

FEBRUARY 2024 NEWSLETTER



COSPONSORED BY HOMELESS ACTION SONOMA

INVISIBLE NEIGHBORS

MARCH 7 - MARCH 31

OPEN DAILY 8:00 AM - 9:00 PM

CAUSEWAY GALLERY
SONOMA COMMUNITY CENTER
276 E NAPA ST, SONOMA, CA 95476

FREE ADMISSION

Sonoma Community Center Unveils "Invisible Neighbors" Exhibit, cosponsored by HAS, to address homelessness

Featuring the work of local artist and dedicated volunteer, Osias Encarnacion, the exhibit brings to life the stories, faces, and realities of those experiencing homelessness in Sonoma through captivating digital photography and video. Encarnacion's work not only highlights the personal narratives of Sonoma's homeless residents but also emphasizes the importance of understanding and empathy in combating this global social issue.

Alongside HAS, the Center will also host a community forum on Tuesday, March 12th at 6:30 p.m. in Andrews Hall. This event aims to facilitate an open dialogue about the homelessness crisis in Sonoma Valley featuring insights from local non-profits, officials, and community members. Attendees will have the opportunity to learn about ongoing efforts to address homelessness and explore how they can contribute to making a difference.

Exhibit Opening: Free Admission

March 7th 5:00pm-7:30pm
Sonoma Community Center

Community Forum: Free Admission

March 12th 6:30 PM
Andrews Hall, Sonoma Community Center

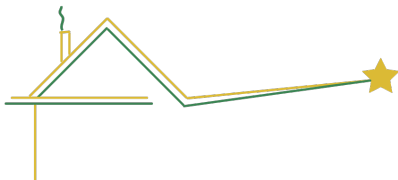
“ I hope my artwork will help dispel many of the misunderstandings that people have of the homeless ”

- OSIAS ENCARNACION, EXHIBIT ARTIST



Volunteer and local artist, Osias Encarnacion hangs a portrait in preparation of his exhibit at the Sonoma Community Center

For more information, visit the Sonoma Community Center Website sonomacommunitycenter.org or hassonoma.org



RESPONDING TO CHANGE ONWARD AND UPWARD

The Board has elected Ted Nordquist, PhD as the organization’s new President. Ted has previously served as the Vice President of HAS, the Chairperson of the Board, Program Director, and the Chair of the Planning and Programs Committee.

James Whittaker will continue to serve as Board Chair, Barry Tanis is Treasurer, Constance Bennett is Secretary, and Petra Longley is Chair of the Marketing and Fundraising Committee. Doug Fryday recently returned to the board, and HAS welcomes Marie Koller, our new Director of Operations.

HOME AND SAFE CENTER IMPROVEMENTS

The entire Village site is involved in a beautification landscape project, an upgrade to the landscaping and community presence, which will come to its completion this week. This Saturday, Petra Longley, clients and volunteers will begin the landscape work, bringing a breath of fresh air into the Village. Simultaneously, spring cleaning and reorganization will upgrade the aesthetics throughout. The newly completed bath/showers and laundry room will enhance functionality of a living village, rounding out the transitional site. Thus far, 35 people have been able to transition to more permanent housing with more leaving soon.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

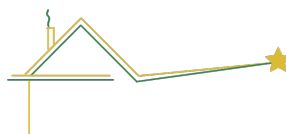
Our regularly scheduled Sunday dinners routinely have 40-50 sheltered and unsheltered community members plus HAS Village clients in attendance. We are thankful for our dinner volunteer groups- to name just a few: Congregation Shir Shalom, Harry Boon, Tina Baba, and The Lighthouse Church.

DONATIONS

Donations are always needed and gratefully accepted. Now that HAS is providing additional services to the homeless community, a few essential supplies are in continuous need - laundry soap and dish detergent, bath towels, paper products of all kinds including paper plates and cups toilet paper and paper towels, men's undergarments and socks, gently worn men's clothes, jackets and pants.

