

Reflections on the Development, Activity and Personalities of Northern Valley Catholic Social Service, 1986 – 2017

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Board Chair January 1988 - November 2014

It is spring 2017 in Northern California and it is absolutely beautiful, a great place to be before the heat arrives. At Northern Valley Catholic Social Service we are entering our 32nd year of service in the North State. NVCSS began in Redding in 1986 but gradually spread to 6 northern Counties with 70 programs, 170 employees and more than 300 volunteers. As former Board President for 26 years, 10 months, until November 2014, I present some of my recollections/perspectives of these past 31 years. This is a broad overview, and I refer you to the writings of our Executive Directors who combed the minutes of our Board meetings to insure depth and accuracy.

Our history is a story of many people and many events. We have been a family and a team. Without the volunteer attitude of our staff, there is no way we could have accomplished what has happened. This could be described as nothing short of miraculous, and we credit God's grace allowing us to achieve this wonderful result. We've been here at Washington Plaza along the Sacramento River since 2005; 50,000 square feet in two four story towers, one providing rental income to support the other. I suspect no one, except maybe our visionary Deacon and Board member Mike Evans anticipated all this on May 1, 1986 when we opened our doors for the first time; a one-bedroom house on the SE corner of Court & South streets. At that point we had one employee, Pat Modrzejewski, our 1st Executive Director, and a Volunteer Secretary Jolean Burk, a good friend of my family.

NVCSS got its start because of needs that were not met. They were recognized by Msgr. Russ Terra of St. Joseph Parish in Redding and Fr. Mike Kiernan of Sacred Heart Parish in Anderson. These Priests communicated these needs to their parishioners, and a small group formed which I joined. This group became our first Board of Directors. The chief need perceived was affordable counseling. As a psychiatrist, a Deacon, and hired in 1966 by the Shasta County Board of Supervisors to begin Shasta County Mental Health, NVCSS seemed a natural fit for me and I jumped in with both feet. I've been in before the beginning, and ever since; heart and soul. I often was seen as the face of NVCSS. I looked on myself as the agency cheerleader, riding the crest of the wave that the staff created. Often I was announced as NVCSS founder, but it is clear that honor rightly belongs to Msgr. Terra and Fr. Kiernan. It was Msgr. Terra along with Deacon Mike Evans, Sacred Heart Anderson and Pat Modrzejewski, the de facto leader of the first small group and soon to be our first Executive Director, who went to meet with the diocese and obtain the needed funds. Seventy Nine Thousand dollars was promised each year for three years and we were off and running, and run we did, spear-headed by Pat Modrzejewski. Pat seemed capable of speaking without breathing and she was an inspiring leader who recognized talent and nurtured it in staff, volunteers and donors. For special events like birthdays, Pat called, sent cards, sometimes flowers, especially if there was illness, injury or surgery. She promoted a culture of success before we had actually achieved it. I became a part of this with agency tours, the first with Bishop Quinn. They continued regularly for more than 20 years and approximately 700 tour-goers. The tours promoted community awareness, major donations, and staff morale since their programs made up the tour. We demonstrated the inner workings of our main office, took them for coffee at City Hall in a transportation van, and then to some of our programs around town, especially housing and including our thrift store, "Second Time Around".

We had started our thrift store with Sue Ochoa within our first two years near the Pine Street Safeway, soon moving downtown across from the Cascade Theatre. Neither place attracted many customers so after Kathy Lockhart became manager we moved to

North Market where we remained for 25 years (Kathy, as a young woman, had cleaned our house). As Second Time Around Manager she was successful in marketing for fundraising. The thrift store also became a social service for disadvantaged persons. Kathy had a volunteer force of 30 people. She soon was joined by another volunteer she found out back lifting a heavy refrigerator. Bill Ripley was strong and had a good sense of humor. Soon they were married, and continued together until November 2016. When "Goodwill" arrived in Redding, the thrift business became very competitive and we were no longer able to cover expenses. Overall, NVCSS became a coveted place to work, and with our growth many entry level employees soon became permanent and advanced in responsibilities.

Our first expansion outside Shasta County occurred during 1987 when my wife Kate with her newly acquired Master's Degree and license in Counseling traveled to Red Bluff using the Sacred Heart rectory as her office. There was insufficient call for her help so she returned to work at the Shasta Street office which we occupied for about one and a half years before our move to Oregon Street in 1989 (1 block south of the downtown post office, with 7000 sq. ft.). After our unsuccessful effort in Counseling in Tehama County we returned in 2000 with Theresa Flynn, a native of Tehama, with degrees at Stanford and Berkley to establish programs there. This was successful and Theresa became my daughter-in-law and mother of two of my grandchildren.

In the first year, many community contacts and meetings occurred, the Board of Directors expanded with the inclusion of necessary skills (John Kenny has been our pro-bono attorney since August 1986) Marilyn Medley in real estate, Ruth Duclos fundraising and events. Marilyn and Ruth started "Magic of Christmas" in 1989 at the Country Club, which has continued as a major holiday social event and fundraiser. John Kenny was auctioneer. The success of Magic of Christmas prompted us to move "Magic" to the Holiday Inn, which has become our preferred venue.

Our staff leadership team began to form as many talented people came and stayed for a time. Dan Johnson our Chief Financial Officer joined the staff in 1990 as a bus driver when he and his new wife Rhonda were resident managers at our first adventure in housing, Pine Street. Dan became a CPA and finally our CFO in 2014.

