

# New Beginnings Fall News



## Annual Benefit Dinner & Performances

This past Fall, New Beginnings took its annual theatrical benefit to a whole new level, presenting not one but two shows over four nights to the community.

Internationally acclaimed British comedy duo Jonny Donahoe and Paddy Gervers made their U.S. debut with their hit show, *Jonny & The Baptists*, to the New Beginnings audience who filled the seats at Center Stage Theater.

Known for their razor-sharp wit, music, and fearless satire on mental health, the performers took the stage to raise awareness – and critical funds – for New Beginnings' Donald J. Wilfong Community Counseling Center's programs and services.

Additionally, Donahoe, a Drama Desk Award-nominated writer and performer, brought back his wildly popular and magnificent one-man show *Every Brilliant Thing*. Previously showcased by New Beginnings in 2022. The critically acclaimed play has become a global stage phenomenon, playing more than six hundred times over four continents, including five months off-Broadway at the Barrow Street Theatre. The show will make its long-awaited Broadway premiere with stage and screen star Daniel Radcliffe on February 21, 2026.

New Beginnings has a history of using live shows to put a human face on challenging issues like mental health and homelessness – transforming what could be “just another black-tie gala” into an evening that invites understanding, and sparks conversation and inspiration. “At New Beginnings, we believe in the power of storytelling to address complex social issues like mental illness and homelessness. Through engaging narratives, we can break down the psychological barriers that often prevent individuals from understanding or acting on these issues,” says Kristine Schwarz, New Beginnings’ Executive Director.

The fundraiser was supported by nearly 40 individual and business sponsors, 20 in-kind sponsors, and more than 500 guests. Our sponsors also enjoyed a delicious three-course dinner at Bouchon restaurant before the Saturday performance. We were thrilled to partner with Mark Bacino, owner of Villa Encanto, to auction off a seven-day stay at his eight-room, oceanfront villa in Bucerías, Mexico. Thanks to the excitement it generated, we had two winning bidders who will each be enjoying this fabulous getaway.

We're deeply grateful to our staff, sponsors, and donors whose support strengthens our mental health clinic and the community we serve.

(Continued on page 3)

## Message from Executive Director, Kristine Schwarz



Dear Friends and Colleagues,

Greetings! First of all, a big, warm welcome to all of our new subscribers! We have gained quite a few new team and family members, admirers, and all-around supporters this year, and we are thrilled to have you join us. Thank you for your interest in all things New Beginnings. Welcome! We hope to see more of you next year!

Once again, this has been quite a year. 2025 has brought with it many successes, continued growth, much excitement, anticipation, and, yes, even some uncertainty. We have navigated our way through challenges, changes, occasional chaos, an increase in clients served, a potential decrease in funding, and most amazingly, record-breaking outcomes across the agency, and in every program. Throughout the past year, we invested in the power of the New Beginnings team and family, the importance of staying true to ourselves and our convictions, and the invaluable nature of the partnerships of our community collaborators in order to make our way through. Throughout this intense growth and, at times, uneasiness, I have remained immensely grateful for our team, and unendingly impressed by their resilience, commitment, and determination. Every day I am in awe of them and am so very proud of each and every one of them.

To our “external team” – donors, collaborators, funders, partners and neighbors – thank you for your trust, support, patience and everything in between. It still takes a village.

