



JESUS CENTER

1297 Park Avenue, Chico, CA 95928

JULY 2019

Dear < First name >,

Early on in my time as Executive Director, people routinely suggested that the best and only solution to homelessness was housing. Seems simple enough. And in fact, the federal government has invested a great deal of their funding into a method called Housing First. As a result, many exemplary programs nationwide are focused on getting people housed first instead of intermediary steps towards stabilization.

I will not bore you with the complexity of this “simple” solution. Whether we are talking about housing availability—here in Butte County that is a REAL complex issue—or exploring the logic of putting a severely mentally ill person in a house without adequate support, the conversation gets complicated and controversial quickly. The common sense wisdom of our Director of Services, Shelly Watson, from one of my first conversations with her rings true over and over: “It’s not just giving them a key; it’s having them keep the key.” It is far from simple.

Every week I hear testimonies from our past participants who eagerly credit our services and our efforts but more importantly they credit our staff as a key factor in their full restoration. We might call this approach: *Humans First*. This factor is the key to any successful intervention.

“When I found myself homeless, nobody was more shocked than me. And I was so grateful that the staff at the Jesus Center welcomed me with wide open arms. They honestly listened to what I had been through and then got me started with case management. That was a real help because I had no idea where to start when I got here, case management got me connected with all of the available programs, including getting a job through employment services. Staying at the Sabbath House gave me a chance to be with other women that had shared experiences, but also we were experiencing the growth of common hope for our future.”

That being said, there is no doubt that when one of our friends on the street is unsheltered, there is little to no hope of helping them to take next steps towards their overall restoration. From a pragmatic level, they just spend way too much time in survival mode and the adverse circumstances increase their substance abuse and exacerbate their mental illness symptoms. So, yes, housing first is the best path towards ultimate resolution of the myriad of issues they face. Once sheltered, they can begin to trust



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1297 Park Avenue
Chico, CA 95928
jesuscenter.org

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YES, I want to support the Jesus Center’s work to help the vulnerable with a financial gift of:

- \$35.00 to help feed and care for 14 people
- \$50.00 to help feed and care for 20 people
- \$75.00 to help feed and care for 30 people
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in other humans to help them along. Once again, *Humans First* is an intervention that is a multiplier of all other efforts.

To truly help, we build robust solutions and paths to help, we study and we learn.

An alarming study completed in December of 2018 called the Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress, revealed that nearly half (48%) of homeless individuals are unsheltered—living in their cars, on the streets, or in some other place not meant for human habitation. There are many factors that lead to unsheltered homelessness but the lack of accessible shelter is having the biggest impact. Developing and providing beds to those in need requires a variety of options in order to offer the best opportunity for impact. Emergency shelter beds are often the starting point in an individual attempt to change folks' circumstances; and there are roughly 27,246 emergency shelter beds in California, a decrease of nearly 52 percent since 2007. Now with over 35% (194,596) of the California homeless population being unsheltered, that translates into an alarming shortage of over 167,000 beds a night.

Transitional housing is another option that most often follows a period of stability in an emergency shelter. The Jesus Center embraced transitional housing six years ago and has since grown the program into six houses that provide shelter for nearly 40 adults and many children each night. We have seen an incredible amount of success stories over those years. The ability to continue to build transitional housing programs is heavily reliant on available housing stock, and participants who have the financial opportunities to secure the housing.

Nationally, the most effective intervention is permanent supportive housing (PSH). In fact, the number of permanent supportive housing beds has grown nationally by 92 percent since 2007. Permanent supportive housing is a model that combines low-barrier affordable housing, health care, and supportive services to help individuals and families lead more stable lives.

Since the fire, we've done a lot of soul searching about where to put our energy, what is the best contribution we can make to our community's response to increased need overall and how we make the biggest impact on the vulnerability of those who find themselves homeless.

In conjunction with the development of the Renewal Center and the move to new quarters, the board and staff of the Jesus Center are very pleased to be partnering with Jamboree Housing Corporation, a nonprofit provider and developer of Permanent Supportive Housing out of Irvine. With 93 communities (buildings developed to care for those needing permanent supportive housing) under their belt, they are perfect partners to add this kind of service into our offerings. They will be developing the current property on Park Ave (buying the property from the Jesus Center) and developing permanent supportive housing at the Renewal Center. We are imagining close to 100 new permanent beds for the most vulnerable in our community as a result of this partnership.

Because of the complexity of these challenges, we work on many fronts at the same time. We continue to partner with other shelter providers to get creative about adding shelter beds in the community so we can stabilize those who need to take a deep breath, find support and community, and begin healing towards a life restored for purpose and full health. We invest in the 23 women and children at the Sabbath House who sleep with us each night. And, we build in case management and future planning with those in residence in our transitional houses.

Yes, housing first. But we know that the most important component of this work is adaptability, flexibility and relationships. There is no answer for any of this outside of human-to-human contact. We are fans of relational work at the Jesus Center, because we know that in Christ, we become God's hands and feet and through the Spirit we can bless, embolden, and be part of God's healing and restoration.

You are part of this too! Please join us in our *Humans First* approach. Yes, housing, yes services, and YES to humans being kind to other humans. Your gift today will ensure that we maintain the level of high quality staffing that is the front line to a *Humans First* approach.

Thank you and blessings,



Laura R. Cootsona
Executive Director

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