



# The **GOOD NEWS** Letter

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

JUNE 2021

## The Winter Nights Family Shelter Another Milestone – Season #17 comes to an end

### Clearly, a year like no other.



Winter Nights ended its Shelter season on June 14<sup>th</sup> with 4 families, our Covid-protocol limit. We are glad that parents and children were able to be sheltered, fed and kept healthy, through 32 weeks, at the height of the Covid pandemic in Contra Costa. No one got Covid!!!!

Families worked with staff to resolve issues, find jobs, save money and create nest eggs going forward. But, despite their best efforts, and ours, no one was able to secure their own home. Housing is scarce for low-income families. All of our clients will remain part of the Winter Nights family of alumni through Continued Success, where resources and contacts will continue to be available to them.

**We are so grateful for the amazing staff whose determination, dedication and flexibility made a season of shelter-in-place possible. Thank you Bill, Teri, Stephanie, Elaine, Ty, Melissa, and Elijah.**

The Shelter program will begin again in September 2021 and run through June 2022. It will be hosted by 18 congregations who have offered their sites for two weeks at a time. Dozens and dozens of faith communities and community groups will lend a hand throughout the 36-week schedule, and we can welcome volunteers back within the shelter. The shelter will also be returning to a more normal capacity of about 24-26 clients (6-7 families) at a time. Stay tuned for details as we approach September.

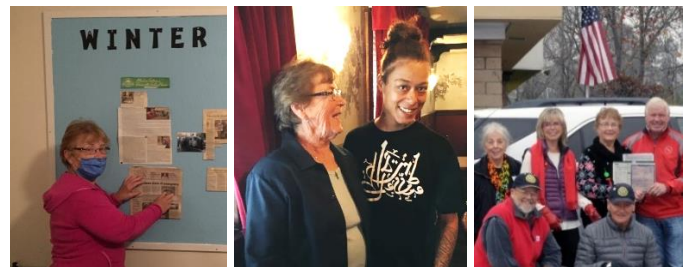
### Judy Stillman, Executive Director Since 2014, “Retires”

Judy Stillman, Winter Nights Executive Director, has decided to “retire” from her role as ED, but, gratefully, will continue her involvement with the program.



Winter Nights transition from a program of the Interfaith Council to an independent nonprofit has expanded the role of Executive Director, and Judy would prefer to focus on aspects of the program that she loves and are essential to the program’s success. She also wants to play more golf.

Thank you, Judy, for the many years of leadership you have provided and the success of the program you have nurtured and led.



We look forward to many more years, too, as you lead the Winter Nights Homeless Summit and involve yourself in other aspects of the program.

Jo Kerner has written a tribute below that captures so many of Judy’s accomplishments and her many, wonderful qualities.

## A Tribute to Judy Stillman

Jo Kerner – Volunteer Grant Writer and longtime friend of Judy's

When Judy and I began to volunteer at Winter Nights in 2008, we began as tutors for the school-age children in the shelter. The Executive Director at the time was Gwen Watson, a founding member of Winter Nights and a former teacher like Judy. Judy and I had both just retired and had taken a Cruise together with a couple of other tennis friends to celebrate. We'd talked about what we were going to do with all of our free time, and we came upon volunteering for Winter Nights, because the churches we attended – though they were different denominations – had both been involved in the shelter. We chose to volunteer as tutors.

Gwen insisted on a place away from the chaos of pre-dinner shelter activity for tutoring. We'd arrive about the same time the families did at the sheltering congregation, find out where the tutoring room was. We would gather all of the children who had homework as best we could. We weren't the only tutors; sometimes Harry Miller or Jim Pfohl or Peggy Woehleke or Louise Severy or Doug Leich - and a few others who've moved away or gone on to other volunteer activities - would be there too. We all became friends while trying to settle down our excited students and get them to concentrate. We loved having dinner with the families, getting to know the parents and more about the family dynamics. We also talked Gwen how the tutoring experience could be improved for the children.

The idea of the tutors committing to volunteer on the same night each week for the entire shelter season was born, and "Traveling Tutors" became a Winter Nights institution with Judy at the helm. As we all know, Judy has a real talent for organization and under her gentle guidance the tutors began to track the academic progress of each child with a personal file that we added to each week. The Reading Program was fine-tuned to include a chart with each child's progress and awards for completing hours of reading each week.

