



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




join the cots monthly giving society!

This month, we are pleased to launch our new COTS Monthly Giving Society, and we invite you to join us!

Join the COTS Monthly Giving Society today at give.cots.org/monthlygiving and ensure that COTS can sustain our work for the long term.

Start investing in our community today!



2 a note from
chuck

4 jules pelican
director of programs

6 homelessness
prevention

8 new
programs

10 your support
matters



SUMMER
20x20





a note from chuck

Dear Friends,

Over the summer, we at COTS have been taking this time of national crisis to examine our programs, our capacity, and our priorities.

We operate happily in the world of Housing First. You likely know that a Housing First approach provides low-barrier opportunities to those who are homeless or at risk of becoming so. Supportive services are mostly reserved to help people retain permanent housing once they've found it. The guiding—and indisputable—principle behind this approach is that everyone benefits when people are housed. Both our state and federal governments prioritize this approach.

In a perfect world, shelter stays are brief. In a perfect world, the focus on providing supportive services only in housing makes tremendous sense.

But wonderful as it is, Sonoma County is not perfect, and our tight and expensive rental market translates into longer shelter stays than in other parts of the country. It results, too, in a more

competitive and harrowing search for housing.

We need to provide our shelter residents with services and opportunities to meet those challenges. We need to provide them with choices about how they want to live.

That's what our new Pathways options are about. And that's what much of this newsletter is about.

We are lucky at COTS to have a wealth of knowledge; a staff ready for any challenge; volunteers and community partners at the ready to help; and clients eager to change their lives for the better.

Your support is more essential now than ever, and I look forward to sharing more about our critical work in the months to come.

Until we end homelessness,

Chuck Fernandez



Board of Directors

- Bill Gabbert, President
- Ben Leroi, Vice President
- John Baxter, Treasurer
- Karen Nelson, Secretary
- Raymond Dougherty
- Erin Hawkins
- Matthew Ingram
- Marie McCusker
- Curt Peters
- Andrea Pfeiffer
- Chris Ranney
- Mike Resch
- Troy Sanderson
- Ken Savano
- Wendi Thomas
- Judy Tuhtan
- Samantha Yee

Executive Team

- Chuck Fernandez, CEO
- David Tausheck, CFO
- Jamieson Bunn, Director of Development
- Cathleen Higgins, Director of Human Resources
- Jules Pelican, Director of Programs
- Kiera Stewart, Director of Grants

Writers

- Eileen Morris
- Jamieson Bunn

Graphic Designer

- Angela Pustorino

Photography

- Angela Pustorino
- Sharon Galindo
- Paige Green



expanding choices at the mary isaak center emergency shelter

The passage of the Housing First law in 2016 enabled COTS to expand our reach and our services, but over time, we have found that our clients pursuing sobriety could use some extra support.

That's why, in Summer 2020, COTS is launching Pathways recovery options within our low-barrier shelter to offer additional client choice within a larger Housing First model. Depending on their preference, clients can choose from the following options at the Mary Isaak Center Emergency Shelter (MIC-ES):



Community Beds

After initial intake, new clients complete the COTS Intake Assessment so that we can assess each client's specific needs and goals. During their stay at MIC-ES, clients receive ongoing case management and work towards the completion of their goals, with an ultimate goal of achieving permanent housing. Progress on achieving goals is evaluated every 30 days.



Pathways

For those interested in additional support for sobriety, we offer Pathways options through our Outreach, MIC-ES, and Integrity Housing programs. Clients enrolled in Outreach may opt-in to a 21-Day Sobriety Challenge; those in MIC-ES may choose to stay in designated sober beds; and clients in Integrity Housing may opt to live in sober housing. All clients are offered opportunities to participate in on-site support and sobriety groups, bolstering a sense of community and common purpose.



Client Enrichment Services

All clients may participate in Client Enrichment programming. This program will include financial literacy and housing readiness groups, employment support, referrals to our Legal Aid partnering attorney, credit counseling, and more. Client Enrichment is available not just to shelter residents but to anyone in COTS' programs.

This issue of our newsletter provides insight into our new offerings at a time when the need for homeless services is growing. We invite you to learn more through interviews with Jules Pelican, Director of Programs, on pages 4-5, and Eileen Morris, Client Enrichment Manager, on page 9.

We talked to Jules Pelican, Director of Programs, about the ways she and her team are providing services and opportunity to our shelter residents.

