



Porch Light

TORRES COMMUNITY SHELTER

2009 FALL

HIGHLIGHTS IN THIS ISSUE

The News	1
Executive Director's Message	2
One Family on Their Way	3
The Meaning of Homelessness	4
FESG Funding Update	5
Looking Back	6
Volunteer & Event News	7
Statistics & Wish List	8

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Sheryl McWatters, Chairperson
Diane Slater, Secretary
John Schleh, Treasurer
Mike Deems
Karen Betenbaugh

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Brad Montgomery

TORRES SHELTER

101 Silver Dollar Way, Chico, CA 95928
Office Hours: 12:00 - 5:00 PM
Monday - Friday
Phone: (530) 891-9048
Fax: (530) 891-9084
www.chicoshelter.org

People Helping People News!

We have 130 people on our team roster! We are slowly but surely building our People Helping People team. If enough people donate just \$10 each month eventually we will have enough to cover our monthly operating costs! Thank you PHP team!

NEWS FROM TORRES SHELTER...

Join us for our 7th Annual Christmas Tree Auction and Holiday Festival! This fun and very important fundraising event is coming up in just a few short weeks...Saturday, November 7! See the flyer inside for more details.

Under Construction—We're about to start the remodel that we told you about this past summer. By the time you receive this newsletter the construction work should be in progress! The new family rooms will add much needed space and privacy for our families, and the new conference room has many, many possibilities...a children's play area, space for Guest activities, etc. We want to give a huge thanks to Chico State Construction Management Group and many other volunteers for taking on our project!

Giving Back to the Community! Last month the City of Chico and Butte Environmental Council had their annual Bidwell Park & creek cleanup day. We are happy to report that a number of our Guests participated in the cleanup day and a few even had their picture in the Enterprise Record! A big thanks to our Guests that joined our cleanup team—we are proud of you!

Check out our website! If you haven't had a chance to visit our new website, please do so! We are working to keep it fresh and interesting, so check back frequently for new information. We did have a problem with the donation page recently, but that's all fixed now. If you are interested in joining our People Helping People campaign you can do so right on our website by signing up for automatic monthly donations through Paypal using a credit card or a Paypal account. Here's our website address: www.chicoshelter.org

Book in Common—The Soloist. What a wonderful opportunity for all of us to learn more about homelessness. If you haven't read the book yet, please do! There are lots of events in our community you can attend if you like! To see the schedule of events just go to our website, click on "What We Do", and then click on "The Soloist" under "Other Resource Links". This will take you to the Chico State website, which is full of information about the book and upcoming events. Also, see our events section of this newsletter for more information.

Letter from the Executive Director

By the time this newsletter arrives in people's homes, I will have been the Executive Director of the Torres Community Shelter for five months. I would like to take this opportunity to answer the question I've been asked most often in my first five months, *"How's the economy affecting things at the Shelter?"*

As one would imagine, our nation's economic crisis has had a strong impact here at the Shelter. A few statistics should help to put this into perspective. In 2008, we had an average of 47 Guests per night at the Shelter and by the end of the year we had provided close to 15,000 nights of stay for people. So far in 2009, we've already provided close to 20,000 nights of stay and for the last few months our average nightly attendance has been over 70 Guests. As dramatic as this contrast is, we haven't even hit our peak season yet this year. In a short while, the rains will come and our occupancy numbers will spike again and level out at an even higher plateau when they do.

I also believe that many of our neighbors and friends that have been hit by these economic conditions are still tenuously holding on to arrangements that can't last forever. Staying with friends, doubling up in households, moving from family member to family member are examples. For them, and many more, their safety nets are going to rip further apart and land them here with us.

Even before this current economic crisis, Butte County had an extremely high poverty rate. The last census in 2000 listed our community's poverty rate at slightly below 20%. That means that one in five was living in poverty in our area during the "good days".

