



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

## THE COTS RAFFLE IS BACK!

Century 21 Bundesen is once again hosting its annual COTS Raffle, a fundraiser benefiting COTS! **Raffle tickets are available now through October 13th, with a drawing to be aired on Facebook Live on October 14th.** Prizes include dining packages to a selection of amazing Petaluma restaurants.

**You can purchase raffle tickets at Century 21 Bundesen (616 Petaluma Blvd S. or 522 Petaluma Blvd. S) for \$20 each, or by contacting Century 21 Bundesen at [info@bundesen.com](mailto:info@bundesen.com) or 707.769.9000.**

**Visit [cotsraffle.com](https://cotsraffle.com) for more information** and a full list of prize packages. Thank you to Century 21 Bundesen for holding this event once again!



*2019's COTS Raffle winner Eric Machado with his winnings*



## FALL NEWS 2021



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a note from chuck

Dear COTS Friends and Family,

This summer, Cat Higgins, our Director of Human Resources, announced to staff a surprising – and heartening – new statistic: 25% of our staff at COTS have experienced homelessness firsthand. This is not just an interesting figure for us; it’s a philosophical approach that says our work must be informed by research, data, and the lived expertise of those who understand homelessness best.

The insight of our staff is invaluable as we chart new paths and new programs to better address the realities of homelessness in Sonoma County. In this newsletter, you will hear from Dana, a COTS employee who learned about our work as a resident first. You’ll also learn more about our Recuperative Care program, which is thriving even with COVID restrictions and saving lives like our client John’s (whose story appears on p.4).

You’ll also learn more about Petaluma’s new SAFE Team (Specialized Assistance for Everyone) and sustainability initiatives that are designed to help those in and out of our shelter live safer, healthier lives.

This year has been one of the most exciting in COTS’ history, in no small part due to our incredible employees and community partners. Their passion and creativity are making a difference across Sonoma County, and I am so inspired by the large and small ideas that are changing the way we do business. I hope you will be too.

Yours sincerely,

*Chuck Fernandez*

Chuck Fernandez



Keeping our Community SAFE

In July, the staff at COTS were thrilled to have a new community resource at their fingertips: the new team at SAFE (Specialized Assistance for Everyone). SAFE provides crisis response services in lieu of police presence, modeled on the successful CAHOOTS program in Oregon. If someone is having a mental health crisis or substance abuse issues in Petaluma, rather than having to call 911, community members can call the SAFE team directly. This helps reduce demands on police time for non-emergency situations and allows trained SAFE team members to aid with mediation, de-escalation, and referrals or transportation to service providers like COTS who are trained to support people in crisis.

In Petaluma, if you see someone in need of services but who is not an immediate threat to themselves or others, you can call SAFE at the number below:

**707.781.1234**

The best part is, if you’re unsure, it’s still fine to dial 911. If the SAFE team is the right response, the PPD will make that assessment and alert SAFE.

COTS staff are already seeing the benefits of this service. Recently, Diana and Jesse Morales, COTS’ Engagement Specialist and Site Coordinator (who happen to be a married couple), were driving through Petaluma when they noticed a former client in distress. They were discussing how best to help her when Diana noticed the SAFE vehicle parked nearby. Diana made a U-Turn, parked behind the SAFE vehicle, and explained who they were, where they worked, and described the situation they had witnessed. The SAFE team immediately said they would see if they could help and left to investigate.

Says Jules Pelican, Director of Programs, “The addition of the SAFE team is a true game changer for us at COTS! Their presence enables us to better serve those in our homeless community who are struggling with mental health issues. SAFE team members are professional, responsive, and have already proven to be invaluable partners as we work to serve those with mental health needs in Petaluma.”





John sitting down in the shared Permanent Supportive Housing kitchen with fellow PSH residents, Diane and Roger.



## taking a breath: john’s story

“I’ve been sick for about a year,” John Fallon said, struggling to take a deep breath through his face mask. “Advanced COPD, from smoking, more than likely. It’s terminal.”

In June, his breathing got so bad he finally went to the hospital, where he stayed for five days. “They offered to send me to an assisted care facility, and I thought I was going to lose my free agency, so I turned it down,” he said. After arriving home, he realized he’d made a mistake, but by that point, it was too late; the window to get into assisted living had closed.

