



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.

When asked about his 25 years at LSS, JP redirects attention to collaboration. “None of this happens in isolation,” he reflects. “Whether helping someone access housing, advocating for fair funding, or building coalitions, it’s always about partnership—with participants, colleagues, and community members who share our vision of a just society.”

This perspective captures both JP's approach and LSS' mission. His quarter-century represents not just individual dedication, but the power of sustained community partnership in creating pathways to dignity, stability, and opportunity for all.

As we celebrate JP's service, we also celebrate the countless lives touched, policies improved, and systems changed through his commitment to LSS' vision: that every person deserves the opportunity to thrive.