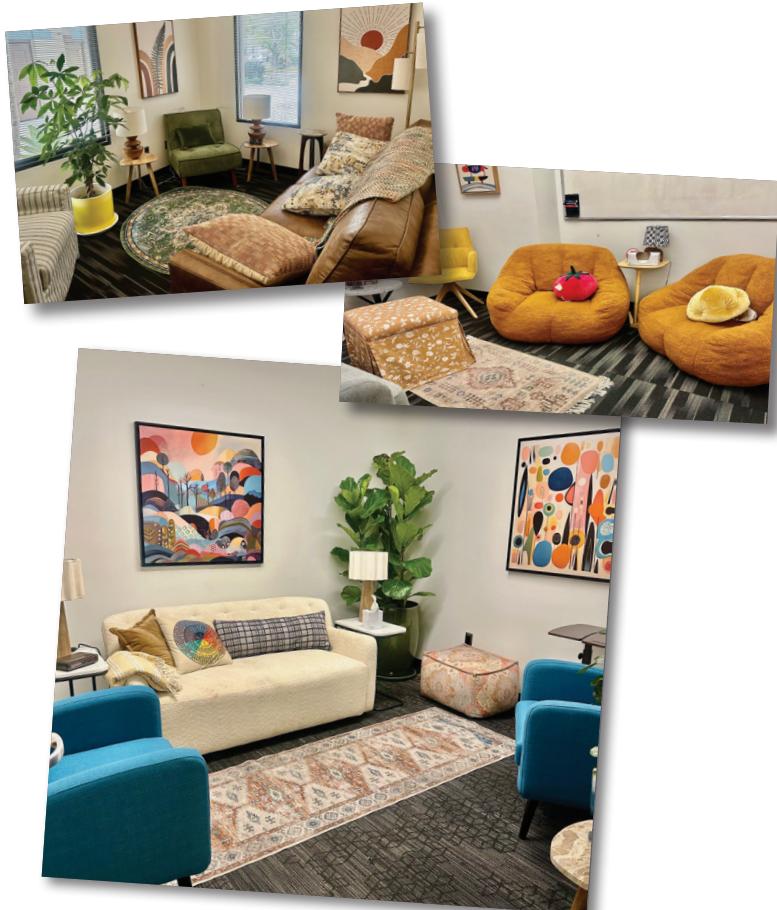
Merry merry to all, and to all a good new year ahead.

– Kristine

## A Fresh New Look for New Beginnings' Counseling Clinic

This summer, New Beginnings unveiled a bright and welcoming update to its counseling clinic. Thanks to generous support from the Alice Tweed Tuohy Foundation and the Rotary Club of Santa Barbara Sunrise Charitable Foundation, our counseling rooms have been transformed with new couches, pillows, lamps, and artwork – creating spaces that feel as comforting as they are inspiring.

These thoughtful upgrades help foster a sense of warmth and safety for every client who walks through our doors. We are deeply grateful to our donors for making this transformation possible and for helping us create an environment where healing and hope can truly flourish.



# Annual Benefit Dinner & Performances (cont.)



## Thank You to our 2025 Sponsors

We are sincerely grateful to all of our event contributors.

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# Rob's Story: Finding Strength Through Healing

Rob\* grew up in a turbulent and frequently unstable home as one of ten children. After spending time in foster care, he was eventually adopted. But his teenage years were marked by hardship – living on the streets, using and selling drugs, and becoming a teen parent.

As an adult, Rob tried to rebuild his life by focusing on his career, hoping to create a sense of normalcy. But unresolved anger and pain from his past continued to surface. His struggle with anger led to a domestic violence arrest, a prison sentence, and ultimately, divorce.

After his release, Rob faced significant barriers to rebuilding his life. His criminal record and difficulty managing his emotions made finding and keeping work a challenge. Determined to stay sober and make lasting changes, he secured a job through a friend and began attending New



Beginnings' Life Skills Anger Management Group, along with individual therapy through our Counseling Clinic.

Since beginning counseling, Rob's therapist has seen a remarkable transformation. He has learned to open up, show vulnerability, and reflect deeply on his experiences. Through the coping tools he's developed in both individual and group sessions – such as mindfulness, self-reflection, and meditation – Rob has been able to maintain steady employment, secure his own apartment and car, and cultivate a sense of stability he once thought could never be possible.

Rob continues to work on managing his anger and understanding it as a defense mechanism rooted in trauma. With his counselor's support, he is also learning to embrace his authentic self, including his sexuality – challenging cultural stigmas around same-sex relationships. As his self-acceptance grows, so does his empathy and compassion for others.

Rob's journey is a powerful reminder that with access to mental health support and a willingness to heal, change is possible.

\*Name has been changed to protect client confidentiality.

# Priscilla Halferty Finds Joy and Companionship Through New Beginnings



Priscilla Halferty is one happy lady. At 76, she not only has a safe, clean place to call home now, but she's also found a loyal companion to share it with.

Priscilla receives New Beginnings onsite supportive services where she lives at Veracruz Village. When she found her forever home, she was full

of optimism but carrying a deep sense of loneliness. She is the only living member of her family, having lost her son and her sister, who she once lived with.

The quiet moments reminded Priscilla how much she longed for connection. Her case manager at New Beginnings

arranged a trip to the Humane Society so Priscilla could find potential companionship. It took less than ten minutes for Priscilla to meet her perfect match – a five-year-old Pomeranian mix she affectionately named Fitz. "When I asked if he wanted to come back to my place, he wagged his tail," she recalled with a smile.

