New Beginnings

Everyone Deserves a New Beginning...

New Beginnings Counseling Center held its annual fundraiser in a new way with an evening of theater at the New Vic. It was a stage reading production with award winning professional actors including a wonderful nine-year-old girl, Hope Dekker, and Stephanie Edwards, who co-hosted the Tournament of Roses Parade with Bob Eubanks for 35 years. The play, Food and Shelter, was written by Emmy award winner Jane Anderson and directed by Jenny Sullivan. Did you ever wonder what it would be like to go to Disneyland if you were homeless? That is the play’s theme.

Jane wrote it in 1992 thinking that the homeless situation would improve. It seems to have only gotten worse. As New Beginnings executive director Kristine Schwarz said, “This isn’t a depressing preachy lecture about what people need to do.” She believes people relate to others through shared history, belief, experience and understanding.

After the two-act play, fundraiser guests had a reception in the courtyard. This whole event was arranged by coordinator Judi Weisbart and development manager Michael Berton. Diane Pannuk heads up the board of directors.

New Beginnings was established in 1968 to provide psychological counseling and supportive services to homeless, veterans, and low income families. In 2016 they served an amazing 1,733 people in Santa Barbara.

One of New Beginnings’ popular programs is the safe parking at night for folks living in their cars. What surprised me is that 40% of those who live in their cars have full-time employment and 95% are locals as opposed to someone just driving through town. It has been operating since 2004 cooperating with churches, governmental and non-profit agencies as well as businesses. They connect the chronically homeless to shelters and services that will get them off the streets and into safer environments. They also distribute more than 450 pounds of food each month and offer a rapid re-housing component that helps them transition into permanent housing and employment. New Beginnings offers job tutoring and resume preparation. Life changing assistance is offered.

Other services are a life skills parenting education program and more. Their motto: “Changing Lives One Person at a Time.” Contact them at 805.963.7777.

Ghost Light Night

This event wasn’t about Halloween. According to the invitation the ghost light is a “luminescence in the pitch of night in theaters across the globe. The haunting bulb stands bare-bones and aglow defying theinky darkness and beckoning spirits to come hither and play.” This was a party orchestrated by the Ensemble Theatre Company (ETC) and the ghost light presides over the New Vic Theatre.

I loved the invitation which specified “Theatrical attire admired, not required!” And so it was, with guests showing up in all sorts of attire at the Santa Barbara Club on the grassy lawn outside. The tables were decorated...
New Beginnings Counseling Center

by Zach Rosen

All too often the amount of people living on the street in the area is referred to as the "homeless problem." While there is a negative connotation to the word problem, problems also have solutions and New Beginnings Counseling Center (NBCC) is one of the nonprofits in town working to provide solutions. Their range of programs approach the problem with solutions that bridge temporary fixes and long-term stability for those in need.

It is important to have accurate metrics and quantifications to understand the breadth and depth of a social issue like homelessness. Every other year NBCC participates in the Point-in-Time Count that incorporates almost 500 volunteers canvassing the county on census tract maps routes over a three-hour period to properly quantify to define the current state of homelessness in the Santa Barbara County. This year they recorded 1,803 homeless individuals in the county; compared to 1,680 individuals in 2017. While the total homeless population went down, there was a 27% increase in unhoused individuals living in their vehicles, this form is often referred to as the "invisible homelessness." Many of them are still working jobs and lost their homes due to circumstances out of their control like an unexpected medical bill or a sudden rent increase. In 2004, NBCC launched the Safe Parking Program that provides safe, confidential parking spaces to those living out of their vehicles. Today the program manages 134 spaces in 24 different parking lots spread between Goleta, Santa Barbara, and other unincorporated areas of the county. In addition to offering a parking space, participants are connected with support services like food and counseling that can include job tutoring and resume preparation. The program has seen widespread success and in the 15 years that the program has been around, they have not had any major incidents of damages. Since launching the Safe Parking Program, it has received national praise and the program has been adopted by other cities. NBCC even created a three-day training program and manual that helps other cities and organizations launch their own version of it.

The Safe Parking Program has an additional rapid rehousing component where the NBCC works to get these individuals and families out of their cars and into housing as soon as possible. This is an important piece to the NBCC programs. Housing offers stability. They have found better long-term success by getting individuals and families settled in a home first, and then offering the proper support. This is seen with their Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program. Security and utility deposits can be one of the many hurdles that a veteran may have for finding a home. By partnering with landlords and even offering temporary financial assistance, NBCC helps veterans and their families both obtain and maintain housing. They then also assist with short-term case management, counseling, and assistance with VA benefit applications. The SSVF helps provide solutions that will result in long-term stability for veterans and their families.

NBCC began as a counseling center in 2001 and that continues today. Their Donald J. Willifong Community Counseling Clinic helps more than 600 at-risk individuals and families each year by providing one-on-one counseling to those in need around the area. Counseling is provided by masters and doctoral-level interns who are working on hours for their clinical license and is offered on a sliding scale. Their Life Skills Parenting and Education Program assists over 100 low-income families each year with practical tools that help form a stable home. These programs are in bilingual formats that offer support for both English and Spanish. There are also additional specialized programs that offer services for groups like coping veterans, single expectant mothers, and sex trafficking survivors. Collectively these programs help over 300 people each week.

More information about NBCCs different programs is available at sbnbcc.org.