Jan Mauer-Watkins joined NVCSS after 18 years in Housing at City of Redding. Hired in November 1994, she was named Deputy Director in January and became Executive Director in February 1995. Housing took off in a flurry and with Jan's expertise and HUD finding we had permanent housing units for special needs populations in Redding, Red Bluff and Chico, as well as for families and seniors at Laurel Glen in Redding and Jarvis Gardens in Chico.

During Jan Mauer-Watkins tenure our center of operations was the two story Medley building on North Market in Redding beginning in 1994 until 2005. It provided 10,000 square feet, however our burgeoning growth required renting additional space around town. The Board determined we needed a home that would accommodate our administrative requirements without the expense of rentals. Jan, working with Don Chapman, by then our Chief Financial Officer, and Haedrich and Company found Washington Plaza. Due diligence discovered rotten beams outside this 1970's structure. That repair plus a \$600,000 seller donation produced a selling price of 4.4 million. Eight months of inside changes brought it up to code, and we occupied our new home in November 2005.

In November 1996 Jan recruited Bobbie Sawtelle who has been our Housing Department Director since that time. Jeff Dunaj, retired Army Major, has been Property Manager since 2001 – always happy to help and make you laugh.

Through the years, a Development Department was formed to make friends and raise funds. Jeanine Hedman was first in 1992, followed by Maggie John. Jeff Finck did crucial work in our Capital Campaign for Washington Plaza. In 2005 Jake Mangas joined us for

10 years as Development Director. Jake was able to form and foster many committed relationships for the agency. Together Jake and I were a team, contacting donors to help with Magic of Christmas underwriting/sponsorship and Annual Fund. Both the Annual Fund and Endowment Fund were begun during the directorship of Jan Mauer-Watkins. Jake was able to develop a legacy society of those who arranged for a \$10,000 gift to NVCSS in their wills. Jake left a big hole at NVCSS when he became President of Redding Chamber of Commerce on January 1, 2016. Fortunately we had Meghan Anderson on board in Development. We had already seen her impressive graphic design talents and her ability to promote and manage events. An added benefit was her father, mother and even brother who soon made their skills available in consultative and support roles.

From the onset NVCSS has been blessed with many donors who added their time, talent, and treasure to our efforts. Heading the list are John and Betty Fitzpatrick, and Ken and Sally Gifford. Jane Flynn, Board member for 13 years was a financial backbone to the agency in Tehama County. Our Diocese of Sacramento with each of the Bishops have provided major funding from the beginning to present.

Jennifer Cummings joined us on April 1, 1997 as Human Resource Specialist and later became our Director of Human Resources, a position she maintains at this time.

Bob Michels became Butte County Director soon after we assumed management of the Family Service Agency in Butte County (1992). Bob developed close working relationships with County and City Departments who became strong supporters of NVCSS. His illness and subsequent death in 2012 was both a shock and major loss to NVCSS.

We have had a line of Executive Assistants over the years, all of whom were of major help to me in my agency activities. Pat Burris was first, followed by Suzanne Kofford and Jolene Lader, Gina Ott, then Gloria Kuma. Currently, Leslie Albrecht who began in February 2017 performed the arduous task of transcribing this composition.

My earlier implication about de facto volunteer status bestowed on all employees is thankfully true, but we've had hundreds of official volunteers from those who file and stuff envelopes, to Board Members in director capacity, and advisory board status. An impressive example would be that of Deacon Mike Evans, always with a development idea. He was our Board Chair our second year. He suggested and produced our first Newsletter (Community Report) and championed the formation of County Advisory Boards as eyes and ears of the community as well as promoting awareness of NVCSS. Mike was also active in the establishment of our Christmas Adopt a Family program in 1991 which made us known to many donors, volunteers, and clients; servicing up to 1000+ families each year area wide. A similar event helping young children was "Mervyns Child Spree" what later became "Kohl's Cares for Kids". These events just before school starts provided new clothes and shoes for about 100 children each year through help of our donors, volunteer shoppers and the department stores.

CASA, (Court Appointed Special Advocate) is a nationwide program providing support for foster children the juvenile judge decides need a voice in court. CASA is certainly a popular program with volunteers. Starting in Butte County in 2001, we now have 4 of our 6 Counties in CASA with a goal of 15% foster youth, or 225 youth. There is a serious shortfall of funding which requires major efforts in fundraising for CASA but we have been successful especially with the Super Hero Run both in Chico and Redding that have attracted 1500 participants. Suzanne Birch, of Cornerstone Bank, chosen Volunteer of the Year (2014) has been a major force in this fundraising. A Regional Board exists with always dependable NVCSS Board Member Marge Remedios who keeps everyone informed of CASA activities.

Never to be forgotten is the Schaefer family. Karen, then Cathy joining us as employees in 1999 and 2006. Soon the whole family was there when ever man/woman power and especially food was needed; Mom, Son, Husband, Daughters, and Children: a transforming effect time after time. The Schaefer's were chosen Volunteer Family of the year in 2005, a new award.

With many volunteers, a natural development was an event to tell them our appreciation. In the early years this took form as a dinner cooked by John Kenny and served by our Board of Directors at Our Lady of Mercy Parish Hall in Redding. That practice spread to other Counties, but became primarily Staff driven. When we moved to Washington Plaza in 2005 the appreciation event in Shasta County became an evening hors d'oeuvres / awards event.

As I stated at the onset, our NVCSS history is filled with people and events and I'm aware that there are things that I overlooked. I apologize for whatever glaring omissions exist. I leave it to the reader and their associates to fill the blanks. I hope these pages will jog memories and bring joy to all who have been a part of this wonderful endeavor. It certainly has been a joy for me, as we inspire hope and transform lives.

David H. Gasman MD – Past President