

CHAT Executive Director Resigns Due to Family Reasons

Just after this newsletter was published, CHAT Executive Director Jennifer Spatz resigned. Jennifer decided that she needed to return to Coos Bay, Oregon, due to family matters. She moved to Chico in June to become CHAT's first-ever paid Executive Director. We respect Jennifer's reasons for leaving and agree that family needs to come first.

We are sad to lose Jennifer, as we found her easy to work with. She came to us with a wealth of experience around housing people who are homeless or are in danger to becoming homeless. We learned a lot from her and, in turn, we hope we gave her some ideas to bring back to Oregon. We look forward to staying in touch with Jennifer and comparing notes on our mutual efforts to assist unhoused individuals and families. CHAT is just one link in a chain of organizations throughout the country who are working on providing truly affordable housing for those most in need.

We wish Jennifer all the best in her future pursuits.

Housing for Behavioral Health Clients

WORK UNDERWAY ON EVERHART VILLAGE



Hard-working volunteers are transforming these sheds into comfortable sleeping cabins. They include (l. to r.) Ken Dickson, David Welch, Bob Van Fleet, and Nelson Kaiser.

After a year of planning, preliminary construction has begun on CHAT's collaboration with Butte County Behavioral Health for a new emergency shelter facility for Behavioral Health clients. A shelter consisting of 20 single-occupant sleeping cabins will be located in Chico, on a parcel of land owned by Butte County and adjacent to existing Behavioral Health facilities. The project has been named Everhart Village in memory of the late housing activist and CHAT co-founder Dan Everhart.

Behavioral Health clients will stay in the cabins while continuing to work toward their mental health goals with County staff. In addition to building, managing, and maintaining the facility, CHAT will provide a variety of supportive programs for shelter users.

Amber Benedict has been working on a programming plan for the project for several months. Amber began as a CHAT intern and recently earned her Master's Degree in Social Work from California State University, Chico. She will assume the full-time position of Program Director in July. She will be assisted by Caitlin Davis-Rivers (currently case manager for CHAT's Redwood Housing program for college students), other paid staff, and interns.

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FAMILY PROGRAM CONTINUES WITH \$282,000 GRANT

Just as the two-year grant to support our Hand-Up Supportive Housing (HUSH) program ended CHAT was awarded a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) of \$282,933 by a unanimous vote of the Chico City Council.

HUSH has housed and supported more than 20 families since it began in spring 2019. Of those families, 14 have transitioned into permanent, Section 8 or other low-income, stable housing. All families include at least one child under the age of 18 and a parent/adult guardian. The CDBG grant extends this work for another 18 months. This allows CHAT to provide services to more families. Some of the families previously served by the HUSH program will continue as CHAT residents in our Housing Now program.

HUSH Case Manager Amanda Gaylord has been the driving force behind the program's success. She says, "It's been an amazing journey. I'm so blessed to see so many people find a little hand up and to really spread their wings. It has been an honor to serve them and to continue to be part of their journey." With the new funding, Amanda will continue to serve as case manager and assist many more families from homelessness into permanent housing.

Everhart Village Underway

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The idea behind Everhart Village is that people living with a mental illness have a much better chance of stabilization if they live in a secure place in which they can easily access a variety of services, rather than while living on the streets. A goal of CHAT's programs and activities is to foster in the residents a sense of community and belonging while working towards transitioning into permanent, safe, and stable housing.

As of this newsletter's publication, a local company has been contracted to construct a modular building that will serve as the community building. It will include a kitchen, laundry facilities, showers, toilets, offices, and a community room.

The cabins will be a combination of the four tiny houses already built for the Simplicity Village project (before it was stopped by a lawsuit) and Old Hickory cabins, which are shed-like structures into which will be built such items as electricity, heating, cooling, and insulation. The cabins are stored off-site. Volunteers, recruited and organized by CHAT Tiny House Coordinator Charles Withuhn, have begun construction on them.

