

# Grace at Work



Lutheran Social Services of Northern California

FALL 2025



## *Beyond Four Walls: The Relational Foundation of Housing Success*

As leaders in the movement to end homelessness, we have a moral and practical responsibility to follow approaches that are backed by research. We must honor human dignity while delivering real results. The data is clear: Housing First works, and relationships make it last.

After decades of research, Housing First shows remarkable results.

Housing First means giving people a home first, then providing support. This works better than making people prove they're "ready" for housing.

A major review found that Housing First helps 66% to 90% of people keep their housing (Roggenbuck, 2022). That's much higher than previous approaches. Programs that provide both housing and ongoing support achieve up to 98% success rates after one year.

But here's what's really important: the size of someone's support network directly affects how well they can keep their housing stable (Kirst et al., 2020). It's not just about handing someone keys. It's about helping rebuild the connections that help people thrive.

Research from a major Canadian study followed 2,141 people. It shows that people who had stronger relationships with their case managers did much better in their communities. Their quality of life improved significantly (Stergiopoulos et al., 2014).

Later research analyzing this data found something remarkable: even small improvements in someone's social connections led to dramatically better quality of life (Friesdorf et al., 2022). Think about that: better relationships led to much better lives.

We need to understand two types of connections. Some connect people to others with similar experiences—like other people who have been homeless. Others open doors to new networks and opportunities in the broader community. Both matter. But connections to new networks help people build a life beyond just using services. Homelessness doesn't just take away a home. It damages someone's sense of who they are. People need safe spaces where they can try things, make mistakes, and start to feel like themselves again.

Sometimes barriers aren't about logistics. They're about dignity. Someone might stop coming to support groups not because they lack transportation. They stop because they don't want to be seen as needing charity. Housing saves communities an average of \$31,545 per person over two years (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2025). That's money not spent on emergency rooms, jails, and shelters. Housing First programs cost up to \$23,000 less per person annually than shelter programs (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2025).

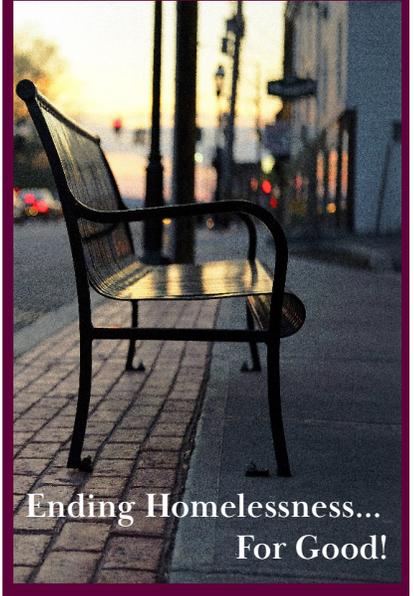
Housing First isn't just a program—it's a value system. It recognizes housing as a human right. People need homes, and they need community. When we focus on both, we don't just end homelessness. We restore lives and strengthen communities. This is our foundation and how we build something better.

To view the complete research and citations that inform this article, visit [www.lssnorcal.org](http://www.lssnorcal.org)

Carol Roberts, Ph.D. - CEO

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## Welcome New Board Members!

We're excited to introduce three exceptional leaders who have recently joined the LSS of Northern California Board of Directors. Each brings unique expertise and a shared commitment to creating lasting change in our communities.

### Dr. Gloria Hernandez: Educational Leadership



Dr. Gloria Hernandez brings over 35 years of educational leadership to our board, including six years as Superintendent of Ravenswood City School District. She successfully led her district's exit from a twenty-year federal court mandate and increased graduation rates from the low forties to 86 percent.

What resonates most with LSS' mission is Dr. Hernandez's experience addressing systemic barriers. During her tenure, she implemented safety net collaborations with organizations to address student homelessness and hunger—work that aligns perfectly with our comprehensive approach to ending homelessness.

### Mike Oliver: Technology with Purpose



As President of SOLUS Technology Solutions, Mike Oliver has spent over two decades building successful technology businesses while maintaining a commitment to community service. His global perspective and recognition as an "Advisor of the Year" reflect both his business expertise and dedication to excellence.

