

# VINCENTIAN

CONNECTION

Winter 2021 Volume 57, Number 2 Magazine of The Society of St. Vincent de Paul Phoenix Diocesan Council [stvincentdepaul.net](http://stvincentdepaul.net)

## HOMELESS TO HOUSED

A SPECIAL ISSUE DEDICATED TO HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION

STORIES OF UNEXPECTED HARDSHIPS AND RESOUNDING REBOUNDS



# HOME



My mother became a Catholic at the age of 80. After the beautiful Easter Vigil service at which she was confirmed, she said, "I feel like I've come home." Our daughter in Atlanta, a mother herself of two small children, has a small pillow prominently displayed in her home that reads, "Home is where Mom is" to remind her of her own mother's love.

**Home means different things to different people, but whether we equate it with a physical place or a state of being, home is where we are most content; where we feel loved, valued, and at peace.**

It evokes memories of family gatherings around the Thanksgiving dinner table and early Christmas mornings when our children were young and eager to see what treasures Santa had brought them. In adolescence we seek independence, striving to create our own unique identity, but later in life something inevitably causes us to turn around, put one foot in front of the other, and begin the journey back home — to our loved ones, to the values instilled in us by our parents, and to our creator. Home, too, is holding the hand of a terminally ill loved one as he or she spends his or her final days in hospice care.

Many of those served by the Society of St. Vincent de Paul are named "homeless." They lack the comfort and security our homes provide us. More importantly, they lack connections to family and friends. The holidays we look forward to and cherish are often, for the homeless, lonely, painful reminders of what they've lost along the way. Many others we serve are at risk of becoming homeless. The rent and utility assistance we provide enable them to remain in their homes during times of financial crisis. St. Vincent de Paul is home for our Ozanam Manor residents. Because they are older and/or disabled, life on the street would be very challenging. Our Medical & Dental Clinic helps ensure a healthcare crisis doesn't lead to a state of homelessness, and our One at a Time college scholarship program increases the likelihood that future generations will be able to build meaningful lives and comfortable homes for themselves and their families.

St. Vincent de Paul offers many services intended to provide those we serve with a sense of home. Because, for all of us, there's no place like home.

*S Attwood*

Steve Attwood, President, Phoenix Diocesan Council

# VINCENTIAN

CONNECTION

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The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is an international nonprofit organization dedicated to serving people in need and providing others with the opportunity to serve. SVdP has been assisting central and northern Arizona families since 1946 and has more than 80 parish satellite locations. It offers services for the homeless, medical and dental care for the uninsured, charity dining rooms, transitional housing and homelessness prevention assistance.

Vincentian Connection magazine shares the stories of compassion, hope, healing and impact SVdP has in building a better community. The magazine has a circulation of 90,000.

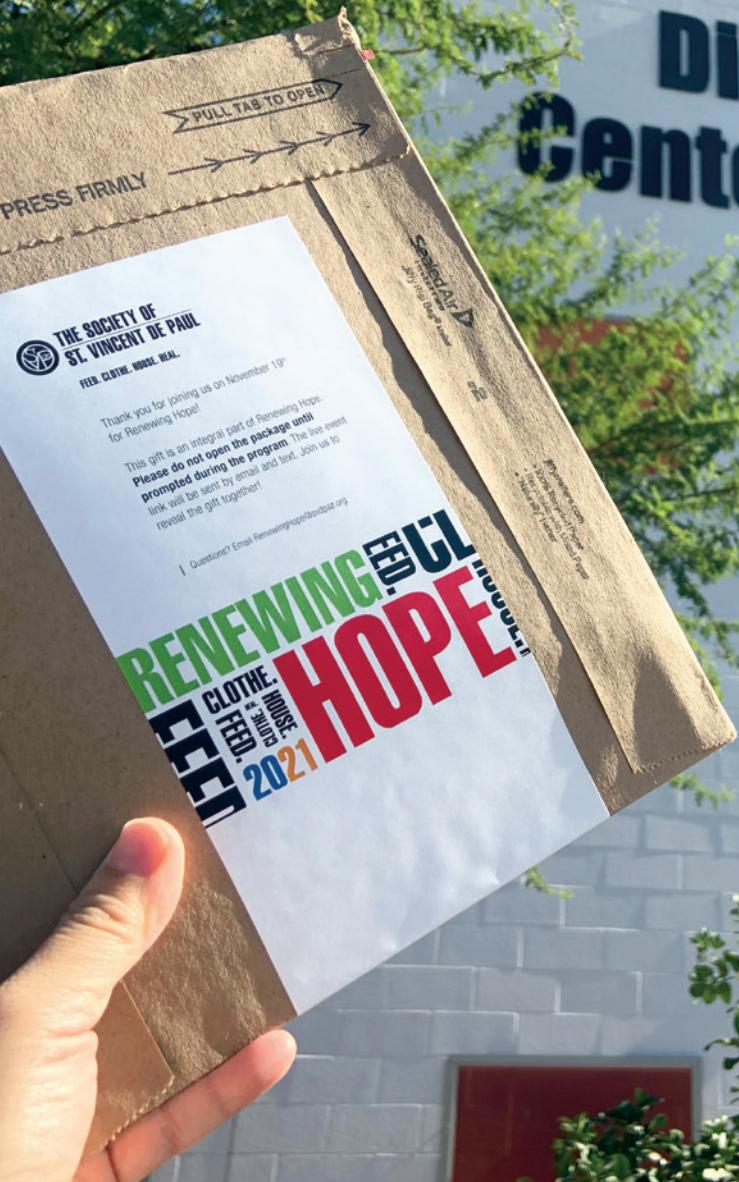


## ON THE COVER

(Left) Former Army veteran and Ozanam Manor resident Darren Collins prepares to move out of the transitional shelter and into a senior apartment community. (Right) With the help of St. Vincent de Paul's Social Work Services program Rebecca Torres transitions from living in her car with her dog to an apartment. Both Darren and Rebecca were able to end their homelessness and find a home of their own with the support of St. Vincent de Paul.

