

JANUARY - MARCH 2021



COTTAGE HOUSING QUARTERLY

COTTAGE HOUSING IS #1!

The Sacramento Continuum of Care consists of different organizations throughout Sacramento County concerned with issues of homelessness. The CoC Board offers every year a competitive grant called the NOFA. Agencies can apply and use the funding to provide assistance for the most vulnerable individuals so that they maintain permanent housing with more individualized support.

Cottage Housing ranked #1 this year in the ranking for the CoC! With this top position, Cottage Housing received a bonus of \$25,000. Cottage Housing is extremely delighted to end the year financially in the black. Thank you to all the generous donors who continue to support Cottage Housing.

From the streets to
self-sustainability

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FROM THE STREETS TO SELF SUSTAINABILITY: A PERSONAL STORY

Homelessness is an equal opportunity destroyer. It doesn't care who you are, where you come from, who you know or what level of education you have. It can happen to anyone and I would know because it happened to me. My name is Sarah Stofer and I'd like to tell you about how Quinn Cottages lifted me out of it and how I'm trying to do the same for the ones still unsheltered. Two years ago this May, I was homeless and living in a tent with my current boyfriend of 5 years, Barry. I became homeless about a year after moving from San Jose to Sacramento. It's important to note that less than 6 months prior to the move, my dog Heidi passed away and two months after that, my Mom did, also. My Dad died when I was 6 so it was just her and I. It was her that taught me empathy and compassion for others. Losing her felt like I lost the best part of myself.

After moving to Sacramento, I was able to get my first apartment. Less than a year later, I found myself sleeping outside the church next to my apartment complex, with a clear view of my warm, comfortable, fully furnished apartment that I no longer had access to – the victim of an illegal retaliatory eviction. My landlord sued me for back rent I didn't owe. We went to court because his lawyers found proof that I didn't owe anything and they dropped the lawsuit. He somehow had the Sheriff's remove me from my home anyway. My worker told me to schedule a hearing but the next one was months away. In the meantime, I was a very sheltered woman who was totally alone, homeless and in a rough city she hardly knew. In the days following the lockout, my landlord had our maintenance man empty my apartment and send everything I owned, to the dump. All my family photos, letters written to me by my parents before they died, my Grandfather's high school yearbooks and his United Airlines retirement pins, my dog's ashes and all the little trinkets given to me by my parents. I'm so grateful my aunt was holding my Mom's ashes until I got stable because otherwise, my Mom would be in a landfill with the rest of my life. Losing all the tangible things that my Mom painstakingly preserved for me, was like losing my family all over again. It's a blow I've never recovered from. As I laid on the concrete at that church, cold, scared and devastated at the injustice of it all, my landlord was luxuriating in his multimillion-dollar mansion, paid for with the shattered dreams of his tenants.

I put myself on a waiting list for a shelter but being a young, single woman, I was not a priority. After a couple months of calling daily to stay on the wait list, I had moved only a couple spots and still had over 70 people ahead of me. I gave up and focused on trying to survive homelessness. I very quickly learned that it's incredibly dangerous for a woman experiencing homelessness. I've been sexually assaulted, I've woken up with a man straddling my chest, I've woken up with a stranger inside of me, and I've been robbed at gunpoint by people I helped in the past. I migrated to Rancho Cordova after that, and met Barry. Loving him and wanting a better life for us both is what reignited my interest in pursuing housing but it was still terrifying. What if I picked myself up, rebuilt my life from the ashes, and everything got taken away again?

Despite my fear, I kept at it. Eventually, I got The Call and my life was forever changed. Our Navigator, Gabriella, picked us up from our camp to bring us to our new home. She brought us to Quinn Cottages – where residents have their very own one bedroom, one bathroom standalone house. I spent the entire visit in tears, completely overwhelmed with emotion. I jokingly told staff that if they didn't see me for the first few months, not to be alarmed because I was just taking a very long shower. I was speaking in jest but there was a kernel of truth to it. Staff and neighbors saw me so rarely the first year that they had to do a welfare check on me more than once. It wasn't shyness that kept me indoors, although homelessness did create significant social anxiety for me that I still struggle with sometimes.

