most of the time.”

A much-needed escape from trauma was another dead-end as I wasn't granted housing in the end. I returned to the house of my abuser. A year later I left for good and had to make the hardest decision: do I take my daughter with me and destabilize her with unknown specifics, or do I allow my daughter the love of her family and peace of mind and body that I have never known myself? I chose the latter.

I struggled for years, coming to see my daughter when I could and providing her with what I had. I slept at the houses of friends, family, and in my car most of all. I became so **undone emotionally and mentally** every time she asked me if she was going to see me again. The drive away from her father's house to where I would park those nights were excruciating. I would fall asleep just wishing I could be cuddled up with my daughter.

For her safety she only came with me when I was at my family's house, or on those rare nights when I could afford a hotel. **It was never enough!**

I became pregnant with my son during this period with a different man. Eventually I was able to find a safe space at his family's house. However, I had to leave late in my pregnancy as it was a 1-bedroom with 6 adults and 2 children. There was no space.

Luckily around that time my sister let us move in with her. I was so excited to put my baby's bassinet up and have an air mattress to myself for the first time. **It was home.**

Time went by fast and the fairytale ended. Neighbors started reporting overcrowding, so we had to vacate and ended up at my mother's live-in care unit. I labored there and gave birth to my son just to find myself in the hospital with an infection.

Staying in the hospital was a vacation as I would soon need to move **again**, out of the live-in care unit. With no options we decided to go to a hotel. I had to drive for DoorDash constantly just to pay for a \$100 room for three months.

I simultaneously tried shelters in the city but for a newborn it wasn't the safest option. As a last-ditch effort, we were in contact with St. Vincent de Paul the last few months of my journey.

Working together with my SVdP case manager was imperative to my success. Everything seemed to just align; I was in complete disbelief when she showed me my new apartment that was obtained through a Section 8 voucher. Although it was extremely hard to bring myself and my children into housing, I DID IT!

“Although it was extremely hard to bring myself and my children into housing, I DID IT!”

The client is a 28-year-old single mother of a 6-year-old daughter and 6-month-old son. She was enrolled in the CalWORKs Housing Support Program where she was able to be prioritized for an EHV voucher and move into a 2-bedroom and 2-bathroom apartment where she can live with her two children and her Emotional Support Animal. She wants to go back to school to get her GED.

Celebrating our Annual Gala Pennies from Heaven

WITH GENEROUS SUPPORT from our extraordinary benefactors, Pennies from Heaven raised more than \$600,000 in support of our mission!

This year we proudly focused on raising funds for the seniors in our community.

Pushed onto the streets, our low-income elderly neighbors are facing a retirement defined by fear, loneliness, and cold nights, instead of a safe and af-

fordable place to live. With about 50 seniors currently living in their cars in Marin County, the beautiful generosity of our benefactors will help these struggling individuals and families find a safe place to live with dignity.

Thank you for your support, for we cannot do our work without you. We look forward to seeing you at our 2023 Pennies from Heaven Gala on Saturday October 7th.



Photo: Credits: Mo DeLong & Dudley DeNador



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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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AT THE MEADOW CLUB FEATURING
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Shopping
10:00 am-3:00 pm

Lunch and Fashion Show
12:00 pm-1:30 pm

Tickets \$150.00
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