



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

Save the date for
**THE
COTS**
HOUR
-AT HOME-

The COTS Hour is
going virtual again!
Look for a link coming
soon.

Tuesday, December 7
Broadcasts on Facebook
and cots.org



**HOLIDAY NEWS
2021**



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A Note From Chuck

Dear COTS Friends and Family,

With the holidays approaching, a new energy is building at COTS. Many of you may know about our People’s Village project, launched this year in partnership with the City of Petaluma. It is an initiative to bring 25 emergency shelter units, similar to a tiny home, to the COTS campus – in the hopes of providing temporary housing for individuals who might be resistant to the typical dorm-style shelter environment.



There are lots of reasons a person experiencing homelessness might not want to come inside to a shelter bed. For some, addiction and mental health issues are the barrier. Others, especially veterans of the US military, ex-prisoners, victims of sexual violence, those who grew up within the foster care system, or people with pets, also may have very personal reasons they don’t trust institutions or cannot comfortably live in a dorm-style congregate shelter.

This has intensified during COVID, when that lack of trust might be exacerbated by fears around viral transmission. Homeless individuals are at higher risk of COVID-19 due to close living quarters and a lack of accessible hygiene options. For some, the perceived risks of shelter outweigh the benefit.

COTS’ Street Outreach program was designed to serve these individuals through engagement and relationship building, with a goal of getting people into shelter or housing when the time is right. Now, thanks to investments from the City of Petaluma, we will have an even better option for those who can’t or won’t come into our dorm – offering access to clean water and sanitation, nutritious meals, case management, mental and physical health services, employment resources, and so much more.

Everyone is busy working in hopes of opening our doors to new clients before the winter rains make encampment life unlivable. It’s our way of getting into the holiday spirit – honoring a time of year when we turn our thoughts outward, celebrating all that is best in our community, and giving thanks for all that we have.

I am thrilled to be able to share more about this project in our Holiday newsletter. We are so grateful for your partnership in bringing this project to life.

Yours sincerely,

Chuck Fernandez

Chuck Fernandez, CEO



People’s Village: An Introduction

Below are some quick details about our People’s Village project. Do you have additional questions not answered here? Visit our website to learn more at <https://cots.org/interim-housing-faq>.

What is it?

25 Emergency Shelter Units at the Mary Isaak Center in Petaluma for people experiencing homelessness. This is an interim solution to living on the streets with the goal of then getting residents into permanent supportive housing.

Who will it serve?

The 2020 Point in Time Count estimated 133 unsheltered individuals in Petaluma and 427 unsheltered in south Sonoma County (Cotati, Rohnert Park, Petaluma). This project is designed to serve those living in encampments who are resistant to dorm-style living but who still need the services and case management that COTS can provide.

When Does The Program Launch?

We aim to open the units to new residents in December 2021 or Early 2022.

Services Provided

- Outreach & Engagement
- Intake, Assessment & Goal Planning

- Meals
- Case Management
- Transportation
- Behavioral health treatment
- Client Enrichment – housing search, credit repair, resume preparation, mock interviews, job search; technology assistance,
- Life Skills & Recovery support
- Social Supports/Mental Health
- PHC on-site clinic
- Legal Aid & Job Link Referrals
- Disability management
- Substance use treatment
- Expungement
- Referral to other services

What input was gathered from potential residents?

In summer 2021, COTS surveyed incoming shelter applicants and encampment residents around Petaluma. We received 47 responses, and gauged interest in a range of solutions, from tiny homes to permanent supportive housing. About a third were open to a tiny home option and case management. COTS will continue to pursue additional options recommended by our unhoused neighbors as we are able.



Shelter Unit Details

QuickHaven is a company based in Rohnert Park founded specifically to address the Bay Area homelessness crisis. Their emergency shelters are built with metal framing, locking doors, operable windows, and standard residential insulation to provide safety and comfort to residents. **They offer long-term durability and can be built by three people in less than an hour with standard tools.** This reduces maintenance costs over time and allows for future site adjustments should COTS and City staff wish to add units to the existing site or move them to a new location down the road. **QuickHaven also makes a point of hiring staff with lived experience of homelessness** as part of their commitment to our community, and **we hope that we will be able to connect COTS clients with employment opportunities at QuickHaven** when appropriate throughout our partnership.





Lead Outreach Specialist
Randy Clay

A Matter of Trust: Randy Clay

The QuickHaven shelter units being built for the People's Village project at COTS can be built in an hour apiece, using only a wrench and a few strong hands. But there is more to the People's Village project than an "if you build it, they will come" mentality.