Thanks to volunteer electrician Doug Calbreath and a donation of 1,000 feet of wire from Cerro Wire, wiring is nearly complete. Ceiling joists, pony walls, insulation, and sheet rock will go in after that, followed by bed decks, counters, and sinks. The cabins have a small front porch and windows will be installed to give them a house-like look and feel.

The biggest and most expensive part of the job will be bringing infrastructure to the site. CHAT will pay local construction companies to install water lines, sewer lines, and electrical service.

To get the project started, CHAT is using a grant award of \$175,000 from Butte County Behavioral Health, and the donations previously collected for Simplicity Village. Those donors who sponsored a

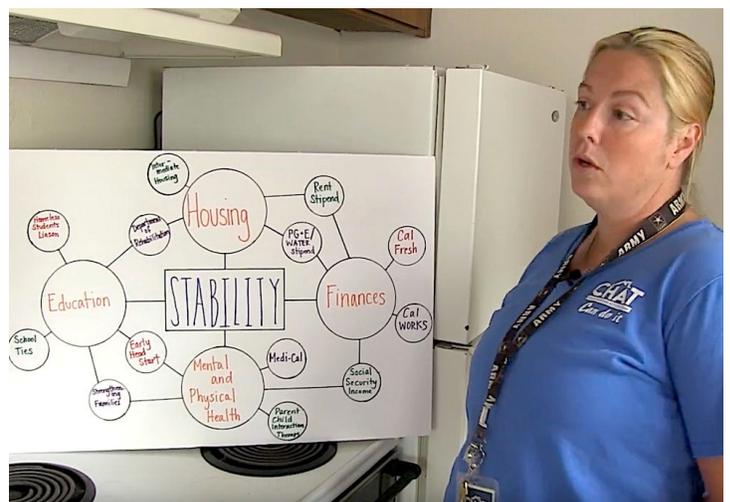
house for Simplicity Village will have their sponsorship acknowledged on the Everhart Village sleeping cabins. Additional fundraising will be required.

Depending on when additional funding is secured and the weather, CHAT hopes that residents will be able to start moving in by the end of 2021. When residents are stabilized, they will be assisted in finding permanent housing. After a resident moves out, a new person in need of the program will take his/her place.

FEATURED VIDEO: "THE SEVEN PROGRAMS OF CHAT"

Learn what community supporters such as you have enabled CHAT to accomplish by watching this issue's featured video, "The Seven Programs of CHAT." There is so much going on in CHAT that even those of us directly involved have trouble keeping up! However, in just 20 minutes, filmmakers Gerard Ungerman and Stacey Wear (AKA Respectful Revolution) provide an excellent overview of our work.

To access the video, go to the CHAT website at chicohousingactionteam.net. Then, under the "News and Videos" pull-down menu at the top of the page, click on "Videos," and then click on "The Seven Programs of CHAT."



In "The Seven Programs of CHAT" video, Case Manager Amanda Gaylord displays a chart illustrating the resources available to the families she serves.

CHAT WELCOMES NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR!

We are delighted to announce that Chico Housing Action Team has hired its first paid Executive Director, Jennifer Spatz (pronounced “spots”).

Up until now, Leslie Johnson has heroically served in the Executive Director role as a volunteer. Jennifer’s hiring means Leslie can now return to the CHAT Board (as our new Board President) and focus on grant writing, donor outreach, and public relations.

Jennifer has been helping people in need in non-profit organizations for more than 15 years. She comes to us from Coos Bay, Oregon, where she worked for housing organizations, including Habitat for Humanity, in many roles: case management, veteran services, grant writing/management, fundraising, executive director, and program management. Jennifer understands the needs of unhoused people and strives to show compassion, guidance, and support to help them stabilize and move forward.

Jennifer began her work with CHAT on June 21. Among other duties, she will serve as the coordinator of CHAT’s paid staff. She says, “I believe in cre-



Jennifer Spatz is CHAT’s new Executive Director.

ating a fun, respectful, and capable work environment for staff. I look forward to being part of the CHAT team.”