In Sonoma County we've been operating under the Housing First model for two years now. Tell us about Housing First. What's the rationale?

Housing First is about respecting client choice. It's about human dignity, the importance of treating everyone as worthy individuals with unique desires, histories, talents and challenges. Each person has different housing aspirations and needs. One person might be fine living with other people, another may recoil from that idea. One person might want to live in a sober environment, another person might not. One person may need continued support to hold onto their housing, another may just need a little help with a security deposit or a phone number to call in case of emergency. But no matter what a person's circumstances, everybody deserves safe housing.

And what's interesting is it's not just basic decency that argues for this approach. It's rationality, it's the bottom line. If we devote resources to placing people into housing situations that aren't right for them, those people are going to end up homeless again. This has been well-documented, and it's a very expensive proposition, in terms of money, effort and lost human potential.

How does that work here in Sonoma County?

That's the question! We wouldn't be upholding human dignity if we didn't acknowledge that we live in one of the tightest and most expensive rental markets in the nation. What works in Utah isn't a perfect fit for Sonoma County. It would be counterproductive and cruel to act like it was. Housing First advocates say that shelter stays should be short—a matter of days—or avoided entirely. No one argues with this ideal, but we also can't argue with the fact that we just don't have a sufficient stock of affordable housing.

At COTS, we also talk about Housing Focus. How does that differ from a Housing First approach?

I wouldn't say it differs. I would say it augments the Housing First approach.

From the moment people enter our shelters, every conversation they have with a staff person centers on housing. You have a complaint about another resident? Of course, we'll address it, but we'll also ask you to think about how nice it will be to have a rental of your own where you don't have to put up with someone in a bunk nearby. Did you recently get a job? Will it be a better use of your paycheck to buy a car or to save for a housing deposit? We're going to make you answer that question.

We are clear that we expect clients to be engaged in creating a better future for themselves. We're providing precious resources to our clients, and we feel it's our responsibility to provide them to those who want to put them to good use.

People can stay up to six months in a shelter that receives federal funding. We break that up into smaller, 30-day chunks. If you're not focused on housing, if you're not actively pursuing it, then we ask you to make way for someone who is.

How does that go over with clients?

It sort of depends on the client. But, in general, it goes over well. I think that's because we've created a sense of community within our shelters.

Strangely, COVID has helped with that. We had to furlough most of our kitchen volunteers and clients have picked up the slack. Our residents do community service, whether it's washing



dishes, picking up litter, mopping the floor—you name it. There's a real pride of place among our residents, and a real sense that we're all in this together.

What about choice and opportunity?

These are big. The Housing First model recommends that supportive services accompany housing, that you design and implement services that help people stay well and stay housed. We do this. Case management and supportive services, including mental health services, are offered but not mandated for housed clients.

Starting this summer, we're increasing the services we provide for clients. Most importantly, we're offering more options to individuals who are interested in abstaining from drugs or alcohol. About 40 percent of our residents report that they struggle with substance use, and we want to offer them a variety of resources. Pathways is a new program offering to serve individuals who want to explore or pursue sobriety. Shelter residents will have a separate, presumably quieter, area of the dorm, and they'll have a multitude of opportunities to support one another and to receive support from staff and

volunteers. Pathways also extends to permanent housing. A few of our shared Integrity Houses are becoming recovery-based homes.

An exciting partnership that's off to a great start is with Legal Aid of Sonoma County. They're providing an attorney, Asya Sorokurs, to work with our clients on a host of legal issues, primarily things that are barriers to achieving permanent housing. We're also partnering with a number of local licensed therapists to provide much-needed counseling services for our residents.

Starting in August, we're offering our home-grown tenant education, financial literacy, computer literacy and employment success programs. These programs all depend on volunteers to help us support our residents. For the next few months, at least, we'll be working with those volunteers via Zoom. We are grateful to our volunteers for their continued support of our clients.

It's an exciting time at COTS—lots of opportunities for clients and community members alike.

homelessness prevention at cots

At COTS, we know that it's important to stop homelessness before it starts. That's why we offer our Homelessness Prevention Program, to help those at risk of eviction to find a new home or supplementary rental assistance before they end up on the streets or living in their car.