Randy Clay, COTS' Lead Outreach Specialist, is clear-eyed about the difficulties we may confront in serving clients coming in from the encampments. He points to trust as the main ingredient that will make or break the site plan over time.

“So often, we look for instant gratification, but that’s not how this works.”

“Some people think that building rapport with someone is about being their friend, but that’s not it,” Randy says. “It’s about getting to know them, so that when you

need to take action, you can.” Action can mean getting someone into treatment – or motivating them when they need an extra push. For Randy, it’s all about trust. Trust from his clients, that he will be there for them no matter what, even visiting them in detox two or three times a week to check on their progress. And trust from service providers that, through his solid relationships with clients, he can help encourage them in their recovery when no one else can.

“People have to make the choice as to when they’re ready to change,” he says.

In addition, **Randy says clients’ success will hinge on the services offered to new residents through People’s Village.** For mental health and case management for these vulnerable clients, COTS plans to partner with Sonoma County IMDT (Interdepartmental Multidisciplinary Team). The name itself doesn’t tell you much – but think of these trained professionals as a kind of Mental

Health Justice League. Each member of an IMDT Cohort brings a unique specialty, be it mental health, substance abuse treatment, housing navigation, clinical case management, social work, probation officers helping people complete their probation, and more. This allows the IMDT Cohorts working with COTS to address a range of issues any individual client might be facing.

We believe that by partnering with subject matter experts, our community can elevate the care Village residents will receive, making their success more likely over time.

Randy also says we’ll also need to watch out for the lack of trust among new residents with each other. While in their camps, they develop a sense of community; residents choose their own leaders and enforce their own rules. In a new emergency shelter site, strangers will be coming together without an initial sense of trust and community, making conflict between residents more likely.

Randy agrees that creating a sense of empowerment among the new residents will be key to the site’s success overall. When engaging with clients about a problem, he always asks, “What do you think we can do about this?” **Allowing homeless individuals to come up with their own solutions fosters a sense of responsibility and achievement that ultimately make it more likely they will overcome their barriers to housing.**

Still, Randy acknowledges that 25 individual units on the Mary Isaak Center campus will not solve the problem alone. Eventually,

he would like to see more units at a separate, neutral location, with funding for onsite resources and security so that residents can finally let down their guard. “People on the street sleep with one eye open,” he says. “That’s why they continue to use, because if they’re high, they don’t have to see [the danger]. The drugs give them courage.” He believes that **only a fundamental sense of safety will allow homeless individuals to treat their addictions.**

He also points to states like Rhode Island, where vacant warehouses have been turned into housing

for veterans. He would like to see projects like that here at home, where empty hatcheries and industrial buildings from Petaluma’s past dot the river and highways.

Most of all, Randy counsels patience with the People’s Village – and with the residents themselves. He knows from experience not to expect miraculous transformations overnight. “If there’s an increase in the timespan between setbacks,” he says, “that’s progress. So often, we look for instant gratification, but that’s not how this works.”

Mental Health Supports at People’s Village

Three specialized IMDT (Interdepartmental Multidisciplinary Team) Cohorts could aid COTS’ clients in the new shelter units. These three Cohorts have unique specialties, and our hope is that each team will be connecting with their assigned clients on a regular basis to ensure engagement and progress through their stay at COTS. The Cohorts include:

High Needs Homeless – The High Needs Homeless cohort focuses on intensive engagement with homeless individuals who have chronic and persistent mental health needs, chronic medical issues, substance use disorders, high utilizers of emergency medical services, frequent crisis mental health services, and criminal justice problems. Services

aim to stabilize individuals linking them to resources and housing, addressing mental health and medical needs, and reducing utilization of emergency medical, acute psychiatric, and criminal justice systems.

Emergency Department High Utilizers – These individuals have existing physical or mental health issues who do not have regular access to medical care. The cost of going to the emergency room is much higher than managing a condition and preventing an emergency. Utilizing health care in only emergency situations leads to poorer health outcomes. Additionally, costs are passed on to the health care system. IMDT members provide integrated care management, and connect them with clinics and primary care

providers for health outcomes that are both better for the individual and lower cost to the community.

Mental Health Diversion – The Health Diversion cohort is a criminal justice diversion program that focuses on mentally ill offenders. Individuals are provided services including case management, individual and group counseling, housing navigation, substance use screening, medication monitoring, and assistance accessing benefits. Throughout their two-year court approved program, participants return to Diversion court each month for reviews of their progress in treatment. Successful individuals may have legal charges dismissed upon completion.



