

Improving the Shelter Experience

The first few nights a family spends at the shelter can be especially difficult. Losing a home is traumatic, and adjusting to life in a shelter brings its own challenges. Families must navigate unfamiliar rules and procedures while sharing close quarters with other families they may not know. It's a lot to manage during an already stressful time.

Although we can't take away all the difficult emotions that come with this transition, we can do our best to make those first days a little less overwhelming and a bit more comfortable.

We'd like to share a few initiatives

we've introduced at Transition House over the past couple of years, including some implemented just a few months ago. Each reflects our commitment to creating a welcoming shelter environment—one that honors every family's privacy and dignity while helping them feel safe, respected, and at home.

COMFORT KITS

On the first night they arrive at the shelter, each family member receives an age-appropriate Comfort Kit. The Kits contains items such as toothbrushes and shampoo, water bottles,



Comfort Kits might include a stuffed animal, a book, a water bottle, tissues, a journal, colored pencils, shampoo, slippers, or other items.



Program Director Debbie Michael Retires

Transition House's long-time Program Director, Debbie Michael, is beginning a new chapter as she transitions to retirement. Debbie began her work with the agency in 1997 as an AmeriCorp member. She then moved up to a case manager position, soon became our Program Manager, and finally was promoted to her role as Program Director overseeing all of Transition House case management and career development services in 2006.

During Debbie's long tenure, Transition House added rapid rehousing and housing location functions to the department, refined its case management methodology, and expanded its transitional and permanent supportive housing programs.

Debbie has helped thousands of people return to housing. We are so grateful for her many years of dedicated service and wish her well! 🏠

stuffed animals for children, slippers, journals, playing cards, toys and books. The items are contained in a colorful bag with a tag that includes a message of welcome to the recipient.

The Comfort Kits are given to them by the evening Shelter Manager—this provides a positive first introduction for the family as the Shelter Manager is the person who will be giving them guidance and answering any questions on their first evening. While the items contained in these kits are simple, sharing them is the first step our shelter staff member takes in building trust.

Supporters have donated items for the kits and helped us to assemble them so there are always plenty on hand to readily welcome new families.

FAMILY SLEEPING ROOM DOOR LOCKS

You might assume that because we provide private sleeping rooms for families, those rooms have always had locks. That hasn't been the case—until recently. While locks offer an added measure of privacy and security, we've also had to consider several practical concerns, including lost keys, toddlers accidentally locking their parents out of the room, and the need for quick access in the event of a fire. Finding a solution that balances privacy, safety, and



Private sleeping room keycodes are issued to new families on their first night in the shelter.

peace of mind has been an important step toward making our shelter feel more like home.

Thanks to technology that has improved how door lock's function, we were able to source key-pad-controlled locks that have addressed the reasons we hesitated to install locks in the past.

Parents are not required to carry keys—they simply use a four-digit code provided by staff. The doors do not lock on their own so kids can't lock out parents. The adult (who memorizes their key code) has to enter the key code to get the door to lock when they leave the room.

The locks have been a great success! Clients report feeling more secure, particularly on their first few nights in the shelter when they are still meeting other families and staff. We are grateful to our corporate partner, Yardi Systems, Inc., for purchasing the door locks for the shelter.

DINING ROOM MILK FRIDGE

If you have ever helped cook meals in the shelter, you'd know that the kitchen is quite small and frequently very busy. The refrigerator is usually packed full of supplies for the evening meal as well as other meals during the week. When dinner was served in the past, cartons of milk were offered in a large bowl of ice on the serving counter and quickly returned to the refrigerator at the end of the meal. When mealtime ended, the kitchen was closed—goodbye, milk!

Thanks to the recent purchase of a beverage cooler which we have located



Fresh, cold milk anytime!

along one wall of the dining room, we can now offer fresh milk to clients *anytime* day or night. Parents appreciate being able to provide a cold carton of milk to their child whenever needed. Our new milk fridge offers families the coldest milk in town—and a little taste of home!