From the time Judy and I started volunteering until the year before Gwen retired, Winter Nights underwent many changes such as using tents to give each family privacy (thanks, Jim Pfohl, for that idea!) and the online Quip blog started by Harry Miller for sharing each child's progress with the other tutors so we'd know what had happened before we arrived to tutor. When Gwen decided to retire, Judy's talent for organization and gentle leadership had not gone un-noticed, and Gwen asked Judy to "shadow" her for a year and then take over as Executive Director. In the 2014-15 season, Judy took over as Executive Director, and Harry took over the Traveling Tutors.

The world didn't stand still either. The median rent in Contra Costa County went up more than 25% from 2000 to 2014 while average renter income went down 3%. The number of unhoused people in the county increased until shelter capacity in the county was and is less than half of the number of homeless people needing shelter. The Winter Nights budget was \$170,000 the year Judy took over, while this year it was over \$400,000, and will climb to about \$600,000. The Parking Lot Program (now the Safe Parking Program) began in 2018 as the brainchild of Bill Shaw and Will McGarvey. It has grown from a two-month pilot to eight months this year and hopefully will become year-round next year. In 2018-19, the discussion at the Homeless Summit noted that more unhoused families were working, and also more of them arrived extremely traumatized from losing their homes and having no one to turn to.

Judy led the Homeless Summit competently and courageously through difficult budget decisions such as how to purchase a new van with scarce funds. She navigated the Summit discussions of which congregations were chosen to host and when they wanted to schedule hosting like a seasoned diplomat. She organized groups to stamp, sort and mail the once-a-year appeal letter to keep costs down. Like Gwen, to Judy no task was too small or too large. She cajoled congregations to fill empty slots in the schedule, and this past year sold some of them on offering their space for a month at a time during the corona virus emergency. She quietly maneuvered the volunteers and paid staff into a smooth-working team that was able to slide fairly smoothly from being an appendage of the Interfaith Council into an independent non-profit organization. During a global pandemic no less!

Judy, you have earned your retirement yet again, and we salute you. We are grateful to you for leading us calmly and steadily through many changes, planned and unplanned, over the past seven years. We will always be thankful that when Gwen Watson asked you to serve, you stepped up to the plate and batted a thousand!

**Welcome Bill Shaw**  
**New Executive Director of WNFS, Inc,**  
**effective July 1, 2021**

When Judy Stillman announced her retirement plans, the Board of Directors began the task of finding her successor. After research and discussion, the Board is pleased to announce the unanimous selection of Bill Shaw as the next Executive Director of Winter Nights Family Shelter, Inc. The Board is equally pleased to announce that Bill accepted the job. His acceptance was confirmed at the June 9<sup>th</sup> board meeting. Unlike Judy, who served pro-bono, Bill will be the paid Executive Director of Winter Nights.

A native of Berkeley, Bill joined Winter Nights in 2010 as a Site Supervisor. He became the Program Manager in 2014. Upon Mahmood Barakzai departure, Bill assumed the responsibilities of Program Director, with the title bestowed in 2019. He has a BA in Child Development and an MA in Spirituality and Culture. Before joining WN he worked with the Hannah Boys Center and St Vincent's Home for Boys as a councilor and trainer, an Adventure Travel company as Operations Manager, and AMC Theaters as a General Manager.

We know that you can "move him upstairs", but what energizes and motivates him is a personal connection with Winter Nights' clients and staff. That will not change. But on July 1<sup>st</sup> he will begin to also oversee things like administration, financials, marketing and funding. As Bill says: *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.* Well said. And, we are here to help.

**The Safe Parking Program**



**Three More Months of Safe Parking**

The Winter Nights Shelter program has ended for the season, but the **the Safe Parking Program is open and growing.** Winter Nights is extending the program by three more months. June-July-August. What a gift to the many clients living in their cars.

Two of clients now have savings and are ready to look for their own housing. The Safe Parking Program was central to their being able to hold down steady jobs, get help with DVM registration and licenses, receive a bit of guidance and support, and make plans for the future.