QuickHaven staff Tim, Joel, Sam, Steve, and Dan stand in front of the emergency shelter unit during a demonstration at the Mary Isaak Center

QuickHaven: The Mission Behind the Model

Walking near the Highway 101 bridge near the E. Washington exit into Petaluma, Former COTS Outreach Specialist Jeff Schueller is glad to see that the people who had been living there seem to have moved on. Debris from their time under the bridge, however, still litters the site behind the Ross Dress for Less in Petaluma.

He says that, for those living under bridges and by rivers elsewhere, when the winter rains come, the water will drench their belongings, destroying any sense of stability they have built and making clean-up even more difficult. He says the people will escape, but not their possessions.

Homeless individuals often have to restart their lives from scratch. Whether because of rains, encampment clearings, theft, fire, or another setback, homelessness requires vigilance and resilience to survive. **The People’s Village emergency shelter units, designed by Rohnert Park-based company QuickHaven, provide an alternative to tent-living that are designed to help make the transition into permanent housing, and a true sense of stability, easier for those used to living on the streets.**

COTS staff interviewed the team at QuickHaven to learn more about their philosophy and the mission behind the model.



QuickHaven CEO Dan Bodner

What did you do before launching QuickHaven?

I was running (and am still the CEO of) the IT support firm, Fido Systems.

How did you become aware of the need for emergency shelter? Was there anything particular you saw that drove you to start this work? Living in Oakland and commuting to San Francisco, I experienced a

daily journey through suffering; tent encampments in Oakland, people sleeping on the floor of the Embarcadero Station concourse. It got me thinking about why we are not doing anything effective as a community. I started developing my own ideas about housing options, combed through data to find what could be immediately impactful which led to emergency transitional shelters, and slowly

developed the concept and vision of QuickHaven.

What lead you to take action in this particular way?

I’ve always been driven to make things and express my creative energies. As I’ve gotten older, I’ve become more and more dedicated to directing these energies to community minded projects that help others. As I developed the Quickhaven concept, I came to a point when I had to make a decision about dedicating my efforts in a serious way to forming a company and really pushing forward with it. It took me a year to make that decision, and I’m so glad I did. Now I feel like I’m living

my best life.

How long did it take you to create a unit you were satisfied with? It was a 4 year process from the germination of the idea to getting into production.

“We want our shelters to provide a dignified space for the occupants, as well as to be an amenity for the community.”

Why is it important to you that the units are attractive, as well as durable? Ours is a whole community vision. **We want our shelters to provide a dignified space**

for the occupants, as well as to be an amenity for the community, something that would be aesthetically appealing to neighbors. We are going for a miniature townhome type look.

What’s your hope for QuickHaven’s future?

The goal is to scale our production to be able to begin to address the enormous needs in communities throughout the country for solutions like ours.

Tim Craig, QuickHaven Architect

How has the design of the shelter unit evolved over time?

This initial concept was quite simple, but too simple to actually work. I worked on taking the initial concept, developing it and refining it to meet the California Building Code requirement for size, accessibility and amenities. We built the first prototype and discovered that the initial concept required too much labor to make it efficiently and at a reasonable cost. Several additional sets of drawings were prepared for Prototype 2 but they never left the drawing board for a number of reasons. We further refined the drawings and finally produced Prototype 3 which was presented to the City of Petaluma. The City had additional items that they wanted included in the Shelter and additional minor revisions

to the design have been made and we are now assembling the Production model of the Q70 QuickHaven Shelter.

What benefits do you see to this unit?

We were intentional about building it for comfort and security like a home. Our hypothesis was that by doing so **it increases the chances of transitioning to permanent housing while providing dignity at the same time.**

What realities did you take into account when designing the unit?

- 1. California Building Code compliance
- 2. Comfort and security of the future occupants
- 3. Aesthetic appeal for both occupants and the community where the shelters will be located



4. The reality that these are for temporary use and may be relocated from site to site as need arises.

How long are these units made to last?

The roof and wall panels have a material life of at least 30 years. Depending on the number of redeployments and tenants, **we anticipate these shelters can last for over 20 Years.**



Steve Rangoussis, Director of Customer Success

How did you get involved with QuickHaven?
My connection with QuickHaven was serendipitous. I'm a sales management consultant transitioning away from VC backed San Francisco based startups to local North Bay

I sincerely believe that between hiring from the homeless population, to providing shelters that are built like homes, QuickHaven creates a pathway to ending homelessness in our community.

companies with social impact missions. I had just read an article regarding the unsheltered when upon investigating viable clients in the area, I stumbled across QuickHaven. I reached out to the Founders who were gracious enough to meet with me, and once I saw the quality of the shelter and their willingness to hire from the homeless population and pay a living wage, I was all in!