At the time, he was living in a trailer on his sister’s boyfriend’s property, which had fallen into severe disrepair. “It was pretty much uninhabitable,” said Julia Dodge. “I struggle to call it housed.” The water heater, stove, and refrigerator had all broken, his truck had stopped running, and he had no way to access the bus or get food for himself. “At points I was going without bathing for four, five months,” John said. “I don’t know when the last time I’d laundered my clothing was.

The only time I’d leave was to go to the grocery store, and then it got so bad towards the end that I couldn’t even do that. It was miserable, it was human misery.”

“If COTS wasn’t here, I don’t know what I would be doing....I feel like I was plucked out of the middle of the ocean.”

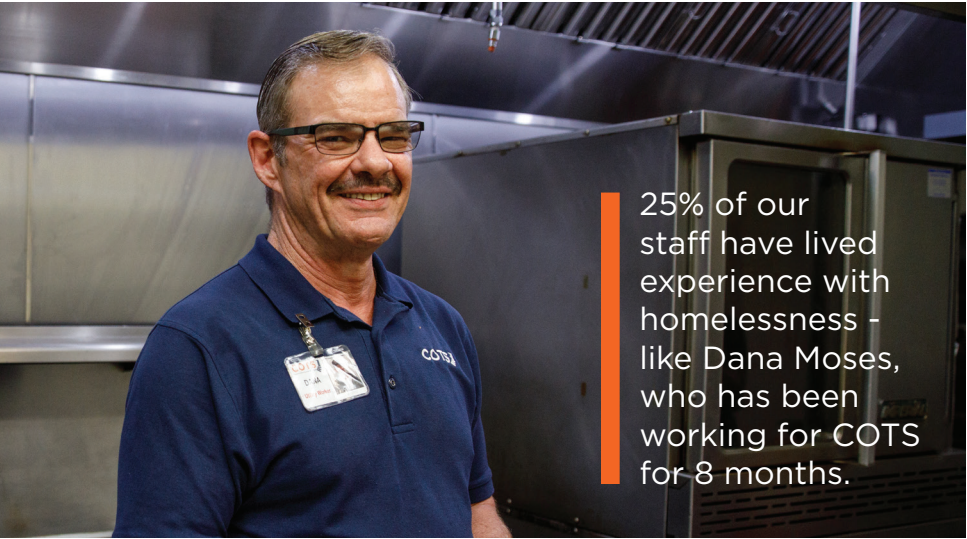
Since he could no longer get into assisted living, his only other option was COTS’ Recuperative Care, where he stayed for six weeks. Then, as luck would have it, a unit opened up in the Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) on the second floor. “I can’t explain it, I just feel like I’m so lucky,” he said. “I don’t know who to attribute it to other than Jules [his former Case Manager at the Mary Isaak Center] and Julia, I just can’t believe it.”

“When he got out of the hospital he would have had nowhere to go and been able to have his oxygen concentrator, which he needed

to live,” said Julia, who is now his Case Manager in PSH. “For homeless individuals, the options are limited already, but when you have medical equipment like that, it’s like, what do you do?”

For John, who’s been dealing with chronic homelessness for a long time, staying at COTS has been a literal lifesaver. “Nutritionally it’s great, the sleep, the stability it affords, the mental [health component], it’s incredible,” he said. He’s also meeting with LMFT Karyn Duffy, a therapist who works with many of COTS’ programs. “She gave me some really good practical advice I can chew on, it’s really helpful.

“If COTS wasn’t here, I don’t know what I would be doing. I came from a point where everything looked really bad, hopeless, and now it doesn’t feel like that at all. It even is getting comfortable. You burn every bridge you got, and then somebody just out of the blue shows you a lifeline, what do you say to that, I mean what can you say to that? I feel like I was plucked out of the middle of the ocean.”



25% of our staff have lived experience with homelessness - like Dana Moses, who has been working for COTS for 8 months.

## getting motivated: dana’s story

“It’s pretty self-explanatory,” Dana Moses said. “I was homeless and now I help the homeless.” Then he laughed. “Nah, there’s a little more to it than that.”

At the beginning of 2020, Dana had his own painting business, and had been living in Cloverdale for 10 years. Then Covid hit. “I lost my place, I lost all my business,” he said. “I started living on the river, under a bridge.” He’d struggled with addiction before, and after becoming homeless, began using again.