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# Diane & Bruce Halle Center for Hope & Healing

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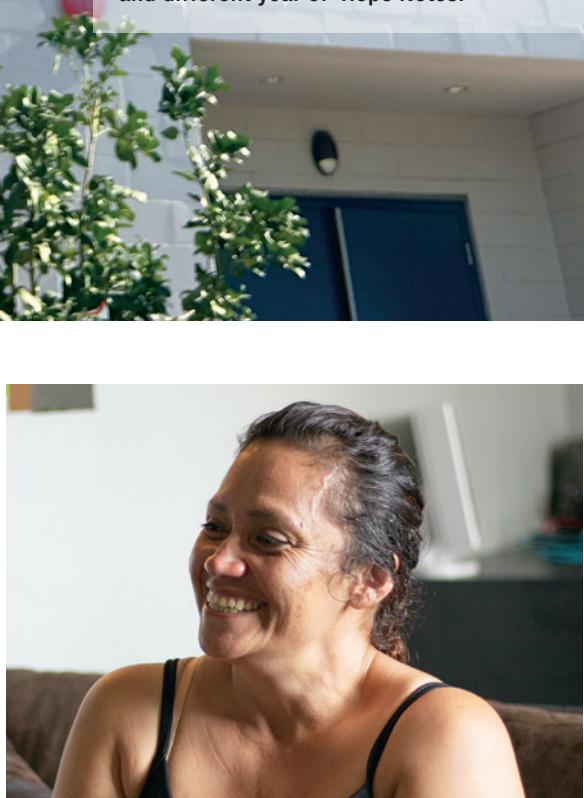
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Meet moments of renewed hope through the eyes of the SVdP family in a series of snapshots from the Renewing Hope virtual gathering that took place in lieu of SVdP's usual Restoring Hope Breakfast. And catch up on a new and different year of 'Hope Notes.'



### 8 A veteran's healing journey

After a sudden amputation, Darren Collins found himself without the care and housing he needed until SVdP's transitional shelter set him on path of healing — not only physically, but also spiritually in his search for home.



### 12 The new road home

A mental breakdown caused Rebecca Torres to lose everything except her dog Boss and her car, where they lived. Learn how SVdP's new Social Work Services program, with individualized wraparound services, found them hope and home.

# IN BRIEF



## Safe, together, cared for

This September, guests and their fur babies got some tender loving care Sept. 17 at St. Vincent de Paul's first-ever Companion Animal Program (CAP) mobile pet wellness clinic for pets experiencing homelessness alongside their owners. In partnership with the Arizona Humane Society and Maricopa County Animal Care and Control, the event provided pets general wellness checks, vaccines, heartworm testing, microchipping and more. Lost Our Home Pet Rescue, Midwestern University Animal Health Institute and Community Bridges Inc. had booths at the event as well. In total, the day saw 55 pets receive services and love.

This newly founded program – developed in partnership with longtime SVdP donor Marion Auray – strives to keep pet owners safe, together, and sheltered with their pets, by providing food, essential items, and basic veterinary care.

**"FOR PEOPLE WITHOUT HOUSING OR SHELTER, THEIR ANIMALS ARE OFTEN THE ONLY COMPANIONS THEY HAVE AND PROVIDE SAFETY, LOVE AND COMFORT,"** SVdP's Chief Program Officer Jessica Berg said. "With our partners' help, we were able to return some of that love and wellness."



## Summer's emergency heat relief shelter saves 1,777 from sleeping outside

Taking quick action when asked to help, St. Vincent de Paul hustled to open an emergency heat relief shelter inside its Family Dining Room in fewer than three weeks thanks to a partnership with Maricopa County aimed at preventing heat death after last year's record numbers.

On June 9, the temporary shelter opened with 200 socially distanced cots inside the dining room that was open and available with to-go meal service still in operation in SVdP's drive-thru.

"In the age of COVID, it's almost an issue of opposing forces," SVdP Shelter Manager Jennifer Morgan said. "We didn't want to increase the chance of anyone getting sick, but at the same time we knew that heat can be deadly. We needed to get people off of the streets and into shelter."

The shelter came just in time before the vicious, life-threatening 117-degree heat for a week straight. Its low-barrier model offered partitioned sections for men and women along with allowing pets, belongings and bikes. That resulted in getting more people off the street and inside during the extreme weather. Shelter ended on Sept. 30 along with SVdP's other heat-relief services, during a week of lovely 80-degree weather. In total it saw more than 1,777 people stay the night with many transitioning to more permanent housing. That's 1,777 lives saved from possible heat related death.

### >> HELP FUND HEALTHY SMILES WITH DENTAL CLINIC COFFEE CRUSADE



The St. Vincent de Paul dental team is asking the community to put their daily coffee fund to work for the Virginia G. Piper Dental Clinic at SVdP. As one of the few charity dental clinics in Phoenix, the team needs all the support it can get in caring for one of the largest, most unmet needs in the community — comprehensive dental care for uninsured patients.

For as little as \$5 a month, donors will receive an exclusive SVdP Coffee Crusade mug and be on the dental clinic's list for special events. Join the crusade now at: [stvincentdepaul.net/dental-clinic-coffee-crusade](http://stvincentdepaul.net/dental-clinic-coffee-crusade).

## Welcoming guests back inside with reopened dining rooms

With much anticipation, St. Vincent de Paul reopened its Family Dining Room on Oct. 4 after the closure of SVdP's emergency heat relief shelter, which temporarily used the space. Family Evening Meal and the educational Dream Center activities fully transitioned from to-go service to offer programs indoors, with socially distanced service.

"We're so excited to host meals inside again," SVdP Director of Food Services Danielle McMahon said. "There is nothing like the magic of the Family Dining Room with its restaurant-style meal service and the kids playing, learning and growing together in our Dream Center. It's such a joy to see that liveliness and connection again."

The reopening of the Family Dining Room followed the initial July reopening of three other SVdP dining rooms in Mesa, Phoenix and Sunnyslope, which implemented a "hybrid dining model." The model gives guests the option to dine inside while social distancing or to pick up to-go meals depending on space availability and whichever service method they prefer.





