

SVdP Helps Mom Go From Homelessness to Stability

Michelle is safe and living with her daughter. Michelle, who suffers from multiple sclerosis, studies for IT classes and her daughter plays with PAW Patrol toys. But it wasn't always this way.

Michelle was homeless, in the throes of addiction, but she says the support she received from St. Vincent de Paul of Contra Costa County helped her turn her life around. For Michelle, SVdP is the lifeline that kept her family together.

"I was homeless on the streets of Rodeo," Michelle said. "The volunteers at SVdP gave me the motivation to change."

Michelle lived on the streets for 8 years. During that time, she dealt with tragedy, and the loss of children. She said her addiction made her lose the trust of friends and family and left her alone. She said, "I panhandled, I was an addict. I slept rough. It was dangerous."

Michelle and her daughter with SVdP Vincentian Cindi Erickson

Michelle said she was an intravenous meth user, and her addiction controlled her life. She said. "I'm blessed I found the volunteers at SVdP. They never gave up on me. With love, hope, and a little faith, they helped me change my life."

SVdP was a necessary lifeline for her. The distributions by the SVdP team at St. Patrick's church helped her feel seen and loved. "I'm blessed, not everyone can meet a group of strangers that love and care about them like I found in SVdP," Michelle said. "They're my friends and their support helped me go from having no hope to providing for my child."

Volunteers Recognized for Outstanding Service

During St. Vincent de Paul of Contra Costa County's 60th Anniversary Celebration, some of SVdP's most dedicated and compassionate volunteers were recognized for their outstanding service. Receiving the "Top Hat," award, these volunteer Vincentians exemplify all it means to care for your friends and neighbors in need.

These volunteers truly represent the heart of SVdP. Here at SVdP, we feel deeply honored to work with such incredible and caring people.

The Vincentians honored alongside Bishop Michael C. Barber, S.J.

Bill Hurley, Frank & Monica Wnuk, Stan Bochenek, Ron Costanzo, Carol Brazil, Bill Lujan, and Kathy Dasso (not pictured) were honored with the coveted Top Hat award, and at a Mass celebrated by Bishop Michael C. Barber, S.J. Each was recognized for their special contribution to SVdP during their many years of service to people and families in need.

Bill Hurley was recongized for his contribution to designing the volunteer reporting programs that SVdP conferences still use. Frank & Monica Wnuk received a Top Hat for their amazing recruitment drives, which have doubled the volunteers at their Conference in San Ramon. Stan Bochenek has been a mentor not only at his SVdP Conference in Danville, but to hundreds of volunteers. Ron Costanzo, former Board President, was recognized for his tireless volunteerism and for desinging and coordinating SVdP's Workforce Development Program. Carol Brazil & Bill Lujan received a Top Hat in recognition for their amazing work teaching volunteers about the home visit - the cornerstone of all of SVdP's work. Kathy Dasso was recognized for her amazing work helping her conference provide care for over 300 families annually.

Thank you to our Top Hat recipients and all of our dedicated Vincentian volunteers!

Medical Provider Sets Example by Caring for Uninsured

As a Doctor Nurse Practitioner and a dedicated Rotarian of 30 years, Paul Kiruuta, D.N.P, exemplifies commitment to caring for those in need. Volunteering at the RotaCare Pittsburg Free Medical Clinic at St. Vincent de Paul allows him to give back to his community, continue his father's legacy and inspire his sons.

"I'm from Uganda. My father was a doctor," Paul said. "My home was full of people in need. I want to help people just like my father."

Paul said working in Uganda differed from practicing in America. "In Uganda, we often had to scavenge for supplies and be creative with limited resources, especially when treating HIV patients," he explained. "Here in America, medical resources are more readily available, many people are unaware that help exists."

"In Uganda, we relied on volunteers," Paul said. "In America, the biggest hurdle is raising awareness that help is available for those who can't pay."

Paul said volunteering is crucial to him, to repay the kindness extended to his family. "There are volunteers in Uganda helping my family," Paul said. "The least I can do is volunteer. My sons are Boy Scouts, and live by the motto of doing a good deed every day. I hope they see that I strive to live by that same principle."

Paul, a Doctor Nurse Practioner, volunteers his time helping others at the free medical clinic.

Ukrainian Refugees Find Safety & Community in the USA with Your Support

In 2014, Russia invaded Ukraine, and again in February 2022. The war displaced families like Gala's, who came to America with her husband and young son.

"Our home was invaded in 2014, and since then we've been moving," Gala said. "My son just turned 11, and all his life he's been moving, he's never had a home because of this war. We lived with my husband's parents after the 2014 invasion. When Russia invaded again, we fled for our lives. It is unbelievable how willing people are to help strangers."

Europe couldn't offer shelter or security. Her family could not work in European countries if they did not speak the language. Gala said she felt blessed to come to America. "It was as if God opened the gate to safety for us. In Ukraine, you were always a target. It is a relief to not live like that anymore. I'm so thankful my family can be part of such an amazing community."

Locals helped them adjust to life in the U.S. "Everything was so new to us," Gala said. "Some neighbors told us to ask volunteers at their church for help, leading us to SVdP at St. Isidore. They helped us with food, clothing, with finding a car - I can't say enough about how much the support helped us find our feet."

"It's hard to be away from your home country," she said. "The people at SVdP have treated us like family, volunteers even bought my son tickets to Disneyland for Christmas. It's the one thing my son wants to do since coming to California. We want to be good, productive Americans, we work and we are paying taxes. Everyone has been so kind and we want to repay that with everything we have."

Gala & her family are now safe in the United States.