



MEDIA RELEASE

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Media Contact: Jamieson Bunn
COTS - Chief Development & Communications Officer
Email: jbunn@cots.org Telephone: (C) 646-705-4676

Petaluma, CA – Committee on the Shelterless (COTS) in Petaluma today announced the forthcoming retirement of Chief Executive Officer, Chuck Fernandez, effective April 2023. Fernandez has served in his current role at COTS since October of 2018. An executive search firm has been engaged to work with the COTS Board of Directors to lead a nationwide search for his replacement.

Board President Bill Gabbert says, "On behalf of the Board, I am tremendously grateful for Chuck's leadership over the last several years and so proud to have served alongside him. Thanks to his vision, COTS has strengthened our relationships with partner agencies, broadened our funding sources, and put our clients first every step of the way. Chuck possesses a mindset that is infectious and inspires everyone from Board members to frontline staff. By announcing his retirement well in advance of his departure, Chuck provides us the opportunity to take the necessary time to find a new CEO and to assure a smooth transition."

Since joining COTS as CEO in 2018, Fernandez has helped establish COTS as a regional leader in homeless services and has done so by first creating a strong organizational culture and investing in staff, notably encouraging employee training, authorizing higher wages, and increasing benefits for team members across the board. He has also overseen professional development initiatives including Management and Leadership Cohorts designed to build connections between colleagues and create a leadership pipeline at COTS and throughout the human services industry in Sonoma County. Under the leadership of Fernandez, COTS Staff and Board are currently engaged in organization-wide Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging trainings to encourage respect for all throughout our COTS family and ensure equal access for clients to our full range of services.

Most recently, Fernandez has overseen a partnership between COTS and the City of Petaluma to create People's Village, a new project to provide 25 high-quality emergency shelter units to encampment residents who might be resistant to dorm-style shelter living and associated services. People's Village is scheduled to open to clients in February 2022. He also recently hired Ouida Cooper-Rodriguez as COTS' first Chief Housing Officer to strategize innovative housing solutions to better serve clients in the tough Sonoma County housing market.

Fernandez started his career in social services in 2009 with Catholic Charities in Santa Rosa, serving as Homeless Services Manager and then Executive Director. In 2014, he became the CEO for Catholic Charities in Oakland, where he helped grow the agency budget from \$5.5M to \$11M in four years and expand services in Immigration, Refugee Resettlement, Mental Health, and Housing Counseling.

Prior to his social services career, Fernandez worked for several large organizations and held positions such as Manager, Director of Operations, Chief Financial Officer, and Deputy Director. He started his career as a C.P.A. and has a Masters Degree in Business Administration, Information Systems, and Organization Development.

Jamieson Bunn, Chief Development & Communications Officer says, "Chuck has overseen a cultural shift at COTS, strengthening our programs and investing in our staff, helping us all be more effective in our advocacy of those experiencing homelessness. He is unfailing in his belief in the COTS team, and I know so many of us are especially grateful for his example and his belief that every staff member has valuable ideas to contribute to the whole. COTS is so much stronger because of Chuck's dedication and we are excited about implementing many of the innovative projects he has launched."

Following his retirement next year, Fernandez looks forward to spending more time with his wife Denise, his two grown children in New York and Iowa, and his beloved dogs, who will be missed by all COTS' employees on future zoom meetings.

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