# RENEWING HOPE 2021

**O**n the morning of Nov. 19 members of the St. Vincent de Paul family from around the world joined our virtual celebration of hope – specifically Renewing Hope, the virtual community gathering held in lieu of the traditional Restoring Hope breakfast.

This event – held virtually once again this year – continued SVdP's longstanding tradition of gathering its community the Friday before Thanksgiving.

Hosted by 12News Anchor Mark Curtis, the program highlighted how SVdP brings people together for shared moments of hope and

healing regardless of their individual vantage point. Paula English, a volunteer, found a renewed sense of hope every Friday night by working in SVdP's Overnight Heat Relief Shelter. Sabrina McMiller, a single mother, found hope at SVdP when she and her children were experiencing homelessness over the summer. Ronnie Smith, a case manager in SVdP's Resource Center, not only helped Sabrina navigate her challenges, but he himself found healing through the process.

Viewers also received a special gift this year – Hope Notes. Inspired by the encouraging notes volunteers made for guests of the Overnight Heat Relief Shelter,



Scan QR Code to watch the  
Renewing Hope program

these Hope Notes gave event participants the opportunity to write a note of encouragement for another member of the SVdP family.

"One of the most powerful aspects of our St. Vincent de Paul mission is our ability to harness the strength of love, compassion, and care," Shannon Clancy, SVdP associate CEO, said. "To renew hope in our world. Each of us has the power every day to renew hope and change lives for those in our own circle and in the larger community."

The spreading of hope continued beyond the 30-minute virtual event as Hope Notes were exchanged throughout the SVdP family.



### **Paula English Overnight Heat Relief Shelter Volunteer**

"For them to share their vulnerability, and I get to create that safe environment for them, that's it. That's why I keep coming back. That's what renews my hope." – Paula

### **Ronnie Smith Resource Center Case Manager**

"Being at St. Vincent de Paul has been a healing process for me. It's been a restorative process because of the service to others. Serving others has brought the restoration that I needed. We often say that we're helping other people heal, but we're being healed too." – Ronnie

### **Sabrina McMiller Mom and Resource Center Guest**

"It's a miracle because I had just told the kids probably 10 minutes before meeting him [Ronnie] that we were going to get a blessing tomorrow. I just said it because we were feeling down. And he came up to the car that night, and the kids were like, 'I think we just got a blessing right now.'" – Sabrina

# A VETERAN'S JOURNEY OF HEALING, HOPE AND FINDING HOME

After a sudden amputation, Darren Collins needed more than housing. He needed Ozanam Manor.

By Sarah Farrell



# H ome means something different to each of us.

**For Darren Collins, it's a place to call his own. A place surrounded by family, in the neighborhood he grew up in, filled with the laughter of his grandkids.**



It would take St. Vincent de Paul's transitional shelter, Ozanam Manor, to help him find home. But his journey getting there started long before he became a resident.

With his stepfather in the Air Force, Darren moved around a lot growing up. In his four years of high school, he went to four different schools, including graduating in Okinawa, Japan. Later, a stint in the U.S. Army stationed him around the world. Even during his post-military career as a forklift driver, Darren spent time in Kansas, Arkansas and Arizona.

As he got older, his neuropathy, diabetes, and declining vision in his right eye forced him to retire. At first, he lived with his sister in a rental in Phoenix while applying for disability benefits. But when the landlord sold the house, Darren decided to move in with his 89-year-old father in South Phoenix. Luckily, he had secured his benefits shortly before.

They were doing okay, until Darren got an infection in his left foot. He tried to take care of it himself, but his diabetes complicated matters. He called in a home health nurse, who would wrap his feet three days a week, but the infection was persistent. One day, he unexpectedly passed out and woke up in the hospital, missing his left foot. Unsure of how he got there, the doctor told him that the infection had gotten down to the bone, forcing them to amputate.

When Darren's younger son Chi heard what had happened, he quickly made the move from Kansas City, Missouri, to Phoenix to help. "It was a shock at first him, you know, losing his leg," Chi said, "because I thought he'd be discouraged or down, but he was excited and happy to live."

What wasn't certain was Darren's living situation, given the care he would need. After the hospital, he went to a rehab center to

continue his recovery. As the time to leave rehab approached, Darren knew he needed to find a housing solution. His sister came to pick him up from rehab.

"I got in the car with my sister," he remembered. "And she said, 'You know Pops. He's 89. He ain't gonna be able to handle you the way you are in your situation.'"

Unsure where to go, Darren decided to reach out to Veterans Affairs, which referred him to SVP's Ozanam Manor, a transitional shelter for veterans, seniors, and adults with disabilities. There, residents receive support and resources to bridge them to permanent housing. The facility has 60 beds with 25 set aside for veterans like Darren.

Living at Ozanam Manor gave Darren the peace of mind to be in a safe space with daily meals while he worked with his case manager, Esther, to find a place to live.

"We interviewed Mr. Collins," Esther said, "and wanted to get the history of what his needs are. How we can help him as a community. That's how we initially welcome people in. We meet with them, and from there we made a commitment to one another to be a team and meet every week."

Being at Ozanam Manor was more than just a way for Darren to find stable housing. It gave him a sense of community, especially with the other veterans that lived there.

He could often be found sitting in the breakroom of his dorm even after mealtimes, chatting with his friends and fellow veterans. Darren made a point to say hi every time he saw them in the breakroom, elevator, or dorm room. Even if they didn't say hello back right away, people always came around, he said.

**"I'M HOME," HE SAID. "I'M GLAD TO BE HOME. HOME MEANS A LOT, NOT ONLY TO ME. I'M QUITE SURE IT MEANS A LOT TO EVERYBODY THAT'S OUT THERE LIKE I WAS."**

"I think God puts people in different places for a reason," he said. "I'm happy to be here. It's helped me immensely."

Being raised on the south side of Phoenix, it was important to Darren to stay in that community. Esther found a senior living community for him that perfectly fit his needs. As soon as it was built in June, he was able to move-in.

Move-in day itself was an unusually rainy June morning. Darren and Esther went to the complex as soon as it opened in the morning to sign paperwork and get his keys. Then it was off to the St. Vincent de Paul Last Chance Thrift Store to pick up his washer and dryer that had been in storage as well as a brand-new twin mattress for his new place.

