



# The **GOOD NEWS** Letter

*Celebrating the families, volunteers and staff of the  
Winter Nights Family Shelter*

MARCH – 2021

## Winter Nights One of the Few Congregate Shelters to Open in Any Form During the Pandemic



Toddler helping with the morning temperature check and logging it in.

The Shelter has now moved to its sixth host site in this season's journey. It will be another 4-week, Covid-style stay. Two more host sites to go before the end of the shelter season in June. Local agencies tell us that we were one of the few non-profit congregate shelters able to open in any form during the pandemic. County shelters have remained closed.

We are very excited about Contra Costa moving into the "Red Tier" of Covid-19 restrictions. That's progress. Finally. However, it doesn't affect the county protocols for shelters that both the Winter Nights Shelter or the Safe Parking Program are following.

The Shelter will still operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week as a socially distanced, shelter-in-place facility. Food from commercial kitchens, and no volunteers inside the shelter. The Safe Parking Program will continue to operate socially distanced from 8 pm – 6 am, 7 days a week.

More good news: The County is vaccinating all homeless adults, 18 and older. What a blessing for all of our eligible adult clients in the Shelter and Safe Parking Program.

### Continued Success



More former client families have replied to the outreach of the Continued Success program.

These alums from past years were delighted to share their thoughts. Here is one example:

*"How are you guys? We are doing great. We still live in the same house. Can you believe it? We had a baby 2 years ago, .... (Our oldest) graduates high school next year. (Our younger son is) going to high school and (our youngest) is going to Jr high. (My husband) works for (a school). I work for a healthcare company. ... We want to thank you again for everything you guys have done for us. We really couldn't do it without you guys. The kids still talk about when we went bowling and the fun they had. You guys made a horrible situation better not just for (my husband) and I but for the kids. We are so grateful. We will keep in touch. Thanks again for everything. Stay safe"*

## Sheltering Families

Many thanks to everyone at **Walnut Creek Friends Church**, Maria Coburn and Rich Wallace, coordinators, who hosted Winter Nights families for the past 4 weeks.

*After 10 years of co-hosting, we had the opportunity to host for the first time. It turned out to be a very rewarding and heartwarming experience. Thank you, Judy, for choosing our Church as host, for trusting me to lead the effort and your guidance in selecting co-hosts. I couldn't have asked for a better team, from day one everything was moving like a well-oiled machine. Thank you to all of you for providing groceries and tasty meals for our guests. ~ Maria Coburn*



Walnut Creek Friends Church

Thanks to the many teams of Cohost congregations:  
**Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints** – Walnut Creek Stake , Kimber Blatter,  
**St. Anselm's Episcopal Church-Lafayette**, Anne Brown; **Most Holy Rosary** – Antioch, Linda Castro;  
**Lafayette United Methodist Church**, Judy Stillman;  
**Grace Episcopal Church-Martinez**, Christina Reich;  
**Ygnacio Valley Presbyterian Church-Concord**, Christie Jacoban.

## News from the Shelter



**Rocco's Ristorante & Pizzeria** in Walnut Creek donated a complete meal to shelter guests and staff in February at Walnut Creek United Methodist. What a treat. What a spread. Thank you so much, Rocco's.

**I Heart Art**, of Pleasant Hill, did it again.

Co-founders Abby and Amy donated Art Kits for the kids (and some adults) to let loose their creative energy. An afternoon making snow globes added a spark of fun to sheltering-in-place.



### Quilts to Share:

A program of **The Guild of Quilters of Contra Costa**

Cynthia Allen brought a very special donation of handmade quilts (19), placemats (18), crocheted hats and quilted tote bags. Have I forgotten anything? Members make all these items to donate to local non-profits. Winter Nights clients from the Shelter and the Safe parking program are so delighted to have these handmade gifts. Very special. Thank you so much.



## HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

There was another birthday celebration. YES! Everyone loves a party. Even with the mask, you can see her eyes sparkle.





### Continued Success: The Kowall's



Carmella and her children, John (J.J.), 18 and Gloria, 21 in 2020

Carmella, Gloria and J.J. Kowall were clients at Winter Nights in 2014/2015, from October through May. Carmella describes a divorce and absent father leading to serious financial stress. She worked full time, the bills still piled up and rent became impossible. They were ultimately evicted. With an eviction and unpaid rent on her record, no one would rent to her. For 2 ½ years she continued to work full time, parent her kids, while living in various motels that could cost her over \$3,000 per month.

In 2014, at a motel, Carmella met a father and his 2 young sons who were also homeless. He was interviewing with Winter Nights and left to join the program. After arriving, he called Carmella, leaving messages saying “You have to come here. This is just what you need”. She says it took her a few more days to finally agree to talk to Bill. It changed her life and the lives of her children.

At the time J.J. was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade at Walnut Creek Intermediate, Gloria was a sophomore at Las Lomas and Carmella was employed full time at Kinder’s.

*“I never saw it as a free ride. I thought of it as holding me up so that I could take care of my business. A stepping stone. It gave me time to do the things I needed to do to make our lives better. I still worked full time, and the money I saved on*

*motel bills and food let me pay-off my bills, including all the back-rent. The kids focused on school. I focused on working and finding us a home. We were ready to start again.”*

Since leaving Winter Nights in the spring of 2015 a lot has happened. A rental wasn’t immediately available because of the eviction on her record, so it was back to a motel for a bit.

