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COC Fact Check

During January through March, 2006, the COC met the following needs:

- > Provided food to 180 families and 488 individuals
- > Provided housing assistance to 11 families and 43 individuals
- > Provided emergency shelter to 2 families
- > Provided rental assistance to 2 families (security deposit and other) and emergency assistance to 10 families to avoid eviction
- > Provided forms assistance to 251 families
- > Determined 8 families are maintaining stable housing six months after receiving COC rental assistance

The Coastside Opportunity Center (COC) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit multiservice center incorporated in 1976 whose mission is to provide human service programs to the homeless, low-income, working poor, immigrant, farm and nursery worker, elderly, and disabled residents of the San Mateo County Coastside.

Our office is located at 99 Avenue Alhambra, El Granada. Our mailing address is P.O. Box 1089, El Granada CA 94018. Our telephone number is 650-726-9071.

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Coastside Opportunity Center

Extending hope and a hand to Coastside residents

Letter from COC Executive Director Cheri Parr

In my first six months at the Coastside Opportunity Center, I've been touched and humbled by the outpouring of generosity from my Coastside neighbors.

On a warm October evening at the start of my journey, more than 300 of you gathered for our presentation "The Other Coastside." That night, we brought to life - through photos, video and testimony - the reality of poverty and homelessness on the Coastside. You responded generously with more than \$50,000 in donations and pledges. For that, we thank you. That evening, I promised to get back to you to show the impact of that investment in the lives of your neighbors. This inaugural edition of the COC newsletter is a start.

In each issue we will highlight the success of our clients through the COC's social, immigration and transportation programs, spotlight cooperative efforts with other Coastside organizations and tell you how you can help your neighbors through volunteer work, in-kind donations and financial support.

The people you read about today - the Johnson family, Veronica Tatton and Susie Maya - are just a few of the hundreds of individuals and families who come to the COC in times of need.

I hope you'll join the COC this year in celebrating 30 years of successfully providing critical human services to the Coastside community. What better way to celebrate than to get involved. After all, without you, there is no COC.

Sincerely,

Cheri

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Coming Home Again ... Costs More

A COC social services success story

Tiffany Johnson got a wake-up call à la Rip Van Winkle when she returned home to the Coastside after being away nearly 25 years: She couldn't afford to live here.



The Johnsons finally found a home after working with the COC. From left: Tiffany, Jayce, Cody, Taeya, Cheyenne

When Tiffany Johnson returned to the Coastside after having been gone for more than 20 years - to be closer to her mother, a cancer survivor, and give her four children the experience of growing up with Grandma - she found herself a member of the working poor.

Finding a place to live was a challenge. Tiffany's salary as a restaurant manager barely suffices, and trying to scrape together a rental deposit meant one thing: There wasn't enough to eat.

So, Tiffany visited the COC. "I went to the COC to see about getting some canned foods or something to get us through," she said. Instead, the COC was able to make up the funds needed to move into a single-story house in Montara Tiffany rented under Section 8. "It was a godsend," said Tiffany of the COC's assistance.

The house is now full of energy - just like any home with four kids aged 3 to 12. Cody, 12, burst through the door bubbling about winning a basketball shoot-off. Taeya, 5, was preoccupied

with a Happy Birthday balloon Tiffany received the day before. Three-year-old Jayce was clamoring for his mother's cuddles. Cheyenne, 11, was trying to stay above it all. For now it's home.

Tiffany's frustration with the cost of living here, however, may send her elsewhere. Once Cody reaches high school, she would like to own a home - not possible for her on the Coastside. Even now, the cost of living still leaves them wanting. Cody wants to join a local basketball team, but the fee is too much. In Minnesota, she could afford her daughter's gymnastics - not here. And Head Start wants a weekly \$90 copay for Jayce. She buys only things on sale, and stocks her deep-freeze with good buys.

Still, Tiffany is certain she's better off than many and does not want to take advantage. She knows the COC offers other forms of assistance, including groceries, but resists. "I feel I'm still kind of blessed," she said. "I can pull together things. I believe there are so many people in this community - women and children, especially - [who need help]. I would rather see someone who needs it more get it."

Here She Comes ... Miss America

A COC immigration services success story

A longtime cashier at Cunha's, Susie Maya has made two big changes. One was coming to work for the COC.

And the other?

American citizenship.

Becoming an American was a dream for Susie Maya. "It was a dream I never forgot. It was like being born again. Opening a new book," she said, just a few days after being sworn in as a citizen in San Francisco Feb. 21.

Susie has spent much of her 19 years on the Coastside providing for her eight younger siblings and getting them through school. "I had to make a decision. It was them or me," she said of her younger siblings. So she chose them. "I wanted citizenship, but I never applied because I didn't know what to do. And I work sometimes six days a week."

But one day in 2004, while working at Cunha's, she chatted with customer David Pasternak, the president of the COC board and an immigration attorney. He and his assistant, Suzanne Prado, helped Susie navigate the system.