Mike's technology leadership comes at a crucial time as LSS continues to innovate in service delivery. His understanding of how technology can be optimized will help us leverage digital tools to reach more people in need more effectively.

### Savannah Jorgensen: Policy and Advocacy



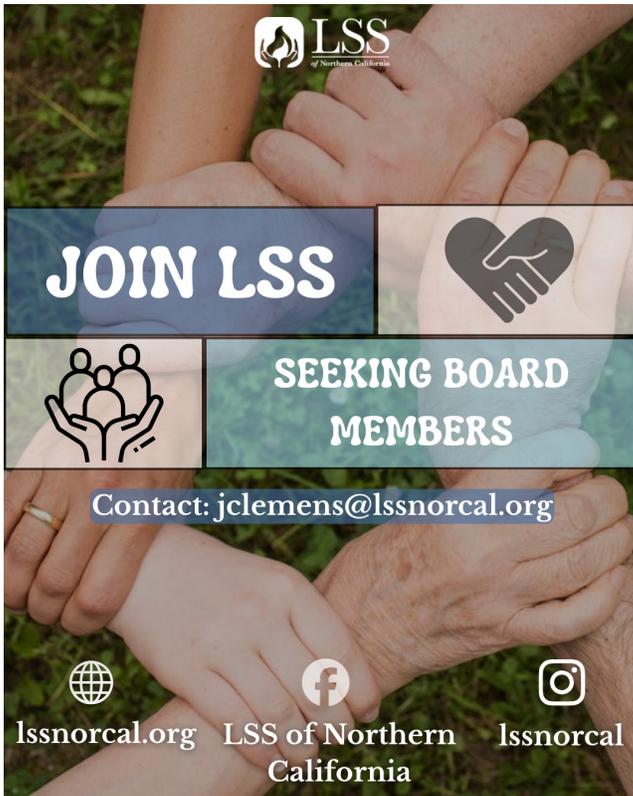
Savannah Jorgensen brings a unique combination of scientific research and hands-on policy advocacy. Currently serving as Public Policy & Organizing Manager for the League of Women Voters of California, she has proven experience turning policy analysis into action.

Her recent work as Legislative Coordinator for the Lutheran Office of Public Policy-California included advocating for affordable housing and environmental justice—issues directly connected to LSS' daily work. Her role coordinating Lutheran Lobby Day demonstrates her ability to mobilize communities around shared values.

## Strengthening Our Mission

These three leaders join our board at an exciting time for LSS. As we mark nearly six decades of service, their combined expertise in education, technology, and policy advocacy strengthens our ability to address both immediate needs and systemic barriers.

Together, they embody the collaborative approach that has allowed LSS to help more than 6,500 people last year. Their diverse backgrounds and shared commitment to justice position us well to expand our impact as we continue our work of ending homelessness, for good.



**LSS**  
of Northern California

**JOIN LSS**

**SEEKING BOARD MEMBERS**

Contact: [jclemens@lssnorcal.org](mailto:jclemens@lssnorcal.org)

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## Join Our Mission: Become a Board Member!

Ready to make a tangible difference in Northern California? Our team of dedicated Board of Directors are seeking passionate individuals to help:

**Advocate** – Amplify LSS NorCal’s mission and raise awareness in the community.

**Support** – Provide expertise, resources, and connections that strengthen programs.

**Oversee** – Ensure strong governance, accountability, and strategic direction.

By sharing your unique skills and perspective, you can play a vital role in expanding stable housing opportunities and strengthening lives across Northern California.

If you are interested, please contact Development Director Julie Clemens at [jclemens@lssnorcal.org](mailto:jclemens@lssnorcal.org)



## Celebrating David S: A Story of Resilience and Success

We are incredibly proud to celebrate the remarkable journey of one of our young adults, David. After years of instability, David entered our Achieving Change Together Shasta program, funded by OES, in search of a steady path forward. What he found was not only stability but also a launching pad for a brighter future.

