



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

cots invites you to wear your support!

This spring, we hope you will join us in “Wearing Your Support” with custom-designed COTS shirts, hoodies, toddler tees, and more! Now through May 5th, choose from three exclusive designs representing different COTS programs, available in multiple styles, sizes, and colors. But don’t wait - after May 5th, these designs are gone forever! Proceeds from these sales will help ensure that COTS programs can continue to serve those experiencing homelessness in our community.

To view the designs and purchase one of your own, visit bonfire.com/store/sonomacountycots. Or visit cots.org for more information.



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a note from chuck

Dear COTS Friends and Family,

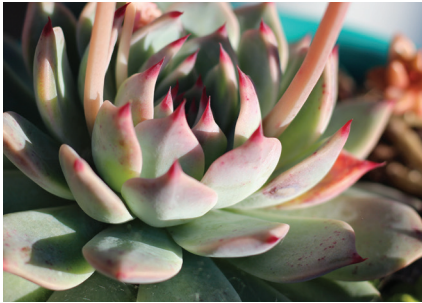
With the spring, we at COTS are feeling a surge of hope: hope that the threat of COVID will continue to diminish through the coming year; hope that our shelter will return to full capacity soon; and hope that our volunteers, too, will return when it is safe to do so.

This issue of the COTS Newsletter is filled with stories about hope for those experiencing homelessness, even when things seem the bleakest. We look at two stories of substance abuse and the resilience of our clients and staff in dealing with the many facets of addiction. We also find the silver lining in the pandemic through volunteers who are able to connect with COTS and our clients for the first time via Zoom. Finally, we see a homelessness prevention client who was able to stay housed with help from COTS and find a renewed connection to her roots despite the stresses of the past year.

I hope your spring, too, is a season of hope – one filled with chances to get outside, see friends and family in whatever way is safest, and look towards a brighter future. With your support, COTS will do our best to spread that hope to the whole community.

Until we end homelessness,

Chuck Fernandez
Chuck Fernandez



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cots' mission and values

At the start of 2020, COTS' mission was to assist people to transition from homelessness to a permanent home. Our vision was to end homelessness in Sonoma County.

In the fall of last year, however, members of COTS' Board and representatives from every level of our staff met to renew our Strategic Plan and reconsider our founding principles to better represent our work to the community. Through our mission, we aim to articulate why we exist, our core purpose, and the benefits we bring to the world. Our vision represents our North Star, what we wish the world to look like, and how we inspire our employees, clients, and communities.

Our new mission and vision will guide us in the coming years with an expanded purpose, greater inclusivity, and respect for the complexity of homelessness in Sonoma County. We invite our community to join us in fulfilling our new mission and vision in the years to come.

Our new mission:

We assist those experiencing homelessness in finding and keeping housing, increasing self-sufficiency, and improving well-being.

Our new vision:

We envision a community where everyone has a place to call home.

COTS' Values

In 2020, we also reviewed our organizational values, to better state what we believe in, how we treat each other, how we make decisions, and how we carry out our Mission, Vision, Goals and Objectives. We defined these values as follows:

Integrity: We act with reliability and honesty and take ownership of our roles.

Respect: We honor the diversity of perspectives, experiences, and the needs of others.

Collaboration: We foster constructive relationships within our community.

Celebration: We take pride in our work and applaud each person's successes.

Outcomes: We rely on best practices to provide data-driven, client-centered services.

With your partnership, we are excited to spread the word about our commitment to bringing these values to life through our work each day. To learn more about our plans for the future, read our Strategic Plan 2020 – 2023 at cots.org/strategic-plan.

healing substance abuse: the work continues

One of the hardest aspects of our work at COTS is aiding clients with substance abuse issues. Often, drug use is exacerbated by mental health challenges, and recovery can be a long road. In this newsletter, we wanted to give readers an opportunity to see how this work can play out over time – and show why so many of our staff hold hope for these clients even when the clients themselves can't yet see a way out of their addiction.

The first part of this series shows our engagement last fall with Greg, whose story shows what it can look like when someone first shows up at COTS, knowing on some level that they need help – even if they're not yet ready to seek it. The second tells the story of JM – a former client who turned his life around after working with the staff at COTS over several years. Through these two profiles, we aim to show that no matter what the challenges, our work with clients towards sobriety is cyclical, tireless, and rooted in an unshakeable compassion for those we serve.