Donna says *"We have 4 new clients. A mom and her teen age son, and a very young couple. There is one more client due to arrive, and then we will be at maximum capacity, with a waiting list."*

A huge round of applause to the staff of the Safe Parking Program: SPP Manager, Donna Zukaucka, SPP Manager and program staff Elijah, Heather and Denise.

**A Year-Round Program?**

Winter Nights hopes to keep expanding the Safe Parking Program, making it a year-round program. Wouldn't that be great! It is the only Safe Parking program in Contra Costa right now, and has always been the only program to accept families with children living in their cars. It is a matter of securing a year-round host site and, of course, funding.

**A Note from Safe Parking Program**

*Dear Winter Nights Program,  
I am truly humbled for this enormous help to bring my vehicle registration finally to current. Now being able to have a Peace of Mind is everything to me. This Program truly is my BLESSINGS .... I was able to structure my life back on the right path. To all the great staff, Donna, Heather, Denise, Elijah and last but definitely not least Bill Shaw, You D-MAN. To all the members behind it all THANK YOU. I WILL NEVER FORGET THIS. I LOVE YOU ALL. THANK YOU.*

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**A High School Graduate!  
Congratulations Akasha, Class of 2021**



**Moving on from Middle School  
Well Done, Anyanka!**



**With a Party and  
CAKES to CELEBRATE  
Akasha and Anyanka's  
MANY  
Accomplishments**

(Thank you Cakes4Kids)



**Thank you  
California Watercolor Association**

The members of the California Watercolor Association of Walnut Creek, generously donate gift bags of art supplies for the children in the shelter.

Each kit was age appropriate, from toddlers to teens. And each bag was personalized with the child's name. The CWA hoped it would encourage them to discover and explore the joys of making art. We hope so too.

They loved them. Thanks.

CWA Community Outreach  
Sheila Cain, Georganne Zaro,  
Victoria Bianco, Marianne Elliot



**A Movie Under the Stars**

Everyone had a great evening in early June at Concord UMC. They spread out on the lawn, socially distanced, watching a movie. Felt almost "normal".



## Sheltering Families

Concord United Methodist Church provided the last month of shelter this season. What a fantastic month!



Our thanks to everyone who helped, especially the host coordinator for Concord UMC, Delores Loague.

Co-host congregations and coordinators were:

- Good Shepherd Lutheran Church - Concord, Sue Hertless
- St. Bonaventure's Catholic Church - Concord, Ann Sparks
- First Christian Church of Concord, Diane Maltester
- The Bay Church - Concord, Carey Gregg and
- Concord International Seventh-day Adventist, Gilda Levia

You are all amazing. Thanks for a special End-of-Season. What a year!

## It's Time to Thank Bob Switzer



Bob Switzer is the owner and operator of Bizzy Home Service in Martinez, and a long-time supporter of Winter Nights. Winter Nights needed thorough cleaning because of Covid, and he donated his cleaning services all season long. The Shelter moved to a new site every month. Bob cleaned the site we were leaving and cleaned the site we were headed to before we arrived.

Bob, you are a treasured friend of Winter Nights. Thank you.

## Shelter Season 2020/2021 ★ What a Year!

It has been quite a year for everyone! At the Shelter especially. Families sheltered-in-place 24 hours a day, congregations provided their sites for a month a time, for 7 months. We had masks and temperature checks, socially distanced tents and tables. Staff covered for volunteers who were not allowed inside the shelter, but lots of volunteers provided meals and activities with no-contact delivery.

All the staff and eligible clients were vaccinated and no one got Covid!

Life went on, Covid-style. There were birthdays and holidays and new jobs and graduations.

**Ready for some memories?**

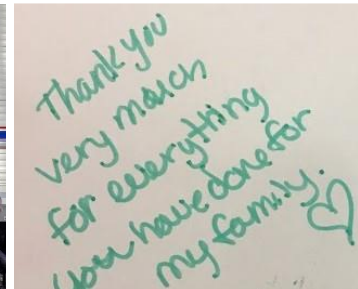
### Family Shelter



# The Safe Parking Program



## Continued Success



## 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 for a donation.

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



Contact: [info@cccwinternights.org](mailto:info@cccwinternights.org)

FACEBOOK

[VIDEO Winter Nights Family Shelter](#)

[VIDEO Shelter Family Stories](#)