The owner of the motel got to know Carmella and the kids, he was so impressed with them. When an apartment became available in a building he owned, he offered to rent the unit to them regardless of the past eviction. They have been there ever since.



Kowall's - 2014

### **Moving On**

Carmella moved on from her long-time job at Kinder’s in 2017 and joined Toyota Walnut Creek, where she was promoted to Concierge Manager in 2019 (the free pickup and delivery service for customers). She is working to grow the service in a time of Covid contact-free protocols. She now manages 400 customer trips a month.

J.J. graduated from high school last year and is employed full time at a local electrical supply company. He is learning the business day-by-day and supporting himself. His latest accomplishment, he says, is learning to drive the forklift around the facility. Every guy’s dream. J.J. will be moving into his own apartment in June.

Gloria tackled high school with determination. As a freshman, she set herself a goal of taking Honors English before she graduated. She accomplished that goal in her junior year and went on to take AP English in her senior year. She must have set a lot of goals because she graduated in June 2017, and went on to California State University, Monterey Bay. She received multiple scholarships her senior year in high school, and also received one through CSUMB.



**The Kowell' (con't)**

In May 2021 she will graduate Cum Laude with her B.S. in Biology, with a concentration in Evolution, Ecology and Organismal Biology in Science. Bravo, Gloria!!!



What does an accomplished young woman do with her college degree? For something entirely different, and 2700 miles away, Gloria has enlisted in the US Army. Gloria will begin her 10-week basic combat training in June at Fort Jackson, South Carolina and then do a 4-month AIT (*I had to look that up: Advanced Individual Training*) at Fort Eustis, Virginia, in the repair of the CH-47 Chinook helicopter. We have a feeling that she may be flying Chinooks before her 6-year hitch is up.

**Paying it forward, then and now**

Even while at the shelter in 2014, Carmella wanted to give back. She approached her employer, Kinder's, and arranged for a full dinner for 40 to be donated and delivered. Wonderful! Festive, fun and wow, what a spread of great food. Last year during the spring Covid-19 shelter-in-place she donated prizes for a nightly bingo game. Thanks Carmella. Gloria did her high school community service project at Winter Nights in 2017, returning to tutor kids. She had been where they were only a few years before. We know she made a real impact on the lives of the kids she worked with. In 2019, Winter Nights had the opportunity to speak at a meeting of the

Lafayette Juniors as one of their Beneficiary finalists. Bill Shaw, Program Director, reached out to several alumni families to join with him to make the 20-minute presentation. Carmella and J.J. stepped forward and were there to present the client's point of view. It was a true success. We thank them for their insight and candor, and for speaking from their hearts about Winter Nights' role in restarting their lives on better footing. Winter Nights was selected as the Lafayette Juniors major beneficiary and received \$21,000 to expand the program.

**Carmella,  
a Winter Nights Board Member**

In July 2020, when Winter Nights Family Shelter, Inc became an independent nonprofit, we began forming a Board of Directors. High on our list of candidates were Winter Nights alumni; individuals who knew the program from the inside and could speak for the clients.

Carmella was among almost 20 men and women with various skills who were nominated. In December 2020 she was officially elected to the board, along with five other community members. Her voice is sought and heard in all aspects of board responsibilities. She is serving on the Audit committee and offering guidance to the Development Committee. Strategic Planning is next.

Thank you, Carmella, for giving your time and talent in support of the future of Winter Nights.

**Continued Success personified**

**Under Covid-19 Protocols**

**Winter Nights Family Shelter is currently full and is serving**

4 families \* 11 guests \* 5 parents & 6 of their children  
6 girls, 0 boys \* Ages 5 months, 2, 2, 3, 14 and 18 years old

**Safe Parking Program**

6 clients in 5 cars,  
and growing

*Our strength is our ability to meet the changing needs of the growing population of homeless families in Contra Costa County. Each family's circumstances are different, and it is our goal to work with each of them to provide support and services that address their particular needs and assist them toward stable and affordable housing. ~ Bill Shaw, Program Director*

## **Update on Funding Winter Nights: Just \$70,000 to go.**

Winter Nights has already raised 80% of our forecasted expenses for the year.

We have about \$70,000 to go to cover projected costs through the end of our fiscal year, June 30<sup>th</sup>.

More staff hours have been needed to better manage Covid-protocols, 24/7 shelter operations. We have also directed funds to help Alumni families stay employed and stay housed through our Continued Success program. A true blessing to many families. Safe Parking Program is scheduled through the end of April.

Thank you to the many individual donors and the many community groups, foundations and city agencies who support us. We are also very grateful to the many congregations who donate funds in addition to their time, meals and facilities.

Costs for the Shelter, Oasis Day Center, Winter Night's van, Safe Parking Program and Continued Success are running about \$2,000 a day.

**If you would like to help close the \$70,000 funding gap in this unusual year, your gift of any amount would be greatly appreciated.**

### **Offering hope, One Winter Night at a time.**

Checks can be made out to

**Winter Nights Family Shelter, Inc** and sent to:

**Winter Nights Family Shelter, Inc · 404 Gregory Lane, #7 · Pleasant Hill, CA · 94523**

**Online donations can be made through this link:** [DONATE](#)

**Winter Nights Family Shelter, Inc** is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, public benefit corporation  
Tax ID # 84-4775540 Donations are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law,  
and no goods or services are provided in exchange for a donation.

Web: [www.cccwinternights.org](http://www.cccwinternights.org)



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