

New Beginnings Spring News



California State Senate President pro Tempore Monique Limón Reflects on Service and New Beginnings

On January 5, 2026, California State Senator Monique Limón was sworn in as the 50th President pro Tempore of the California State Senate.

New Beginnings was honored to be present at the local ceremony later that week, held at the Marjorie Luke Theatre on the campus of Santa Barbara Junior High School. The oath was administered by former Vice President Kamala Harris. The ceremony, held at the Senator's former junior high school, was an intimate and festive event.

Senator Limón, who once served on the board of directors for New Beginnings, was gracious in answering a few questions about the event and her commitment to improving lives in our region.

Q: What are some of your precedent-setting policies, partnerships, and legislative work, especially those that relate to the important work that New Beginnings does in our community.

A: *Healthcare and homelessness have always been top priorities for me because they so deeply impact our district. The COVID pandemic showed us just how much we need access to mental health services. I authored SB 966 to ensure everyone has access to critical behavioral therapy, even after the pandemic ended. Clinics can now use pre-licensed professionals who are working*

towards a license to address the shortage of mental health professionals.

My time in the Senate has also given me a deeper understanding of the housing crisis. The California State Senate continues to fund the Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention Program to address that crisis across the state. Just last year, the Legislature expanded services to areas that need it most, including Sacramento, Santa Clara, Alameda, and Orange counties. I look forward to continuing that work as the leader of the California State Senate.

Q: What are some of your reflections on your early work with New Beginnings, including your time as a member of the board of directors?

A: *Serving as a board member for New Beginnings was special. My most memorable moment was witnessing the organization launch the first-of-its-kind Safe RV Parking Program. At the time, it was an innovative program that provided safe overnight parking for individuals living in vehicles. I sat at Santa Barbara city council meetings to make a case for this program. I am especially proud that this program has grown through the years and still continues today.*

(Continued on page 4)



Message from Executive Director, Kristine Schwarz

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

As we move through another year of growth at New Beginnings, I am struck by how much of our work is rooted in exactly what our name represents: new beginnings. Every week, we witness individuals and families taking courageous first steps toward healing, stability, housing, employment, and hope. It is a privilege to walk alongside them as they rebuild their lives and discover new possibilities for the future.

This year has already brought many exciting developments to our agency. We are thrilled to welcome several talented new team members whose compassion, expertise, and dedication are strengthening our programs and expanding our impact across Santa Barbara County. We are also deeply grateful for the many new supporters who have joined our mission. Whether through financial contributions, event sponsorships, volunteer service, landlord partnerships, or simple acts of advocacy, your support makes our transformational work possible.

Throughout the year, we have celebrated new homes for clients who once faced tremendous uncertainty. Families are settling into safe housing, veterans are rebuilding their lives, and individuals living in vehicles are finding pathways toward permanent stability through our Safe Parking and rapid rehousing efforts.

Perhaps most inspiring of all are the stories of new employment and renewed independence among our clients. Securing a job is often a critical turning point for the individuals and families we serve. Through case management, counseling, financial assistance, and community partnerships, we continue to help clients build the confidence and stability necessary to move forward toward long-term self-sufficiency.

As always, thank you for standing with us. Your compassion and generosity allow New Beginnings to continue providing affordable mental health counseling, housing assistance, veteran services, parenting education, and life-changing support to more than 2,000 people each year throughout Santa Barbara County. Together, we are creating pathways to healing, dignity, and hope – one new beginning at a time.

– Kristine

Employment Workshops & More in New Space

Last year, New Beginnings added 6,432 square feet of office space for dedicated case management meetings and educational opportunities for veterans and other clients. The new area includes office spaces and a large central area for gatherings, an open area for clients to use, a reception area and private client meeting rooms.

A new series of employment workshops, *Pathways to Employment & Career Success*, are now being held on a regular basis in the new space. Presented by Hamid Zarifketabi, Employment & Benefits Specialist, these workshops empower individuals with the skills, resources, and connections needed to achieve long term employment and economic stability.

