

PJ Ministry and SCPD Join Forces to House the Homeless



Annette Walls next to Lynn Murphy, co-founded PJ Ministry as an outreach for homeless people in Santa Clara's Central Park.

Story by Diane Andrews

It is a remarkable success story. A group of formerly homeless individuals and families—once regulars hanging out with shopping carts of belongings at Central Park—found housing thanks to the efforts of PJ Ministry, the Santa Clara Police Department's Nuisance Suppression Unit and a \$220,000 grant from the City of Santa Clara to house the most vulnerable of the City's homeless.

The story began in 2013 when Santa Clara resident Lynn Murphy noticed that more and more homeless people were hanging out at Central Park. Rather than turn a blind eye and walk on by, she decided to do something about it.

Murphy had no training in outreach and limited financial resources. What she had in abundance, however, was compassion born of her own personal heartaches and the conviction and religious faith that she was called to follow Jesus by ministering to "some of the least among us"—the homeless.

Murphy became a street chaplain through Chaplain Fellowship Ministries. Then, with her friend Annette Walls, they founded PJ Ministry. PJ stands both for pleasing Jesus and the peanut butter and jelly sandwiches that they sometimes made for the homeless.

To get to know the homeless regulars in Central Park, Murphy and Walls began visiting, bringing pizza occasionally and catered food for holiday parties. They passed out personal supplies. A local hair salon gave free haircuts. They celebrated when a baby was born and mourned at the funerals of Howard Kimura and Victor Flores.

Friends and strangers alike helped

financially. Once the ministry came under the umbrella of their church, the Campbell Church of Christ, donations were tax deductible.

"PJ Ministry is about meeting homeless people and getting to know them personally and getting to know what their needs are, and then treating them with dignity and respect," said Walls, a registered nurse who helped with the post-surgery recovery of two of the men.

As the women's friendship with the homeless in Central Park grew, the mission of PJ Ministry expanded to include housing them. Murphy contacted Santa Clara Police Department (SCPD) Sgt. Richard Fitting with the Nuisance Suppression Unit.

Police Involvement

Murphy's timing was perfect. Also in 2013, SCPD had noticed an increase in the unsheltered population of the City and launched an analysis of the problem.

Based on SCPD findings and recommendations, in July 2015 the Santa Clara City Council approved a two-year revenue agreement with the County of Santa Clara for \$220,000 to provide intensive case management and homeless prevention services to Santa Clara residents. More recently, in September 2017, a two-year agreement for \$350,000 was approved: <http://tinyurl.com/yafyc2pe>.

PJ Ministry was the initial helping hand that connected the homeless in Central Park to the police department, which referred them to the county for assistance. Of those in Central Park, eight found housing thanks to these combined efforts.

"We're with people who have full-

time jobs—or two—but can't afford rent in Silicon Valley. The Valley is splitting up families," said Chaplain Murphy.

Testimonials

"Being homeless is isolating. Simple conversation was a blessing," said Luci Barnum, attending a celebration honoring the Central Park "family" at Campbell Church of Christ's 10 a.m. worship service on Sept. 24. Other formerly homeless people also expressed appreciation.

"When I was homeless, I was very sick and my money was gone and PJ Ministry made it possible for me to stay in the motel. I am physically and spiritually thankful for all of your help," said V. Bowen.

"PJ Ministry absolutely put sunshine and love of God into my new home! Thank you from the bottom of my heart," said Dawn Hamn.

"It has always made me feel so loved and welcomed," said Sheila Volk.

"PJ Ministry showed all of us that life is something worth rejoicing," said Mary Costa.

Sgt. Fitting, though unable to attend the celebration, shared a recent email from a still homeless woman.

"I was parked overnight (in an area) where I normally sleep in my car... two extremely nice officers tapped on the window and asked if I was all right and how I was doing, etc. They were so professional and yet so caring," wrote the homeless woman in an email to the SCPD in September. "The female officer suggested I contact a # 211 for some homeless assistance, like possibly a place to sleep, a shower, etc. Then they wished me a good night after telling me to be careful."

"What great officers and what a superb example for the Santa Clara PD, they set! No reprimands, no hostility, just friendly, professional concern," wrote the woman.

"I want people to see the beauty in how if you reach out and pay it forward, you can see the blessings in helping someone," said PJ Ministry Chaplain Murphy before heading for Texas for emergency response training for chaplains. View PJ Ministry's video on You Tube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=xm1bxx5mAUw.