During his time with us, David truly thrived. He secured not one but two jobs, purchased his own car, and committed himself fully to his education at Shasta College while also playing football. His hard work and dedication paid off in a big way: David earned a full-ride scholarship to Kansas State University to continue his education and play football at the next level. Because of this incredible opportunity, he graduated early from our program, and we couldn’t be prouder of his accomplishments.

David’s journey is a true testament to resilience and perseverance! A powerful example of what can happen when a young person is given the right support and runs with it. We wish him all the best in his exciting next chapters!



## Celebrating John Paul Soto's 25 Years of Service to LSS Northern California

When John Paul Soto joined Lutheran Social Services of Northern California in 2000 as a case manager, he brought a deep commitment to serving vulnerable populations and belief in community advocacy. Twenty-five years later, as Deputy Director overseeing the North Coast Area, JP has become integral to both LSS' mission and the broader fight for social justice throughout the San Francisco Bay Area.

JP's journey began with direct service to chronically homeless individuals in supportive housing, working with people living with HIV, facing homelessness, substance use, and mental health challenges. This hands-on experience shaped his understanding of systemic barriers that perpetuate inequality. "JP has always understood that effective advocacy starts with

listening to the people we serve," says Carol Roberts, CEO. "His approach amplifies client voices in rooms where policy decisions are made."

Advancing through Program Manager and Senior Program Manager roles, JP expanded from individual programs to comprehensive service coordination, directing multiple initiatives including money management and transitional housing programs while consistently demonstrating LSS' commitment to meeting people where they are.

JP's advocacy extends far beyond LSS through two decades of service on planning bodies ensuring client voices are heard in policy decisions. His longest appointment to the San Francisco HIV Community Planning Council spans over 20 years advocating for fair Ryan White CARE Act fund allocation. Currently serving as community co-chair of the Governor's California Planning Group, he contributes to the reshaping of statewide HIV policy.

Through coalitions like HIV/AIDS Provider Network (HAPN), San Francisco Supportive Housing Provider Network (SHPN), and the Human Services Network in San Francisco (HSN), JP has actively participated in efforts to protect and expand funding for essential services. This year alone, his advocacy contributed to securing cost-of-doing-business increases during San Francisco's budget crisis, ensuring continued services for the community's most vulnerable members.

JP's community involvement extends beyond his professional role through current and previous volunteer leadership with the Imperial Council San Francisco, Golden State Gay Rodeo Association, and Dolores Street Community Services. "Whether facilitating statewide meetings or volunteering at fundraisers, JP brings the same dedication," observes Julie Clemens, Development Director. "He understands that lasting change requires both policy advocacy and grassroots community building."

The challenges facing LSS' communities—housing affordability, healthcare access, economic inequality—require the sustained, multifaceted approach JP has exemplified. His ability to work from street-level service to state-level advocacy positions him as an impactful voice in the ongoing fight for social justice.

## THANK YOU NAPA VALLEY LUTHERAN



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**thrivent**<sup>®</sup>

Thank you to Leanne, Napa Valley Lutheran for their partnership, and Lynette Felsen for bring this all to fruition for our participants. Together, you're helping us offer not just housing, but true homes where our participants can build secure, happy lives!

## A Heartfelt Thank You to Napa Valley Lutheran!

We want to celebrate a remarkable example of community leadership! As part of the “God’s Work Our Hands” project, Napa Valley Lutheran decided to invite their members to donate “welcome basket” items for our participants moving into homes. Leanne Martinsen used her Thrivent Action Team community impact card to augment the donations from the church members, and the results were astounding!

These thoughtful baskets—filled with kitchen essentials, cleaning supplies, and comforting accessories—bring an immediate sense of belonging and dignity to our participants. It’s exactly the kind of creative partnership that strengthens our entire community.

If you’re a Thrivent Financial member, with membership you have similar opportunities to support LSS at no cost to you. Through Thrivent Choice, you can direct funds to our organization, and through Thrivent Action Teams, you can lead projects like this one. Thrivent provides planning resources and up to \$250 to help make your vision a reality.