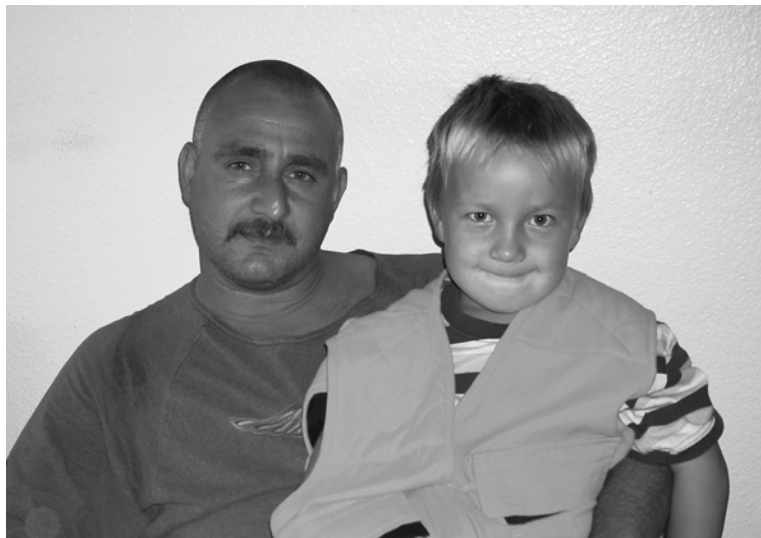
I share this because of a number of conversations I've had with many of our community leaders. Many of our donors, volunteers and other prominent community leaders have shared surprising information with me about their lives to explain why the work we do at the Shelter is so important to them. Individuals who have been homeless or who have been on public assistance or have encountered something in their lives that helps them understand on a personal, even visceral level why what we do is crucial. I'm not going to divulge any secrets, but it is truly surprising how many of our community leaders, donors and volunteers have been in circumstances similar to our Guests at some point in their lives. I'm glad people share this information with me because I find it truly inspirational. Being a polite Midwestern boy, I was raised not to ask people personal questions and so these declarations have been unsolicited, but with each person that shares their story I feel more certain that every one of us has the ability to shape our own futures. This is the environment we work to create at the Torres Community Shelter.

Of course, having more jobs in the area for our Guests to apply for would be a big help as well!

Thanks,
Brad Montgomery
Torres Shelter Executive Director
opwindows@aol.com

Porch Light

One Family on Their Way through Hard Work and Effort



"I never thought it would be so hard to be a single parent, to be a single dad. Last July I got laid off from my job. I work in cabinetry and was laid off because of the economy. I tried going back to work a couple times, and did work at Taco Bell for 16-20 hours a week, but I couldn't afford daycare. I tried looking for assistance for daycare by going to the County. The County and the Welfare Department told me to ride out unemployment and then the County could help with daycare.

My roommate wasn't paying rent, so we both got evicted. I'm originally from Oroville and grew up there. The Rescue mission in Oroville couldn't help me, because I'm a single dad. Thankfully the Torres

Shelter is here. Shawn Jr. and I have been at the Torres Shelter since the beginning of June. They are able to take families like me and Shawn. Shawn is four years old, and he's in preschool right now. For awhile now I've had a job working full time as a cabinetry worker. Patrick, my case manager here at the Shelter is helping me look for housing. Since I'm working, I'm saving some money now, and we'll probably be here at the Torres Shelter for another month."

—Shawn

A Guest Speaks Out: I want to thank the staff at the Torres Shelter for helping people who are down on their luck. My stay here was very pleasant. The food was good and you were able to take a hot shower, and the staff was wonderful. I came here scared, confused and very unsure of myself. I'm leaving here with a plan for my recovery and a lot more confident. I owe it all to the Torres Shelter. What you offer here is hope, and that's all we can ask for. I believe that people who come here have a real good chance to make it in the outside world. Yours truly, Mike

A Volunteer Speaks Out: I am a regular volunteer at the Torres Shelter. I began by serving monthly meals with friends and then I invited my colleagues in the Department of Education at CSU-C to join me. Our department has a mission related to community service and we try to model these values for our students. After volunteering, I became a member of the Shelter Board and for three years I worked to raise funds and support the work of the shelter. Although I am no longer a board member, my department continues to serve meals once a month. Every time someone new comes to serve with us I hear some version of the same comment: "Wow, they look just like me." Every time, that's the reaction. This is usually followed with: "My gosh, they are so grateful." Both of these comments really speak to the types of assumptions we have about those who are experiencing homelessness. As educators, we particularly value the lessons we continue to learn about understanding the many different people who make up our community and our world. —Ann Schulte

Porch Light

The Meaning of Homelessness Through the Eyes of our Guests:

"Homelessness means no structure, no safety, no security. What you say to people doesn't carry any weight. But not every homeless person is the same. I don't drink or do drugs but people assume I do. I couldn't imagine being a kid and homeless."