“FREE STORE”

Our Operations Director, Kristin Phillips, came up with a clever way of providing toiletries and other personal hygiene products to residents. The Free Store is stocked largely with donated items such as shampoo, toothbrushes and paste, shaving cream, diapers and supplies such as pacifiers and wipes.

The Free Store is available to clients whenever they have a need. Staff gives them access and a shopping bag to carry any items they pick up.

We welcome your ideas and donations to the Free Store. We simply ask that items be new and unopened.



The Free Store currently offers shampoo donated from Underground Hair Salon, soap, deodorant, mouthwash, and much more.



The world's classiest shelter bathroom!

What child doesn't want to give their parent flowers, and what parent doesn't want to receive them?



A BEAUTIFUL BATHROOM FOR ALL

If you've ever volunteered at Transition House and "needed to go", you would have been directed towards our downstairs bathroom off the dining room. No windows, bright fluorescent lighting, fake tiles, chips in the wall paint—no matter how hard we scrubbed it clean, it still looked shabby.

Boy, have we classed up our act! Thanks to a generous grant from All Saints By-the-Sea Episcopal Church, we remodeled the bathroom with cheerful Spanish floor tile, cozy bronze lighting fixtures, and a warm wood vanity. The upgrades are most appreciated by families, staff and our volunteers.

FLOWER POWER

We have always been grateful for dinner provider groups that bring flowers to decorate the dining room tables. Everyone loves flowers!

Recently, we have been thrilled to begin receiving a monthly donation of cut flowers from Whole Harvest Farms for clients to use in making arrangements for the shelter. We love providing this creative activity to help our residents occupy their free time in a beautiful and refreshing way.

Both children and adults have enjoyed making bouquets for their rooms and for shelter common areas. They are thankful to Whole Harvest Farms for keeping them in mind!

OTHER FAMILY SLEEPING ROOM UPGRADES

We've also made other upgrades to our family rooms over the last year that have helped make the shelter a little less institutional and a little more welcoming. They include throw rugs, mirrors and towel racks, wall clocks and bulletin boards.

Thanks to all who have donated to support our efforts! ⬆

Affordability and Poverty

By Kathleen Baushke, Executive Director

(Note: data and definitions in this article come from the *Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin – Madison, 2026*)

Poverty is not a topic we see covered with regularity in our daily news, but rising costs and the affordability crisis have shed new light on what moderate- and lower-income wage earners face when paychecks don't keep pace with inflation.

You might have heard statements such as, “*the family lives below the federal poverty line*” or “*the funding is meant for programs serving those under the poverty line.*” So, what is the poverty line?

To describe poverty and to count how many people in the United States live in poverty currently, the federal government uses the Official Poverty Measure (OPM). As we will see, the impact of the affordability crisis may not be fully captured in the OPM's methodology.

How is the Official Poverty Measure Determined?

The Census Bureau determines poverty status by comparing pre-tax cash income (e.g., employment earnings, Social Security, pensions, and disability benefits) against a national poverty threshold adjusted by family composition (number and age of household members). In other words, the OPM uses calculations of these three elements—income, poverty threshold, and family composition—to estimate what percentage of the population across the country experiences poverty.

The Census Bureau's official poverty estimates are drawn annually from their *Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement*, which

is conducted in February, March, and April using a sample of approximately 100,000 addresses per year.

In 1959, when the federal government began measuring poverty in this manner, the national poverty rate at the time was 22%. In 2024, the OPM's national poverty rate was 10.6%, representing 35.9 million people living in poverty. While it may be heartening to see this percentage decrease, the data can be quite deceiving.

A definition of poverty is important for both government decision makers and organizations like ours. However, we also need to understand how affordability drives poverty as we work with families experiencing homelessness.

Thresholds

Let's learn more about the thresholds used in calculating the OPM. Poverty thresholds, the minimum income needed to avoid poverty, are updated annually for inflation using the Consumer Price Index and adjusted for family size, composition, and age of householder. However, thresholds are derived from food spending and household budget models *created in the 1960s!* While they are updated annually for changes in prices, the components that we accept as necessary to get by in today's household budgets cannot possibly be reflected in a household budget from the 1960s. Furthermore, thresholds do not vary across geographies—they may be more meaningful for one town or city, but quite inaccurate for another.