My transition to hermit crab was because I spent 5 years outside, desperate to get back inside. Now that I was inside, I didn't want to come out for a while. I needed the time and space to process everything and Quinn allowed me to do that. That's the beauty of Quinn: I got to heal on my own timeline, in my own way. Staff were always available, always offering assistance if I needed it but they didn't make me feel badly if I didn't accept it. A lot of places and programs will expect you to get sober, find a job and return to society within a few months or else they put you back on the street. While people may comply with that, often times it doesn't last and that's because unless someone is ready and wants to do it for themselves, they lack the motivation to maintain it. Despite being ready to rejoin the Land of the Living, as I like to call it, my criminal record was becoming a major barrier to employment. I've been to jail one time in my life because our bike trailer broke down and we were within 1000 feet of a former campsite we weren't supposed to go to anymore. We went to jail and were given 3 years probation. During the beginning of the pandemic, when everything was switching to delivery, I couldn't get hired because of my record of trespassing and the program that helps people expunge their records was closed due to COVID.

Discouraged, I turned my focus elsewhere. Never having forgotten how devastatingly cold and lethal it can be to live outside in the winter, I decided to do something about it. I had an idea to give our unsheltered people emergency mylar sleeping bags that were waterproof, tear resistant and reusable. Using my stimulus payment, I bought a few from Amazon to see how well they worked. They worked fantastically well and I wanted them to help more than just a few people. So, I took to Nextdoor and explained what my idea was, calling it "Hugs 4 Homeless", where the hugs are the sleeping bags. I went to sleep that night thinking it would be amazing if just one person donated one Hug. Overnight, the response was incredible. My inbox was flooded with hundreds of emails spread across multiple platforms. We sold Amazon out of the sleeping bags within 24 hours and while looking for another vendor, people from the community took it upon themselves to find more from different stores and had them shipped directly to my house. It was suggested I start a GoFundMe page as well, which has garnered over \$2,000! Every late afternoon/early evening, Barry and I would load ourselves and our bikes up with Hugs, go out and deliver them to people who needed them the most. The generous donations from my community to benefit the homeless, restored my faith in humanity. Now that the weather is starting to warm up, the Hugs will be too warm to be safe. I'm currently sampling different types of reusable cooling towels instead for Summer.

In addition to that, something else amazing happened and my life will never be the same again. Hope Cooperative is a nonprofit working tirelessly to improve the lives of homeless people struggling with their mental health. The CEO of Hope Cooperative, Erin Johansen, happened to read my post on Nextdoor and to my surprise, she offered me a full time job as a Homeless Outreach Navigator and an even bigger surprise, I actually got hired! I've been working full time since January and my entire world has changed. I just got my driver's license for the first time ever, I'm looking for a car now and I actually have a retirement plan. I even have my own cubicle! I'm also starting to rebuild my credit so that one day, I can own my own home and never, ever be homeless again. To go from regularly eating Popeye's chicken straight out of a dumpster to gainful, meaningful employment in less than 2 years, has been a whirlwind. I'm in love with my job, I have the absolute best supervisor and coworkers, who are understanding and always make me feel like I belong. My entire outlook on life and the trajectory of it have been forever changed through this whole experience and absolutely none of it would have happened if I didn't live at Quinn Cottages.



After 5 years of homelessness, it took just a year and a half at Quinn to get me on the right path. The no pressure, non-judgmental approach at Quinn was exactly what I needed. Everyone's journey is different, thus their approach to healing should also be different. Taking a generalized approach to healing an individual, often times doesn't work long-term. What works for one may not work for another. I believe that Quinn's tailored approach is what has allowed me to find success in life. I needed time, personal space, and stability; someone else may need structure and routine. Quinn is whatever we need it to be. A police officer once told me he wasn't too concerned about substance abuse because once I got housing, it would probably phase itself out naturally. Sounds crazy, right? Well, he wasn't wrong. My substance abuse was largely a product of my circumstance. Once removed from the daily trauma of homelessness and given the safety and security most people take for granted, I started to heal. Quinn's approach to my personal struggles is exactly what I needed. If I need space, they respect that. If I need someone to hold my hand, they do that. It goes so much deeper than a place to live, it's a place of self-discovery. Finding our inner peace is an essential component to becoming a happy and productive member of society again. No one should place a timeline on an individual's mental health recovery.