Esther packed up the accessible van with a few boxes of Darren's belongings that he had had with him at Ozanam Manor.

As he rolled up to his door on the first floor of the brand-new apartment complex, he turned the key for the first time and entered his new apartment.

"I'm home," he said. "I'm glad to be home. Home means a lot, not only to me. I'm quite sure it means a lot to everybody that's out there like I was."

He went through the one-bedroom apartment marveling at the tall ceilings, huge bathroom, and laminate floors. Most of all, he was excited about how quiet, peaceful, and private the space was. He wasn't in the shelter anymore, living in a dorm space with 15 other people. This home was all his.

As Darren reflected on his journey to get to this place, he started to tear up, overcome with emotion. He had made it through housing insecurity, losing his leg, accepting that he needed help and rebuilding his life at Ozanam Manor, to end up here in his own apartment.

"At this age, now that I'm 62, I'm just trying to enjoy my life, spend time with my son now that he's here, and just kick it with my grandkids when they get here," he said. "Just live."



Scan the QR code to watch Darren's video

SCAN ME



"We've been blessed to help, but it's not just giving, it's caring."

– Chris and Brian Smith



# BE THE HELPING HAND IN YOUR COMMUNITY.

For Chris and Brian Smith, giving back runs in the family. That's why they chose to join our SVdP family, and not only give to the mission annually, but also volunteer with their three boys.

Every time the Smiths volunteered at the Phoenix Dining Room or visited our facilities, they saw the impact of being there for someone else and the unconditional support our guests receive at SVdP.

You can extend a helping hand to someone in need just like the Smiths by volunteering or donating to the mission today.

See what our SVdP family is all about.

**Make a gift.**

**Volunteer.**

**Be the difference.**

[stvincentdepaul.net/give](http://stvincentdepaul.net/give)

[stvincentdepaul.net/volunteer](http://stvincentdepaul.net/volunteer)



Scan the QR code to read the Smith's story or visit [stvincentdepaul.net/svdp-blog/brian-and-chris-smith](http://stvincentdepaul.net/svdp-blog/brian-and-chris-smith)

SCAN ME

# STEER THEM



# HOME

New Social Work Services program got Rebecca Torres and her dog Boss off the street after a mental health break resulted in them sleeping in the trunk of her car.

By Marisol Saldivar

**Rebecca Torres lived through a time of “darkness,” as she calls it. There was the darkness of her mind, but also the darkness that was the trunk of her car, a black sedan where she slept with her American bully dog named Boss during years of homelessness.**

Only with the help of St. Vincent de Paul's new Social Work Services (SWS) program did Rebecca make it off the streets and into a studio apartment. The new program, established in the spring of 2021 and made possible by the Garcia Family Foundation, focuses on solving homelessness one case at a time through intensive, individualized wraparound services.

The SWS program is based in SVdP's Resource Center, in the Diane & Bruce Halle Center for Hope & Healing which serves those at risk of or experiencing homelessness. The program's holistic approach has already connected more than 200 individuals to housing since its start. Rebecca counts among those housing successes.

## A diagnosis too late

Rebecca, who is 42, has schizoaffective disorder — a mix of schizophrenia with a mood disorder. The diagnosis didn't come until three years ago. In her case, it manifests as hallucinations, voices and extreme paranoia complicated by bipolar disorder. She experienced her first, mild symptoms when she was a teen. They grew more out of control into adulthood, especially when off medication. She eventually lost both her jobs, one at Amazon and another at an animal shelter. Without an income, she lost her home as well.

“Everything just started to go downhill,” Rebecca says. “I was so afraid to be homeless, and I ended up homeless.

I was staying in a backyard of my family member's house. We just lived in the backyard, but then it got



hot, and it just got to be too much. So we jumped from place to place, but nobody wanted us because of Boss.”

That's how Rebecca ended up living out of her car with her dog. She would push the backseat down, so they could curl up every night in the trunk for protection and warmth.

Rebecca sought shelter at local facilities, but when she learned she couldn't have Boss with her, that was a deal breaker. “He's everything to me,” Rebecca says. “He saved me, because I didn't want to live any more. And I tried to commit suicide, and he alerted help for me. So he's my best friend. Boss, he's my guy.”

Unfortunately, living on the street — even with Boss for protection — amplified Rebecca's paranoia. She recalls random people knocking on her window and how she discovered secluded alleys to park where she and Boss wouldn't be bothered.

Rebecca tried her best to maintain “normalcy,” going to doctor's appointments and starting medication again, which helps her cope with her disorder but offers no cure. She also started job hunting.



## A fresh start

Scraping together cash for fuel, somehow Rebecca managed to land a job working waste management at the airport for \$13 an hour. It wasn't glamorous, but it paid. She began her daily job of picking up trash on the grounds and making sure runways were clear of any debris that might fly up and get stuck in a plane engine. With no other choice, she'd leave Boss in the car.

At the end of the day, she'd return exhausted, sweaty and smelly. Still sleeping in her car and wanting to be presentable for the next workday, Rebecca sought out SVdP's Resource Center, where she could take daily showers and get fresh clothing.

That's when she met Krashanda Cleveland, manager of the SWS program.

"I noticed Rebecca as a regular coming in to take showers," says Krashanda, who — along with her SWS staff — looks for Resource Center guests who show promise and desire to get off the street. "It was just a matter of us starting that conversation."

Rebecca shared about her living situation and how thankful she was to have (at the very least) a place to make sure she was clean and ready for work.

"I felt like, this is someone that we could possibly help because she has employment," Krashanda says. "She's just lacking housing."

Krashanda connected Rebecca with SVdP case worker Mary Beth Marrone. Together, they identified barriers to Rebecca's housing and focused on setting achievable goals.

"At first I was like, okay, are they going to be like everybody else and tell me how they're going to help me? But then they don't help me, and they just push me out there? But that's not what happened," Rebecca says. "They didn't leave me by myself. They gave me papers, resources, numbers to call and apartments that work with them."