COTS' Site Coordinators, who work the front desk at our Mary Isaak Center Shelter, often are the first to engage with homeless individuals who visit MIC seeking food or assistance. At the end of their work-day, they email "Shift Notes" to the other programs staff to keep everyone apprised of any issues, progress, or client successes. The following series of emails from our Shift Notes tells the first chapter in Greg B's story – one we hope will find a better resolution when Greg is ready.

John Souza, Site Coordinator
Re: "SHIFTNOTES"
10/22/20

- I noticed that our guest on the porch Greg B. had some empty bottles of booze, Fix-a-Flat, and a Torch Lighter. I got Stacy and called Robin so we could give Greg the news that he would have to move on.
- Randy [Outreach Specialist] went to talk with Greg about his options and the reason he cannot stay on our porch any longer. To say Greg was unappreciative would be an understatement. He was rude, drunk, and verbally abusive. It was then

decided that 911 would need to be engaged. That wasn't before Greg decided to use language I do not need to repeat to verbally attack Randy. Then Greg decided to assault our windows with his fist.

- 12:30 p.m. – Greg returns to property with his beer, then the PPD [Petaluma Police Department] returned. Greg was allowed to leave. We now have a Trespass order on Greg who is very volatile right now, so Site Coordinators please be careful and just call PPD if he returns.

Stacie Questioni, Shelter Services Assistant Manager
Re: "SHIFTNOTES"
10/22/20

- Greg B. who was sleeping on the porch has been asked to leave, he is not allowed to be sleeping on the porch again. Call PPD if he returns there is a NO Trespass order on file, and he is volatile and mad at this point. PPD has picked him up and arrested him.
- Orinda Detox Center is closed, no one can go to detox at this time.

John Souza, Site Coordinator
Re: "SHIFTNOTES"
10/22/20

- 2:00 p.m. – Greg returned to the MIC property, I will spare you all the yuckies.

Robin Phoenix, Shelter Services Manager
Re: "SHIFTNOTES"
10/22/20

I will add the rest of the story...

Greg relieved himself on the building to top off his misbehavior all day. This is the reality of drug and alcohol addiction. There was some part of his brain

that knew if he blew it, at least he would be somewhere safe inside and fed. Detoxing in jail is better than continuing to use until it kills you. He was out of his right mind and yet he knew. Which is why he indeed came back.

This whole situation was unfortunate because the day he was meant to go to detox, we were met at the door with no entry due to a Covid outbreak. Covid has absolutely crippled our ability to get those who are asking for help, get it in a timely manner. It especially cripples us when our partners do not keep us in the loop about outbreaks! We could've come up with a Plan B.

The day before yesterday I planned to offer him the 21 day challenge until we could get on the other side of the situation but he had been drinking and using since Monday when we couldn't get him into detox.

The mess we found on the porch yesterday shows the level of his disease. Huffing Gorilla Glue, the aerosol out of sunscreen and carburetor spray for a cheap high along with drinking himself silly. He had a backpack of beer that he was consuming on the porch during our engagements with him and then with the PPD who made him toss it.

Know that myself, Randy, John and Stacie were present and engaged with Greg multiple times yesterday to no avail. When someone is at the level of intoxication he was and he get as volatile as he did, punching the glass doors, yelling and spitting at the top of his lungs, we call for assistance. He

was made aware after the second engagement that if the PPD had to be called again, he would be arrested. Later in the afternoon after he came back once again and then peed on our building...it became a done deal.

We start over and over and over again.

Does this mean the door is closed for Greg B.? Nope. **It simply means that when and if he wants to try again, we will do our best to be there for him and start again.**

Moving forward we'll start with the 21 day challenge with anyone unsheltered who asks for help with their addictions. put them in the dining hall and set them up with a recovery plan that includes, attending all recovery programs at MIC, attending the AA/NA meetings on campus and doing community service daily to stay focused and busy. This way when and if someone chooses to go to treatment, we'll have a pre-plan for our own "detox" since it's closed. When it opens again, those who need to detox will still have to be tested for Covid prior to entry, so we'll put them in our program as a precursor to entry there as well detox. **Nothing says we can't safely start this process if they're willing and able.**

I will note here that no one can enter Turning Point without going to the Orinda Detox Center first. The good news is if they start the 21 day challenge and maintain their sobriety, have a negative Covid test, they would have a very short

stay at detox before entering treatment. Perhaps as short as a day.