Susie's reasons for becoming a U.S. citizen are simple. "I want to vote, to help my community. I've lived here 19 years. I think it's time to give ... back to everybody [who had helped me]," she said. "Now I can do a lot of things. I can work a little bit more hard. I can go to university – that's another thing I want to finish. A lot of things are different now."

Ed Watkins, an HMB High School teacher who has had a Maya sibling in class in nearly each of his 16 years at the school, is impressed with Susie's achievements. "You've got to take your hat off to this young woman who took on these roles [of raising her siblings] along with going to school, along with working, and getting herself into a position of getting her citizenship, which means a lot to her. It's amazing. She's so proud. She should be."

Susie's got a list of people she wants to recognize for the help and friendship they've pro-



Susie Maya was surrounded by supporters the day she became an American. From left: Cheri Parr, Juan Maya, Alejo Maya, Naomi Patridge, Maribel Maya, Susie, Pary Maya, Bev Cunha-Ashcraft, Eduardo Maya

vided. There's Ed Watkins, whom she calls a second father; Naomi Patridge, who helped her navigate HMB High School for her siblings and attended the swearing-in; Bob Kay, who sold her her first car; Lyn Muth, a teacher who helped her brother; and Debra Godshall, who obtained signatures of support for her citizenship application. There's also Julie McGowan, Palmira Oesterreich, Bonnie Harrell, Chris and Greg Miller, Gigi Bravo, Guillermo Acevedo, Moto Yamamoto and Juie Zhou. And, of course, Bev Cunha Ashcraft, who also witnessed Susie's swearing-in.

"She's not my boss, she's like my – grandma," Susie said, smiling. "She worries about me all the time. She loves my brothers, my sisters." Bev has employed several of the Maya family at one time or another and has nothing but praise for how Susie raised her younger siblings. "She made good decisions with them," Bev said. "They're all well-mannered, well-dressed, good kids."

Now the COC is proud to have Susie become a receptionist after having volunteered at the center for a year. She is also providing assistance to nearly every department at the COC – immigration services, social services, transportation services and tax services. "I want to say thank you very much to Cheri to give me this opportunity to work here," Susie said. "If Bev is my grandma, Cheri is my angel."

The day after the ceremony, Susie came in to work to find her desk decorated with red, white and blue balloons and photos of the event. "And now," she said, chuckling, "everyone calls me Miss America."

WHAT COC CLIENTS NEED NOW ... that you can provide

- > Diapers
- > Laundry Detergent
- > Cooking Oil
- > Sugar

For more information, call Susie Maya at 726-9071

There and Back Again: A Daily Round Trip From Montara for Treatment

A COC transportation services success story

When her husband died a little more than a year ago, Veronica Tatton's son and daughter-in-law invited her to come live with them and their two sons, 14 and 4. Mrs. Tatton had her reservations. She and her husband lived in Hawaii, and Mrs. Tatton had been receiving treatment for cancer. She wasn't sure how she would continue the daily regimen if she moved in with her son and his family. "They both work. I didn't want to have to depend on them," she said. "I didn't want to impose." But her local doctors introduced her to the COC's transportation services. Now, for \$5 a day, Mrs. Tatton gets a round trip ride to San Francisco – made longer now by the Devil's Slide closure. She receives oral medication daily and radiation on Mondays. "I was in between a rock and a hard place. You guys came to my rescue. And it's just great," she said. Now that she's a regular, she knows and loves all the COC's drivers. "I can't tell you how much I love them," she said. "They pick me up in the morning and bring me back home. I think it's terrific. The drivers are all so nice." And even with the frustration of the Slide closure, she said, the drivers "keep us talking and laughing."



Veronica Tatton gets a ride from COC Driver Carlos Velazco, this year's first winner of the "You Make a Difference" award from the COC and SamTrans

Volunteer Opportunities

Looking for a way to give back to your community? Right now we need about 20 volunteers for the Food Program. On the third Thursday of every month from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m., the COC provides bagged groceries to needy families. Do your skills and interests fit one of the following jobs? For more information, call 726-9071 or email Beth Bryant, our volunteer coordinator at Savee@aol.com

- > Family Harvest food distribution: 12 to 15 volunteers
- > Maintain stock of food at COC Pantry: 2 to 3 volunteers
- > Distribution of food at COC Pantry: 1 volunteer
- > Obtaining barrels of canned food from Coastside locations during food drives: 1 to 2 volunteers, as needed
- > Assisted Food distribution: 1 volunteer
- > General office and data entry: 3 to 4 volunteers



Did You Know?

Tax time! The COC has processed more than 1,000 client tax returns during the past five years, helping claim \$235,000 in Earned Income Tax Credit refunds. The program is a free service the COC provides to eligible, low-income clients. If you think you or someone you know may qualify for this program, please call the COC at 726-9071.

Judy O'Leary, a COC board member and volunteer, provides tax preparation assistance to a Coastside family.