



PAJARO VALLEY SHELTER SERVICES

Providing Families with a Path to Stable, Self-Sufficient Futures

SPRING 2026



We made it! — A Journey of Recovery and Hope

I first came to the Shelter as a child in the 1990s with my mom. At the time, I didn't understand how much that experience would matter later in my life.

Years later, I returned to the Shelter as a young single mother. I didn't have the skills to take care of myself or my children. I didn't even know how to cook. The staff and other parents in the program helped teach me. We supported each other, and some of those parents are still my friends today. However, I left early thinking I was ready for permanent housing.

In 2019, I returned as an adult. Ready for change. I was pregnant with my third child and trying to rebuild my life. My partner, Larry, was with me. My two older daughters were staying with their aunt while I focused on my recovery. I was working hard on my recovery from substance abuse. This March, I celebrated seven years clean and sober.

My daughter was recently asked what she wants to be when she grows up. She said, "I see my mom helping others, and I want to help too."

Larry and I went through a very hard time before going to PVSS. After leaving a sobriety program, we were living in our car. Before work, I would brush my teeth and wash my face in a Safeway bathroom. Sometimes we would sneak into a campground just to take showers.

We would also take showers at another shelter in Santa Cruz, but the bathrooms were often dirty. One day when I was pregnant, I was taking a shower there and thought to myself, "I can't believe I'm here." That was a pivotal moment.

That's when I reached out to the Shelter. Thankfully, there was space and we were accepted into PVSS Transitional Housing.

Living in a shared space while staying clean and sober was not easy. But it also helped us see that we were not alone. Everyone there was going through something difficult, and we supported each other.



I loved the workshops at the Shelter. They were very helpful. One of the biggest lessons for me was learning how to save money. At first, it was hard. We had to learn the difference between wants and needs. I saved every receipt and kept them in envelopes. At the end of each month, I would go through them and see how much we spent. It was challenging, but it was also fun. It showed me that if you really try, you can do it. It's not easy, but it's worth it.

The ACEs workshops were also very important to me. I learned that the environment my mom was in while she was pregnant with me was toxic. That helped me understand my own childhood. It also made me think about what my children were experiencing. The workshop helped me become more aware and change the way I parent.

With all the support we received, I decided to go to college because I wanted to be a good role model for my kids. I'm taking classes at Cabrillo College and working towards a degree in child development.

Continued on page 4



Why Second Chances Matter

Mike Johnson / Executive Director

At Pajaro Valley Shelter Services, we often say our goal is to serve families well, but only once. Our programs are designed to help people stabilize, build skills, and move forward into permanent housing and long-term independence. And when that happens the first time, it's something we celebrate.

But the reality of human change is rarely linear.

For many families facing homelessness, the challenges they carry are deep and multi-layered - poverty, trauma, unstable employment, family disruption, or recovery from addiction. Learning new skills, rebuilding confidence, and changing long-standing patterns takes time. Sometimes people leave our programs before they are fully ready. Sometimes life setbacks pull them backward. And sometimes the most important ingredient for success is simply timing.

That's why second chances matter.

When someone returns to PVSS ready to engage in a different way, the impact can be transformational.

The lessons that once seemed abstract suddenly make sense. Budgeting practices become real tools for survival. Parenting workshops become opportunities to break cycles for the next generation. Supportive community becomes something participants lean on rather than something they feel they must leave behind.

Alexis' story is a powerful reminder of this truth. Her first experience with the shelter planted seeds, even if she wasn't ready yet. Years later, when she returned determined to change her life, those seeds had a chance to grow.

Today Alexis is seven years sober, working to help others in recovery, and studying child development so she can continue serving families like her own.

Second chances are not failures of the system. They are evidence that the door remained open long enough for transformation to happen. And when that transformation comes, it doesn't just change one life. It changes a family, and often the next generation as well.



PVSS — More Than A Shelter

Ian MacGregor / Board President

Springing forward with the time change, I'm reminded how quickly time passes and how certain moments stay with us.

As the principal at E.A. Hall Middle School in the early 2000's, I visited a family living in the Family Emergency Shelter.

What I saw was more than a shelter; it was a home.

Today, as board president, I am happy to report that the Shelter I visited is still intact and has been since 1984! Significantly, PVSS now provides a comprehensive program of personal case management and transitional housing that helps families acquire safe, secure and stable housing for their families.

The foundation for this effort is threefold: the professional staff of individuals working for PVSS; the leadership team and the attention they give to maintaining the financial

stability necessary to carrying out the mission, and the many committed donors and organizations who give generously, year in and year out, to Pajaro Valley Shelter Services.

It is this shared commitment that allows Pajaro Valley Shelter Services to remain a place of support, dignity, and hope for our community.





