For many, the holiday season consists of loved ones gathering together, dinner plates full of favorite foods and gifts waiting to be unwrapped. But for the more than 8,000 homeless people in San Diego County, the holidays can be another reminder of life’s hardships and daily struggles.

For more than 30 years, Robert was one of thousands of San Diegans who called the streets home. Following the tragic deaths of his parents at 12 years old, Robert found himself living on the street, only able to find comfort in a cramped tent, and soon began struggling with debilitating drug and alcohol addictions.

“Life on the street is a struggle for survival,” said Robert. “No one can understand what it’s like - it’s really dangerous out there. A lot of people will try to prey on you.”

Thanks to the help of Family Health Centers of San Diego (FHCSD) and our Healthcare for the Homeless program, Robert’s life has been set on a new path. This holiday season, he is sober and has a warm bed at a downtown San Diego homeless shelter, where he performs daily chores in exchange for room and board. Robert still relies on FHCSD for support and care. He has regular meetings with a FHCSD case manager, as well as wellness check-ups. Robert says he’s grateful for the invaluable services we offer him and thousands of other San Diego residents.

The goal of the Healthcare for the Homeless program is to reduce the barriers to healthcare access for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. In 2013 alone, FHCSD provided comprehensive healthcare services, including mental health, dental, vision and wellness check-ups at our brick-and-mortar clinics and through our Mobile Medical Units, to more than 24,000 unduplicated homeless individuals in San Diego County. This number includes individuals who transition in and out of homelessness during the year.

In order to continue offering these vital services to people like Robert, we need your help. Enclosed in this special edition of Adelante is a donation slip and envelope. Your donation will help FHCSD continue to provide much-needed services to homeless San Diegans, as well as provide quality health care to thousands of others.

*According to 2014 San Diego Regional Homeless Profile Summary*
It’s that time of year when we turn to the significance of the holiday season and reflect on our families, our blessings and our lives. On a daily basis, the evening news makes us aware of those less fortunate. We may be a fleeting sad thought or give a prayer as we hope for better times for those affected by tragedy. Perhaps, in that moment, we may even be grateful to those non-profit organizations for the help they provide to those touched by tragedy, disease or circumstance.

But, what about those “non-profit” organizations? How do they take care of a community and residents during hard times or disasters? How do they sustain, open their doors each day and work with those in need? Plain and simple… we fundraise. We tell the compelling stories of our daily work and ask for our community’s support.

At Family Health Centers of San Diego, fundraising has brought needed clinical equipment, such as colposcopes and mammography units to identify cancers; fetal monitors to help diagnose early abnormalities; ultrasound units; and expensive dental equipment to care for kids and their families. Fundraising brought mobile medical units to battered women’s shelters and disadvantaged schools. It helped our organization open several clinics in areas not well-served with comprehensive medical care. Fundraising brought mobile dental care to special populations such as veterans or homeless who have gone without medical and dental care for years. Fundraising brought sealant programs to young children and dental education to their parents. Fundraising enabled our organization to provide developmental screenings for young children and therapy to those identified with delays.

After many years of working in non-profits, I now know the most interesting aspect of fundraising starts with the power of one. All those fundraised dollars that started programs, built clinics and bought special equipment begins with one person’s belief that they could make their community better. They believed their commitment could change the lives of those less fortunate.

Thanks to the many who have made it better than they found it. Happy Holidays!

A REASON TO SMILE

While a smile can express our joy and happiness, it can also mask pain and sorrow.

No one knows that better than Carol, a native New Yorker and stay-at-home mom who has dealt with tragedy too difficult to fathom—the death of her children.

Following the death of her ex-husband from a fatal aneurysm, Carol discovered that all three of her children suffered from Ehlers-Danlos syndrome type 4, a connective tissue disorder that affects the body’s vascular system and can lead to fatal aneurysms. More than 80% of those who suffer from the syndrome develop life-threatening complications by age 40. Carol’s oldest son succumbed to an abdominal aneurysm at the age of 21; her second oldest son died at the age of 30. Carol’s daughter, now in her mid-thirties, continues to suffer from aneurysms.

Carol’s tragic losses took their toll on her, both emotionally and physically. She found herself homeless and briefly lived in a single room occupancy dwelling before moving to a transitional living center in San Diego County in 2011. Poor dental hygiene combined with no access to dental care created problems for her teeth. Carol qualified for Family Health Centers of San Diego’s Restorative Dental Program, which provides extensive dental work—including cleanings, partials and dentures—to a limited number of homeless individuals with no dental coverage.

Her smile now gives her purpose and self-esteem, necessities for a woman who has dealt with so much tragedy.

Our Restorative Dental Program is completely funded by donations. Please consider completing the enclosed donation slip with your tax-deductible donation to help us continue to provide these life-changing services to those who need it most.

Who are the homeless? (according to 2014 San Diego Regional Homeless Profile Summary)

- 74% Are underhoused homeless adult males
- 47% Are a member of a homeless family
- 19% Have substance abuse disorder
- 22% Of all homeless adults were victims of domestic violence

37% have a high school diploma or GED
33% have some college education
20% are veterans of the US Armed Forces
26% are over the age of 54
17% are under the age of 35

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