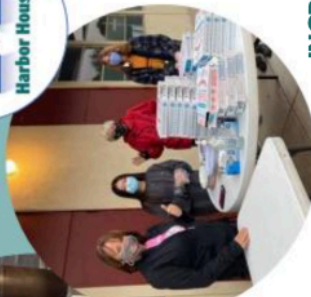




# A Helping Hand FOR THE HOMELESS in the Conejo Valley

**WE ALL KNOW WHAT A DIFFICULT YEAR 2020 WAS FOR EVERYONE, PARTICULARLY THOSE WHO ARE MOST VULNERABLE IN OUR COMMUNITY. MANY OF OUR LOCAL FAMILIES LOST THEIR JOBS, DID NOT QUALIFY FOR UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS AND STRUGGLED TO SUPPORT THEIR FAMILIES FINANCIALLY AND KEEP THEM OUT OF HOMELESSNESS.**



**“OUR HEARTS ARE FULL, BOTH FOR THE INCREDIBLE NEED WE SEE INCREASING EVERY DAY AND ALSO FOR THE GENEROUS COMMUNITY WHO HAS CONTINUED TO SHOW UP FOR THEIR NEIGHBORS.”**

— DENISE CORTES, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Harbor House is a nonprofit that serves those who are experiencing homelessness and those in extreme poverty in the Conejo Valley. When the Coronavirus became a crisis, the staff became deeply involved in helping families survive with the least amount of trauma to children and the elderly. They know the names of all those they serve and were able to pivot their daily food delivery to be distributed outdoors at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church while wearing masks and social distancing. They worked more hours, provided more financial assistance, lifted up more kids who are living without parental support, and fed families who need it the most while the need continued to grow.

The homeless situation in America was exacerbated by the pandemic and the need increased in the Conejo Valley as well. Thankfully when the pandemic started, the County of Ventura temporarily housed the elderly and those with physical health conditions in a local motel. However, those who were under the age of 65 or did not have a physical health condition did not qualify for the motel program. For these individuals, COVID-19 made their lives much more difficult without access to public spaces like libraries and senior centers that were a refuge during the day.

To help combat this issue, Harbor House has a mission to contribute to the building of a just community where all people are invited. They aspire to see all human beings as worthy of their time and efforts and offer referrals, resources, case management, and a hand up for those who are struggling. It is their goal to help all people in our community find hope, gainful employment, affordable housing, and a sense of personal wellbeing.

Harbor House also works closely with people entering young adulthood without support. An astounding 36% of California foster youth become homeless within 18 months of aging out and 46% do not graduate from high school; less than 3% earn a college degree. Harbor House believes that one of the best ways they can have an impact on homelessness is by helping to improve the success rate of these young people, before they end up on the street.

The staff also feels extremely grateful to be of service in a community that is as generous as the Conejo Valley.

“None of the work we do would be possible without the generosity of this community,” said Denise Cortes, Executive Director at Harbor House. “We are blessed in so many ways by this community. The partnership and collaboration that happens here is extraordinary.”

In their continued efforts to help families that need it, Harbor House hosts an Adopt-a-Family program each year to help provide the magic of the holidays for children. In 2020, they provided for more families and more children than ever before, all with the help of a record number of donors.

“Our hearts are full, both for the incredible need we see increasing every day and also for the generous community who has continued to show up for their neighbors,” said Cortes.

**WAYS TO CONNECT WITH HARBOR HOUSE:**

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