“Each workshop is comprehensive and covers different aspects of job readiness,” Zarifketabi said. “They are available to individuals enrolled in one of our programs at New Beginnings, and additional support will be provided through one-on-one sessions tailored to each participant’s needs. We had 25 participants countywide at our first workshops in Lompoc and Santa Barbara, and they were very successful.”

He also noted that he leverages relationships with local workforce, community-based, and educational agencies to

connect participants with meaningful employment resources. Examples include EDD Employment & Disability Services, America’s Job Centers, the WIOA program, SBCC, CommUnify, Goodwill, YMCA, the Department of Rehabilitation, and the Workforce Development Board.



Grand Opening Coming Soon for Housing Authority of the City of Santa Barbara

Permanent Supportive Housing on De la Vina Street

Last year, the Housing Authority of the City of Santa Barbara secured \$5.9 million from California's Homekey+ program to help purchase a Quality Inn at 3055 De la Vina Street and convert it into 32 housing units for low-income and formerly homeless individuals. The residents include those with physical, mental health, or developmental disabilities. New Beginnings will provide important on-site support services to meet the residents' needs, including case management, counseling, healthcare navigation, and housing retention services to promote stability and wellness. Additional funding for the project came from the City (\$6 million), the Santa Barbara Foundation (\$1.5 million), and a bank loan for construction.

Rob Fredericks, Executive Director/CEO for the Housing Authority of the City of Santa Barbara, says they expect the new housing to be ready by August. The extensive renovation is transforming the formerly vacant hotel into an attractive Spanish Colonial-style property, with stucco finishes and red tile roofing, that features fully self-contained studio units with kitchenettes, a community room, offices for supportive services, laundry facilities, parking spaces, and an on-site manager unit. Five units include accessibility upgrades.

The project has taken a village to bring to fruition, made possible by the Housing Authority and its dedicated staff, the architect (RRM Design Group) and builder (Vortex Construction), generous funders, and the agencies including New Beginnings that will be providing support services. The building will utilize Section 8 vouchers and those who qualify will pay no more than 30% of their income. An important



aspect is the robust on-site property management provided by the Housing Authority to ensure that the property is an asset to the neighborhood.

“The new residents will be highly supported, and good neighbors. The community really stepped up to help them integrate into their new homes,” Fredericks said, referring to the recent successful Adopt-A-Home Campaign to provide new furnishings for all of the units and community room. The campaign's goal was to raise \$50,000 and included an Amazon wish list and general fund to provide everything from lamps and lightbulbs to beds, dressers, desks, and more. 2nd Story Associates, a local nonprofit that supports the development of affordable housing, collaborated on the successful drive, and New Beginnings helped to spread the word.

“It's appropriate that the residents will be moving into new units with brand-new furnishings,” Jacqueline Kurta, Board President for New Beginnings, pointed out. “After all, this housing and the tailored support they will receive truly provides a new start in life.”

Welcome to Sara Bazan



Sara Bazan is the Clinical Director for New Beginnings and comes to the organization with years of experience working in the Santa Barbara mental health system of care. She is passionate about community mental health and very happy to be supporting the mission of New Beginnings. She has been a licensed therapist in Santa Barbara for almost 20 years, working both in private practice and as a Manager and Supervisor at CALM and the County Department of Behavioral Wellness. She has raised her two sons in Santa Barbara and loves the great outdoors.

Monique Limón (cont.)



Q: Please share any of your thoughts and reflections about the Santa Barbara nonprofit community.

A: I am proud to represent a district with over 2,000 registered non-profits in Santa Barbara County alone. Nonprofits can pivot more quickly than the government to meet community needs and contribute significantly to our economy, ranking as the 4th-largest employer in the state. These organizations are also key partners in creating

legislation that positively impacts our neighborhoods. We can see the power of these collaborations when they succeed. The Life Skills Parenting and Education Program is a great example of what building community looks like. Providing people with tools to be better parents and neighbors is essential to keeping the essence of Santa Barbara alive.

