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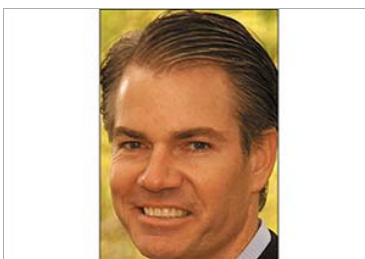
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### WALL STREET : Transition House: Serving Santa Barbara for more than 25 years

Craig Allen

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As the current president of the Transition House Board, I have had the distinct pleasure of working with a team of dedicated board members and staff to address the serious problem of family homelessness in Santa Barbara. The mission of Transition House is not to simply offer shelter and food for homeless parents and their children, but to provide them with the tools to get back on their feet financially and re-enter the community on their own two feet, with dignity and the skills to sustain themselves and their families.



In this week's column, I would like to describe exactly what Transition House does for Santa Barbara -- not only for our homeless families, but for the community and our economy -- and to let business owners and citizens know why it is vitally important, for so many reasons, that we all support Transition House.

On St. Patrick's Day in 1984, Alice Gillaroo of Catholic Charities met with John Dally and the Vestry Committee of Trinity Episcopal Church regarding the critical need to address family homelessness in Santa Barbara. Trinity Episcopal stepped up to the challenge along with Reverend Bob Pryor of First Presbyterian, Tony Perino of the Unitarian Society, and representatives from First United Methodist. Not long after this meeting, a total of 12 faith-based communities in Santa Barbara came together to form the Inter-Religious Taskforce on Homelessness. It was from this union that Transition House was born.

On March 1, 1985, Trinity Episcopal Church was the first to open its doors. First United Methodist and First Presbyterian were the second and third shelter locations, providing food, shelter and volunteers to staff the program. The response was overwhelming: 177 people came to find shelter during the first month of operation.

After two years of moving from one church to the next on a month-to-month basis, Transition House finally found dedicated space. The Quonset Hut at 210 Ortega Street officially opened to guests on April 1, 1985 with 35 beds. Volunteer proctors took turns staffing the shelter overnight, braving the cold, and drinking coffee to stay awake.

Although the shelter residents had to bear with public sleeping quarters, cold drafts, and overcrowding, they at least knew they would have a roof over their heads, three meals a day, and a warm, friendly smile to come home to.

In 1989, with lots of neighborhood support and a fair amount of neighborhood resistance, Transition House opened its second-stage, transitional housing facility on upper De la Vina Street. Rob Pearson of the Santa Barbara City Housing Authority helped acquire the building for Transition House's use. The program, eventually named Firehouse in tribute to the building's prior life as a fire station, housed five families at a time. Each family paid up to 1/3 of their monthly income in rent and participated in case management while achieving the goals they set that would enable them to return to housing.

Following a national trend, family homelessness proved to be the fastest growing segment of the homeless population and the Quonset Hut was bursting at the seams. A new home was found two blocks from the Quonset Hut at 434 E. Cota Street and purchased thanks to generous loans and significant funding from the County and City of Santa Barbara. The new space allowed the capacity to be increased to 70 people, and provided more administrative space so that meaningful support programs could be implemented.

Transition House adopted a philosophical approach and began programs to support solutions to poverty. The first of these programs was infant care -- the E.L. Wiegand Childcare Center was opened onsite. Consistent with the agency's child and family centered approach, the after-school program was begun through a collaboration with the Santa Barbara County Department of Education.

More programs were developed, including the HOMES program and Career Development. The HOMES program was conceptualized to address the root cause of homelessness among residents: poverty. HOMES provided below-market rate or subsidized housing to families who exhibited extraordinary commitment to permanently escape homelessness. In exchange for HOMES services, the clients signed a contract in which they agreed to work to be free of all forms of public assistance within 5 years. A partnership with the City of Santa Barbara Housing Authority made housing subsidies possible.

The Career Development program was launched to aid clients who were unemployed or underemployed and wanted to increase their income earning ability. At the time of its inception, the Career Development program was a three-stage approach featuring job preparation workshops, individual career goal development and job search support, and long-follow-up.