How do you see the company making an impact in our community?
As a long time Petaluma resident and someone who loves Sonoma County more generally, **emergency transitional shelters provide a more cost effective and expeditious option to ease the suffering of**

the unhoused while improving the safety and overall image of the community. QuickHaven shelters are unique among emergency transitional shelters because they are the only shelters that are built with similar insulation as our Sonoma County homes which provide dignity, security, and comfort. In short, I sincerely believe that between hiring from the homeless population, to providing shelters that are built like homes, **QuickHaven creates a pathway to ending homelessness in our community.**

COTS: What's something you wish more people knew about the company, the units, or the team you work with?
My mind has been opened based on my interactions with two of our production employees (Sam and Joel) who were homeless when we hired them. They are a couple of the most creative, engaged, and hard-working individuals I've worked with in my career. As a result, any preconceived notions I had have been dispelled and gained a greater appreciation for the suffering of unsheltered individuals who are just like many of us but through circumstance and lack of a support network, hit rock bottom.

Quick Facts

- Each unit is 8.5' by 8.5' with a peaked loft that allows for a raised bed where appropriate; the bed can also be positioned at ground level as needed



- The units are designed to be attractive, offering comfort for residents and increasing the likelihood of acceptance by neighbors



- QuickHaven is committed to hiring staff with lived experience of homelessness, and paying a living wage



Case Manager Angeles Cruz

While most of this issue focuses on programs designed for chronically homeless adults, across COTS' programs, staff are noticing an increase in the complexity of all our clients' challenges. While those living in Sonoma County's encampments are often the most visible, even residents of our family shelter are dealing with unprecedented barriers to housing.

Jean, Marie, and their two sons, lived at the Kids First Family Shelter earlier this year. Jean was a science teacher in Haiti and his wife Marie was a nurse. But Jean was part of a group of teachers advocating for better pay – and in response to his activism, he received death threats. He left Haiti in 2018 for Mexico, where he lived for three years until his family could join him. Then Jean, Marie and their children decided to try their luck in the United States where Marie had family, in the hope of finding better opportunities.

After a stay in Atlanta, the family landed in Rohnert Park. There, they lived in the living room of their pastor's house with several other families – their small, allotted space kept private by a curtain. When they could, they moved into the family shelter at Catholic Charities and stayed for around a year before coming to COTS.

Case Manager Angeles Cruz has

Pivoting and Paperwork: A Case Management Story

worked with many families in her time at the Kids First Family Shelter. With Jean and Marie, the first barrier to overcome was linguistic – Marie speaks French and Haitian Creole, while Jean speaks French, Haitian Creole, and some Spanish. While the children spoke some English and could translate for their parents in a pinch, Angeles mostly relied on Spanish to communicate with Jean, and through him, the family.

Once Angeles could communicate with the family, she was able to understand their next challenge: Jean had applied for political asylum in 2020, and when he crossed the border into the U.S., his passport was seized. He had fled Haiti without his birth certificate, and during his time in America, his passport expired.

KFFS was a safe place for my kids to feel comfortable....Thanks to COTS I have a better chance at starting a new life here.
- Jean, Kids First Family Shelter Client

Now he was stuck in California with only copies of his expired IDs – making it difficult to obtain a temporary state ID to begin the process of applying for a legal work permit, a driver's license, health insurance, or an apartment. Yet Haiti was no more safe for him or his family than when he'd fled three years prior.

The process to obtain political asylum is neither easy nor quick – Jean and Marie will likely not have a hearing until 2023. Until then, Angeles was able to drive them to meetings with a lawyer that helped them apply for Temporary Protected Status, which allows nationals from twelve countries (including Haiti) the

legal right to stay and work in the United States for a short time. Jean and Marie will likely hear whether their application has been approved within a few months, but until then, they remain in limbo.

Still, Angeles continued to work with the family to find a rental unit after almost six months at KFFS. The best option they could find in their price range was a garage with bathroom and kitchen access. Before they left KFFS, Angeles made sure that they had an air purifier for fire season and a heater for winter, and she continues to check in on the family several times a week. Angeles also says that while the unit may not be ideal, it is a win for them to have a place to call their own.

Through their stay at COTS, Angeles and her coworker at KFFS, Wendy Lindberg, helped the family with everything from the immigration process, the health insurance market, low-income housing applications, finding work and transportation, budgeting and financial literacy, and even personally driving their children to school.

And the most amazing thing is, this is only a partial list. The work of a Case Manager is never-ending, and while many of us have had to pivot during the pandemic, COTS frontline staff have become experts in the field: constantly flexible, resilient, and never losing hope.