Q: New Beginnings was honored to attend the recent swearing-in event. Please share your thoughts about the event, and how serving in your role as Senate President pro Tempore will help you continue to enhance the lives of constituents and communities in California.

A: It is an honor to serve in this role. I am proud to be the first mother, the first Latina, and the first Central Coast lawmaker in modern history to hold this office. The ceremony in Santa Barbara holds a special place in my heart. Former Vice President Kamala Harris attending the swearing-in at my former junior high school is a moment I will not forget. I am also grateful for all the community members who came out to show their continued support for my time in the Legislature. I would not be here without a community that has given me that opportunity.

Photos courtesy of the office of California State Senate President pro Tempore Monique Limón



The Honorable Susan Rose Educational Luncheon Series 2026

We are excited to announce that the **Honorable Susan Rose Educational Luncheon Series** will be offered through the end of the year. The luncheons feature in-depth discussions about critical social and human service issues in an open forum with Q&A sessions. Hosted at eateries and social clubs in Santa Maria and Santa Barbara, the events are designed to foster meaningful conversation, hands-on experiences, and educational opportunities focused on the most pressing issues our community faces.

We invite you to join us in supporting this important work by sponsoring these important events. As a sponsor, you'll enjoy a range of exclusive benefits, including invitations to intimate cocktail receptions and other special gatherings held at our newly expanded office. We look forward to connecting with you and our community throughout the year. For more information, please email development@sbnbcc.org.



For luncheon dates and sponsorship details visit the New Beginnings website:
sbnbcc.org/educational-luncheon-series-2026/

**SPONSORSHIP
OPPORTUNITIES
AVAILABLE**



A Veteran's New Home

Sean Mackinnon grew up in Alaska and served in the U.S. Army. He learned how to play the guitar when he was ten years old, was part of the music scene in Santa Barbara in the late 1990s, and still loves music. After facing incarceration and the challenges that followed his release, Mackinnon found himself experiencing homelessness. He knew he needed support to get back on his feet, and that's when he connected with New Beginnings' Rapid Rehousing (SSVF), part of its Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program.

Mackinnon lives on a fixed disability income, and through SSVF's services he was able to move into a low-income housing opportunity in Goleta, through the Housing Authority of the County of Santa Barbara. Since his unit was not subsidized, SSVF assisted Sean and he paid a share of his rent that was affordable. This realistically prepared him for being able to afford rent later at a level similar to being in subsidized housing. This allowed Sean to transition from homelessness to housing and live independently.

During this time, New Beginnings continued to work with Mackinnon and advocate for him, working to secure a path to sustainable, permanent housing. He worked with Christian Morgan, his SSVF Housing Retention Specialist, to navigate the requirements and complete all of the documentation needed to make strides toward this important goal. Everything came together, and he was selected for housing through the US Dept. of Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing program (a collaboration between the US Dept. of Veterans Affairs and US



New Beginnings client Sean Mackinnon

Dept. of Housing and Urban Development) and issued a housing voucher. He was able to relocate to a studio apartment in the heart of Santa Barbara.

This was an big step in Mackinnon's journey, and he is much happier. His new apartment is updated, closer to everything, and feels more like home.

"I love it, it's my own place," he said. "I can have visitors and the location is great. It's somewhere I can be in no one's way and stay away from troublesome people and negativity. It feels like a fair chance to at least live a normal life." He says he's been cooking a lot in his new apartment, inspired by his son who lives in Denver, Colorado and works as a professional chef. He especially enjoys making pork chops and salmon, which reminds him of his Alaskan upbringing.

Annual Theatrical Performance Fundraiser

This fall in Santa Barbara, as our signature annual fundraiser, New Beginnings will present an exciting musical theatre event, *The Willard Suitcases*, by composer Julianne Wick Davis, with an accompanying photo exhibit with a special talk by photographer Jon Crispin.