Thank you for taking to time to read the rest of the story. This is the work we do each and every day in one way or another. With all this said, WE ARE HAPPY TO DO SO! **We start over and over and over again.**

Yours in seeing and supporting the toughest of the tough who we recognize are human beings just like us, who deserve health, happiness and a home of their own.

-Robin

Pathways Recovery Shelter Beds

A portion of MIC Emergency Shelter beds are dedicated to those who are actively pursuing sobriety. Interested individuals can note this request on their MIC Emergency Shelter pre-application.

21-Day Challenge

For unsheltered individuals who are interested in recovery from substance use. Offerings include overnight shelter in Mary Isaak Center dining room, 3 daily meals, showers, laundry, community service, and the ability to participate in Pathways recovery groups.

the adventure of sobriety

JM become homeless on August 3, 2013. He came up to Petaluma from Berkeley when offered a ride, stating, “Well, I have no obligations right now...why not?”

He slept on the tracks next to the Mary Isaak Center (MIC) but was embarrassed to ask for help. When he finally approached staff, Robin Phoenix, Shelter Services Manager, offered him a shower. He had not showered in over two months and was immensely grateful. **He also came in for dinner, and it was the first hot meal he had enjoyed for months.**

Winter of 2013, JM utilized COTS’ Severe Weather Beds program. He was grateful to sleep indoors and have dinner and a movie before bed!

“There is no doubt in my mind that I would still be living underneath a freeway overpass if it were not for PSC, Randy, Robin, Christina, Billy, and everyone else at MIC.”

Over the next few years, JM would come to MIC for lunch and utilize Severe Weather Bed program each winter. He also became an MIC resident a number of times. Each time he would get a job, save money, but return to meth use and homelessness. In his words, “It was like I was deriving a high out of destroying everything I had built.”

Randy Clay, Outreach Specialist, went out the various camps he lived at, “never judging but letting us know that he was there when we wanted a change.” Robin and Christina Madden, Case Manager, reiterated this message when he would come for lunch or to do laundry.

In April of 2016, Randy had visited his encampment and JM was “just so sick of sleeping outside” so he walked over to MIC. He was allowed to spend the night in the dining room on the condition that he would meet with Randy the following morning about Petaluma Sober Circle (PSC). He agreed.

The next day, April 20, 2016, JM met with Randy and agreed to enroll in PSC. “And so, my adventure of sobriety began!” JM entered a 31-day rehab program at Turning Point Rehabilitation Center. He was granted a 60-day extension, for a total of 91 days. In his words, “This is a critical amount of time to be in treatment. 31

days may be enough for someone who had a little slip...but now having worked in the field for a while, I can see that 31 days is not enough.”

After completing Turning Point’s program, JM returned to MIC, began taking classes at Santa Rosa Junior College for computer studies and eventually began working at MIC as a seasonal employee, staffing the Severe Weather Beds. In January 2017, JM moved from MIC into a Sober Living Environment (SLE).

On the one-year anniversary of his entry into Turning Point, he was offered a job there. He worked overnight shifts both at MIC and Turning Point. JM worked at Turning Point for over 2 years, and was then offered a job at Olympia House Rehab, where he currently works.

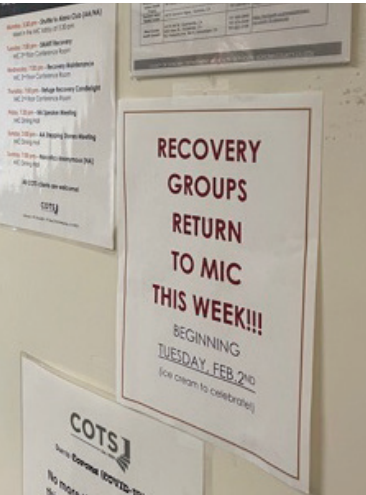
Housing-wise, JM lived in 2 different SLEs, then rented a room, then a studio, and in November 2020, he moved into a 1-bedroom apartment. He is thrilled!

He now works serving those who were in his position years ago—homeless and addicted. He ran into Randy not long ago while volunteering to help a homeless individual who had landed in the hospital. “It was SO awesome to run into Randy, the man I was currently emulating by helping this relatable homeless addict get the help that he needs.”

JM states, “There is no doubt in my mind that I would still be living underneath a freeway overpass if it were not for PSC, Randy, Robin, Christina, Billy, and everyone else at MIC.” He also notes that he feels extremely lucky to have been at MIC when it was a clean and sober facility, as it was exactly what he needed.