On this page, we feature a landlord and tenant who found help through COTS and a single mom who was able to keep her children housed with your support. We know the need for Homelessness Prevention will only increase in the coming year, and we are so grateful to the COTS family for investing in our programs when it matters most.

landlord spotlight: carmen

With two energetic kids in their family, Carmen and her husband decided they'd outgrown the small condo they owned. They rented it out to a young mom, Wendy, and found a bigger house for themselves. They like Wendy. She's hardworking and pleasant to deal with, Carmen says.

In March, Wendy was laid off. Unemployment didn't come through. She managed to pay her rent in April, but when May came around, she came up short. **Wendy told Carmen she was working with COTS to get help with her rent.**

"It's always in the back of my mind that we need to keep money to cover a few months of the mortgage in case the tenant can't pay or in case they move," Carmen says. "I understand that's part of being a landlord." The risk of nonpayment may come with the territory, but, especially in uncertain times, it is stressful and inconvenient.

Still, "I told her not to worry," Carmen says. "I believed and trusted that we'd work it out. I decided this is a crappy situation, but we'll get through it." When she told her tenant to relax, "I could see her relief," Carmen says.

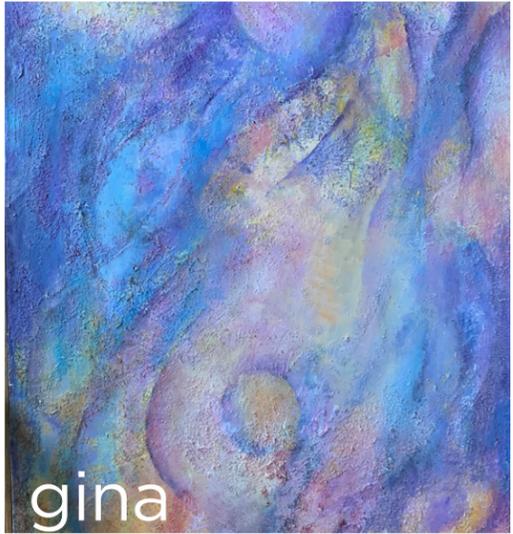


Through our Homelessness Prevention program, COTS was able to help with two months of rent—enough to tide Wendy over until she was back at work in mid-June, enough to keep mother and child safely housed. Throughout the process, we had Carmen's full cooperation.

Her advice to other landlords is **"Be open-minded to alternative ways to support your tenants.** Initially, I was wondering if [COTS] was for real and if I was giving my personal information out to some random person." Carmen did her research and discovered she could trust COTS. "Getting informed, getting all my questions answered helped me get through it," Carmen says.

Thank you to all the landlords who work with us!

To learn more about Renting to COTS, contact Christa Cheek at ccheek@cots.org or 707.765.6530 x204.



prevention success story: gina

Gina and her two daughters were fleeing danger—for the second time in only a few years. This time, it was their landlord who was the threat.

And the pandemic had just begun.

Thankfully, a family member offered couches to sleep on for a few weeks and Gina got to work looking for a new home. Despite the shut-down, she managed to find an apartment in a beautiful new town. But after spending thousands of dollars in legal fees to divorce her husband and protect her children from their violent father, she had the rent but not the security deposit.

Gina reached out to her advocates in the domestic violence services program who had helped her escape her husband several years earlier. "They saved my life," Gina says. "There's no question in my mind." Now, those same advocates helped her find COTS' Homelessness Prevention Program. And they helped her through the application process which demands a lot of documentation and paperwork.

COTS was able to pay her security deposit. \$2500 was all it took to change three lives for the better.

"When I finally got the keys, I looked around our new living room and there were a lot of tears," she says. **"I told my children we're here because there's some kind person somewhere who donated something to help somebody they didn't know. I was overcome by that. And so grateful."**

They're all breathing more easily now. "I can see in the way they carry themselves that they're feeling more free," Gina says of her girls, who are 13 and ten. She is making sure that they both continue to work with therapists, who are made available to them as crime victims. The girls are staying in touch with their friends and looking forward to making new ones in their new town.

"I told my children we're here because there's some kind person somewhere who donated something to help somebody they didn't know."

For Gina, the relief comes from finally having safe and private surroundings. It also comes from the fact that her ex-husband is now incarcerated (on charges unrelated to his family) and her ex-landlord is prohibited from all contact. "Not having to be on alert all the time, I'm getting used to that," she says. She, too, is working with a therapist.

Local artist Maria Krahn donated several paintings to COTS for our clients to hang in their new homes. Gina chose Maria's "Efflorescence of Compassion," a study in pinks, blues and purples of a woman floating upward with her arms stretched above her head, body relaxed, trusting and purposeful, rosy objects in her reach.