The team also helped with Boss. Beyond vaccinations and microchipping, they found temporary foster care for him, something only possible with Garcia Family Foundation's unrestricted funding. That allowed Rebecca to work without worry and focus on apartment hunting. She stayed persistent, continuing to show up and seek guidance from Mary Beth, who would call her almost every day.

"Making that contact every day, built a spirit of hope in her and that security that we weren't just going to abandon her or neglect her through the process," Mary Beth says. "It gave her more faith in the process that it would move forward and not fall through."





### One ring away

When the phone rang from a landlord, Rebecca almost didn't believe it. Her application had been accepted for a small studio on Indian School Road, just off I-17. She immediately called Mary Beth with the news and summer move-in date.

Back at SVdP's Resource Center, the SWS team got to work. Not only did they cover Rebecca's deposit and first month's rent, but they also set in motion a furniture delivery from SVdP's nearest thrift store and readied a food box for Rebecca as well.

With every housing success, the team has a tradition where the newly housed gets to ring a victory bell hung on the wall of the center. The day Rebecca picked up her check, she cried as she rang the bell.

"I was already really emotional because it was a long journey," Rebecca says. "And I didn't know if I was going to make it, but I did. And ringing the bell made me feel like I had pride again. I felt like I finally accomplished something."

"She wanted it so badly. She wanted to be off the streets," Krashanda says, "and she just needed some help making that work, someone being able to guide her in the right directions. She did the rest."



### Four walls and two dog beds

The doormat outside Rebecca's apartment says, "Bless this mess." And on each wall of her studio, she has inspirational wall prints — all faith based. Rebecca says it helps her keep going even when things still seem impossible.

On \$13 an hour, she budgets carefully. While her mental health disorder qualifies her for Social Security Disability, she chooses not to accept that help, because she feels she can work.

Of course, her dog Boss is her daily motivator as well. Back home with her now, she sets aside just enough to make sure he has a fresh bone each week to stay busy while she's at work. And thanks to SVdP's thrift store, Boss has not one, but two beds.

For the next year, the SWS team will follow up to check on Rebecca and make sure all is well.

Recently, she fell while climbing the concrete stairs to her second-floor studio, resulting in knee issues that make working on her feet all day difficult.

"If I don't work, I don't have money," Rebecca says, "and if I don't have money, then I don't have a place to live. So I've been working. I worked today with my knee hurt, because I know rent is due."

While Rebecca powers through, the difference this time is the support system she has in Mary Beth, who continues to help her toward solutions, be it medical care or occasional food assistance.

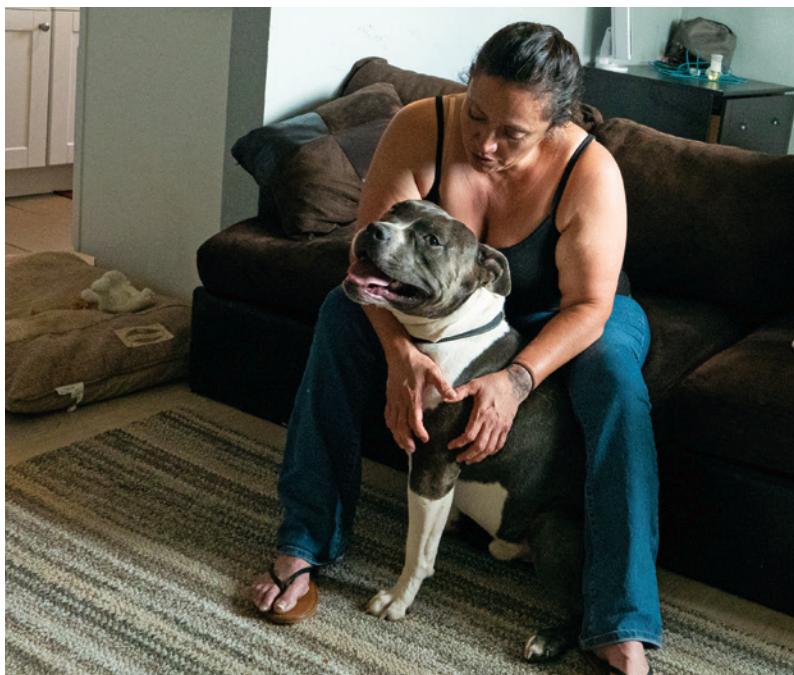
Quiet on her sofa for a moment, Rebecca embraces Boss. Recollecting their journey together, she looks him in the eye and says,

"I have to make it."



Scan the QR code to  
watch Rebecca's video

SCAN ME



# A GUEST, BUT ALSO A VOLUNTEER ON A MISSION TO WORK HIS WAY OUT OF HOMELESSNESS

Rex finds hope (and hopefully a home) through SVdP's new Workforce Development Program

By Marisol Saldivar

**R**ex is a force. He zips around St. Vincent de Paul's Sunnyslope Dining Room setting up meals and unloading delivery trucks during his volunteer shifts. At night, he retreats to a secluded place to sleep on the street.

In a few months' time, Rex hopes that will change.

He's one of a handful of SVdP guests experiencing homelessness who are part of our new Workforce Development Program. Sponsored by the Opus Foundation, the personalized program pairs individuals experiencing homelessness with trained SVdP staff to work one-on-one to overcome barriers that had previously prevented them from finding full-time employment.

Rex struggles with bipolar disorder and ADHD. As an adult, he turned to marijuana and other drugs until using got him fired from construction jobs. He then landed on the streets and doing a couple of stints in prison. When he got out in 2018, he had nowhere to go and became a regular guest of the dining room.