When I first started working for Hope Cooperative, my off-the-charts incredible supervisor pulled me aside and expressed concern that my new job may make me ineligible to live at Quinn. I was blown away by his concern for my well-being but I shouldn't been because that's just the way Hope Cooperative is and it's the way they've trained me as well. I had the same concern but after speaking with Quinn staff, I was reassured that I would not lose my home just as I was starting to become self-sufficient. That also should not have surprised me, as that's just how Quinn is. From the outside looking in, I'm working and I'm earning enough that I can afford to live in a traditional apartment without financial support, so I should have to move out and make room for someone else. That's the mistake a lot of other similar programs make. Just because I have the financial means, does not mean I have the emotional and psychological strength to maintain self-sufficiency. I'm not ready yet, I'm still adjusting to having my first full time career and I still get overwhelmed with time management and balancing work and home life. I'm working on it with help from Quinn and my supervisor, too. I've been given an opportunity to get healthy as a whole, unique person and Quinn refuses to abandon me just as I begin to flourish. When I do transition out of Quinn Cottages, the likelihood that I will maintain and stay the course is significantly increased compared to moving out the instant I started to show signs of improvement. My journey to a healthy, meaningful and hopefully prosperous, life is not complete. Quinn is rehabilitating me as a whole person, providing support where needed and letting me spread my wings when I need to. One day I'll be ready to fly solo but until I am, Quinn is there with open arms, ready to catch me if I fall.

Getting housed anywhere would have been helpful but getting housed at Quinn Cottages specifically is what saved my spirit and my life in general. I would never be doing as well as I am without the dedication, compassion and seemingly endless patience of Quinn Cottages staff. I lost everything and nearly lost myself, too. If you told me a few years ago that this is what my life would look like today, I probably would have thought you were playing a sick joke on me but the joke is actually on me: I shouldn't have underestimated my ability to thrive because that's just the way my Mom raised me. Quinn has restored my faith in myself. Quinn Cottages truly saved my life, in more ways than one.



Outside one of the cottages at Quinn Cottages!



BDOG IS ON AND WE'RE IN

From the Streets to Self-Sustainability

MAY 6, 2021

BIG DAY OF GIVING

Schedule your gift online now at
www.bigdayofgiving.org/cottagehousing

MAKE A REAL DIFFERENCE FOR A REAL FAMILY.

YOUR \$25 GIFT

Provides gift cards for our Community Within Community program, inspiring motivation.

YOUR \$50 GIFT

Provides a month's worth of healthy snacks and prizes for our homework club.

YOUR \$50 GIFT

Builds a Welcome Home basket with personal and household care items for a new resident.

YOUR \$300 GIFT

Provides leadership experiences to empower our kids and teach them to serve their communities.

YOUR \$500 GIFT

Sponsors a SkyLab experience — where kids learn about themselves and the world around them.

YOUR \$600 GIFT

Supports holistic services that build our residents' self-esteem and sense of self-sufficiency.

YOUR \$1,000 GIFT

Supports a year of STEAM and STEM activities to expose our kids to the arts and sciences.

YOUR \$1,500 GIFT

Sponsors a cottage for one year — your gift memorialized by a plaque in our community.



Visit www.bigdayofgiving.org/cottagehousing
to schedule your gift in advance starting Thursday April 22nd
or to learn more.

DONATIONS NEEDS LIST:

- PREOWNED, RELIABLE CAR FOR THE JESUIT VOLUNTEER & MERCY VOLUNTEER TO USE FOR WORK
- PREOWNED, GENTLY USED ELECTRONICS (LAPTOPS, TABLETS, CELL PHONES)
- SHEETS & BLANKETS
- ADULT SIZED WINTER COATS
- MOPS & BROOMS
- POTS & PANS
- BATH TOWELS
- TOWELS & TOILETRIES
- CLEANING SUPPLIES
- TOILET PAPER
- RUGS

HOW TO DONATE

ONLINE AT:

WWW.COTTAGEHOUSING.ORG

MAIL TO: 1500 NORTH A ST.

SACRAMENTO CA 95811