Jennifer grew up in Montana and has three grown sons. Depending on continued progress in bringing the Covid pandemic under control, CHAT hopes to invite everyone to a “Meet Jennifer” open house event at the CHAT office this fall.

Second “Mercy House” Established

FAITH COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS ASSIST CHAT RESIDENTS

In our last newsletter, we highlighted CHAT’s “Mercy House,” a place where four residents with chronic medical issues can call home. Members of Faith Lutheran Church are involved in supporting Mercy House residents in their journey to stability and security.

Because so many people living in camps or in their cars suffer from medical conditions such as diabetes and heart ailments, CHAT is pleased to announce we have rented a second “Mercy House.” This house is home to five people. Following Faith Lutheran’s lead, members of Congregation Beth

Israel in Chico will provide friendship and supportive services. The congregation’s efforts will be led by two long-time friends of CHAT, Nancy Evens and Marv Megibow. We are so grateful for this help from Faith Lutheran and Congregation Beth Israel.

CHAT welcomes more faith community congregations to become volunteers. CHAT Board President Leslie Johnson recently gave a presentation to the Chico Area Interfaith Council about opportunities for faith communities to get involved and received a warm reception there.

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CHAT Awarded \$500,000 Grant

CHAMP PROGRAM HELPS 140 CAMP FIRE SURVIVORS – SO FAR

On November 8, 2018, a disaster of unprecedented size changed life in Butte County forever. The massive Camp Fire destroyed 15,000 dwelling units, most of them in the town of Paradise. In January 2020, Chico Housing Action Team launched a new program, specifically to help Camp Fire survivors obtain permanent housing.

As of May 27, 2021, CHAMP (Camp Fire Housing Access Model Program) has assisted 55 households (102 adults and 38 children) rent homes. CHAMP staff help people seeking their own housing who have income sufficient to pay rent, but have been unable to find housing for such reasons as inability to attain a qualifying credit rating, insufficient funds to pay security deposit and application fees, and/or inability to find a landlord willing to rent to them.

In addition to financial aid to survivors, CHAMP offers incentives to landlords to lease their properties to them, including a cash incentive signing bonus of \$500. CHAMP's services also include case management and mediation services for the first year of renting.

Just as it appeared CHAMP's funding would start to wind down, in June 2021 CHAT was awarded a \$500,000 grant from the Butte Strong Fund of the North Valley Community Foundation, opening up opportunities to help many more people. **We are so grateful for this extremely generous grant!** The program was started with grants from United Way of Northern California, Global Giving, and the California Community Foundation.

Program Administrator TamRa Wich'Ma and Case Managers Jennifer Haffner and AmyBeth Ahl-Wright have become a formidable team. They are dedicated to helping their clients, and they will go to great lengths to be sure fire survivors find stability and security in permanent housing.

One of their clients, Suzanne, attests to the excel-

lent work of the CHAMP team. Referring to Jennifer, her case manager, as "this angel," she tells the story of losing the mobile home on a small piece of property she owns in Paradise. She fled the approaching fire in a police car, wearing only pajamas and leaving behind her nine cats, her phone, and all her possessions. Discouraged and fighting alcohol addiction, Suzanne, a Butte County native, lived on the streets of Chico for a year.



CHAMP Administrator TamRa Wich'ma at the site of a property in Butte Creek Canyon that was burned by the Camp Fire.

Things started looking up when the United Way referred Suzanne to CHAMP in March 2020, but it was a long journey. Along the way, she lived in more than half a dozen places and spent a month in rehab for her alcoholism.

"My life was spiraling down," Suzanne recalls. "But they (CHAMP staff) never gave up on me. They went above and beyond – there are no words to express how thankful I am."