Since bringing Fitz home in July, Priscilla's life has blossomed. She's venturing out more, making new friends, and enjoying the joy of caring for someone who loves her in return. "He makes me laugh; he's always chasing his tail," she said. When word got out at the Humane Society how important a pet adoption was for Priscilla's state of mind, an anonymous donor, decided to cover the cost of Fitz's adoption.

Thanks to New Beginnings case management support, Priscilla has found not just a home but also companionship that fills her days with laughter and love.

# Ricky Middleton, Santa Barbara Air Force Veteran

In 2004, 70-year-old Ricky Middleton found himself without a stable place to call home. Nights were spent moving from one friend's couch to another, and when privacy was needed, the backseat of his van became his refuge.

Middleton once served proudly as a Santa Barbara County Sheriff's deputy, a career he remembers with gratitude. But after retiring in his mid-50s due to severe knee injuries that prevented him from meeting the physical demands of the job, his financial situation began to unravel.

Living on a \$2,000 monthly pension, Middleton stretched his income by driving school buses and later working for Santa Barbara Airbus. But with rent costs rising faster than his earnings, he found himself falling behind. "The rent was taking more of my finances than what I was making," he recalls. Still too young to receive Social Security, Middleton began to lose hope.

That changed last year when he crossed paths with Matt Chapa, a Housing Navigator with New Beginnings. Chapa encouraged him to apply for the Veterans Housing program. Having served in the Air Force, Middleton qualified for New Beginnings' Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) Program. By January, he had moved into his own apartment under the temporary housing assistance program, which provides up to nine months of support.

Transitioning into permanent supportive housing came when Housing Retention Specialist, Christian Morgan began to review Middleton's finances and was able to successfully bridge an unnecessary financial gap. "When I looked at his finances, I saw that nearly all of his pension was being withheld for a super high health premium and given his age and that he was now receiving social security benefits, I knew that he was



**New Beginnings client Ricky Middleton on left supported by SSVF Housing Retention Specialist, Christian Morgan on right.**

eligible for equal coverage with Medicare, at a fraction of the cost." Morgan was able to access resources available through the Central Coast Commission for Senior Citizens to switch Middleton's insurance, cutting it down by almost 1/5th of the cost.

This August, with the continued guidance of New Beginnings' case management staff, Middleton transitioned into permanent senior subsidized housing through the City of Santa Barbara – finally regaining a safe and stable home of his own. "I must thank Christian. He was on my hip almost throughout this whole process. He would come up with an answer about what had to be done. I really must thank him for getting me into the program and working through my finances and vet benefits."

## Student College Program

With generous support from New Beginnings donors – the Kind World Foundation and Eileen and Charlie Read – 17 teens recently graduated from the "Preparación, Bienestar y Cultura" (Preparation, Well-being, and Culture) summer program. Their contributions helped provide college tours, as well as backpacks, school supplies, stipends, and solar-powered chargers, ensuring students had the tools they needed to succeed both academically and personally.

The program, led by the Housing Authority of the City of Santa Barbara (HACSB) in partnership with 2nd Story Associates, offers a four-week curriculum focused on life skills, social-emotional growth, and cultural awareness. Teens participated in college tours, community service projects, field trips, and interactive workshops designed to strengthen critical thinking and cultural identity.

Students and their families were celebrated at a graduation ceremony earlier this fall, showcasing the tangible impact of donor-supported initiatives. Through New Beginnings' financial support, backed by the Kind World Foundation and Eileen and Charlie Read, programs like this continue to empower youth and foster a stronger, more connected Santa Barbara community.



# Johnson Court Residential Life

## Veterans Find Peace and Connection at Sea



In August, the Veteran residents of Johnson Court discovered more than fish on the Santa Barbara Channel – they found peace, connection, and renewed hope. Coordinated by Veterans Outreach Case Manager Dewane “Dazz” Brown, the group spent a restorative day aboard the Stardust Fishing Boat, enjoying the open water and the simple joy of being together.

For many participants, daily life involves managing the challenges of mental health conditions, physical

disabilities, or recovery from substance use. This outing offered a welcome reprieve – a chance to step away from those struggles and experience the healing calm of the ocean.