Pajaro Valley Shelter Services

42nd Annual MOTHER'S DAY RUN *and* WALK

*Run for Home. Run for Hope.
Run for Mom!*

Sunday, May 10, 2026

Location:

Pinto Lake County Park

1K Kids Fun Run — 7:45am

5K Run or Walk — 8:00am

10K Run — 8:45am



Register today!

pvshelter.org or scan QR code



Artist - Quesia, (age 12) Shelter participant



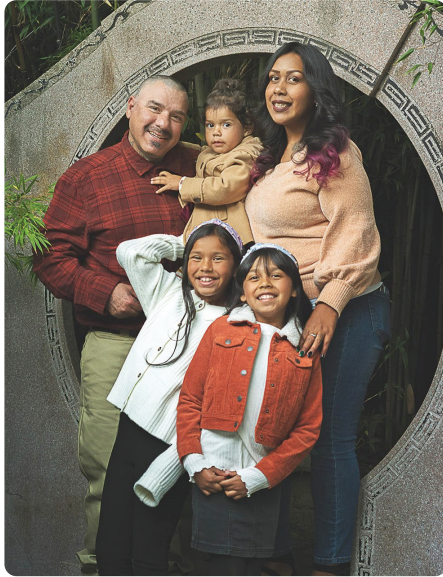
We Made It! Continued from the front cover

As the time came closer for us to move out of transitional housing, I started to feel scared. I didn't want to leave because I worried about having enough money to support my family.

In 2022, Larry and I secured permanent housing, and we were reunited with my older children. It wasn't easy but we made it!

Today I work as an Office Coordinator at Sobriety Works, an organization that helps people who are in clean and sober living programs. I am also taking classes to earn a degree in child development.

My daughter was recently asked what she wants to be when she grows up. She said, "I see my mom helping others, and I want to help too." I realized in that moment that I'm raising her to do good.



And to the donors who support this work, thank you!

Even if you can't always see where your donation goes, please know that it matters. You are helping mothers and fathers keep their children in a safe place, maybe even allowing for reunification because the Shelter is a safe place. You are truly making a difference.



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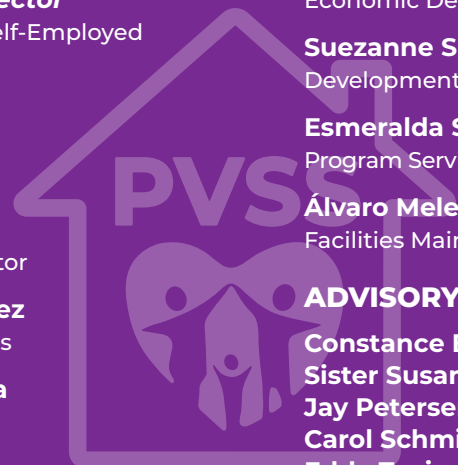
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Introducing a New Board Member...



Lorna Joiner / Director

Lorna is a project and program management professional who brings a collaborative, operations focused mindset to the PVSS Board and is passionate about supporting programs that create lasting paths to stability and growth.

"The PVSS' mission resonates deeply with me because stable housing and supportive services can be life changing for women, children, and families facing instability. Having experienced moments of uncertainty in my own family life, I've seen firsthand the difference that strong community support can make."

Introducing New Staff Members...



Suezanne Sites / Development Coordinator

Since moving to Santa Cruz County in 2014, Suezanne has enjoyed building a life and laying down roots with her family in the community. She joins the PVSS team as Development Coordinator, drawing on her background in non-profit event planning and fundraising to grow our mission.

"I first connected with PVSS as a donor during the 2023 floods. Seeing the immediate impact of their work was inspiring. I'm honored to join the team and help families work towards their goals of providing a safe and stable home."



Jayne Prieto / Economic Development Coordinator

With a BA in Collaborative Health and Human Services from CSUMB, Jayne has been working with families in our community for about 6 years. Born and raised in Watsonville, she experienced homelessness and knows first-hand the challenges and barriers to stable housing. Her father worked in the strawberry fields, and the family lived on the ranch where he was employed. When Jayne was in high school, the ranch was sold, and her family lost their housing. At the time, they were unaware of shelters such as PVSS. Jayne is passionate about ensuring that families in PVSS programs are informed about available resources for education, employment, and support.

A Turning Point for Lydia *by Jayne Prieto*

**Name changed to ensure the privacy of this mother*

Lydia is a devoted single mother who came to the Shelter in April 2024 after receiving a notice to vacate her home because the landlord needed the unit. As her move-out date approached, Lydia searched urgently for housing, growing increasingly fearful of where she and her daughter would land. Their acceptance into the Shelter brought immediate relief.

Adjusting to shelter life was not easy. Sharing space with strangers and living with limited privacy was a dramatic change for both Lydia and her daughter. Still, Lydia met the challenge with resilience and determination, quickly adapting and focusing on creating stability for her child.

In December 2025, Lydia's daughter received holiday gifts through the Shelter's Adopt-a-Family partnership. In a thank-you letter to the donor, Lydia reflected, "Having to pack my belongings and go to an emergency family

shelter with my daughter was the most humbling experience I have ever gone through." That experience became a turning point.

Lydia is on track to move into stable housing with savings of over \$30,000!

Lydia entered our two-year transitional housing program in June 2024 and has excelled. Inspired by the support she received from staff, Lydia shifted her career goals from dental hygiene to social work determined to help others facing crisis. She was accepted into multiple CSU's and has chosen to attend CSU, Monterey Bay starting this fall. She's pursuing flexible employment in the social services field to gain experience while balancing school and parenting. Lydia is on track to move into stable housing by June 2026, with savings of over \$30,000!



PAJARO VALLEY SHELTER SERVICES

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Watsonville, CA 95076

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Return Service Requested

Because of you...

79% of families moved into *Permanent Housing*
72% left with *Employment*
70% left with *money in Savings*

With **Sincere Appreciation**
for Our Granting
Partners:



Thank you!

Santa Cruz Gives
2025 Campaign raised

\$14,152.20



Together, we are changing the trajectory of lives and restoring hope.