Today, Suzanne talks about rebuilding. Her property has been cleared and she is using a FEMA grant to have a single-wide modular trailer home built. She hopes to move back before the end of the calendar year. ***(Suzanne wrote an essay, reflecting on her journey. It is printed below this article.)***

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CHAMP Program

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Case Manager AmyBeth is a Camp Fire survivor herself. She has not yet been able to move back to Paradise. Her family has lived in Butte County for generations, and she can empathize with people who lost so much. “I use my experience to help other survivors find stability. I’m concerned for other folks in my community,” she says. She adds that she appreciates the “creativity and flexibility” of the program she can use to help others.

Case Manager Jennifer adds, “It’s an immense feeling of satisfaction when you find housing for someone.”

TamRa, who coordinates CHAMP’s efforts, says the program provides “an opportunity for housing to a very vulnerable population that can otherwise fall between the cracks.” She adds, “I work with an amazing team. I’m privileged to work with them and with CHAT.”

CHAMP CLIENT’S CAMP FIRE JOURNEY

By Suzanne

Editor’s Note: *The author, a client in CHAT’s CHAMP program, lost her Paradise home in the Camp Fire. For information about CHAMP, and more about Suzanne, see the adjacent article.*

There are many words that depict that fateful day of November 8, 2018. The Camp Fire ravaged Paradise, rapid and violent, resulting in an unrecognizable pile of ash and rubble of what once was a town. A true calamity.

In utter despair, I found myself wandering the streets of Chico, enduring a year-long education from the School of Hard Knocks. At the time, my prospects for assistance had reached an impasse. My outlook dismal and bleak. In desperation, I persevered. The human spirit will endure amazing things when in survival mode.

Ultimately, United Way led me to CHAT’s CHAMP program. It was created to assist Camp Fire survivors with finding adequate, safe housing. This led me to

two of the most compassionate women I have yet to encounter throughout this journey.

In the beginning, mind you, I was not the most enchanting person to work with. I was down and out, pessimistic at best. These women did not give up on me. They not only rescued me from life on the streets, but they were instrumental in guiding me through a labyrinth of red tape.

Together we are working our way through a daunting list of requirements to prepare my property for rebuilding. We are nearing the finish line and the ultimate reward is just around the corner. It will be the installation of a manufactured home graciously donated through an organization called Samaritan’s Purse.

Tracy Davis (Camp Fire Collaborative) has also been instrumental in this process. Working together with CHAMP (Jen and TamRa) it’s been a miraculous recovery. Not to be cliché, but together we will rise from the ashes. Many thanks go out to Brian Boyer (United Way), Jennifer Haffner (CHAMP), TamRa Wich’Ma (CHAMP), and of course, Samaritan’s Purse. This experience has taught me to always have faith, give thanks, and NEVER give up. There are angels among us.



Suzanne, CHAMP client and Camp Fire Survivor.

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN CHAT'S MANY PROGRAMS

Below is an update for each Chico Housing Action Team program:

CHAMP

CHAMP (Camp Fire Access Model Program) staff have assisted 140 Camp Fire Survivors in renting permanent homes. The program recently received a \$500,000 grant from North Valley Community Foundation's "Butte Strong" fund. (See article elsewhere in this newsletter.) Eight CHAMP clients live in houses managed by CHAT.

EVERHART VILLAGE

Preliminary work has begun on this shelter facility for unhoused people receiving services from Butte County Behavioral Health. (See article elsewhere in this newsletter.)

FOOD PROGRAM

Food is delivered weekly to more than 50 households. Special thanks go to Camina Bakery owners Ken Curran and Tatton White (25 loaves of locally-baked bread every week), Trader Joe's, Contra Costa-Solano Food Bank, Blue Bag Project, Butte County Food Bank, and individual donors.

HOUSING NOW

According to a June 21, 2021 report from Housing Coordinator Mark Alvidrez, there are now 152 residents in 52 locations in Chico through Housing Now. These numbers will go up with the enrollment of another group of families to replace those who "graduated" to permanent housing in what was formerly called the HUSH program. Housing Now is a master lease program, in which CHAT rents properties and places residents in them who are homeless or in danger of becoming homeless. Residents pay a monthly fee to help cover the rent and receive supportive services. The need is great – Mark noted in the report that CHAT currently has a waiting list of 295 active applications from people who are homeless or are facing homelessness.

