



Sarah Ettman for the Housing Authority, City of Santa Barbara

Johnson Court: Family Affair Sparks “Love Match” with HACSB, Area Agencies, Offers New Housing for Homeless Vets

On Friday, February 14, 2020 - Valentine's Day - HACSB held the grand opening celebration and dedication for Johnson Court. The idea for the new facility, located at 813 East Carrillo Street, was born through a “love match” between the Johnsons, a philanthropic family with a long tradition of providing shelter for those who served our country, HACSB, elected officials and partner agencies. The 16 studio apartments, which boast Spanish Colonial architecture, are specifically designed to meet the needs of low and very-low income homeless veterans. The veteran target population is in keeping with the wishes of the former property owners, the Johnsons, whose father had served in the military. Anne and Vernon, parents of eight children, acquired the property in 1976 to house their brood. Acutely aware of the plight of the those who served in the military but were homeless in Santa Barbara, they decided to take action. They devised a way to create housing by ingeniously stacking railroad box cars on their 1/3 acre. Their legacy continues through the new complex, built through a partnership with HACSB, 2nd Story Associates, and the Hearthstone Housing Foundation.

Now that Johnson Court is at full occupancy, the feedback from staff and residents is proof-positive that the love match is working. Here's what they have to say:

Alice Villareal Redit, HACSB Resident Services Supervisor/Johnson Court Manager - “Everone that lives at Johnson Court is grateful to have a beautiful new home. There is a strong sense of community and mutuality here. The residents care about one another, and this shows in how people look out for one another—sharing stories, resources, food, or just each other’s company. Having stable housing lends itself to improved outcomes in many other areas of life.



Johnson Court Composite View

Housing is health care. Most residents have now been connected with primary care physicians, and a few have been able to schedule long overdue surgeries. Residents have access to social workers, therapists and other specialists. By partnering closely with organizations that have expertise in working with veterans and formerly homeless, our residents have the chance to acquire benefits, increase their income, and access vital services.”

Jeff Rock, Resident -

“I was homeless due to unexpected life circumstances and on the HA housing waiting list for over a year. When I attended the Johnson Court information session and viewed the units, my gut reaction was being blown away by the opportunity to



Jeff Rock, Resident

live in something so nice after living on the streets for so long. It was a dramatic change to go from living in cardboard boxes to Johnson Court. I was amazed and floored by how the Housing Authority understood and provided for the needs of homeless vets down to the smallest detail, from having personal grooming

(Section 8 Housing News, continued)

care items to outfitting the kitchenette - from dishes to a stocked pantry. My unit looked like a real estate model when I moved in. It was absolutely turnkey with everything you need to live. The staff are spectacular about taking care of specific requests/needs like getting TV's donated and supplying cleaning products. I was in the Marine Corps and continue the lifestyle values that training instills in you - respect, keeping order, cleanliness, good personal hygiene. I'm a fanatic about cleanliness and I got the materials I needed to keep the place spotless. Now that I live here, the biggest change for me is reduction in anxiety and fear of the unknown. I lost weight on the street, and now I'm putting on healthy muscle weight. I can do normal activities because I don't have to guard my belongings. The resources in SB are outstanding, they are second to none to help you to get needs met and get your life on track. I couldn't be happier - I'm in bliss. I'm a different person than I used to be. I've slowed down, I enjoy the beauty of the day. I'm on the 3rd floor and I can see the ocean. I stop and breathe it in. I'm enjoying aspects of life that I never did before. I'm even dating; you can't imagine dating when you're living on the street. Life at Johnson Court demonstrates that there's help if you ask but it won't land at your feet. You have to reach out. Now that I'm getting resources, I'm using them as a way to find my way back to the life I once had as a degreed professional. I will be starting school in the fall to study cyber security and build the second half of my life. Now I have everything I need to transition to get back to being productive and living in peace and tranquility.

Craig Judd, Resident -

I've been homeless and living on the street for 20 years. I used to pack up and move all my things to my bike every day. I couldn't leave anything in one spot because there were other homeless stealing from homeless. I'm an outdoor guy, but it gets old camping every night and dealing with



Craig Judd, Resident

people that keep you awake, especially those on drugs who couldn't sleep so they would stay up all night. I was on the HA list for 8 years before I got my place at Johnson Court. I found out about

the Housing Authority by going to the Vet building for coffee and donuts. There I met a woman from New Beginnings who encouraged me to get on the waiting list. I was first offered housing in Lompoc but it was too far away to make it work. I'm a 50 year resident of Santa Barbara and wanted to remain in my home community. When Johnson Court was almost finished, she told me I could get in, but I didn't think so. Someone called HACSB on my behalf, I was asked to go there the next day, and once there, the rep went through paperwork for the lease with me. Once I signed all the papers, they handed me the key to my own place. One minute I was homeless, doing my normal routine, the next minute, I got a place - it was amazing. Having a home base has helped me get the head space to brainstorm ideas to start a business. I plan on creating a hot dog cart to pull on an electric bike. The biggest improvements to my life are that I'm living safely in my own place, with a door that locks in a drug-free environment. I can sleep at night. It's a blessing.

William E. Robinson, Jr, Resident - The Johnson Court builder did a great job. It's full of modern conveniences, I love that there is a laundry room, the size of the shower and the great location, it's convenient to everything. There is good security for residents and management is doing everything possible to make improvements since opening. The support staff - Raelin Shackley, Veteran Supportive Service Specialist from New Beginnings, Alice Villareal Redit, Resident Services Supervisor/Johnson Court Manager who lives onsite and Andrea Fink from HACSB - are all doing a great job. I think Rob Fredricks, the Executive Director and CEO is the finest man in the HA; he's doing an excellent job, has good judgement and a lot of talent.

When I was at the rescue mission, I couldn't trust people there; the people I encountered were the lowest form of humanity. I was crippled by lack of sleep, and became a human zombie. Since I couldn't get a good night of sleep, it affected my short term memory and damaged my metabolism. This experience has saved my life; I'd be dead now if I hadn't gotten this place.

SBRPA is pleased to present a series of articles by Sarah Ettman for the Housing Authority of the City of Santa Barbara on Section 8 Housing.

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