



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



Refresh your
COTS
collection!



SUMMER NEWS
2024



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A Note From Chris

Dear COTS Supporters and Friends,

Summer is here, and COTS is busier than ever! We hope each of you are reading this newsletter in good health, and with some excitement for the warm, sunny months ahead.

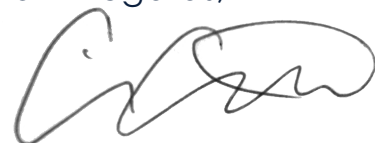
In this edition, COTS highlights the importance of permanent housing solutions, as well as food insecurity in Sonoma County.

COTS has worked tirelessly over the last 18 months to bring 27 new units of permanent supportive housing to our community, increasing the stock of this critical housing to best support those we serve. With a return-to-homelessness rate of less than 5%, COTS envisions a future in Sonoma County with more permanent supportive housing options, decreasing the likelihood of individuals and families returning to homelessness.

Additionally, our community kitchen has increased its food output by more than 50% since 2021. COTS, like other providers in Sonoma County, is seeing an increasing number of households experiencing food insecurity. As the main provider of free, hot daily meals in South Sonoma County, our team provides high-quality, nutritious meals to any household in need any day of the week. We invite you to join us for a hot meal to learn more about Mary's Table, our beloved community kitchen program.

We hope these newsletters serve as a reminder of our collective responsibility to ensure our community provides accessible opportunities for everyone who lives here. Thank you for your ongoing support and partnership—we could not do this important work without you.

Warm regards,



Chris Cabral



What Clients Have to Say About COTS

“ COTS is doing wonderful. [It is] the best place to get better in the homeless community.”

“ I am very happy with the work Scott [a COTS Care Manager] has put in helping me work on an issue that has held me back for 10+ years. I feel that my mental well-being has improved more than I expected before moving into PV [People's Village].”

“ I think the various opportunities offered at COTS are thorough and efficient, particularly [the] Red Tape [Club]. The case workers do a good job. . . . I feel it's a very well-run system and I would highly recommend it to anyone in a situation that requires this assistance.”

Support COTS Today!



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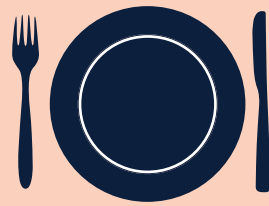
Photography

Lorena Aguilar

In 2023:

**95,889
Meals**

were served at Mary's Table last year
(an increase of 50% over the last two years)



**5000+
Service Hours**

**200+
Volunteers**

8 Volunteers

have served at COTS for OVER 10 YEARS

Comradery in Mary's Kitchen

Jenn P., a Sonoma homeowner for the last 29 years, has worked her way through many of life's struggles. She started working at 16 and by the time she was 19 years old, Jenn had worked her way up the corporate ladder at a fast-food location down in Mill Valley. Even after leaving that location, Jenn's strong work ethic did not diminish as she worked at cafes, delis, and other merchandise stores. At each location, Jenn rose to the top of her field and proudly led her teams to success.

She experienced personal milestones too when she married her husband in 1987 and had their only child in 1991. As her daughter entered her schooling years, Jenn began her career in volunteering as a teacher's assistant and librarian. She was a loving mother figure to every one of her daughter's friends, reminding them to wear their rubber bands for their braces and organizing a carpool.

Her love and caring attitude also extended to everyone she met. Jenn cared for her mother-in-law who had dementia and her mother as she experienced Alzheimer's. Both incredible women passed approximately two years ago.

It was the overwhelming stress and lack of sleep that Jenn says led her to have a drink of alcohol before going out to buy eggs one morning. While she was in this intoxicated state, Jenn rear-ended another car and was sentenced to probation and over 300 hours of community service.

After her first service placement did not work out, Jenn requested that she be reassigned. Her reassignment brought her to the doors of COTS in September of 2023. With over 25 years of kitchen and service experience, Jenn felt right at home volunteering at the Mary Isaak Center. Jenn volunteered multiple days a week and grew to have friendships with other volunteers and COTS staff.