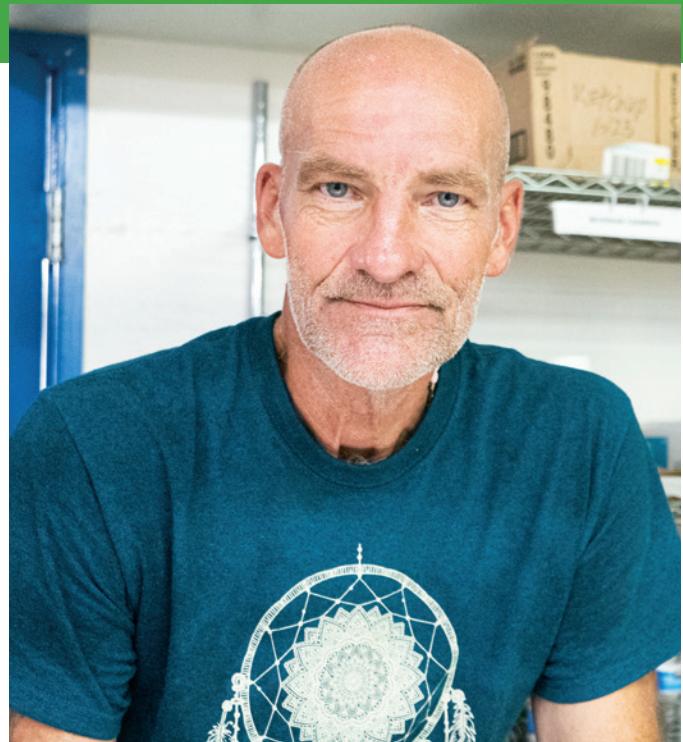
Staff there took an interest in his potential and recommended him for the new program.

"Rex has been a client at SVdP's Sunnyslope Dining Room 'forever,'" Jim Baker, the dining rooms manager, says. "Homeless off and on for 18+ years, the structure of this program got him so incentivized that he's doing phenomenal."

Rex simply needed the confidence and tools to get back in society.

As each case of homelessness is highly unique, so are the goals for individual participants. Rex's plan includes earning his driver's license, attending weekly therapy, staying clean, taking his medications, landing a driving job and maintaining a regular volunteer shift within the dining room.

"Once I walk into that apartment and look around and say it's mine, I'm sure it's going to be gratifying," he says. "It's going to be a relief for me."



"Volunteering for me, it gives me some self-satisfaction. You know, it brings the morale out," says Rex, who also acknowledges it gets him out of the elements. "I can do laundry. I can take a shower every day. I get clothing."

Rex knows the big payoff comes at the end when he finds stable employment and can afford his own housing.

"Once I walk into that apartment and look around and say it's mine, I'm sure it's going to be gratifying," he says. "It's going to be a relief for me."

By November, Rex achieved nine months of sobriety — his longest stretch yet. He's also attended every mental health appointment and is preparing for his driving test.

"This time I've got my mindset in a different spot," Rex says. "This program just got me to the level of thinking more clearly. I can think of things a little better now than I could before, because my brain was a thousand horsepower a minute."

In a few months, case managers will check Rex's status. Hopefully then, he'll not only have his sobriety, but also his health, credentials, a job and soon, a home of his own.



Scan the QR code to watch Rex's video



## Once a Palomino student shopper, **NOW A THRIFT STORE STAFFER**

By Marisol Saldivar



In a black St. Vincent de Paul shirt, Stephanie Abril rings up shoppers' unique finds at the nonprofit's Hope Chest Thrift Store at 4857 E. Greenway Rd in Scottsdale. As a team lead, she price checks items, sets up store displays and helps sort the latest donations.

It's a job with a special connection for Stephanie — one she traces back to childhood and her years as a student at Palomino Intermediate School.

Stephanie remembers special field trip days leading up to Christmas, where she and her classmates would walk to SVdP's Bell Road Thrift Store for the annual Palomino Christmas event.

For 32 years, the Bell Road store has gifted Palomino Primary and Intermediate

students a holiday shopping spree. Students pick out three presents, usually, to give to family members and sometimes a toy for themselves.

"It was something that we looked forward to every Christmas," says, Stephanie, who participated during fourth, fifth and sixth grade. "So that's kind of how I first heard of St. Vincent de Paul when I was little."

Stephanie always picked out small, ceramic figurines — somewhat like the Precious Moments figures.

I remember that every year I would grab three of those, and I would give them to my mom," she says. "It became like a traditional thing."

She would carefully tote the figurines back to school, where the teachers help the students wrap their presents before heading home. Stephanie remembers how excited she and her classmates felt to be able to give something to their family members.

"I remember seeing a lot of kids really happy, 'Oh, look, I got my mom this, you know, she's been wanting one of these for a while,'" Stephanie recalls. "It's just something really nice that the kids could give back to their parents or their family members, especially



Scan the QR code to watch Stephanie's video

because a lot of kids can't, or a lot of families can't provide that stuff."

Stephanie never expected she might come full circle one day and provide that same opportunity to current Palomino students. For a second year, the annual Palomino Event will provide students gift cards to SVdP thrift stores, including Hope Chest, for individualized shopping trips instead of hosting a large shopping spree event.

It makes Stephanie proud to be part of the effort, especially after suffering job loss during the pandemic. In September 2020, SVdP had been the only place to offer her work in helping open the Hope Chest Thrift Store.

"This is such a great store to come and shop at, especially not only just Christmas time, but just all year long, because there's so many great items that are so affordable," Stephanie says. "Not only that, but the funds go to the community, which helps out people that are in need."

While working recently, she came across some figurines like the ones she used to give her mother. And with the Palomino opportunity this December, she wonders if another student might continue her tradition with their mom.



## MESA'S LITTLE FARM THAT COULD WITH HELP FROM VOLUNTEER **MARY ANN RICKETTS**

By Sarah Farrell



Six years ago, not many people would've looked at the barren parking lot at the Mesa Dining Room and imagined the small, blooming oasis of a farm that it has become. Luckily, two St. Vincent de Paul volunteers did see the potential in that quarter of an acre space. Together, Mary Ann Ricketts and Margot Jauregui built the Mesa Urban Farm into what it is today — a thriving community food source.

"I feel so blessed to serve God by helping those in need by growing healthy food, while having so much fun," Mary Ann says.

Mary Ann didn't have a background in gardening or urban farming when she took on cultivating the smallest (but very mighty) of SVdP's three urban farms. But the retired nurse, who lives in Chandler, did know how to organize and manage people and projects.

She's involved with SVdP in many ways — as a Vincentian volunteer delivering food boxes to houses, a staff mom, and a founding member of WISH (Women in Service and Hope) — but everyone forever ties Mary Ann to the growth and success of the Mesa Urban Farm.

