

SVdP of Contra Costa County Winter 2023 Newsletter

www.svdP-cc.org



*The Society of St. Vincent de Paul
of Contra Costa County*



Your donations to St. Vincent de Paul of Contra Costa County (SVdP) help feed families in need.

Thrift Store Donations Help Families in Need in Contra Costa

SVdP helps people overcome adversity. SVdP and our Vincentian volunteers open their arms to those in need and refuse to turn them away until the job is done. Simply, SVdP helps feed, clothe, shelter, and heal our vulnerable neighbors.

All of this good work is made possible by generous people like you. That is the main reason I am writing today - **I want to thank you for being a donor to our thrift stores.** Our thrift stores earn income that funds the services SVdP and our 650 Vincentian volunteers are able to provide for suffering families. When you donate a bag of clothing, a couch, or even a lamp, you aren't just freeing up space in your garage - you are also helping someone in need get the help they deserve. Thank you for your generosity.

Your donation to SVdP's thrift stores in Contra Costa County help us not only provide clothing and furniture to families in need, but also services to help struggling families.

At SVdP, your donations go towards feeding, clothing, sheltering, and healing our vulnerable neighbors. Your donations help fund numerous programs, like the RotaCare Pittsburg Free Medical Clinic at St. Vincent de Paul – which provides free medical care to uninsured adults. The Dentists on Wheels Pittsburg Free Dental Clinic at St. Vincent de Paul is able to help our neighbors in need receive free dental care.

Because of your donations, SVdP is able to team up with The Bay Church every Saturday and provide clean clothing and hot showers to our friends experiencing homelessness. Your compassion enables us to provide rental and utility assistance to struggling families, allowing them to stay in their homes and keep the lights on and food on the table.

At SVdP, we cannot thank you enough for your generosity. We wanted to share some of the good works your donations are helping make possible in Contra Costa County. In the pages of this newsletter, you will see stories of the real people whose lives have transformed for the better thanks to your generous donations.

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We also want to share with you insights about how our SVdP volunteers, called Vincentians, perform their charitable works throughout the county. A unique way that Vincentians serve our neighbors is through a process known as the **Home Visit**, where they visit people in need in their homes. As a active Vincentian myself, I feel that this is what makes us different than a "agency" or other service-oriented organization. A Home Visit is where two Vincentians go to a neighbor's home to better assess their situation (living conditions, etc.) to see how we can best help them. Often during a home visit, we uncover needs that they have never told us about or more ways that we may be able to help either directly or through referrals. We hope to give our neighbors a hand up, not just a handout, and that makes all the difference.

Thank you so much for caring about your neighbors in need. I invite you to visit us and tour our Family Resource Center in Pittsburg – so you can witness first hand what your donations make possible.

If you are interested, please email info@svdp-cc.org.

Blessings to you in 2023.



Claudia L. Ramirez
Executive Director



Amelia Scudiere, R.N., helps a patient track their blood sugar levels in the free clinic.

Diabetes Education Saves Lives

The RotaCare Pittsburg Free Medical Clinic at St. Vincent de Paul offers patients education and care to manage their diabetes. Many patients coming to the free clinic have untreated diabetes with life-threatening complications. If left untreated, diabetes can lead to complications like cardiovascular disease, blindness, and nerve damage.

“Diabetes is like a horse,” said Amelia Scudiere, R.N., Clinic Care Coordinator. “You control it, or it controls you.”

At the free clinic, uninsured adults learn how to manage their disease. The free clinic has 3 certified diabetes educators. They teach patients to manage their diabetes via diet and exercise, and refer them to specialists if needed.

“These patients are motivated,” Amelia said. “They know we want to see them get better and they want to get healthy.”

Afghan Refugee Family Adapts to the United States With St. Vincent de Paul's Workforce Development Program



Afghan Refugee and WFD Graduate Ajmal Aria

Afghan refugee and St. Vincent de Paul of Contra Costa County Workforce Development Program Graduate Ajmal Aria is the new Director of Operations at Opening Doors in Sacramento – a charity dedicated to helping refugees adapt to their new home.

“My family has been amazingly lucky,” Ajmal said. “My family still in Afghanistan receives threats daily from the Taliban, but my wife, my children and I were able to escape. When we first came, it was so hard and everything was so expensive. But we were blessed to meet SVdP volunteers who helped us.”

In Afghanistan, Ajmal worked with the United States to deliver humanitarian aid. Ajmal, his wife, and their 5 children came to the United States just before the US Military officially withdrew from Afghanistan.

“We were living in a small apartment in Concord,” Ajmal said. “We had 2 bedrooms for the seven of us, and we were scared we would be evicted.”

Ajmal heard about the Workforce Development Program at St. Vincent de Paul, a paid part-time job-training and work experience program aimed at helping people overcome the barriers between them and a good job, and signed up.

“I have a degree.” Ajmal said. “But when you’re in a new country, trying to support a family, it can be hard to get your bearings. SVdP helped me adjust to this country and find a job that utilizes my training – and lets me provide for my family.”

Ron Costanzo, volunteer coordinator of the SVdP Workforce Development Program stated, “Ajmal was an outstanding example and a great worker. We are still in touch with his wonderful family. We were excited that he got the operations manager position in Sacramento. It is amazing to see a close friend succeed.”

Ajmal said he is extremely grateful for the help he has received.

“My family is blessed,” Ajmal said. “We’ve received so much help from so many people. We are just so grateful and hope we can pay it forward and help others.”

Home Visits Transform Needing Help into New Friends



There are lots of charities that help people in need. At SVdP, we do things a little differently, providing those who are seeking help the compassion and dignity they rarely experience. SVdP volunteers, called “Vincentians,” meet families in their homes to find out how they can help people return to stability. We call this the “Home Visit”.

Home visits allow SVdP volunteers to connect with families in need, and form long lasting friendships.

“Studies have found that, it takes on average 7 agencies to truly help someone in need resolve a

poverty-related issue.,” Stephen Krank, SVdP Vincentian Services Manager said. “SVdP visits the homes of our neighbors and brings resources to bear all at once. If you call for help with your electric bill, and your cupboards are bare, we won’t let you go hungry.”

When a family calls an SVdP branch, (we call them conferences), for help, a pair of volunteers arrange a time that works best for that family to make the home visit.

“So many agencies have restrictions on the help they can provide, but SVdP isn’t restricted in what we can do or how we can help,” former SVdP Board President Ron Costanzo said. “Many times, providing an ear is one of the most powerful resources that we can provide.”

But why is the home visit a powerful tool for charity? What is it about visiting people in their homes that makes it better? The simple answer is you don’t know what you don’t know. SVdP volunteers meet with people in their homes to feel what their neighbors feel.

“I went on a home visit in a park,” SVdP volunteer Shawanna Costanzo said. “The neighbor we were helping was homeless. It was eye-opening for me to experience what she was, to feel what she felt. It was important that I was cold. How else could I understand?”

When you visit someone in their home, you become their friend. And people will tell their friends troubles they might be too embarrassed to tell a stranger.

“Helping people is ultimately about trust,” Stephen said. “With SVdP, you help people in need build their plan. With SVdP, you don’t give a handout, you provide a hand-up.”

Ways you can help...

You can help people in need right now through St. Vincent de Paul of Contra Costa County. Your donations help change lives.

Visit www.svdP-cc.org to donate online. Families need your help. You can feed, clothe, shelter and heal people in need.