Transition House made a major step in solving family homelessness by acquiring apartments that would be rented at affordable rates to client families. Transition House purchased a 13-unit apartment complex at 320 S. Salinas Street that was later named Casa Marianna, after longtime Transition House supporter Dr. Marianna Masin. The acquisition of the Salinas Street property launched Transition House's efforts to develop affordable housing.

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In 1999, Transition House began its efforts to acquire more administrative office and program space. The opportunity to purchase 421 and 425 E. Cota Street arose, and a blitz of publicity helped to raise funds for the purchase. With these two properties, located on the back side of the shelter, came eight apartment units. Transition House HOMES clients moved in as apartments opened up due to attrition. The additional space also allowed Transition House to launch the Homelessness Prevention Program.

In January 2001, Transition House began offering the same kind of program services its clients received to low-income community families at risk of losing their housing with the launch of the Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP). During the first year of operation, the agency partnered with the Santa Barbara City Housing Authority to deliver classes and case management to HPP clients. Santa Barbara City College provided the equipment and staff for an onsite computer lab, as well as an instructor for ESL classes. The physical space also allowed for onsite free childcare for participating families who could not otherwise afford care during classes. Program offerings included ESL, Computer, Career Development, and Parenting classes, all held during evening hours.

Transition House designed and built six more units of affordable housing on its property at 320 S. Salinas Street. Five of the units had two bedrooms and one was a three-bedroom unit. The apartments were much needed to house clients ready to move from the Firehouse to the HOMES program.

In 2003, Kathleen Baushke, longtime volunteer, past board member, and the existing Assistant Director, became Executive Director. In November 2006 we completed a renovation to our emergency Shelter. Transition House has also been working on predevelopment plans for 421 E. Cota Street.

Transition House's history of community support continues with over 40 service or faith-based organizations and 1,200 volunteers donating their time and talents each year. Area merchants help by donating time, materials, and contributions to the agency's efforts. Many businesses also offer meaningful employment with benefits to residents of Transition House.

Each year Transition House helps more than 700 community members -- 350 of whom use our three-stage housing program and services; the balance receive support through our homelessness prevention program. Over 90 percent of Transition House's clients come from the greater Santa Barbara area. We have a three-stage program that includes:

1. Emergency Shelter: Homeless families enter Transition House's Emergency Shelter where food, shelter, and transitional case management lasting up to 120 days are provided. Families are stabilized, career goals are identified, and strategies to reach them are implemented. Clients participate in employment and/or educational programs. Children are enrolled in school or quality childcare. Transition House's McCune Family Shelter houses between 15 to 22 families (up to 70 people), and all meals are provided.
2. Transitional Living Residence: The family moves on to transitional residence and services at our second-stage facility, called the Firehouse, where they live for an average of six months. Career counseling, financial management, and educational enhancement continue. Transition House case management monitors progress toward long-term financial and life-skills goals that will one day lead to lasting economic stability.
3. Permanent Affordable Housing: Transition House families with long range goals of achieving lasting economic self-sufficiency can apply for placement in one of 26 low-cost apartments owned by Transition House. Services including career monitoring, case management and educational enhancement continue to be provided. At the end of two years, the family reaches an income level that enables them to afford market-rate housing.

Besides providing vital services to homeless families in need, Transition House serves the community by providing homeless families with a place to live so they are not on the street, career and educational help so that they can be more productive, and by giving children stability and direction so they are less likely to join gangs. Like many organizations, we depend on the direct support of the community. We are a non-profit, 501(c)(3), so we must raise funding each and every year through requests or donations from individuals and businesses in town, and from foundations and governmental agencies. With all of the charities in town that need help, it is difficult for donors to decide who to support. At Transition House we hope that our community will continue to see what we do as an absolute necessity, and will continue to provide us with the generous support that has keep us operating and helping families in need for the past 25 years.

If you are interested in more information about Transition House, or would like to donate, please visit our recently updated website at: [www.transitionhouse.com](http://www.transitionhouse.com), or call 966-9668. We are in the midst of our most important, annual fundraiser, called the Help-a-kid No-ball (we don't have an event, so that 100% of all money raised goes directly to helping families), so if you can help, please donate generously!

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