Why Affordability is Not Reflected in the OPM

While poverty according to the OPM has gone down since 1959, experts have long called for changes in the way pov-

erty is measured. Principal criticisms of the OPM include:

- Its “headcount” approach identifies only those people who fall below the poverty threshold, but does not measure the depth of economic need;
- It does not reflect modern expenses and resources, by excluding significant draws on income such as taxes, work expenses, and out-of-pocket medical expenses, and excluding potentially sizable resources such as in-kind benefits (e.g., food assistance);
- It does not vary by geographic differences in cost of living within the contiguous United States despite huge variation;
- It is not adjusted for changes in the standard of living over time; and
- Its strict definition of measurement units—“family”—as persons living in the same household who are related by birth, marriage, or adoption does not reflect the nature of many households today, including those made up of cohabitators, unmarried partners with children from previous relationships, and foster children.

It is easy to see how the OPM could fail to capture the unique economic realities of Santa Barbara—and many other urban environments—including our extremely high cost of living.

When we ask why homelessness is still present and growing despite our very best efforts, consider the OPM and the affordability crisis. While Transition House knows how to help people improve their income and better manage their money, we cannot control the forces that are driving inflation and higher costs. Yet they must be addressed.

Still, understanding what creates poverty and how it is defined is critical to Transition House and our supporters, improving our ability to advocate effectively as we work together to solve family homelessness. 🏠

Celebrating the Community That Makes It All Possible!

By Kellie Topar, Development and Volunteer Relations Manager

Earlier this summer, Transition House brought together volunteers, donors, shelter families, and staff for our Annual Appreciation Picnic at Manning Park. It was a wonderful afternoon of Santa Maria-style barbecue, laughter, and good company as we celebrated and recognized the people who make our work possible.

The picnic is one of our favorite traditions, and our staff especially look forward to this event each year. It's a chance to step away from our busy schedules and connect with the families and supporters who are part of the Transition House community. Whether through volunteering, donating, or simply lending a helping hand, our supporters play an important role in helping Transition House families build brighter futures.

Thank you to everyone who joined us and to all of those who support our mission throughout the year. We are grateful to have such a caring and committed community, and we look forward

to celebrating together again next year!

Interested in joining our volunteer team? Contact Kellie Topar, Develop-

ment & Volunteer Relations Manager, at (805) 966-9668 ext. 128 or ktopar@transitionhouse.com 

2026 AWARD WINNERS

Ferd Rapp Award "Spreading the Spirit of Service": Sandi Wilson

Sally Rausch Award "Longtime Volunteer Service": Nancy Rapp

Grace Lutheran Founders Award "A Lifetime of Service": Judy and Don Nason

Outstanding Service Organization: Space for Dinner

Kids Helping Kids: Laguna Blanca Student Leadership Team

Compassion in Action Award: Kristin Linehan

Community Champion Award: Kim and Andy Busch

Steadfast Support Award: Jay and Ruth Shobe

New Light Award: Dingman Family Foundation

When it Counts Award: Carol Kommerstad

Best New Screener Award: Monica Kaderali

Best Evening Facilitator Award: Chris Hoehner

Best Children's Program Volunteer Award: Brooke Tamin & Eliana Fine

Best Family Support Center Volunteer Award: Giselle Nava-Benitez

Most Dedicated Shelter Volunteer Award: Brissa Bejarano



Our annual picnic brought together volunteers, donors, staff, and client families for a joyful afternoon filled with delicious food, guessing games, well-deserved recognition awards, raffle prizes, and plenty of smiles!



Shelter Open House & Donation Drive

Wednesday, November 4th
Between 11:30 a.m.-1:00 p.m.
434 E. Ortega Street

**Located down the block from our admin office.*

Help us restock much-needed supplies for families,
and if you're curious, enjoy a quick tour of
the Transition House shelter.

We would gladly accept new or like-new items.



Prefer to shop new?

Check our Amazon Wish List for preferred
items, or use it as a guide for local shopping.