As she finished her mandated hours in February of 2024, her new friends gifted her with a card and flowers, wishing her the best in her next chapter. But after a week off from volunteering, Jenn came back to COTS.

"[Volunteering at COTS has] actually helped me."

While she enjoyed the company of her retired husband, she missed the kitchen's comradery and

being able to help those in her community who need support. Having spent time with the clients during her smoking break, she got to know them.

"a lot of them are really nice people that you know, for some reason or another, they wind up here . . . they're just people who have had problems and they're people just like you and they deserve to have decent food."

Happy to get out of her house and feeling that volunteering at COTS gave her "some sense of purpose because people appreciate what I'm doing." Jenn has continued to volunteer with COTS regularly and is delighted to help new volunteers learn the ways of the kitchen.

As of May 28th, 2024, Jenn has remained 17 months sober and thanks COTS and sweets for helping her maintain her sobriety.



Pictured Above: Kavaliro Volunteers, St. Vincent Student Volunteers, and Jenn P., whose story is on page 5.

Living with Depression: A Second Chance at Home

In 2011, after living in Japan for 21 years as an English Instructor, Kevin, a former COTS client, returned to the United States. Upon his return, Kevin found himself in a tumultuous battle with undiagnosed depression. Over the next few years, his depression consumed him, leading to the loss of everything he had.

Left with nothing but the shirt on his back, Kevin reached a point where he believed the world would be better off without him. Despite several unsuccessful attempts to end his life, he found himself surviving under a bush with nowhere else to turn. Determined to make a final attempt, Kevin decided to walk to a nearby bridge.

During his walk, Kevin recalled hearing about a homeless shelter in Petaluma along his route. On a whim, he decided to visit the shelter, and upon entering COTS, he encountered compassionate individuals who helped him find hope again. Among those who made a significant impact was Debbie Robbins, a COTS Care Manager

and Trainer, whom Kevin considers not just a caseworker but also a friend. He also expressed gratitude towards Emily, who assisted him with housing applications and paperwork, acknowledging their knowledge, patience, and kindness.

Before finding refuge at COTS, Kevin described himself as being at the "absolute bottom" of his life. However, upon moving into the Mary Isaak Center, his circumstances began to change. He spent six months there, before transitioning to a COTS Integrity Housing property in Petaluma. This allowed him to afford rent while working retail jobs, marking the beginning of a new chapter in his life.

During his time at Integrity Housing, Kevin utilized COTS' services and sought help from psychologist Karen Duffy, who assisted him in obtaining an emotional support animal letter. This led him to find Zoe, his dog and loyal companion who provided invaluable support in managing his diagnosed major depression.

Pictured below: Kevin and Zoe



Earlier this year, nearly a year after welcoming Zoe into his life and around his 68th birthday, Kevin received news from Burbank Housing about an available opening that included a section eight voucher. Despite the daunting paperwork, COTS provided unwavering support, guiding him through the process and facilitating his move to Santa Rosa within a month.

Although apprehensive about leaving behind the supportive services of COTS and relocating from Petaluma to Santa Rosa, Kevin now expresses immense happiness. He appreciates his new surroundings, acknowledging the revitalization of the area following a recent fire.

**"I'm alive today,
thanks to COTS"**

Our Mission Changes Lives: So Will Your Bequest

At COTS, we envision a community where everyone has a place to call home. And for more than thirty-five years we have been helping our neighbors transition from homeless to permanent housing with dignity, inclusivity and compassion.

We know that you share our commitment to helping those most in need in our community, which is why we hope you'll consider joining our Legacy Society. A group of supporters, like you, who are committed to COTS' future.

Members of our Legacy Society – whether their gifts are through a will or trust – demonstrate an enduring investment in our mission, ensuring that we will be there to help our neighbors in need for generations to come.



Pictured Above: Members of our Legacy Society at the Annual Legacy Society Luncheon

“ A dollar given to your son or daughter can have an impact, but a dollar given to a program that helps improve your community, consider that. And I don't think it's an either-or. I consider it a great investment in the community in which your family may choose to live.”

-Chris Baker

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