While New Beginnings’ work began with its counseling services more than 50 years ago, it has grown into a countywide service agency not only supporting mental health, but also the homeless and vets. “We’re here to serve our most vulnerable community members with their most pressing problems,” says Development Manager Michael Berton. “We’ve identified those to be mental illness and homelessness. We’ve seen the veteran population struggle with these areas even more and have a dedicated program for them now.”

A major turning point came in 2003, when the nonprofit partnered with the city and the county to launch the “Safe Parking” Program, which provides safe, overnight shelter in monitored parking lots for people living out of their cars. The 2020 homeless count found that 51% of Santa Barbara County’s unsheltered residents were living out of their cars. The 2020 homeless program for them now.”

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When Safe Parking was started, big media outlets including Rolling Stone, CNN, and The Los Angeles Times took notice, lauding the program as a way off the streets for those on the brink of homelessness. Since 2003, New Beginnings has moved more than 2,000 people into permanent housing, making Safe Parking a standout among myriad national initiatives aimed at mitigating the deepening homelessness crisis.

New Beginnings is also the leading nonprofit service provider for homeless veterans in Santa Barbara County, housing 100 veterans and their families each year. It’s 50-year-old Counseling Center in downtown Santa Barbara provides mental health counseling and psychological testing and assessment to more than 600 at-risk individuals and families in the greater Santa Barbara area each year. Its 30-plus masters and doctoral level counselors offer their services at an average of $35 per session thanks to the nonprofits exceedingly lean operation: 91% of revenue is spent on programs and clients. In 2020, the agency put more than a quarter of its $2 million – $500,000 – back into the community; buying mattresses for its homeless clients, renting storage spaces, and covering rental costs. Whatever it takes to help.

For donors looking to make an impact and who want to know that their money is going straight into helping people, Berton frankly says: “New Beginnings is the most bang for your buck.”

“In times that mental illness and homelessness are so prevalent. Fortunately, our community has the resources and ability to address these issues head on. What we need is an organization to guide us. New Beginnings’ leadership has the expertise, entrepreneurial spirit, and compassion needed to make real and long-lasting change in our community. I urge you to join me in advancing the mission of this wonderful organization.”

– Honorable Susan Rose