"Homelessness means you don't have a home, nowhere to lay your head at night, no roof over your head."

"Homelessness means being forgotten. I've been homeless for 25 years. I am a Vietnam vet and there are a lot of vets that are homeless."

"You feel imprisoned, separate from everyone else's experiences and things going on in the world. It's not easy; I go 24 hours without getting a meal. The only meal I get is what they serve here."

"Homeless is the absence of being. For most people there is security—you work, you go home—you have a place to be. People identify themselves or others identify them by where and what they do for work. You don't have those options when you are homeless."

"The word that comes to me is cold."

"I don't feel homeless because I have a roof over my head. I think of people living under bridges. We are all one paycheck from my situation. First time I was homeless we were in the back of my pickup and didn't eat for two days."

"Homelessness is shame, it's pathetic, it's pain. The reason I say that is I've put myself in positions drinking too much and then don't have a place. I've slept outside and I've got good sleep but the second I woke up and walked away—tears were coming down my face."

"To me it means wearing what you need each day on your back."

"To me it means not having privacy for myself. Even though I have a roof over my head, it doesn't mean privacy. I don't tell my job interviews I am homeless. Homeless means no privacy, no security, no freedom."

"It's a very lonely time. I have family and it is lonely because I don't want to put my burdens on them."

"Every day you have to find some way to spend your time or somewhere to hide."

"I was hanging out by somewhere, was hungry, and this man came up to me and told me to hold. Then he went back in the store and came out and handed me seven dollars and I had tears in my eyes."

These are some of the reasons we do what we do at the Shelter. It's about helping people. It's about a hand up. It's about hope. It's about human dignity and doing what is right. It's far too easy to look past someone that needs help. It's harder to look down deep inside yourself and figure out what you can do. As a supporter of the Torres Community Shelter, you've chosen to make a difference. Thank you.

The following article was written a few days ago before finding out we have been approved for our FESG Grant. HOORAY! Please read on for more on the significance this substantial award makes at the Torres Community Shelter.

FESG Funding Update

FESG stands for Federal Emergency Shelter Grant, I'm sure you'll remember around this time last year it became public knowledge that we weren't awarded this substantial piece of our funding. I think it's safe to say that panic ensued here at the Torres Community Shelter when the notice of denial was received. The "panic" was justified; replacing \$100,000 in funding during the worst economic crisis since the great depression is a pretty tall order.

During this time, I was a recent transplant to Chico but still working for a nonprofit back in Milwaukee. My girlfriend Nikki and I started following the story. Nikki had already volunteered for the Shelter; I didn't even know where it was. To be honest, I didn't believe the Shelter would make it. We were hearing the "Shelter didn't receive major funding and has to close" and "Where will people go now that the Shelter has to close?" As someone that had worked in nonprofits for 17 years, I began to wonder what it would be like to run an emergency shelter for people who are homeless. When the position of Executive Director came up, it sounded like a great opportunity but I was concerned about the organization's stability. This was when my education about the Torres Community Shelter and the community of Chico really began. The possibility of the Shelter closing was real and omnipresent in every internal conversation just a short year or so ago. Our situation is much different now, but I want to assure everyone that helped us to get to this point that the threat to our survival was real and their support made the difference.