"About five years ago, we learned of a special story," explained New Beginnings Board President Jacqueline Kurta, "featuring the discovery of over 400 suitcases found in the attic of The Willard Psychiatric Center in upstate New York, when the institution was being closed after 100 years. The stories of the residents to whom the suitcases belonged are quite emotional and powerful and have a significant resonance in today's world."

Kurta contacted Crispin, who had been commissioned by the Museum of the State of New York to document the suitcase contents, and through him learned of a musical/song cycle that had been developed about the Willard suitcases and presented for a limited run in Washington DC. She reached out to the composer who was excited to share her libretto and materials. Each of the songs – inspired by the contents of the suitcases and the personal histories of the owners

of the suitcases – weave these impactful stories alongside the powerful saga of mental illness in the United States.

We are fortunate to present this production with the acclaimed director Jenny Sullivan, known locally for her work in Santa Barbara. Jenny directed the unique theatre event *War Words*, a docu-play by Michelle Kholos Brooks, for the New Beginnings annual benefit in 2023, and in June 2025 directed *Justice* for the Ensemble Theatre Company at the New Vic.



Photo by Jon Crispin

Event dates and sponsorship opportunities will be available soon.

New Beginnings Hosts the Women's Fund



On January 13, New Beginnings was honored to host the Women's Fund of Santa Barbara Learn & Connect Open House.

The approximately 50 guests who attended, including many Women's Fund donors, enjoyed visiting the expanded counseling clinic and learning more about the ways that New Beginnings serves our community.

After gathering in the main room to listen to presentations, guests visited four separate tabling areas to learn more about New Beginnings programs: the Counseling Center, Encampment Resolution Project, Veterans Services, and the Safe Parking program. Everyone had the opportunity to meet staff members and ask questions.



Last year, New Beginnings received a transformative \$150,000 two-year grant from the Women's Fund, fueling the expansion of its counseling and intake staff to meet the growing demand for mental health care. The New Beginnings Counseling Center had experienced a 24% increase in clients the previous year, with new clients waiting up to a month to see a counselor. The grant addressed this need by funding the salary and benefits for a full-time front desk staff member and increased hours for two clinic intake coordinators.

Thanks to the Women's Fund's support, New Beginnings has been able to expand and provide mental health support to those who need it most. The gathering was a great reminder of what's possible when generosity, care, and community come together.

Yardi Generously Donates Supply Bags



Earlier this year Yardi, a global real estate software company with local headquarters, donated 100 bags to New Beginnings that were filled with supplies such as paper towels, toothbrushes, soap, and other sundries. The bags were available for individuals and families to collect when they picked up their permits for New Beginnings' Safe Parking Program, and for other community members experiencing homelessness.

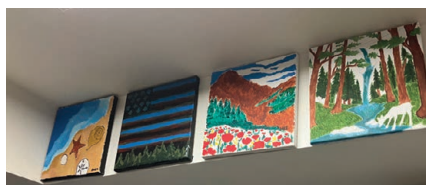
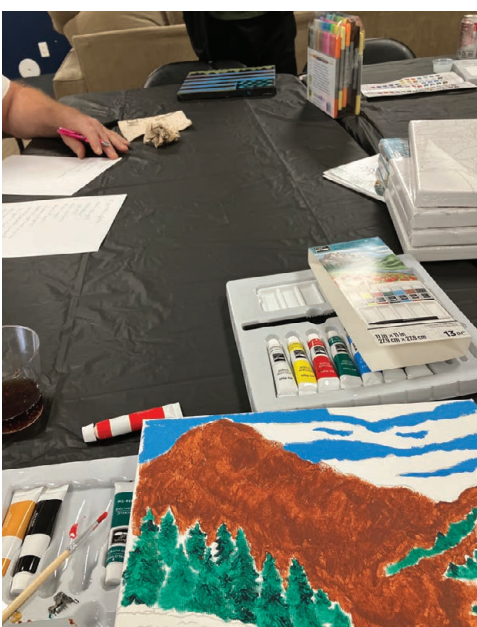
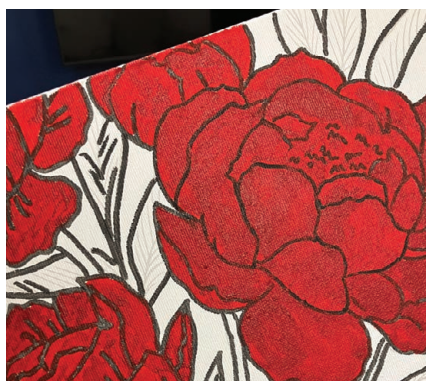
"These gift bags are a thoughtful way of expressing support for our clients," said Brenda Lang, Operations Director for New Beginnings. *"We are very appreciative and know that gifts like this can make a big difference for people at a time when they can use emotional support as well as daily necessities."*