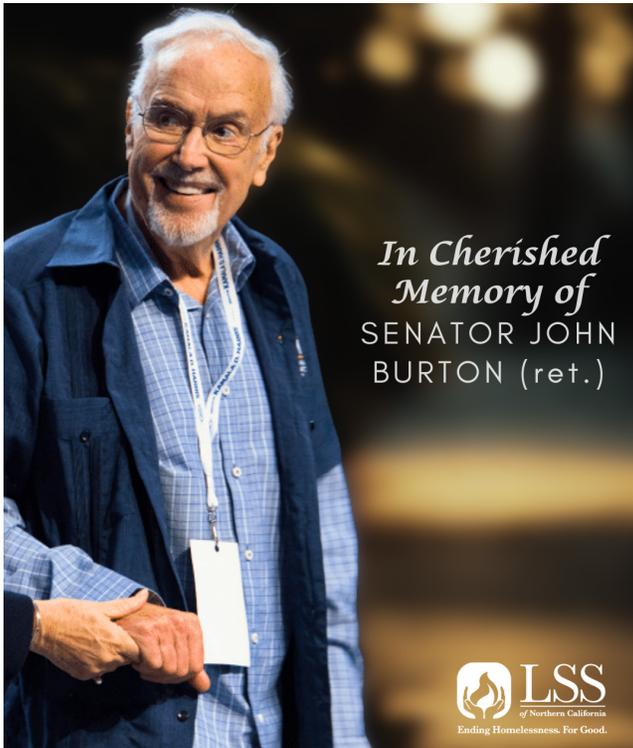


## Her Journwy, Her Powe: Foundation for her future

When Noelle welcomed her son into the world, she knew exactly what she wanted for his future. She made the decision to find an apartment that would better support her growing family, and secured a new home in early April, shortly after his birth – a choice that reflects her commitment to creating the environment she envisioned for her child.

Being a dedicated participant, Noelle was able to leverage the support of the LSS Money Management program, itw ensures rent and utilities are paid first to maintain housing stability. “It’s nice knowing my rent and utilities are taken care of. Whatever’s left over is mine to manage. I can budget it, save it, or use it for what I need most.” Noelle explains. With her housing secured, she focuses her energy on what matters most: her family’s health, building strong financial habits, and planning for what’s next.

Noelle’s case worker who works alongside her, observes: “Freed from the stress of housing insecurity, Noelle is charting her own path toward independence, and it has been amazing to see her grow, especially within this new chapter in her life of Motherhood.” LSS of Northern California is honored to stand beside Noelle with steady support.



## Honoring the Life and Legacy of Senator John Burton

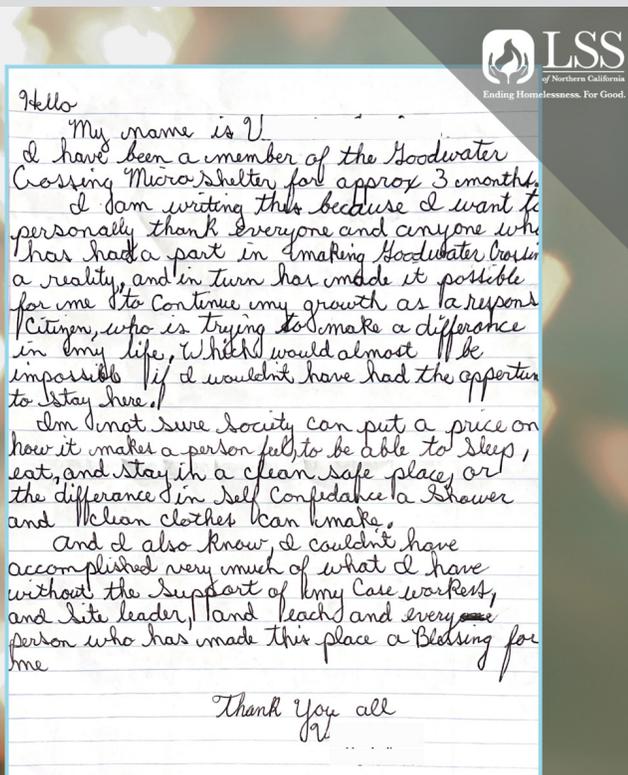
It is with deep sadness that we learned of the passing of Senator John Burton (Ret.), a tireless advocate for foster youth and a beloved leader of John Burton Advocates for Youth (JBAY).