What the Board, staff and volunteers accomplished during this crisis is nothing short of remarkable. One year past the crisis we have a surplus in our budget that we can carry over to next year for part of our operational costs; despite the fact that the demand for our services is up substantially due to the economy. How was this accomplished? The generosity of people in Chico and Butte County is the biggest reason. The leadership, hard work and judgment of our Board Members were also large factors. The Staff operating and maintaining a level of continuity at the Shelter throughout payroll cutbacks and reductions in Shelter staff coverage were also key in our ability to rebound. Our Board Chair, Sheryl McWatters has a small article in this newsletter about her experience as the Interim Director; a role she assumed with no compensation. As is her nature, she states very little about her accomplishments during this crisis. It's honestly probable that I wouldn't be sharing this story if Sheryl hadn't stepped up to the challenges that faced her as a relatively new Board member.

In the final assessment, we needed money to replace the FESG grant we didn't receive. Alexa Valavanis and Lee Laney from the North Valley Community Foundation came through for the Shelter and the people we serve. An anonymous donor (A very generous individual that Alexa and Lee won't even share the name of with me) reached out to them during our crisis and they created a matching gift campaign that literally turned our fortunes around.

- Every individual in our community that has signed up for our monthly pledge campaign called People Helping People (PHP) owns part of our success.
- Every individual that supported us through Shelter our Neighbors owns part of our success.
- Every staff person that dealt with the reductions in hours and increase in expectations owns part of our success.
- Every Board Member that stayed on to navigate our path through this crisis owns part of our success.
- Every volunteer and/or donor that decided to offer that little extra effort because "we were hurting" owns part of our success.

(continued on page 6)

(continued from page 5)

Obviously receiving \$100,000 per year of guaranteed funding is important to the smooth operation of the Shelter. However, I think that the loss of this funding last year had an unintended consequence. I believe that after all of our desperate actions and pleas for assistance and internal restructuring, the final answer as to why we survived this crisis is that our community decided that they have a vested interest in our survival and success. Thank you all!

Last year we were fighting for our survival and we won! This year, we need to expand and prepare. We never want to fall back to the desperate position of a year ago. In order to prevent that, we need support to expand. Please join PHP or make a contribution to help us make the FESG Grant a superfluous part of our funding.

—Brad Montgomery

Looking Back

In May my life changed—in a good way. We hired an Executive Director for the Torres Community Shelter! We had been without an official Executive Director for over a year. I assumed the volunteer Interim Executive Director role when I became the Board Chair in November 2008. Would I have so readily done it if I knew what was in store? Probably not. But, I wouldn't trade the experience for anything. Well, maybe that's stretching it a bit. But, I do know that I gained a great deal in those six months. Being new to nonprofits, homelessness and the Shelter operation, it took all of my 30 years of work experience to keep my head above water as I tried to provide some guidance to the Shelter and leadership to the Board of Directors while we worked through the effects of not receiving major funding. I learned to not almost faint while in front of the TV camera and to actually look at a group of people while talking to them about the Shelter. I gained a personal confidence; but, more importantly, I learned more about those we serve than I would have by just being the Board Chairperson.

The image of the stereotypical homeless person just flew right out the window. In talking with our guests, I realized that homelessness strikes across the board. Yes, there are those with impairments due to mental illness and those fighting drug and alcohol addiction. But, in addition, there are working people who cannot obtain housing and those who have lost their jobs or their homes in these difficult economic times. There are families with children who need a safe place while they get their lives back together. It made me think that many of us might be just one step away from a similar situation.

Thank goodness for the Shelter staff who kept their chins up during budget cuts and who worked so hard to keep our programs going for the sake of our guests. They're obviously in this line of work because they care deeply—it's certainly not for the money a nonprofit can pay.

While the staff kept the Shelter services intact, the community stepped up financially in a way we couldn't have imagined. I don't even like to think of what might have happened if people had turned a deaf ear to our plight. The Torres Community Shelter remains intact because of you, our friends. We can never thank you enough.

I've learned two important life lessons—that people are unbelievably generous and that it feels so very good to give. It truly does warm the heart and the soul.

—Sheryl McWatters, Board Chairperson & Ex-Interim Executive Director!

VOLUNTEER AND EVENT NEWS!

As Always, Thanks to all our Volunteers and Donors!