We can accept the following items:

Pillows (standard)

Sheets (twin & full)

Comforters (twin & full)

Blankets

Bath Towels

Washcloths

Have questions about what we can accept? Call (805) 966-9668.

Transition House Board of Directors

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2026 CORPORATE PARTNERS

We are grateful to the local, regional and national businesses that support our efforts to fight poverty and increase affordable housing opportunities for our most vulnerable neighbors. Please support these businesses if you can. Thank you to all!

Deckers Outdoor Corporation

Jordano's

Folded Hills Winery

Santa Barbara Home Improvement Center

The Towbes Group

Yardi Systems, Inc.

American Riviera Bank

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Underground Hair Artists

Wadell Roofing Services

To learn more about the benefits of being a corporate partner, please call Gina Whitefoot, Associate Director, at (805) 966-9668, ext. 120.

A Wave of Generosity, an Ocean of Possibilities

By Kellie Topar, Development and Volunteer Relations Manager

This year's 22nd Annual *Help-a-Kid No-Ball* brought a splash of fun to Hendry's Beach! With a mermaid-inspired theme, Transition House kids dressed up and spent a fun-filled morning playing in the sand and running in the waves as the stars of this year's No-Ball.

While the kids enjoyed getting dressed up for their beach adventure, our community showed its generosity in a big way. Thanks to our incredible donors and supporters, this year's No-Ball raised over \$222,000 to support the more than 275 children who will call Transition House their home this year.

Unlike a traditional fundraising event, the No-Ball skips the fancy gala and instead directs the resources to where they matter most—our many programs for children. Every dollar raised goes towards providing academic support, quality childcare, and engaging age-appropriate enrichment activities designed to help children build confidence, develop new skills, and experience the stability and opportunities they need to thrive.

We are incredibly grateful to everyone who contributed to this year's No-Ball. Your generosity makes a difference long after the costumes are put away and the tide has receded. Thank you to all the donors and local businesses for helping us create brighter futures for the children and families we serve. 🏠



These adventurous mermaids—Aaleyah, Bella, Cristian, Legend, and Maria—were all residents at Transition House this year. They are enjoying a day by the sea, with an ocean of possibilities ahead, thanks to you!

CORPORATE SPONSORS

American Riviera Bank
California Learning Center
CenCal Health
Montecito Bank & Trust
Patagonia
Santa Barbara Home Improvement Center
Signature Aviation
Tileco Distributors, Inc.
The Towbes Group
Wadell Roofing Services
Yardi Systems, Inc.

RAFFLE DONORS

Arnoldi's Cafe
Bettina
Boathouse at Hendry's Beach
Finney's Crafthouse
Hilton Santa Barbara Beachfront Resort
LOCAL Montecito
Lucky Penny
Lure Fish House
Manifattura
Olio Cucina Inc.
Reunion Kitchen + Bar
The Lark
Third Window

♥ ♥ ♥ **CAN YOU HELP? WE NEED:** ♥ ♥ ♥
pillows • towels • twin sheets • blankets (no wool)
 Gently used items can be donated to our administrative offices at 425 E. Cota Street
 Mon.-Thurs. 9AM to 4PM. **THANK YOU!**



THE WAY HOME
Transition House

425 E Cota Street
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
(805) 966-9668
www.transitionhouse.com

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Help Make Christmas Wishes Come True— Become a Secret Santa!

Every year, our community comes together to make Christmas a little brighter for the children and families at Transition House. With your help, we can bring holiday cheer, special gifts, and joyful memories to the families we serve.

There are three easy ways to be a Secret Santa:



Adopt a Wish List

Choose a child or family's holiday wish list, purchase the gifts, and deliver them unwrapped to Transition House.



Shop Online

Browse our online holiday wish list featuring gifts requested by children and have your purchases sent directly to Transition House.



Donate

Make a monetary donation or provide a gift card, and our team will take care of the shopping to help fulfill Christmas wishes.

However you choose to give, your generosity will help make the season special for Transition House children and their parents.

For more information or to get involved, contact our holiday team at
holidays@transitionhouse.com