Senator Burton's vision and commitment to social justice shaped many of the programs that remain at the heart of our work today. Through his and JBAY's support, initiatives such as AB12, emergency funds for foster youth, and the VITA program were made possible. He also played a critical role in securing funding for college initiative programs, helping countless young people pursue higher education and brighter futures.

His legacy will continue to inspire and guide us as we work to provide opportunity, support, and a voice for the youth and families we serve.

Our thoughts and prayers are with his family, friends, and the JBAY community during this difficult time.

## Blessings: V's Heartfelt Thanks



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Sometimes, the greatest blessings come from simply having a safe space. We recently received this beautiful, handwritten note from one of our participants. V's kind words remind us that stability, support, and compassion truly change lives.

### V's Note:

Hello,

My name is V and I have been a member of the Goodwater Crossing Micro-Shelter for approx 3 months. I am writing this because I want to personally thank everyone and anyone who has had a part in making Goodwater being a reality, and in turn has made it possible for me to continue my growth as a responsible citizen, who is trying to make a difference in my life, which would almost be impossible if I wouldn't have had the opportunity to stay here.

I'm not sure society can put a price on how it makes a person feel to be able to sleep, eat, and stay in a clean, safe place, or the difference in self-confidence a shower and clean clothes can make.

And I also know I couldn't have accomplished very much of what I have without the support of my Case



### Thank You Joan, Lois, Marilyn & Susan

A huge thank you to our dedicated LSS NorCal representatives, Joan Hilse (Emeritus Board Member) and delegate from Bethany Lutheran (Menlo Park), Lois Peacock (Emeritus Board Member) and Human Care Committee CNH District, Marilyn Harri, Human Care Committee CNH District and Susan Contreras (not pictured), who attended the recent Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) convention. They were instrumental in sharing our mission to create lasting solutions for homelessness with fellow members of the Lutheran community.

The LCMS is a key partner for LSS NorCal, and its conventions bring together church leaders, pastors, and members to discuss doctrine, policy, and mission work. This shared vision of providing human care and social services to communities is at the heart of our partnership.

Their attendance at the convention highlights the strong and ongoing relationship between LSS NorCal and the LCMS, as we work together to serve our neighbors in

Workers, and Site Leader, and teach and every person who has made this place a blessing for me.

Thank You all!

### The Power of A Safe Space

We are profoundly moved by V’s reflection on the importance of having a clean, safe place to sleep, and the difference that small acts, like having a shower and clean clothes, make to one’s self-confidence.

To V and all of our dedicated participants: Thank you for sharing your journey and for working so diligently toward your goals. To our incredible staff, Case Managers, PMs, partners, and especially our generous donors: YOU are part of this blessing! Your support makes it possible for us to offer the stability and compassion that fundamentally changes lives, empowering our residents to continue their growth and become the active, responsible citizens they aspire to be.



their time to give our Lavender Court seniors wonderful haircuts! We are so grateful for their kindness and skill. What a treat!



### Fresh looks for our Seniors!

A huge thank you to the talented students and staff from Paul Mitchell School who volunteered





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1465 Civic Court Ste 810  
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Tel: 925.825.1060

**SERVICE OFFICES**

191 Golden Gate Ave  
San Francisco, CA 94102  
Tel: 415.581.0891

2450 Alhambra Blvd Ste 101  
Sacramento, CA 95824  
Tel: 916.453.2900

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Become a **Partner for Good** by making a monthly donation to LSS, helping support vulnerable individuals and work towards ending homelessness. Contributions of \$20, \$30, or any amount can make a difference. Join today and receive an insulated mug or all-purpose bag as a thank you.



Running or not, Car Donation Services, Inc. will sell your vehicle to directly benefit LSS.