More than just a fishing trip, the day became a powerful reminder of resilience and camaraderie. Laughter, reflection, and shared purpose filled the deck, reinforcing that even in the face of hardship, life continues to offer meaningful and uplifting moments.

## Finding Purpose and Connection at Community Swap Meet



On Saturday, September 13th, several residents of Johnson Court came together to participate in the Santa Barbara High School Swap Meet – not just to sell items, but to support one of their own. The group rallied around a senior resident who had accumulated a lifetime of cherished heirlooms, tools, and personal belongings, many of which had begun to create clutter and limit space in his home.

Through this collaborative yard sale effort, residents helped their neighbor safely declutter his living space, improving comfort and accessibility while giving his treasured items a second life. The day was about more than organization – it was about compassion, teamwork, and dignity.

By the end of the event, everyone shared in a sense of accomplishment and community pride. Together, they turned what could have been a difficult task into a joyful experience, reminding all involved of the power of neighbors supporting one another.

# New Board Members

This year, New Beginnings saw the addition of two new board members to help support the agency's goals. Each brings valuable experience and fresh perspective to our leadership. We are proud to welcome Jason Dominguez and Janna Alvarez to our team.



**Jason Dominguez**  
is a judge for the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians and an attorney with Driven Law, focusing on estate planning,

litigation, and government law.

He previously served as a prosecutor with the United Nations, Santa Barbara County Counsel, and the Los Angeles City and District Attorney's Offices.



**Janna Alvarez**  
is a business banker with Community West Bank, dedicated to helping local business owners achieve their financial goals.

She began her banking career at Wells Fargo in Santa Barbara and spent 20 years on their business banking team.

In 2016, Janna became a foster parent, later adopting one child. Her passion for supporting those facing mental health, addiction, and homelessness is informed by her own experience of losing her home and living in a vehicle in Santa Barbara.

## Women's Fund Grant Expands Access to Mental Health Care at New Beginnings



**Left to right: Elvia Hernandez, Aida Mendoza, Kailee Lencion.**

This spring, New Beginnings received a transformative \$150,000 two-year grant from the Women's Fund of Santa Barbara, fueling the expansion of its counseling clinic and intake staff to meet the growing demand for mental health care. New Beginnings Counseling Center experienced a 24% increase in clients during the 2023-24 fiscal year. Yet with limited administrative support, new clients often waited up to a month before seeing a counselor.

The Women's Fund grant directly addresses this challenge by funding the salary and benefits for a full-time front desk staff member and increased hours for two clinic intake coordinators, one of whom is bilingual. These roles have begun to streamline the intake process, improve client flow, reduce wait times, and allow the clinic to serve more individuals and families seeking care. Our intake coordinators are the first point of contact for community members seeking mental health support, guiding clients with warm professionalism to ensure each client begins their therapeutic journey with clarity, respect and improved access to vital services.

New Beginnings Clinical Director, Shana Burns says the impact of this support goes far beyond staffing: "This grant helps us hold space for healing – one family at a time."

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## New Beginnings

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# Stability and Dignity Are Still Within Reach

Homelessness in the U.S. has reached a record high – up 18% in just one year. Rising housing costs and fewer resources are leaving more people without a place to call home. As funding decreases, 170,000 more individuals could lose stable housing.

At New Beginnings, we are both humbled and inspired by the growth and progress we've seen in the lives of those we serve. With your support, we have achieved milestones that are nothing short of astounding for the individuals and families in our community who need it most.

In the past year, New Beginnings served a record **2,174 unduplicated clients** and provided **\$3,436,755 in temporary financial assistance** to clients across all housing assistance programs, supporting everything from securing housing and preventing eviction to offering vital mental health services, career support, and life-skills education.

**Your generosity helps ensure that more people have access to shelter, stability, and hope, not just during the holiday season, but throughout the year.**

Please consider making a tax-deductible donation to help support the individuals and families experiencing homelessness receive critical support, from warm clothing to basic necessities.



**Thank you so much for your support of our work!**



Use QR code to donate online.  
Or mail a check using the enclosed envelope.

Or call our office at 805-963-7777 ext. 122 if you'd like to process your payment by credit card or discuss other options.

**New Beginnings' mission is to provide quality, affordable counseling, shelter, case management, and education that strengthens our community and provides our clients with the ability to lead healthy and productive lives.**