### **WITHOUT MARY ANN, THE SMALLEST OF SVDP'S THREE URBAN F FARMS WOULD NOT EXIST**

The farm itself started with a semi-truck of pine mulch that was donated and grew from there.

"We started planting, just basic salad things," Mary Ann says. "Then we'd make salad. Go up where the people sat, and we'd say, 'We're growing this do you want to help us?'"

Back in the beginning, Mary Ann and Margot would be there seven days a week with volunteers tending to the farm. They worked closely with dining room guests as well and helped about 18 of them find full-time employment and stability through the experience.

Now the volunteers are there three days a week to help maintain the largely self-sustaining farm, but unlike the other farms at the Human Services Campus and Watkins Campus, this farm is entirely volunteer run.

"Mary Ann is one of the most dedicated volunteers I've known in my five plus years at SVdP," SVdP Chief Program Officer Jessica Berg says. "She recruits community volunteers and donors, while also engaging and working with our dining room guests who volunteer with us. In short, we absolutely would not have a Mesa farm without her."

Over the years they've added shade structures, 48 raised beds, a cactus garden, flowers and planters, and composting to make use of the food waste from the dining room. And each addition has a story. Mary Ann points out, a person, business, or group willing to go the extra mile to support the community.

She made sure that community always remains the centerpiece of the Mesa Urban Farm. The purpose of this farm, she says, is to supply healthy, mostly organic food to families and individuals in the community because the area they live in is considered a food desert.

For Mary Ann, being able to serve the families in the community, the guests, and the volunteers who come to help is how she lives the SVdP mission every day.



# THE SOCIETY OF A THOUSAND THANKS

**OLYMPIANS  
WHO GIVE BACK  
THROUGH SVDP  
AND TWO VERY  
SPECIAL THANKS**

Anyone who drove by St. Vincent de Paul's main campus this summer saw a special shout out to Devin Booker and Sarah Sponcil, two Olympians who competed this summer and also have a connection to SVdP. Devin, a Phoenix Suns basketball player who played for Team USA during the Olympics, has volunteered with fellow Suns players during holidays inside SVdP's dining rooms. And Sarah, a Phoenix native and Team USA beach volleyball player, paid a visit to campus just after the Olympic games this summer. Over the years, she's given both time and money to help SVdP feed, clothe, house and heal those less fortunate in her local community.

Devin and Sarah follow a tradition of Olympians ranging from Muhammed Ali to Michael Johnson, Gary Hall Jr. and more, who have chosen to join forces with SVdP to build a better community. We thank, Devin, Sarah and all these special athletes who show kindness and use their platforms to help others.



# THE SOCIETY OF A THOUSAND THANKS

## APS provides critical support during height of Arizona heat and evictions

As two crises collided — summer heat and evictions — Arizona Public Service provided timely relief with \$250,000 for three SVdP programs that help keep people sheltered, in their homes and out of the heat. That generosity made SVdP's emergency heat relief shelter and services possible at its Phoenix Dining Room and its Resource Center. The funding also prevented hundreds of evictions by paying for mortgage, rent and utility bills across the Valley. The utility company didn't forget the vulnerable Arizona communities that SVdP serves beyond the Valley, and dedicated an additional portion to heat relief support and bill assistance in APS territory outside of Metro Phoenix. Thank you, APS, for your continued care for the community!



## SVdP among surprise recipients of Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust generosity

On Sept. 13, Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust gifted \$123 million in grants to 71 Arizona nonprofits — the largest single-day grant initiative in Arizona history. St. Vincent de Paul had the honor to be among those recipients. The grants were presented to the awardees throughout the day — as a complete surprise. The unexpected generosity not only overwhelmed SVdP, but also inspired us to continue to find new, innovative ways to uplift our community. For over 20 years, the Piper Trust has been a champion and supporter of SVdP's mission to feed, clothe, house and heal Arizona. Thank you, Piper Trust, for the continued confidence as SVdP furthers its mission and enhances the quality of life in this beautiful state.



## Second Chance Bike Drive breaks record with almost 1,300 bikes for people in need

For the second year now, ABC15 and Earnhardt Auto Centers have teamed up to help SVdP get bikes to adults and kids in need through the Second Chance Bike Drive. On Sept. 25, new and used bike donations rolled into Earnhardt locations across the Valley, resulting in almost 1,300 — about 100 more than last year — bikes being donated to SVdP for repair and/or distribution through the nonprofit's Bike Shop. Thank you so much ABC15 and Earnhardt Auto Centers for helping collect bikes. All those bicycles helped with holiday gifting and got wheels to kids needing transportation for school or adults needing a reliable way to get to work.



### Fiesta Bowl Charities supports SVdP health programming for at-risk youth

The Fiesta Bowl Charities will impact the lives of hundreds of youth in the community through a \$25,000 gift funding two critical SVdP programs. First, SVdP's Virginia G. Piper Medical Clinic can continue its annual Sports Physical Clinic outreach to more than 300 at-risk kids in Title 1 schools across Maricopa County to help address overall physical and emotional health while offering resources for preventative care. And second, SVdP's Ben and Catherine Ivy Center for Family Wellness can further its mission to educate and empower kids to make healthier lifestyle choices through the annual Every Little Step Counts program that changes long-term dietary, physical, emotional and general wellness behaviors.

Thanks, Fiesta Bowl Charities!

### Sagicor saves SVdP's Christmas thrift store shopping spree for Palomino students

Another year of pandemic meant the usual, jam-packed Christmas shopping spree SVdP hosts at one of its thrift stores for Palomino Primary and Intermediate students had to look different again this year. But thanks to Sagicor Life Insurance Company, the holiday tradition and spirit of students giving back to their families lived on. Sagicor gave a generous \$25,000 to provide each student with a \$25 gift card to one of SVdP's thrift stores, where they could individually shop to pick out presents for family and a gift for themselves. Thank you, Sagicor, for keeping this beloved SVdP Christmas tradition and the giving spirit of the holidays alive!