For over 40 years, Yardi has strengthened communities by supporting nonprofits and initiatives across the cities where the company operates. Their generosity has certainly made a difference in our community and has helped New Beginnings clients lead healthier and better lives.

Art Therapy at Johnson Court

Art therapy for Veterans at Johnson Court is about much more than painting by numbers. It gives clients a meaningful outlet to express their feelings and find relief from post-traumatic stress syndrome, anxiety, and the day-to-day challenges they face. What began eight months ago as simple painting and line drawing has grown into something much deeper. Along the way, we discovered that several of our clients are not only creative, but truly gifted writers and storytellers. Earl Spangler, for example, is the author of nearly 30 fiction books. Wayne Myers has found writing to be a powerful form of expression and healing as he continues his recovery after suffering a stroke two years ago. Cynthia Pulver, a gifted poet, has also embraced writing as a way to reflect on her feelings and the joy she finds in spending time with her grandchildren on weekends.

We were even able to invite a line drawing artist to share his gift and teach our clients the fundamental basics of line drawing. Other veterans have been able to experience art and express themselves in meaningful ways through poetry, giving them a platform for creativity and light in times of darkness. With soft, healing music and a welcoming atmosphere, art therapy has become a safe space where clients can share their thoughts, connect with one another, and find new beginnings through creativity.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Jacqueline Kurta, MFT, Psy.D.
President

Diane Pannkuk, M.B.A.
Secretary

Ziad Elkurjie
Treasurer

Janna Alvarez
Jason Dominguez
Suzanne Grimmese, MFT
Stasia Huiner, M.B.A.
Julie LeVay
Ronnie Shahbazian

ADVISORY COUNCIL

Hon. Susan Rose – *Chairperson*

Alberto Arroyo

Jim Baxter

Marc Borowitz

Patty Bryant

Brynn Crowe

Patricia Duffy

Allan Ghitteman (In Memoriam)

Mary Howe-Grant, Ph.D.

Kathryn LePage, M.A.

Karen Lehrer, MFT

Seymour Lehrer (In Memoriam)

Mike McCarthy

Bruce W. McRoy, J.D.

Fred Morguelan, Ph.D.

Marilyn Rickard Schafer

Das Williams

Michael Young

Maria Zate

Judi Weisbart
Fundraising Consultant

MANAGEMENT TEAM

Kristine Schwarz, MFT, LPCC
Executive Director

Sara Bazan, LMFT
Clinical Director

Michael Dzerski
Finance Director

Victoria Garfield
Grants Administration Director

Brenda Lang
Operations Director

Cassie Roach, MSW
Safe Parking Program Director

Victor Virgen
Veteran Services Director

New Beginnings
530 E. Montecito Street, Suite 101
Santa Barbara, CA 93103



Thank you



Thank you so much for your support of our work! Please make a donation today to support our mission of strengthening our community by empowering individuals and families to achieve self-sufficiency and resiliency.

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.