WE'VE GOT NEW VOLUNTEERS! The number of volunteers at the Shelter has exploded this month with the addition of 37 wonderful students from the Sociology Department at Chico State! The students are helping us during our check-in process, helping to collect stories from our Guests and also assisting with a number of cleaning, organizing and clerical duties while they are here. A big thanks to Professor Cynthia Siemsen who arranged this help for us as part of the Book in Common focus!

DONATED SERVICES HELP STRETCH OUR BUDGET!

We have some very generous businesses that are donating their services to the shelter! We would like to give a BIG thank you to Helen Duval Design, Ed's Printing, Digital Path, Hunter's Pest Control, NorCal Waste, Turf King and PacifiCom.

THANKS CHICO STATE STUDENTS!

On Oct. 8 Linda Bilsborough and a number of her students organized a Health Fair for our Guests that was held right here at the Shelter! Everything you did was greatly appreciated!

UPCOMING BOOK IN COMMON EVENTS:

"A Conversation about Homelessness"

Oct. 22 at 7 p.m. in Chico City Council Chambers

A forum discussing homelessness including our own Executive Director, Brad Montgomery.

Nov. 4 at 7:30 p.m. at CSU, Chico in the Performing Arts Center 134

Enjoy classical pianist Mark Ryan Friedman's free piano recital. Donations will benefit the Torres Community Shelter.

Nov. 21 at 7 p.m. at the Faith Lutheran Church on First Ave.

7th ANNUAL CHRISTMAS TREE AUCTION AND HOLIDAY FESTIVAL

Please join us for this very fun and important fundraising event, which is coming up in just a few short weeks! On Saturday, November 7 you can have the opportunity to bid on beautifully decorated Christmas trees if you choose, or bid on any number of fabulous silent auction items that have been donated. There will be wonderful live entertainment, and of course, the food is fabulous and so is the company! It's a fun night and an easy way to help support the Torres Community Shelter. The event will be held at the Masonic Family Center starting at 6:00 pm. Please see the enclosed flyer for more details or call the Shelter at 891-9048.

BOOK IN COMMON: THE SOLOIST

For those that don't know, Chico State University chooses a book each year for the entire campus to focus on. The last two years this effort has grown into a community-wide focus on the issues that are featured in the chosen book. "*The Soloist*" is the current Book in Common and is the story of Steve Lopez and Nathaniel Ayers. The story is centered on true life experiences regarding homelessness and mental health issues. Having the issue of homelessness featured throughout our community has led to many unique events. Watch the newspapers or visit the Chico State Book in Common website for more information and a calendar of events. www.csuchico.edu/bic

WE ARE ON FACEBOOK!

Did you know you can find us on Facebook now? Look up "Torres Community Shelter" and then please become a fan on our page! We will be updating our Facebook page regularly with events and news from the Shelter.

THE TORRES SHELTER

Porch Light



Chico Community Shelter Partnership
Torres Community Shelter
101 Silver Dollar Way, Chico, CA 95928

Non-Profit Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Chico CA
Permit No. 1718

GREETINGS FROM THE TORRES COMMUNITY SHELTER!

Here Are Some Recent Statistics & Our Wish List!

- > We welcomed 218 guests during July, August and September.
- > These guests included 15 children and their 11 families.
- > One of the most significant statistics we track at the Torres Shelter is called "nights of stay", which is a cumulative tally of our nightly guests. In the last three months, we've provided overnight shelter 6,693 times to people who had nowhere else to stay.

At the Torres Shelter we strive to provide a clean, healthy and safe place for people to stay, and we do not charge our guests for anything. It's going to be a cold, wet winter and we really need the following items!

- > Heavy Duty Rain Ponchos, Water Resistant Jackets, Sturdy Umbrellas & Gloves
- > Large Coat Rack
- > Large Sized Canned Goods...soups, chili, beans & stews are especially appreciated during the winter ahead.
- > Personal Hygiene Items (from toothbrushes to razors to body wash to deodorant)
- > Plastic Eating Utensils
- > Cleaning and Office Supplies
- > Laundry Soap

Design donated by: www.helendualdesign.com