### Embraer Foundation makes critical meals possible at Sunnyslope Dining Room

Thank you to Embraer Foundation, for their first-time grant of \$8,000 to SVdP in support of nourishing meals for individuals experiencing homelessness and food insecurity in the Sunnyslope area. The funding specifically goes to SVdP's Sunnyslope Dining Room, one of the only charity dining rooms in an area with sparse food assistance. Every day, the dining room provides almost 100 hot meals to people living on the street. Thanks, Embraer, for caring for some of SVdP's most vulnerable guests!

### Charles Schwab Foundation helps families and guests experiencing homelessness

A long-time partner in caring for the community, Charles Schwab Foundation continues to lend critical and timely support to SVdP with a \$25,000 gift that will help feed families' minds and bodies through its support of Family Evening Meal programming, a financial literacy course and the children's educational Dream Center. The funding also boosts SVdP's Resource Center services to meet basic needs of guests experiencing homelessness with fresh clothing, hygiene items and more. Thank you, Charles Schwab Foundation, for supporting each of these critical areas serving different populations!

# THE SOCIETY OF A THOUSAND THANKS



## STABILIZING FAMILIES, STABILIZING COMMUNITIES

Our passionate front-line team at the Resource Center in the Diane & Bruce Halle Center for Hope & Healing aims to prevent and end homelessness while tirelessly preserving families' dignity and stability, and lessening the economic burdens. Only with the help of generous community partners are we able to do so.

### Valley of the Sun United Way | \$100,000

Through its new Mighty Change 2026 initiative, Valley of the Sun United Way granted SVdP \$100,000 to share in its five-year vision: Creating a community where every child, family and individual is healthy, has a safe place to live, and has every opportunity to succeed in school, in life, and in work. Thank you, VSUW, for your partnership with SVdP in offering vulnerable Valley residents housing security that includes both rent and mortgage support.

### Bank of America | \$65,000

Through an Economic Mobility grant, Bank of America Charitable Foundation is working with SVdP to stabilize families through SVdP's new Social Work Services program, which offers intensive, wraparound services to remove housing barriers for each individual case of a family experiencing homelessness. Bank of America's \$65,000 specifically helps the program cover rent and utility assistance with the goal of building stronger, more empowered communities through Family Stability...one family at a time. Thank you!

### Wells Fargo | \$10,000

With a focus on housing affordability, Wells Fargo's investment in Neighborhood Stabilization through rent assistance is rooted in its desire to support an inclusive and sustainable economic recovery in the communities it serves. Thank you, Wells Fargo, for giving \$10,000 to help SVdP provide rent assistance during these times of economic recovery for vulnerable renters in the community.

### CIT Bank | \$5,000

CIT Bank's commitment to community investment is inspired by the altruistic principle of helping people in their time of need. This led to its \$5,000 commitment to SVdP's new Social Work Services program, helping develop and fund multi-layered interventions that best fit each family's situation. Thank you for supporting this individualized approach in stabilizing vulnerable families experiencing or at risk of homelessness.



## SYSTEMIC CHANGE ONE CHILD AT A TIME

At St. Vincent de Paul, "healing" communities encompasses more than health and wellness programming. Our Family Dining Room and Dream Center help heal systemic poverty for socio-economically disadvantaged families by offering nutrition for mind and body to every child who visits for a hot meal and educational enrichment. Programming addresses educational barriers and challenges kids to pursue brighter futures.

Many thanks to Next Phase Enterprises for being our primary Dream Center partner since 2015.

**NEXT PHASE**  
ENTERPRISES



# FEEDING THE HUNGRY TAKES A VILLAGE



## Albertsons Companies Foundation gives on top of multiple media food drives

A big thank you goes to Albertsons Companies Foundation, which encompasses Safeway in Arizona. Since the onset of the pandemic, the foundation has given grant funding to SVdP. Adding to that generosity, Albertsons and Safeway continue to host large food drives with media partners to support SVdP and other food charities in the Valley. This fall season, those included Arizona's Family (3TV/CBS 5) Feeding Arizona Children, 102.5 KNIX Million Meal Crusade and Fox 10 Holiday Food Drive. Each drive meant hundreds of thousands of dollars for food boxes and meals.

[azfamily.com](http://azfamily.com)



## Bashas' steps up throughout the seasons to get summer water and fall turkeys to SVdP

A tried-and-true partner for about three decades, Bashas' and their Food City stores come through every year to help SVdP weather the tough summer season and make the holidays extra special with big-time media drives to help raise water and turkey donations for individuals and families in need. This year, their partnership in the ABC15 Water Drive brought in 1.8 million bottles of water to help keep the Valley's most vulnerable hydrated during hot summer months. And their annual partnership in the 12 News Turkey Tuesday drive brought in thousands of turkeys for families this holiday with generous support from customers at the register.



## Fry's Food Stores continue support of SVdP dining rooms and food pantries

Two efforts through Fry's Food Stores helped make sure SVdP got food to individuals and families experiencing food insecurity the latter half of this year.

A gift from Fry's through The Kroger Co. Zero Hunger | Zero Waste charitable giving platform kept food on the table at SVdP's five charity dining rooms and helped stock shelves in the nonprofit's 80+ neighborhood food pantries.

Additionally, the Summer of a Million Meals cash register donation campaign at Fry's resulted in support for SVdP food pantries not only in Phoenix, but shared across Cottonwood, Flagstaff, Prescott, Prescott Valley and Sierra Vista as well!

"We are committed to helping the communities we call home grow and prosper," Kroger explains.

Thanks local Fry's Food Stores for the sustained support!



# VINCENTIAN

CONNECTION

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# A GIFT THAT GIVES BACK AGAIN

The state of Arizona provides an incredible incentive for taxpayers who donate to certain qualifying charities like St. Vincent de Paul. Thanks to the Arizona Charitable Tax Credit, you can donate up to \$800 and get it right back on your Arizona tax return. Find out more at [CharityTaxCreditAZ.com](http://CharityTaxCreditAZ.com) or call 602.266.GIVE (4483)

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## Step 1

Donate to St. Vincent de Paul to support needy families in Arizona.



## Step 2

File your taxes and claim the credit by using AZDOR Form 321.



## Step 3

**Receive your tax credit!**  
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