Ironically, it was the fires that saved him. “They had an evacuation shelter at the fairgrounds, and I went there,” he says. “Someone with COTS was doing interviews in case people had nowhere to go. I did one, and they brought me over to COTS.” Dana got right in. “I was lucky,” he said.

That was August 26th, just over a year ago. A week or so later, Shelter Services Manager Robin Phoenix was looking for volunteers

to clean up a campsite that had been abandoned, and he agreed to help out. “By doing that I think I showed Robin a little something,” he said. “That’s how I got steered into the Downtown Streets Team. Getting motivated with that opened up a whole bunch of other new doors. That was the pivotal turning point for me, that got me out of bed every morning, that made me believe in myself.”

Downtown Streets Team is a partner nonprofit that provides work experience to homeless individuals through street cleaning and creek restoration - offering leadership opportunities and housing/employment resources at the same time. It was the Downtown Streets Team that helped him get sober. “When I first started, I was smoking weed five minutes before I got there.” Then they promoted him from a yellow shirt to a green shirt, a position of leadership that meant he would lead a Team of his own. “I started thinking, well God, I have leadership now; how are these people supposed to respect me

and follow me if I’m high while I’m doing it?” He decided to get clean. From there, more doors began to open. His Case Manager, Christina Madden, referred him to a Sober Living Environment (SLE) in Petaluma. “It just so happens that that day, I had thirty days [of sobriety], and the SLE required 30 days clean. It’s weird, it’s just how everything fell into place.”

His new living situation meant he passed the Mary Isaak Center walking home from his mornings with the Downtown Streets Team, and soon he began volunteering at Mary’s Table. Then a position opened for a Kitchen Utility Worker, and a COTS Site Coordinator encouraged him to apply. A month later, he was employed full-time.

Now, he has a second job at Preferred Sonoma Caterers (a connection he made while working in the kitchen), his driver’s license, and a car (thanks to a generous donor), and is still stably housed in the same SLE he moved into last October.

“I’m very proud of what I’ve done, and I carry it with me,” he said. “I showed up a severe addict, and now I’ll have a year sober October 1st, God willing. I was a different person, and I’m starting to learn how giving back is just as rewarding.

**“I owe most all of it to COTS, and [COTS staff] Robin, Christina, Janin, Max, and Chris all taking the time and effort to steer me in the right direction. I did the work, but they took the time to show me how to do it.”**





Recuperative Care Specialists Wendy Weber (left) and Angeles Cruz (right) in front of the Mary Isaak Center in Petaluma.

## healing powers: cots recuperative care program

When Supportive Programs Case Manager Julia Dodge first opened the Recuperative Care program in January of 2020, things looked quite a bit different than they do today. “It was pretty quiet in the beginning there,” she said. “Crickets! It took a while for the word to get around for the social workers at the hospitals that this was available.”

Recuperative Care is a program that offers a healing environment to hospital patients who are ready to exit from the hospital but who do not have a home in which to heal. It was launched as a partnership between COTS, Kaiser Permanente, and St. Joseph Health. But less than two months

after opening, COVID-19 hit, and the program had to reduce its capacity from six beds down to three.

Over a year later, they’re up to four beds, and with Julia now supervising two new staff members, the unit is bustling. “It really is busy in there,” said Wendy Weber, one of two new Recuperative Care Specialists, who joined the team in June.

Angeles, who joined the team in August, added, “Three or four patients with three staff members might not seem like a lot, but there’s always something going on.”

More team members means the unit can be staffed six days a week and be open for longer hours. “With the staggered staffing we’ve got coverage from 8am to 10pm most days,” says Wendy. “Saturday’s basically the only day we don’t have the unit staffed.”

The longer hours are great, Julia says, “not only so that we can provide case management and connect with the clients, but also because it opens up the window that hospitals can send referrals and have intakes come in. It’s beneficial for everybody.”

Through it all, Julia and her team continue to provide excellent care for their clients. “Our case

management is really intensive,” she says. “Each person is so unique, with their own set of health conditions, so we’re constantly adapting. Recuperative Care evolves based on their needs, and we try to accommodate everybody.”

Clients stay in the unit anywhere from two weeks to about two months, though they can stay longer depending upon their need. “Our goal is to keep them out of the hospital,” says Wendy, “so if it would benefit them to stay longer, that’s what we do.”