FINANCES

In response to the recent community changes, HAS built bathrooms, showers, and laundry to support our unsheltered community members. And as we continue with the HAS four pillars of **Educate - Integrate - Innovate - Create** - mission-based supportive services, the need for funding has increased. There is a cost to hard work and commitment to those that are in need the most in our Valley. Ongoing financial support has become a critical focus of HAS now more than ever. Please visit our website at www.hassonoma.org to donate. Every dollar that comes in changes the lives of many people.



EXCERPTS FROM A PARTING LETTER FROM PRESIDENT EMERITUS, ANNIE FALANDES.

Dear friends.

Thank you for keeping us going through the important 6 months. It has been a whirlwind with construction, moving in, hiring staff, developing programs and getting people housed. I have worn so many hats and worked so hard to have the dream come true. HAS is an amazing organization with a dedicated team in place. That said, I have resigned. So many reasons but the basic is that I am a creator, not so much a day to day operations person. I have hired Marie Koller as our Director of Operations and she is taking over the management of the Village. She is an amazing hearted person. If you remember she was the first Be-Friend with HAS 6 years ago and managed to house a veteran who had been on the streets 20+ years. She was a true friend who cared for him until he died last year, in his own home, with hospice and family.

Ted Norquist, who was the Vice President of HAS is now stepped into the Presidents position. The Board is revitalized and stepping up to fill in the spaces. They believe in the mission and will see it through.

It is a time for structure and professionalism. I am told this is normal when an organization goes from "grassroots" to a viable industry. I am also tired, want a life, and have gained 40 pounds. So it is my time.

We are on our way to doing good things for the Valley. The County has opened offices in the old Nelson building bringing services to Sonoma Valley. No longer do you have to go to Santa Rosa for Medical, or EBT, and many other County services. There are many other resources they can help with and will save HAS driving clients to Santa Rosa. Win, win.

We are very lucky to have housed so many in the past 6 months. This has led to unexpected costs. We have had to hire a caseworker just to work at Siesta Way to keep the services for those clients going. We have also housed 2 in permanent supportive housing in Petaluma and 5 at the LG Village. They all need continued casework to continue to grow.

We have developed some programs such as mental health care, sound healing sessions, and the Sunday dinners have been enhanced with Jim Silverman adding storytelling following dinner. Great groups have added to the Sunday dinner list. Food, clothing, paper products, laundry detergent, and household good arrive daily which help so much to keep our costs down. We are truly blessed with a generous community.

So although I have resigned my heart is still fully in place and I urge you to continue to support this great adventure. On a sadder note, and another reason for my leaving, is that we are getting approximately 5 newly homeless people a week looking for services. These are people with jobs, families, no jail, drugs, or alcohol. They have just been priced out of living in Sonoma. It takes so little when you are living paycheck to paycheck. One illness, divorce, job loss, trauma and you end up in your car. I will bet in a year these people will have "homeless" issues of jail, drugs, and alcohol abuse. So, I am, maybe, interested in how to stop the evictions. Wouldn't it be cheaper to council and subsidize then have these people become homeless? How about raising minimum wage to a living wage? I heard on public radio that 50% of the American public are housing at risk and 58% live paycheck to paycheck. Wow, that is huge. It is overwhelming and maybe my efforts need to go to looking at that? Just thinking. The common thought is to tell them to move to somewhere cheaper to live. There really is nowhere cheaper to live. These days there are homeless everywhere. It may be cheaper to house but the minimum wage is also cheaper so you can't get ahead. Most of these new clients are born and raised in this Valley. Where do they go? Are they not entitled to have a hometown?...

...I will work through the transition and then am going to a wedding in Brazil for a couple of weeks. Maybe longer. We'll see. I have never been to Brazil so I am open.

Six years ago I started a think tank and now have a viable Village. I want to thank the Board, the staff, the Sonoma Valley community, and the clients for helping me prove that if you treat people like human being they will respond. We are on this earth for a very short time and need to be kind to each other. As times get harder, and it looks like they will, lets remember to be kind.

Annie Falandes