Family Values: Mike and Theresa Haire

Mike and Theresa Haire have been a part of the COTS family for nearly three decades. When Mary Isaak and Laure Reichel first started bringing people in from the cold, the Knights of Columbus organization of St. James Church would sometimes provide dinners for those in need at the local fire station. Theresa would cook up a casserole, and when the Knights were short staffed, the Haires would volunteer to serve the nightly meal. And back when COTS' family shelter was hosted in the old convent at St. Vincent's grade school, Mike would occasionally spend a night there with them – eating dinner with the families and serving as a community resource.

“We were both raised in Catholic families,” Theresa says. “Our parents raised us to take care of people.”

Later, after the Mary Isaak Center was built in 2004, the Haires began volunteering in the COTS Kitchen serving line. Mike says, “That was a real eye-opener. The folks were kind, they were so appreciative. And I’m thinking, all I’m doing is ladling food on their plate. But they were so appreciative.”

Theresa adds, “When you work a serving line like that, you meet almost everyone who is spending the night there at COTS. And there’s no grumps! They are just happy to have a meal, to be warm, to have bathroom facilities. And you could tell that a few of them were really down by their behavior when they landed at the Mary Isaak Center...but for the most part, these were just ordinary folks. That really struck me.”

The people the Haires met in the serving line reminded them of their own lean times. During graduate school in Wisconsin, they used the “surplus commodities” offerings for low-income county residents to get groceries: a service they used for

over a year. “It really saved our bacon,” Mike says. “And we remain strong supporters of the Redwood Empire Food Bank because we understand what it means to be food insecure.”



Through the years, their involvement extended to financial contributions. Over the course of his career at Chevron, Mike donated a percentage of his salary to the United Way of the Bay Area. He was eventually able to direct his donations to specific health and human service agencies in Sonoma County to make a greater impact closer to home. And as they were able, they increased their donations to COTS.

“Our expanded support goes hand in hand with the realization that COTS is a very well-run organization that has specific goals and works towards them,” says Mike. “It’s a caring organization, but it’s also a well-directed organization.” Theresa particularly credits COTS’ ability to pivot during COVID and keep the incidence of the disease among our clients to a minimum.

While COVID meant that the Haires had to scale back their volunteering activities at the Mary Isaak Center, they have continued to invest in our programs and services, enabling our staff to continue their work through challenging times. “It is our firm belief that what we have, we need to share,” says Theresa. We at COTS are truly grateful to have partners in our work like the Haires.

Government Funding: Yes, And...

Shelter Services Assistant Manager Chris Inclan holds a poster outlining the Four Agreements, a text that helps clients with Respect, Integrity and Outcomes, three of COTS' core values

Readers of state and national news might be hearing a lot about government funding for homelessness. Here in California, Governor Gavin Newsome has publicly made it a priority and has allocated more than \$1 billion in general funding to help local governments address the issue. President Biden, too, included homelessness and homeless services as part of the 2021 American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), designed to “provide direct relief to Americans, contain COVID-19, and rescue the economy.”

On August 2, 2021, the Petaluma City Council voted to distribute \$1.7 million in federal funding towards “Interim Housing Solutions” to help address chronic homelessness in our community - and the resulting project is COTS' People's Village. COTS is currently also pursuing other government funding opportunities to make the most of the resources available for homeless services. **But while government funding can create a strong foundation for our work, it's not the whole picture...or the whole house.**

Like many Congressional bills, ARPA restricts the use of its funds. Of the entire amount granted, only a limited percentage can be used for operating and administrative costs. **That's where individual donors come in. Your support will make this entire project**

come together: leadership gifts and grassroots support alike ensure that COTS has the resources and the flexibility to adapt our programs and innovate where it is needed most.

What Comes Next?

This newsletter focuses on one solution to an entrenched problem: the 25 emergency shelter units at the Mary Isaak Center campus.

But at COTS, we're always thinking about what comes next. The 25 new units will help decrease unsheltered homelessness in Petaluma by approximately 20%. **To maximize our impact, we are also committed to pursuing other housing alternatives,** like permanent supportive housing units in motels or similar projects that will increase the housing stock for the most vulnerable in our community.

Thankfully, we have the City of Petaluma in our corner. **And funds raised by COTS in the current fiscal year can free up some of that \$1.7 million in federal dollars for the next big project.**

We invite you to join us in this work as COTS expands our services and our reach. **Your investment today will determine how far we can go towards our vision of a community where everyone has a place to call home.**

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



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