"That painting came to me for a reason," Gina says. "I stare at it. It's what I want."



welcome, downtown streets team!

At COTS, we know that we can achieve more when we partner with other organizations and nonprofits to expand services to those experiencing homelessness. This summer, we are thrilled to partner with Downtown Streets Team (DST), a Bay Area non-profit that officially launched in Petaluma this July. DST received funding from the City of Petaluma to serve our city's unsheltered population and we could not be more grateful for the City's support of this game-changing program.

DST's model is simple and effective. Homeless or low-income men and women are encouraged to join DST as volunteer Team Members on street clean-up or other local beautification projects. Team Members are held accountable to show up on time, complete tasks, and work well with others – building skills that will help them find and keep employment over time. Those who show dedication and leadership skills can become Team Leads, then Operations Supervisors.

DST provides Team Members with a non-cash stipend to help cover basic needs while also providing case management and employment services. They also work with Team Members to meet other needs for legal assistance, therapy, bus passes and more – supporting Team Members' visions for their future. DST believes that employment restores hope and opens the door to other opportunities. The reality is

that having a job gives many of us, homeless or not, a sense of dignity, self-worth, and accomplishment. Each week, DST hosts Success Meetings with Team Members on the lawn of Petaluma's City Hall. Success meetings are joyful events filled with shout-outs to Team Members for their work and celebrations of the week's progress.

Brian Cochran, Petaluma Assistant City Manager, was present at the first DST Success Meeting to welcome the group. "The City of Petaluma is excited to welcome the Downtown Streets Team (DST) to Petaluma. Their unique and proven service model is a perfect complement to COTS and the other services that are already available to our residents experiencing homelessness. DST represents an unmatched 'win-win' for our residents and businesses who reap the benefits of the clean-up work provided by volunteers; and the DST's volunteers receive the benefits of work experience, connection to services, pride in the community, and stipends to help them with food and other basic needs."

Volunteer days are 8am-Noon, Monday through Friday, and participants meet at Walnut Park unless there is rain. DST asks that if you see a Team Member or crew out working in their brightly colored t-shirts, please say hello!

THANK YOU TO OUR 2020 BUSINESS SPONSORS!



Eileen Morris, COTS' new Client Enrichment Manager

Eileen Morris has been with COTS since 2001, working in both programs and development. On August 1, she starts a new role as Client Enrichment Manager, coaching clients with rental processes, job applications, and financial literacy.

Eileen, tell us more about your new role.

Our case managers have huge jobs, helping their clients find housing and take care of their health. My new job is to augment what they do and provide information and resources to our clients to help them find and keep housing. Some of it, we'll provide in-house, and some will come from our partners, like Sonoma County Legal Aid and the Sonoma County Family Law Facilitator. I'm revising our Rent Right, Money Smart, and Hire Grounds Employment Program to fit our current needs.

This work is hard for clients. We'll be looking at things like credit, cost of living, rental history, employment history and skills—painful subjects. Some of our residents aren't comfortable using email or texting and may need help gaining those basic skills. Our secret weapon at COTS is that we have a community that loves to volunteer. We've had such talented volunteers work one-on-one with our clients, helping them recognize their own strengths, stay hopeful and take the steps necessary to succeed.

What challenges do you anticipate?

Of course, COVID-19 is the biggest, most immediate challenge. We're going to be doing a lot by Zoom, a lot by phone. We have an outdoor office with a huge table set up for our partner from Legal Aid. We don't want any barriers to participation, so we're

also breaking down our curricula into single modules. That takes some doing, especially because we want to provide consistent, ongoing support for each participating client from one or more volunteers.

You created the original Rent Right and Money Smart programs that brought in volunteers from across the community. What do you think has changed since launching those programs? What will stay the same?

The rental market has gotten more expensive and more competitive. COTS has steadily increased our move-in assistance programs and the amount of permanent housing we can provide, but we alone can't solve the housing crisis. Our clients have always been flexible, determined and creative when it comes to finding permanent housing. We can help them demonstrate their strengths to a landlord.

What do you need from the community to make your programs successful?

Volunteers. We're looking for the kind of person who can be a listener, a witness, a cheerleader, a motivator and a sounding board. I like to team volunteers together so that a veteran and a newbie can work together. We provide lots of training and lots of opportunities for volunteers to ask questions, provide feedback and give advice. The very fact that someone is devoting their time and talent to clients, free of charge, is a huge boost to clients' morale.