Since July 2020, Recuperative Care has served 25 people, and has been running at full capacity for most of that time.

“There’s something about Recuperative Care that has amazing healing powers,” says Julia. “I’ve seen people come in from the hospital and they’re in pain, they’re scared, they’re confused – I take their picture when they first come in and I look at their picture a month later and they just look so different. They feel relaxed and peaceful, their color comes back, and their physical abilities are stronger. It really does have magical transformative properties. And it has a lot to do now with the staff.”

“I’m really proud of Recuperative Care,” she adds, “and I can’t wait for us to open up more beds so we can keep helping people.”

With the program now open and thriving, we are excited to offer care to even more of our community members. If you

“There’s something about Recuperative Care that has amazing healing powers....And it has a lot to do now with the staff.”

When County guidelines allow, Recuperative Care will open up to six beds again; for now, the team is doing everything they can to keep our clients safe: masks are required in the unit at all times except when sleeping, and there’s lots of cleaning and disinfecting, along with as much social distancing as possible.

know someone experiencing homelessness who is discharging or has been recently discharged from Kaiser, Petaluma Valley or Memorial Hospitals, please direct them to Recuperative Care at (707) 789-6389.



Supportive Programs Case Manager Julia Dodge (center) with Shelter Services Manager Robin Phoenix (right) and CEO Chuck Fernandez (left) in Recuperative Care.

### THANK YOU TO OUR 2021 BUSINESS PARTNERS!







## climate action at cots

### Environmental stewardship has always been a part of COTS' culture.

The Mary Isaak Center shelter was built in 2004, with solar panels installed prior to opening and more added in 2007. But in the last year, we have accelerated projects that prioritize water and energy conservation and our longterm sustainability.

On June 10, COTS CEO Chuck Fernandez spoke with Petaluma's Climate Action Commission to report on some of our most recent initiatives. Starting in 2020-21, **COTS replaced all lighting in Mary Isaak Center with LED lights.** These are more energy efficient and incur lower costs than conventional incandescent lights. A grant from Sonoma County is allowing us to install new LED lights in the parking lot, as well. And to conserve water, we installed touch-less water faucets in all our bathrooms – keeping surfaces cleaner and saving up to 30% of water versus traditional faucets. We also switched to low-flow shower heads in all our showers. In addition, we are purchasing new Energy Star Certified washers and dryers for

COTS' laundry facilities, cutting both energy and water usage at the shelter.

At Mary's Table, our kitchen now also uses low-flow faucets and a sanitizer/steamer to clean dishes, which heats to 180 degrees and kills 99% of bacteria. It uses up to 75% less water than a conventional dishwasher. **Together, these changes have allowed us to reduce our water consumption by 41% since 2019** – essential in years of drought like this one.

Our kitchen staff are partnering with local company Protein Products, LLC, to **compost our kitchen scraps** into animal feed for local farms, returning nutrients to our ecosystem and reducing COTS' monthly Recology bill along the way. This kind of partnership is vital as we look for new ways to reduce our impact on our Petaluma ecosystem.

Beyond our doors, COTS is also finding ways to protect our environment. In our Integrity Housing program, in which local

homes are owned or leased by COTS and rented to clients, we are in the process of switching from gas-powered lawn care equipment to battery-powered leaf blowers and mowers. And last year, COTS purchased a used truck for our Street Outreach workers that allows them to remove shopping carts or other debris from our waterways as staff walk through encampments to engage with Petaluma's unsheltered.

Longterm, we are exploring creative ways to increase our community's housing and shelter options which will reduce the impact of unhoused individuals on our ecosystem. **We are currently working with the City of Petaluma to add up to 25 tiny homes to the Mary Isaak Center campus** that will offer a shelter alternative and provide access to sanitation and services to those experiencing homelessness who might be service-resistant or unwilling to enter a dormitory setting.

Ultimately, **our goal is to maximize opportunities for all residents to live in clean and healthy environments that protect against environmental pollutants** and the impacts of climate change.

