



The **GOOD NEWS** Letter

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

March 2020

Goodness, Gracious. What a month!

Great News!

A family of 6 is now in their own home.

Mom, Dad and their four kids arrived at the Parking Lot Program in January. When there was space a few weeks later, they moved into the Winter Nights' shelter. Because Dad is a veteran, they had already applied for HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (*HUD-VASH*), Housing Choice Voucher (*HCV*) rental assistance for homeless vets (say that quickly, three times!). February 27th, after about 6 weeks in the shelter, they were set and moved into a home of their own. The Extended Family program of Walnut Creek United Methodist Church is again helping with furnishings, linens and kitchen stuff.

We are so excited for them, but they are missed. The Tutors especially miss the kids.



"Speaking for the tutors, we'll miss those kids. They were exceptionally polite and helpful. And dad was very grateful for WN and the tutoring" ~ Harry Miller

They always jumped in to help other children with homework (*"I promise not to give her the answers, Harry! Really!"*) and to read to younger ones.

Nice job, kids. And bravo to Mom and Dad for raising such thoughtful, and generous kids.

The Best Laid Plans

For a month or more we have been saying that several more families were on the verge of housing. And some are. But now, some are not. Deep breath.



A family of four was set to move into their new home, when they found out that it was under repair, putting their move-in date on hold.



A mother with 4 children has an appointment this week with HOPE Solutions for housing. YEAH!



Two families were working through the application process with good results when all agency application meetings were canceled (due to COVID). Everyone hopes they will be able to reschedule soon.

Having Fun

Before the Shelter-in-Place order, volunteer and art teacher, Danielle John, spent a Sunday afternoon helping the kids make clay whistles.

They loved it.

They fashioned their own creations and glazed them. Danielle took them home to fire and returned with each child's working whistle.



She even carefully wrapped the finished whistles for the 4 children who had moved into housing. WN staff delivered them to their new home.



To steal from Gabriel García Márquez...
At Winter Nights, it is now
Love in the Time of COVID-19



Wonderful news. All WN families and staff are HEALTHY!

The Challenge of “Flattening the Curve” While Operating a Homeless Shelter

By definition, the Winter Nights Family Shelter is a communal living environment. Families eat, sleep and play in “one” big room. 50-100 volunteers come in and out of the shelter each week providing valuable support for families: preparing and sharing meals and organizing and supervising activities, cleaning, laundry etc, etc.

Things have changed. Homeless Shelters are an “essential service”, and the county expects us to carry on while complying with the guidelines. And we will. Here’s how we are doing it.

The Executive Team of Winter Nights is Zoom conferencing daily, to assess risks, put protocols in place with congregations, brain-storm work arounds and rapidly respond to changing conditions. In three weeks, we have gone from school closures, to limiting the size of groups, to a full shelter-in-place requirement.

The Program Director is adjusting staffing requirements, staying in constant touch with county agencies for both health and housing issues, and providing supervision and guidance to both staff and families under stress.

WN’s staff of managers and site supervisors is incredible! They have stepped in and offered to change their schedules and take extra shifts. They are providing the support and continuity each family needs.

Faith Communities are indispensable! They are providing Shelter-in-Place at their sites and organizing take-out meals (see below)

Precautions, Policies and Compliance:

- As families leave for stable housing, WN is not taking in new families. The plan is to house all the current families and end the season early. Bringing in new families, without knowing their COVID-19 status, is just too risky.
- All current families are healthy and are sheltering in place at Winter Night’s host sites. This means staying at the host congregation site 24/7. 6 families, 7 adults and 15 kids (lots of teenage boys 😊)
- Oasis is now open only a few mornings a week for Parking Lot Program clients to shower. No need for the van to take children to school or Oasis each day.
- No volunteers from congregations or the community are permitted into the shelter areas to provide, meals, activities, cleaning or overnight back-up
- Winter Nights’ site supervisors and managers have adjusted their shifts to have 2 supervisors/managers on duty most of the time to compensate for “no volunteers”.
- All the recommended precautions of handwashing, surface cleaning, cough/sneeze etiquette and laundering are being followed to-the-letter by families and staff.
- Families and staff are checked daily for symptoms of any illness. (so far, so good)

Meals:

- Groceries are provided by congregations so families and staff can make their own breakfasts, lunches and snacks.
- Congregations are providing Hot Dinners by ordering from local restaurants and delivering to the shelter without entering the site. (Food prepared at home is not allowed. It must all be prepared in a commercial, licensed kitchen). Staff and families are serving and cleaning up.

Activities:

- WN’s Traveling Tutors as well as congregation and community volunteers who plan activities cannot enter the site, so we are getting creative with online ways to engage the kids.



Meeting These Unanticipated Needs

The Winter Nights' budget was never intended to cover the demands that COVID-19 has put on the Shelter.

Staffing: Without volunteers, there is more staff time needed simply for the health and safety of the families. Staff is putting in extra hours to clean restrooms and showers, serve meals, and also work with families on employment and housing options. Overtime and additional hours. It will add up quickly.

The Children: We are buying more laptops for their use in online schooling and creative engagement while “stuck” inside the shelter. We have lists of wonderful videos for them to watch. We are looking at online conferencing for tutors to check in with them and maybe do an evening story time for the young ones (get your jammies on and curl up). We are buying board games, art kits, ukuleles (teach yourself on YouTube), manipulatives... anything we can think of to keep the kids constructively occupied. Any more ideas?

Dinners: The estimated costs for take-out meals for families and staff each night run about \$200+ ... well in excess of what congregations usually donate per meal when prepared on-site. We will provide additional funds to help out. 12 weeks to go.

Emergency reserve for motel stays and meals should a family need to be quarantined. Estimated at \$900 - \$1000 per week for a family of 4.

Emergency fund for rapid housing: Each family saves for the cost of moving into housing. In this environment, in order to move families into housing as quickly as possible, WN will consider helping with deposits, supplies, and other essentials that could speed their transition.

Winter Nights' Families and Staff Could Use Your Help **Small donations add up to big results**

The best “social distancing” way to help is by making an online donation
<https://cccwinternights.org/contribute/>

Check can be made out to **Winter Nights Family Shelter** and sent to:
Winter Nights Family Shelter, 404 Gregory Lane #1, Pleasant Hill, CA 94523

Winter Nights Family Shelter
is currently serving
6 families * 22 guests * 7 adults & 15 children
9 girls, 12 boys: 16 weeks to 17 years old

Winter Night's Parking Lot Program
is currently serving
3 individuals & 1 couple, ages 73 – mid-40's
The PLP will remain open through the end of April