HUSH

The HUSH (Hand-Up Supportive Housing) program for families received new funding – a \$282,000 grant. It will include the same assistance and case management, but its number of locations and residents is now included in the figures for Housing Now, directly above. (See article elsewhere in this newsletter.)

MERCY HOUSES

The first Mercy House was established in April 2021, with four residents. In early June, five residents moved into a second Mercy House. Mercy House residents have chronic health issues, such as diabetes and heart disease, and currently receive assistance and friendship from volunteers from Chico-area faith communities. (See article elsewhere in this newsletter.)

REDWOOD HOUSING

This program includes two houses that provide homes for seven low-income college students, in collaboration with funding from California State University, Chico. A third house was rented in late June 2021, with three residents expected to move in during July and August, prior to the upcoming academic year.

VETERANS HOUSES

Three veterans live together in a CHAT house. CHAT plans to add additional sites, collaborating with local veterans' organizations to connect with vets in need of housing.

WAREHOUSE

The warehouse team is constantly delivering donated furniture and household goods to CHAT houses and, when available, additional items to other housing agencies. When space is available, donations of gently used furniture and household items such as appliances and linens are welcome.

ALL THE WAYS TO SUPPORT CHAT (HOW ABOUT THAT OLD VEHICLE?)

There are many ways to donate to CHAT. One is to donate a vehicle, running or not. We're happy to announce a new partnership with CARS, a non-profit organization that assists organizations such as ours in accepting and selling vehicle donations.

CARS makes it easy to turn your vehicle into a donation to CHAT. Just fill out the form at <https://careasy.org/nonprofit/chicohousingactionteam>. (Or you can access the form at the CHAT website by going to the "About CHAT" menu and selecting "Donate.") CARS takes care of the vehicle sale, CHAT receives 70% of the sale proceeds, and CARS sends you a tax receipt when the vehicle is sold. CARS accepts cars, trucks, boats, RVs, and even airplanes!

You can donate money, either by becoming a monthly donor or with a one-time gift, by going to CHAT's website, <https://www.chicohousingactionteam.net/>, and clicking on the yellow donate button on the home page. Online donations will come to CHAT through Global Giving. If you prefer to give by check, please make it payable to "CHAT" and mail it to PO Box 4868, Chico, CA 95927.

Please consider joining our 170 monthly donors. These donations make a world of difference, as they help us with our monthly and annual budgeting. This predictable, ongoing source of income keeps us on track, and reduces the amount of time we have to spend fundraising. When you click on the "donate" button on the CHAT website, you will see the option to have an amount of your choosing taken out of your card each month for CHAT. Or, you may want to have your bank issue and mail a monthly check from your account.

There are other ways to help CHAT. When space is available in our warehouse, we welcome donations of gently-used furniture and household goods. If you would like to volunteer, you can sign up through our website at <https://www.chicohousingactionteam.net/volunteer>.

Because CHAT is a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation, all donations are tax-deductible to the extent provided by law. Whether you donate by check, credit card, furniture, household goods, or a vehicle, we will make sure you receive an acknowledgment letter/receipt that includes our federal tax ID number.



Your old vehicle, running or not, can turn into a cash donation to CHAT, thanks to our partnership with "CARS."

Faith Communities Help CHAT

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We have received financial support over the years from a number of these groups, including Bidwell Presbyterian Church, Chico Area Interfaith Council, Chico Friends Meeting (Quakers), Chico Havurah, Congregation Beth Israel, Faith Lutheran Church, First Christian Church, Grace Community Church, Islamic Center of Chico, Life Church, St. John's Episcopal Church, Trinity United Methodist Church, and Unitarian Universalist Fellowship.

If your faith community is interested in volunteer opportunities with CHAT, please contact us at risdon2@comcast.net.

