



PO Box 2744
Petaluma CA 94953

And homeless near a
thousand homes I stood,
And near a thousand tables
pined and wanted food.

- William Wordsworth



Please join us for the



BIG THANKS

Hopeful
Content
Thankful
Please
Grateful

Please join us for our Big
Thanks, an intimate event
to celebrate the impact of
your support on the COTS
community

Tuesday, October 15, 2019
7:00 to 8:30pm
Petaluma Woman's Club
518 B Street, Petaluma

Live music · Hors d'oeuvres
Refreshments
Venue is wheelchair accessible

Please RSVP by Friday,
October 11 at cots.org

Save the date for the COTS Hour!
Thursday, November 14, 2019, 8am-9am
at the Petaluma Veterans Memorial Auditorium



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Dear Friends,

I consider it a part of my job to connect with our clients, whether in the mornings as I arrive at the Mary Isaak Center or at lunch at Mary's Table. It does my heart good when I know that they're safe, they're working hard to change their circumstances, and they're getting the help they need. They renew my hope every morning and my wonder at human resilience.

I'm especially heartened now that we are partnering with the healthcare system to provide permanent supportive housing on the second floor of the Mary Isaak Center to people with serious health concerns. You'll read in this newsletter about how our resident Sandy's life and health are changing for the better, thanks to permanent housing and respectful assistance from our staff member, Conor Feeney.

You'll also read about Leigha, a client in our permanent supportive housing program for families at Vida Nueva in Rohnert Park. Leigha's childhood was nomadic and traumatic and, often, cruel. But she's raised her children with stability and structure, love and laughter. She's been assisted in that effort by a permanently affordable rent and as-needed assistance and encouragement from COTS.

I am grateful to our community for your embrace of our neighbors in need and for your investment in our clients, our programs, and services. We could not do this work without you.

Until we end homelessness,

Chuck Fernandez

Chuck Fernandez. CEO



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After growing up in Petaluma, Conor Feeney went to college in Oregon. It was there that he discovered a passion for social services and a talent for providing them.

Now Conor case manages our newest Permanent Supportive Housing program on the second floor of the Mary Isaak Center, dedicated to housing and serving people with severe and chronic medical issues. We partner with St. Joseph Health to identify and serve people with great need and great vulnerability.

Tell us about what you do.

My job is to keep my clients housed here or to help them find other housing that will work for them. That's my official role, and it includes lots of things. I help people with their health, taking them to doctors' appointments, ensuring that they have food and can prepare it. A good bit of my time is occupied with helping people get the resources they need. That might be in-home support to help them with daily tasks like cooking, dressing, bathing. Some people need help getting benefits or just interpreting things they get in the mail.

I advocate with doctors. If we're talking with a doctor, I can remind a client of something he told me, like, his knee might be bothering him or that a medication is making him feel sick.

How did your residents come to the Permanent Supportive Housing program at the Mary Isaak Center?

All our residents have serious health concerns. They've all been referred to us by a local hospital. Since we've opened, we haven't had a lot of use of the emergency room. They can get a lot of their medical treatment at home because there's a satellite office of the Petaluma Health Center on site at the Mary Isaak Center. People bonded right away with Annie [Nicol, the Nurse Practitioner who operates

the Petaluma Health Care Center office at the Mary Isaak Center]. She's been great at advocating for people, getting them the appointments and referrals they need, helping them manage their medications.

It's easier to follow a medical regimen when you have a home. Just keeping track of time, and getting adequate rest are so much easier. So, there you go, it saves money and it saves lives to house people like this.

Most have been homeless a long time. Trauma and homelessness go hand in hand. When you're out there, you're vulnerable to all sorts of things. And anytime you're in survival mode for an extended period, that's trauma in and of itself, so that's a common challenge for most people here.

"It's easier to follow a medical regimen when you have a home....[It] saves money and it saves lives to house people like this."

How does that impact your work?

I want to help them in the now. I want to know only what I need to about their past so that I can avoid hurting them again. I don't bring up something they don't bring up first. If there's something they want to talk about, that's what we'll talk about. It's just polite, and it allows people their space.

We try to keep it light.