## kindness, in kind

*Serving the unhoused in Sonoma County requires everyone's help – and our community is always ready to lend a hand! Thank you to the in-kind donors below who provided everything from eyeglasses to ice cream to support COTS' clients as they transition from homelessness to a permanent home. Thank you also to the many anonymous donors not listed whose gifts support our work. We could not serve our community without you.*



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Michael Adayan, Jr., Melanie  
Martinez-Adayan and Family  
Said Adelekan  
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# switching gears with brad sunshine

Brad Sunshine has been a COTS volunteer for years, now. He started out driving the food collection truck for Mary's Table – then, the Petaluma Kitchen – on Monday mornings. The experience allowed him to work each week with a different client and see firsthand how a minor fork in the road could send someone's life into an uncontrollable spiral. "These were just normal average everyday people, and something went wrong that they weren't able to get back on top of for whatever reason. We're all a lot closer to that point than we probably realize," Brad says.

Over the years, Brad also became involved as a volunteer at LandPaths and in the Petaluma Wheelmen Cycling Club. He describes himself as an "avid bicyclist" and a "hands on gearhead guy." One day while volunteering in the kitchen, he saw some beat up bikes at the Mary Isaak Center and offered to fix them up. Over the last couple of years, he's worked on five or six different bikes for our clients at the Mary Isaak Center. Usually he

finds he only needs to pump up the tires, oil the chain, and give them a good washing. If the parts are bad, he'll replace them – often with help from Petaluma's cycling community. Mike's Bikes on Petaluma Boulevard will often give him a discounted price on parts (or even free) when he fixes up bikes for COTS. And last year, Brad worked on a bike with a broken coaster brake. He went to Cycle Chvrch in Petaluma, where the owner happened to have the exact mechanism and gave it to Brad for free.

During early COVID, Brad kept helping with our client's bikes and simply switched gears: when he retrieved bikes from the Mary Isaak Center, he wore gloves and then gave the bikes a thorough washing with an alcohol solution to eliminate lingering germs. While he describes these steps as simply "general precautions," our clients and staff are grateful to Brad for taking the trouble when it might have been easier to stay home and pull back from taking on new repairs.



Brad is happy to help our clients get around, especially knowing so many of those experiencing homelessness rely on their bikes to get to and from job interviews, doctor's appointments, and anywhere else they need to go in a community without many public transit options. Once, sitting in traffic on Lakeville Highway, he even looked out the window of his car and saw someone riding one of the bikes he had worked on. "I rolled down my window and yelled, 'Hey, I just fixed that bike!'" Brad laughs. Thank you, Brad, for keeping our clients on the road no matter the obstacle!



## farm to pantry partnership

COTS is thrilled to announce that we will be partnering with Farm to Pantry, a local nonprofit that harvests surplus food from farms and gardens and delivers fresh produce to local organizations who serve our community.

"Joy arrived in a small van and when she opened the back it was full of boxes of fresh produce," says Diana Morales, Engagement Specialist, who was present for the first drop-off in August. Joy also met Vincent Ajayi of Protein Products, LLC, who partners with COTS for food compost. "Jack and Max got to pick out what they wanted which was purple bell peppers, snake cucumbers, different varieties of tomatoes, lettuces."

Farm to Pantry will be bringing free produce to Mary's Table every Tuesday, and we are so grateful for their help in serving our community.



To support COTS is to invest in a dynamic organization at the forefront of homeless services in Northern California.

I know from experience that our COTS staff, from frontline workers to the Executive Leadership Team, care deeply about our clients – and about ensuring that our programs and services **truly support the unhoused in our community in ways that are adaptive, intentional, and rooted in best practice.**

Recently, the Redwood Empire Foodbank Leadership Team toured Mary's Table, and we were thrilled with the praise our kitchen team received. Robin Phoenix, Shelter Services Manager, proudly emailed the entire staff with the news that the REB team noted we were the "gold standard" of organizations they partner with. That compliment put a smile on everyone's face that day, and we are determined to match that success in every one of our programs.

This year that has meant reassessing our community's need and reimagining how COTS can better serve the unsheltered among us. **From revising our Strategic Plan in 2020 to partnering with the City of Petaluma to offer new options for shelter and housing in 2022,** we are so excited for the future of homeless services at COTS.

Thank you for sustaining COTS and our work for more than thirty years of service, commitment, and innovation. Together, we can achieve a future where everyone has a place to call home.



Sincerely,  
*Jamieson Bunn*  
Jamieson Bunn  
Director of Development



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OR CHECK**



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