In JM’s words: **“Thank you so much for providing me with the opportunity to change my life and create a life that is so fulfilling and that I enjoy so wholeheartedly!”**

Thank you to Robin, John, Christina and all our COTS Staff who continue to serve our homeless neighbors through their lowest lows, and in time, like JM, to change and fulfillment. We are so proud to work alongside you!



Tina Roope and daughter Gabriella had been living with Tina’s grandmother when Tina found an affordable apartment of her own.

“Finally, everything was situated and organized,” 27-year-old Tina says. Gabriella had just reached school age and would go to on-site day care after school. “For the first time, I could work 40-plus hours a week.” Tina’s hairstyling clientele surged to meet her availability. She was on top of her bills and saving.

But then, the pandemic closed her shop. That meant a long, frustrating wait for her unemployment benefits and a months-long struggle to make ends meet.

She finally lost the struggle when it came time to pay September rent.

Through our Homelessness Prevention program, COTS was able to help Tina with September and October rent, allowing her to catch her breath and face the future without the burden of debt to her landlord.

“We’re so grateful to our supporters for making this program possible,” says COTS Director of Programs Jules Pelican. “It’s such a smart investment to keep people in their homes. And where children are concerned, it’s an investment that pays huge dividends.”

Thankfully Tina’s back at work, though things are hardly normal. Gabriella is learning through Zoom, which means Tina spends a lot of time being a classroom aide in her own living room. She’s been able to line up three days of childcare a week, so she crams all her clients in on those days. And it’s great to be back.

She loves the pleasure she can give to her clients with a good haircut. And when that haircut has been deferred for several months, “People are really, really happy.” She loves the creativity of her work, especially when she gets to do detailed, short, sculptural cuts. “Everyone’s face is different, their hair lies differently, so it’s always intriguing to shape a cut to fit that person,” she says.

Most of all, she’s enjoying seeing her clients again. “I learn so much about life from them,” Tina says. “I bond with my older clientele the most. They have so many stories to tell.”

Her involuntary leave of absence spurred Tina to think a lot about what’s important to her. Despite the stress of the year, **she’s spent a lot of time feeling grateful—for COTS supporters, of course, who helped her through her financial crisis, but also for her family, her skill and her heritage.**

We’re so grateful to our supporters for making this program possible. It’s such a smart investment to keep people in their homes. And where children are concerned, it’s an investment that pays huge dividends.

Tina’s mom is a hairstylist and Tina grew up helping out in her salon. “It’s always been my dream to open a shop with my Mom,” Tina says. “She taught me to be organized and to think ahead. We would be a good team.”

Tina’s also committed to ensuring that Gabriella learns about her Pomo heritage and takes part in Pomo culture. “The dance culture had a big impact on me. It kept me out of trouble when I was a teenager.” Though her grandmother serves on the Cloverdale Rancheria’s Tribal Council, Tina had lost touch with the culture during Gabriella’s early years. “I was so busy,” Tina says, “but now I see how important it is to have that link, to keep that culture alive.”

Tina has some advice for others going through a hard time. “You have to keep a clear head,” she says. It’s easy to panic in these uncertain times, “but you need to focus on what you can do now and take it step by step.”

volunteer spotlight: bob monsour



If you were in a lab, building the perfect COTS volunteer for this moment, Bob Monsour would be the result.

A pioneer in the tech world, an entrepreneur, an evangelist for STEM education, and someone who’s curious, creative and friendly, Bob’s devoted his talents and know-how to COTS and our clients since the Fall. He’s Zoomed with over a dozen people, helping them with career exploration, résumés, cover letters and understanding how to use their phones and laptops. Along the way, he’s learned about their kids, hobbies, musical tastes, troubles and dreams.

He’s also been the driving force behind a resources website for clients which debuted in March and **has made looking for jobs, housing, resources and benefits much easier.** Bob spent hours formatting content to make it accessible and inviting.

And free! Bob found us a free platform—Google Sites—and helped us make it our own.

A free site makes sense because doing more with less has been a constant throughout his career.

Back in the days when you accessed a mainframe through dotted green text on a terminal, Bob and his

Motorola colleagues used a punily-powered microchip to craft the very first pager that displayed a call-back number. For the first time, you didn’t have to call a service to find out who called you.