I make connections with them through listening. I listen to them talk about the things that they're interested in, the things that are important to them. I have boundaries, but I try to make it personal



enough so that I earn their trust. I follow through on what I say so that I can keep that trust.

Everyone asks my age. Then, after a while, they forget that I'm younger.

What's life on the floor like?

Some people have become close and some just say "hi" to each other in passing. There have been some friendships that have developed already. Some of them go walking together or they go downstairs and eat at Mary's Table together. I strive in the interview process to make sure that they know that part of our rules and expectations is that you'll be able to co-exist peacefully together. We have house meeting every time someone new joins the floor.

People are easy-going. It's enjoyable to be around them.

How have people made the floor their home?

We've had so many people donate to the floor—couches, televisions, desks. The Quilters for COTS made a quilt for every room. They love them. One resident carries his around with him wherever he goes.

We had lots of donated art and the residents decided what pieces they wanted to hang and where they wanted to put it.

If you had a magic wand, what would you change in Sonoma County?

We need more housing. And we need better public transportation. It can take two hours on the bus each way just to make it to a doctor's appointment.

Why are you in this line of work?

I just like to help. It makes my spirit better. You can't change the world, but you can change your community. I might eventually go back to school, but this is where I want to be now. I'm grateful to know my clients, and I'm grateful for the guidance I'm getting. ■

permanent supportive housing



When we tell stories at COTS, our “happy endings” usually involve someone moving into a home of their own.

But life is complicated. And housing doesn't necessarily provide a fairytale ending.

Sandy has been a resident in our permanent supportive housing at the Mary Isaak Center for two months. She loves having her chihuahua Peanut with her, loves the view from her window, loves the staff and her neighbors on the floor. But she's also spending a lot of time crying.

Because now she can.

“When you're out there [living on the street], you're blocking everything out. You've got to survive. If you start cracking over yesterday's news, you're not going to make it to tomorrow,” she explains.

Now, she has the time and space to reflect on how she's made it through a life full of perpetrators and trauma. “I'm a fighter. I know that,” this tiny woman says. “From the day I was born, I had to be, so I'll get through this better than before.”

After over three years on the street and increasingly worsening health, Sandy was referred to our program by a hospital case manager. “They told me if I went back to the streets I could die,” she says. “COTS said I could have Peanut with me, so I said, ‘Yes.’”

She's still getting used to having a home. “It took a few weeks



for me to leave my clothes in the dresser. I kept moving them back to my suitcase because I wanted to be ready in case something went wrong. Back and forth, back and forth. I finally left them in the drawers. It still doesn't feel like it's mine.”

“All the people who work at COTS are really helping me make the transformation from one life to another.”

Sleeping is another novelty. “[Out there], if you sleep, you're dead,” she says. “Especially at night. You try to grab a little sleep during the day if you can find a place where there a lot of people around. Now, I'm getting used to being safe and I'm trying to sleep through the night.”

Sandy's case manager Conor Feeney was able to arrange for Sandy to work with a therapist. “She [the therapist] and all the people who work at COTS are really helping me make the transformation from one life to another,” Sandy says. “They're proud to have us here and they're so helpful.”

Soon, she wants to channel her fighting spirit to help others who are still on the streets. “I need to find a way to get my voice heard,” Sandy says. “There's got to be a way to protect people.”

For more about Sandy's housing program, please read the profile of Conor Feeney, our Mary Isaak Center Permanent Supportive Housing Program case manager, on page 3.

leigha

Leigha grew up making her parents and grandparents laugh. “If you could make them laugh, you might not get hit,” she says.

Now, Leigha's own kids keep her laughing, but the stakes are not the same. Not at all. Evenings at home are a competition to win Leigha's wild laughter, not to avoid the back of her hand. “The hardest thing about it is that the youngest tries to keep up with the older ones,” she says. “With mixed results.” Luckily, they're a tolerant bunch, able to take riddles and puns in stride.

Her youngest daughter was less than a year-old when Leigha and her family moved into Vida Nueva, an affordable Burbank Housing complex where COTS provides supportive services. The family had been sharing a room at COTS when Leigha won a lottery to move in to a three-bedroom apartment with a rent she could afford and staff from COTS whom she could count on to help her and her kids.

And the kids are all right. The youngest, at 11, is doing well in school and the rest are high school graduates gainfully employed. One of them is in college.