If you're interested in becoming a Client Enrichment volunteer, please contact Eileen Morris at emorris@cots.org or 707.765.6530 x128.



why monthly giving matters

“When we see COTS on our bank statement every month, it reminds us that we’re participating, that we’re connected. It feels good.” - Barton Smith, monthly donor

This month, we are pleased to launch our new **COTS Monthly Giving Society**, and we invite you to join us!

Monthly giving is an important part of how we secure the future for our clients. Knowing we can count on monthly donations helps us budget for the year ahead. But more than that, monthly donors exemplify a commitment to making lasting change in our community.

Join the COTS Monthly Giving Society today at give.cots.org/monthlygiving and ensure that COTS can sustain our work for the long term - helping those experiencing homelessness in our community to find shelter, services, and permanent housing.

Start investing in our community today!

ways to give:

	
ONLINE, CASH, OR CHECK	APPRECIATED SECURITIES & STOCKS
	
MATCHING GIFTS	LEAVE A LEGACY

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.

monthly donor spotlight



Barton, Simone, Ella and Kirsten Smith and the horse that started Barton's stunt career.

When Barton Smith was a broke college student, he scrounged up \$125 to buy a horse from the Bureau of Land Management. That enormous price tag left him with nothing to spare for a saddle, so Barton learned how to ride...bareback. This new skill led to a career as a stuntman with Universal Studios' live shows, where Barton especially delighted audiences with his derring-do as a trick rider. He and his colleagues recreated the stunts from all the great westerns. That meant falls, brawls, shoot-outs, and acrobatics on horseback and in mid-air.

Stunting as a fulltime career ended when he broke his back on the job. Recovery was long, tough and

painful. It was no picnic financially, either. Barton remembers the stress of that time, and he has immense gratitude for his family who helped him get through it. **The experience gives him empathy for our clients. “Everybody needs a little grace and compassion,” Barton says.**

Now, he and his wife Kirsten donate monthly to COTS. “When we see COTS on our bank statement every month, it reminds us that we’re participating, that we’re connected. It feels good,” Barton says. He and Kirsten love seeing that their two teenaged daughters have taken a cue from their parents and also contribute to COTS.

Barton makes his living in real estate, and ‘finds life’ when connecting with his community. Like all of us, he hopes to connect more soon. He’s eager to resume his Petaluma Community Access podcast “The Greater Good,” in which he talks with people doing good around town. He’d love to get back to helping with fight choreography up at Cinnabar Theater or resuming work with Petaluma Radio Theater. Yet, no matter busy he gets when things get closer to normal, lots of kids will be clamoring for him to continue reading bedtime stories to them. It’s something he started on his Facebook page once the shelter-in-place order went into effect. His tiny fans rave about all the voices & characters Barton brings alive and his heart swells with gratitude to bring them a smile.

We are grateful for the Smith family’s support and advocacy!



In January 2019, Rotary District 5130 (covering all of Northern California) **awarded us \$50,000 as part of their response to the October 2017 wildfires.** The grant supports COTS’ Rapid Re-Housing program, designed to assist individuals and families who are currently homeless to obtain permanent housing. This program also offers Case Management support to help clients obtain housing and maintain it, even after they’ve exited the program. **With the Rotary’s partnership, COTS was able to provide permanent housing to 99 clients last year.** We think that’s a fantastic return on investment!

Then, in Summer 2019, the three Petaluma Rotary Clubs (Petaluma, Petaluma Valley, and Sunrise) came back with the best kind of encore: **an additional \$5,000 per club to immediate needs at COTS.** We came up with a list of our most pressing needs, including new lockers for our clients at the Mary Isaak Center, some fresh paint at both our shelters, and blinds in the dining room to keep out the western sun. The Petaluma Rotary Clubs then looped in the Rotary Clubs in Cotati and Rohnert Park. It turns out they wanted to donate as well! **Together, with a total grant of \$25,000 and volunteer labor** to help complete the locker installation and painting at

both the Mary Isaak Center and our Kids First Family Shelter, **the Rotary helped make our facilities a more dignified place for all our clients.**

COTS’ CEO David Taushek wrote in his thank you letter to the club:

“With your help, COTS is able to provide shelter and services that respect the dignity of each person; we couldn’t do it without you!”