His talents for compression and efficiency figured in every chapter of his later career, too, most notably at Silicon Valley’s Hifn, a semiconductor manufacturer.

Hifn’s products were so successful, Bob was able to compress his own career, retiring very young.

But it didn’t take.

While living in New Jersey, his ears perked up one day in the car when he heard a radio interview about a new center at Princeton University. The center was to be dedicated to creating opportunities for engineering students. He sent an email of interest and soon found himself the first full-time employee of the new Keller Center for Innovation in Engineering Education.

“We were trying to attract talent to the field,” Bob says. “It’s a real problem in all the Ivies that the Wall Street firms will just descend on anyone who’s smart.” To combat that brain-drain, Bob helped create an internship program and a program for students to develop and incubate their business ideas.

Luckily for COTS, Bob tried retiring for a second time. He and his wife Sandra moved back to California, and Bob began volunteering at Mary’s Table, our food program. When the pandemic hit and we had to furlough our volunteers, Bob started with our Client Enrichment Services program. The work’s been interesting and fun for him. “It’s always exciting to be on the ground floor of something,” he says. About the website, he says, **“I hope the clients will find it useful and that we’ll continue to add to it.”**

Thank you, Bob!

new mental health offering



At COTS, we are always looking for innovative ways to better serve and support our clients, not just in finding housing, but in maintaining it. That’s why starting this Spring, we are excited to add a new mental health offering for Integrity Housing clients, in partnership with Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist Karyn Duffy.

Thanks to the support of two very generous supporters, Karyn will be able to provide **three 50-minute therapy sessions a week** to clients living in Integrity Housing, **at absolutely no cost to our clients.**

Currently, Integrity Housing serves about 60 clients in 11 houses. In order to help the most people, Karyn will be using a short-term solution-oriented strategy, working with each client for a maximum of twelve weeks. “There are just too many people in that program to only provide three people with ongoing services,” Karyn says. “We’re going to check in on a regular basis, chart out accomplishable goals, and then show a positive outcome. To me, twelve weeks feels very doable.”

A unique challenge Integrity Housing poses is shared living. Each house has a mix of individuals and families living in it, having been referred from COTS’ emergency shelters and other partner organizations. They have never met prior to living together, and they typically move in without seeing the house first. “We do the best we can to make appropriate referrals for these houses,” says Jules Pelican, Director of Programs, “but residents do not have the ability to choose who they are going to live with.”

Add to this that many COTS clients have experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), which contribute to mental health challenges, and can make living communally more difficult. “This is one of a hundred reasons that therapy is important to our clients,” says Debbie Robbins, who oversees the Integrity Housing program.

Karyn is a long-time COTS partner, which makes her the perfect person for this new partnership. “This will be my tenth year,” she says. Originally an intern

through Petaluma People Services Center, over the years Karyn has offered support to both COTS clients and staff, performing in-home visits, facilitating support groups, and offering private therapy sessions.

“She’s done a lot for us,” says Jules. “She works in both of our Permanent Supportive Housing programs, she offers sliding scale sessions for folks who used to be COTS clients so that they can keep seeing her - some people have seen her for years.”

“They’re surviving, they’re strong, and they want to be better. Broken people are not just to be discarded; they need compassion and respect and understanding.”

Part of the beauty of Karyn’s long-standing partnership with COTS, says Debbie, “is that because she knows COTS so well, when our clients go to her, or staff for that matter, they don’t have to waste a session or two explaining about COTS culture, and that’s a time saver for everybody.”

“Jules always said I know how to be with people,” says Karyn. “I actually am really humbled by my work with COTS. When you look at the tenacity of people and their sense of survival, and their will power, it just blows me away. **They’re surviving, they’re strong, and they want to be better. Broken people are not just to be discarded; they need compassion and respect and understanding.**”

With this new offering, Karyn will be able to help even more people. “If we had good county mental health services to serve our folks,” says Jules, “we wouldn’t have to go out and pay for our own therapist. But because we don’t have adequate mental health supports in the county, this has been a beautiful workaround.” Adds Debbie: **“To have these funders realize the importance of having somebody available for our clients to discuss any issues...it’s a game changer for some of our folks. This is huge.”**

Your support is what allows us to keep valuable offerings like this as we continue to explore new ways to support those whom we serve. **Thank you for investing in COTS and our community!**

THANK YOU TO OUR 2021 BUSINESS PARTNERS!



donor spotlight: fatima lassar



Fatima Lassar is an artist who enjoys giving back to her community. Originally from Illinois, she and her husband moved out to California in 1966, where she created paintings and etchings of everything from landscapes and florals to *trompe l'oeil* in people's homes.