Leigha credits Vida Nueva and Vida Nueva alone for her kids' success. “The safety here, having a stable place—that's what saved them,” she says. But the truth is more complicated: much of her kids' success is due to Leigha's attentive

parenting. “We talk a lot, the kids and I,” Leigha says. “I'm honest. I let them know how quick things can go wrong if you're not careful.”

When Leigha was her youngest daughter's age, her parents had her hold the drugs they were delivering to friends in prison. They dragged her and her sister from one seedy, dangerous spot to another, from one crisis to another, one criminal caper to another, one threat to another. She and her sister protected one another as best they

But once drug free, she was still captive to anxiety and chose partners whose controlling ways made her feel safe. She freed herself after a slew of losses—her mother, her beloved sister, and an infant son—woke her.

“I got out the right way. My kids were always safe. They were never cold and hungry, never had to sleep under a bush.” She's been careful to follow every rule at Vida Nueva to the exact letter. “I am never going to lose this place,” she says. “They'll carry me out of here!”



“The safety here, having a stable place—that's what saved them.”

could, but Leigha started using drugs herself at the age of 12. They helped her deal with the paralyzing feelings of anxiety and dread that had begun to overtake her.

At 20, Leigha stopped taking drugs. She didn't want the life she saw family and friends leading. “I was already tired of it.” She ended up working with an agency that provided drug treatment and life skills training to young people. “I listened. I changed,” Leigha says. Shortly after becoming sober, she found out she was pregnant with her first child. That clinched everything for her.

But holding it together for the kids, being ever-vigilant, takes its toll. Her anxiety attacks are a legacy of her own childhood, Leigha knows. “I've got a certain resilience when the ground is shifting. I'm calm in the moment. But I'll freak out later.”

“When we first moved in, I couldn't believe it was happening. I was overwhelmed, I was having a full-blown anxiety attack.

Monica [then, COTS' director of family programs] came down from the office and held me—for 30 minutes—until it passed. That was the first time I felt we would be safe here.”

Now, with only one child left to raise—“Thank God, she'll still allow the occasional cuddle”—Leigha's thinking about what comes next. Thanks to COTS, she's working with a therapist. He's helping her to take credit for her good choices, to enjoy what she has. “I'm working on it,” Leigha says. ■

In the last 12
months, you helped
COTS provide the
support to keep

436 people
in permanent housing

including
138 children

COTS served
18 veterans
through permanent supportive
housing

92%
of people were able to hang
on to their housing when our
assistance ended

Why do people volunteer at Mary's Table?

It's wonderful to get to share food.



Pitching in to make a salad reminds me of a quilting bee.



I just love feeding people.

Of all the volunteer jobs you can do in Petaluma, this is the one I've stuck with. It gives me joy.

I loved the team, all the people I work with. I really look forward to going in.



We talk about our families, our circle of friends, the meaning of life. It's one of the ways you can get together with someone without spending money or consuming anything.

Learn more about how to volunteer with COTS at cots.org/volunteer

volunteer spotlight



Every week, Tracey Rose and Nick Harris arrive at the Kids First Family Shelter with a plan to make cool crafts or science projects with kids. They also arrive ready to go with the flow. Maybe they'll make things or maybe they'll play soccer. Either way, the kids will have a great time! Thank you, Nick and Tracey!



Juan Guzman, 25, loves cooking. He cooks at two Petaluma restaurants—Pongo's and What a Chicken—but he still finds time to come in and volunteer at Mary's Table. "I like that I can use my career skills to have an impact on people in need," he says. "That moves me to keep doing it." He wants to have a kitchen of his own someday, so he's soaking up Chef Derrick Ng's skill of creating a cohesive menu from whatever's on hand.

Lucille Battison

donor profile

Lucille Battison has spent 80 of her 90 years in Petaluma. She grew up on a chicken ranch, graduated from Petaluma High, raised a family, and sewed up a storm, including work on the first quilt raffled for COTS. For 31 years she's been helping COTS, starting by helping to cook meals for the homeless at the Methodist Church, site of COTS' first shelter in 1988. "How could I not help?" she asks. "Laure Reichel and Mary Isaak [COTS' founders] were showing us the need and they themselves did everything that could be done—and without any complaint."