Help for Chico's Unsheltered

On April 11, 2021, Judge Morrison C. England, Jr., of the U.S. District Court in Sacramento, issued a temporary injunction. It prohibited the City of Chico from prosecuting unhoused people for camping or resting in public places, or forcing them to leave unsanctioned camping areas, including parks, in the absence of any adequate alternative place available to them for resting and sleeping. He ordered all sides to get together and find a solution. In early June, the City issued a Request for Qualifications to determine what organizations might be interested in creating and managing an outdoor shelter project in Chico to replace the unmanaged group camping situation.

Caring Choices, with support from Safe Space Winter Shelter and CHAT, submitted a proposal to take on this challenging outdoor shelter project. We have been impressed with the work, time, and collaborative effort Caring Choices has put into developing this preliminary proposal. Although CHAT's involvement is limited to an advisory and oversight role, we are very committed to supporting Caring Choices' proposal.

The City recently selected and set up an outdoor shelter site just west of the Chico Airport, on City-owned land. This location is problematic, however, because it is remote from basic services such as medical care, stores, laundry facilities, social service agencies, possible employment opportunities, churches, thrift stores, and recycling centers. In addition, this location is completely barren and has no trees whatsoever, and the surface is asphalt covered by gravel.

So far, almost no one has chosen to camp there, presumably due to the brutal heat and inhospitable location. The site lacks the sort of supportive services that Caring Choices had offered to provide, and that people need in order to become self-sufficient, such as individualized case management, help with information and forms, assistance getting to important appointments, and referrals for treatment services.

At the time this newsletter went to print, the City had not offered to fund these needed services, and plans remained indefinite, with another court date on the injunction scheduled for July 2, 2021.

Regardless of what happens next, CHAT believes

there continues to be an urgent need in our community, especially during the hot summer months, for a clean, safe, and legal sheltering solution. We know that our city can make this happen.

WHO WE ARE

Chico Housing Action Team (CHAT) is a non-profit, 501(c)(3) organization, 530-520-6412, PO Box 4868, Chico CA, 95927, info@chicohousingactionteam.net

Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/chicohousingactionteam/>

Website: www.chicohousingactionteam.net/

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/chico_housing_action_team/

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/ChicoHousAction>

YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCd_dDVqD5w2mwRfjHZub3dQ

CHAT Staff: Jennifer Spatz (Executive Director); AmyBeth Ahl-Wright (CHAMP Program Case Manager); Mark Alvidrez (Housing Coordinator); Amber Benedict (Program Manager, Everhart Village); Kendra Bonner (Harmony House Manager); Caitlin Davis-Rivers (Redwood Housing Case Manager; Everhart Village Staff); Dijana Fazlic (Finance Manager); Amanda Gaylord (HUSH Program Manager); Jennifer Haffner (CHAMP Program Case Manager); Dan Joseph (Warehouse Manager); Theresa O'Connor (Communications Coordinator); Julian Pierson (Maintenance Assistant); Addison Winslow (Maintenance Assistant); TamRa Wich'Ma (CHAMP Program Coordinator); Stacey Wear & Gerard Ungerman, AKA Respectful Revolution (contracted videographers).

Interns: Anthony Scott (finance intern); Christina Jewell (summer intern).

Volunteer Staff: Bob Trausch (Operations & Facilities Manager); Sheldon Praiser (Finance Coordinator); Charles Withuhn (Tiny Homes Project Coordinator); Kim Kurnizki, (Bookkeeping); Nancy Park ("Housing Action" Editor); Kathy Weeks (Food Coordinator); Cathy Webster (Maintenance Coordinator)

CHAT Board of Directors: Ron Aker, Lorraine Forster, Leslie Johnson (President), Dan Joseph, Nancy Park, Sheldon Praiser (Treasurer), Bob Trausch (Vice President), Bob Van Fleet, Kathy Weeks, Charles Withuhn.

OUR MISSION STATEMENT

Chico Housing Action Team's mission is to ensure that everyone in our community has access to housing they can afford.