She also painted quite a few murals for causes she cared about, at absolutely no cost. One of these was at the Catholic Charities Family Support Center in Santa Rosa, where COTS CEO Chuck Fernandez worked before coming to COTS. "I spent a lot of time in that room," Chuck said. "I remember that mural!"

If you've lived in Petaluma a long time, you might also recognize Fatima's name – or her work – from her time painting the windows of various businesses downtown. Between 1986 and 2013, Fatima decorated the windows of many a Petaluma business, from McNear's to Petaluma Market. "The last year I did work for McNear's was the year the Giants won the Pennant," she said. "One year was a South Park theme. Before that I did pairs of opposites – like Yoda

and Darth Vader decorating a Christmas tree, or Snow White and the Evil Queen."

Window painting is how Fatima first got introduced to COTS. At the time, COTS often held its annual Holiday Free Store in the Golden Eagle Shopping Center, where Fatima already painted the windows of every business present. From there, she started donating produce from her garden to Mary's Table.

Recently, Fatima made the decision to join the COTS Legacy Society. When asked why, she laughed and said: "It's selfish, actually. I think you don't really die until nobody remembers you. I've been thinking a lot lately about what will happen after I'm gone, wondering how people will remember me." **Being a part of the Legacy Society, she says, is "a way to be remembered, and a way to help."** Plus, she adds, "what could be better than helping the homeless? It just seems like one of the most important things."

Thank you, Fatima, for helping to ensure we can continue our work for many more years to come!

If you'd like to find out about joining the COTS Legacy Society, our planned giving program, please visit cots.org/ways-to-give, or contact Jamieson Bunn, Director of Development, at jbunn@cots.org or (707) 789-6380.



Now more than ever, we are grateful for your support - new and continuing, renewed and monthly, for a lifetime and beyond. **As we look toward the future, we invite you to join us in investing in our community, from the ground up.** That means offering not only the dignity of a hot meal and a shower, but addressing the unique issues at the root of each person's homelessness. Your support also provides crucial wrap around services, like mental health support and financial literacy, so that people can not only find but maintain housing for the long term.

Gifts to COTS are tax-deductible, and there are a variety of ways to make a gift to suit your needs. The Development Office welcomes inquiries about ways to structure your gift and invites you to consider the giving options listed below.

Donate to COTS with your Mobile Wallet!

Now, you can give to COTS on our website via ApplePay, Google Pay and Microsoft Pay – and let your gift go to work even faster for our clients experiencing homelessness! Paying with your mobile wallet is not only more efficient, but more secure. Thank you so much for your support!

ways to give:



**ONLINE, CASH,
OR CHECK**



**APPRECIATED
SECURITIES &
STOCKS**



**MATCHING
GIFTS**



**LEAVE A
LEGACY**

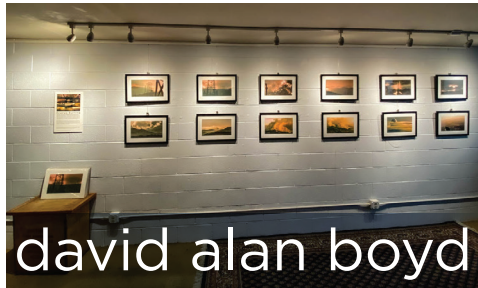
To learn more about giving to COTS, visit cots.org/ways-to-give, or contact Jamieson Bunn, Director of Development, at jbunn@cots.org or (707) 789-6380.

community support spotlight



barber cellars

Between March 16th and 31st, Barber Cellars and Barber Lee Spirits offered customers the ability to donate 10% of their purchase to COTS.



david alan boyd

Through February and March, photographer David Alan Boyd partnered with Petaluma Coffee & Tea, Co for a fundraiser exhibit, with all proceeds going to COTS.



in-kind donors

This spring, we've had many wonderful supporters donate items to our kitchen and clients, helping to provide meals and support our clients both in shelter and as they move into permanent homes.

We are so grateful to our community for supporting COTS and for your continued compassion and generosity. Want to partner with COTS on a fundraiser? Contact **Erin Krueger** at ekrueger@cots.org.

wear your support!

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