Lucille had another reason for wanting to help. With her last donation, she sent along a note, sharing something that happened to her in the brief period she was away from Petaluma. She wrote, in part, "I was once homeless for only three days, but it had such an

impact on my life that I wanted to continue to help the homeless. I was fortunate to have parents that I could "go home" to and get out of a bad situation and my life turned around for the good!"

All her life, Lucille has spread the message that people going through homelessness "are talented and viable. They need to regain their footing. If they want help, COTS wants to help them."

Here's what she wrote about the COTS quilt she helped bring into life: "I only wish one wonderful quilt could cover all those who need what a quilt represents: home, warmth, comfort, family, plenty of food, a job and a roof over their heads."

Thank you, Lucille!

THANK YOU TO OUR 2019 BUSINESS SPONSORS!



ways of giving

A gift to COTS is the best way to ensure that our services and resources are available to our community whenever need is felt. Gifts to COTS are tax-deductible, and there are a variety of ways to make a gift to suit individual donor objectives. The Development Office welcomes inquiries about ways to structure your gift and invites you to consider the giving options listed below.

Federal Tax ID: 68-0176855



Online, Cash, or Check

Online gifts or gifts by cash/check provide COTS with funds immediately available for use. Making a gift online at cots.org is the easiest way to support our mission. By choosing to make a monthly or recurring gift, you make your support go even further and create a sustainable funding source COTS can plan on to support our most vital services.

Gifts of cash or check can be mailed to: COTS, PO Box 2744, Petaluma, CA 94953. Checks should be made payable to COTS.



Appreciated Securities and Stocks

Gifts of appreciated securities and stocks allow the donor to receive a tax deduction for the stock's current market value and avoid capital gains tax on the appreciation. For instructions on how your broker can transfer your stock to COTS, please visit www.cots.org/ways-to-give.

Whenever stock is transferred, please notify Jamieson Bunn, Director of Development, at jbunn@cots.org or (707) 789-6380 of the type of stock, number of shares you have donated and the fund to which you would like to make your gift.



Matching Gifts

Many companies will match or multiply their employees' donations to COTS. Please contact your Human Resources Department or Community Relations Department to see if your company offers this benefit.



Leave a Legacy

Making COTS a part of your estate plan ensures that we will always be here to serve our neighbors in need. By becoming a member of COTS' Legacy Society, you are entitled to special recognition in our Annual Report and invitations to special events that highlight the impact of your support.

To learn more about giving to COTS, visit cots.org/ways-to-give, or contact Jamieson Bunn, Director of Development, at jbunn@cots.org or (707) 789-6380.

rent to cots

Landlords and property owners who entrust us with their most valuable assets play a huge part in the battle to end homelessness. Thanks to dozens of local landlords, we've been able to house hundreds of adults and children while providing property management and oversight to ensure that units are well cared for and rent is paid on time.

If you have a property for rent and you'd like to talk to one of our landlords about their experience with COTS, please get in touch with **Linda Perry** at lperry@cots.org or (707) 765-6530 x 104.



lasting footprint

Bill Gabbert, Member, COTS Board of Directors and COTS Legacy Society



As a Board member, you already invest a great deal of time and resources in COTS. What inspired you to make a planned gift too?

I have always included COTS in my estate planning because, for me, a planned gift is just the right thing to do. I see Legacy Giving as my lasting footprint in this world. It is not what we take from this world but what we give back that counts. COTS is so successful at helping the homeless that I want to do my part to make sure they are here to help long after I am gone.

What impact do you foresee your gift having over time?

I do expect we will need to help people that are homeless for a long time to come. People don't plan to become homeless, but it happens, and we need to help them. COTS does so much more than just help someone get into a home. They provide much needed services before and after they are in a home. Their services are aimed at not only getting someone into a home but also to keep them from becoming homeless again. COTS gives people hope and dignity!

What would you say to anyone considering making a legacy commitment to COTS?

Working with COTS is so rewarding. I have a passion for COTS because of their success with helping others. How can we not help someone that is homeless when we have so much? I feel that Legacy Giving is also a great way to be a positive role model for our children. Legacy Giving speaks to who we are, what our values are and what is important to us.