

Community Partner Spotlight: Welcoming Home

Turning a set of rooms into a home requires more than just keys. That's where the nonprofit Welcoming Home makes its niche.

"It struck us that people, especially in Marin, regularly turn over their furniture," says Marsha Roberts, who founded the organization with husband Greg Hansen after volunteering with a similar group based in the East Bay.

At the same time, she notes, programs that help unhoused families often have no funding for furniture and household goods.

Welcoming Home now serves about 45 families annually in Marin and Sonoma counties, all referred by local nonprofits. Five households from Homeward Bound of Marin received move-in makeovers in the last year.

"It's a flurry of hard work and crazy activity but so rewarding," Marsha says of the "Welcoming" days that happen every other month. "Afterward we're exhausted and the next morning we can't wait to do it again."

Volunteers from Welcoming Home first visit each household, learning about residents' likes and preferences. Their Starter Kits provide new bed frames,

mattresses, linens, pillows and matching dishware. Welcoming Home maintains a "virtual inventory" at welcominghome.org, where donors post photos and measurements of available items.. Volunteers comb the list for things that work with each household.



Inventory gaps may be filled by searching Craigslist or Facebook Marketplace and reaching out to sellers about donating.

"We take pride in giving things that are in very good shape," Marsha says. "These families have been through so much. An important part of making a fresh start is having a home that is warm and inviting.

On "Welcoming Day," teams work from St. Luke Presbyterian Church in San Rafael. Donors drop off smaller items, while Birch Circle Movers provide a truck and team pro bono for large furniture.

Four homes are furnished in a day. Residents leave home for three to four hours and return to find their space transformed.

"Welcoming Home is amazing," says Johanna Hernandez, who coordinates a supportive housing program at Homeward Bound for 10 families. "Not many agencies exist to offer the assistance they give."



Volunteer Spotlight: Nell & Jim Band

Sharing food often nourishes connections and caring. Hilary Perkins and Jim Nunally believe sharing live music does the same thing. So they decided to do both for participants in our shelter services at Jonathan's Place in San Rafael.

"We live here in San Rafael and seeing people in tents outside saddens us," says Hilary, half of the duo who perform and record as the Nell + Jim Band. "We're activists at heart. We asked ourselves 'what could we do?'"

They responded to a call for volunteers to help provide meals at Jonathan's Place, where we provide shelter for up to 40 adults. Joined by friends, they delivered their first dinner in January and brought instruments along.

"It was an amazing experience. People called 'thank-you' to us from across the room," she says. One woman inched closer as they played and told Hilary, "I'm so used to not kindness. It's so nice to be with people who are kind."

Jonathan's Place is the latest venue to benefit from their activism and talents. The couple operates a fledgling nonprofit called Whippoorwill Arts to promote roots music and its performers. Their Music aLIVE program offers paid gigs for musicians to play in non-traditional sites.

While Music aLIVE has chapters now in four states, our shelter is the first site where it brings music to people who are unhoused. Most performances happen in senior homes, prisons, schools or programs serving people with disabilities.

Their monthly visits with food and music on Friday nights have given them insights that will help them expand the music program with more community partners, Hilary says.

Each visit to Jonathan's Place reinforces her belief that live music creates a unique exchange of stories, energy and goodwill.

"The love, kindness and attention to the music that we receive while we're there enriches our lives," she says. "We believe it's healing for everyone."

