



FRIENDS IN SONOMA HELPING (FISH)

Providing emergency help to residents experiencing financial hardships in Sonoma Valley



Our start:

In 1971, eight local churches established FISH to provide emergency assistance to the people of Sonoma Valley.

FISH was founded as a 24-hour telephone answering service, and FISH volunteers provided food, clothing, rides, referral services, and a listening ear to those who called.

FISH has always been run by an all-volunteer staff and has enjoyed broad support from the community.

As requests for assistance increased, community donations allowed the originally nomadic FISH services to establish a home with a permanent Food Room and Clothing Closet in 2002.



Impact100 Sonoma has awarded three Community Grants to FISH:

\$15,000 for facility improvement (2011), \$15,000 for parking repaving and flooring (2012), and \$14,000 (in collaboration with Sonoma Overnight Support) for a severe weather shelter for the homeless of Sonoma Valley (2014).

What we do:

FISH provides the poor and working poor with basic and immediate needs: food, clothing, shelter, and transportation. A special attribute of FISH is that there is no paid staff. Over 160 volunteers manage, run, and serve the organization. At the heart of FISH are the Dispatchers, who receive telephone calls (between 9 am and 5 pm) from those in need of food, rent, rides, clothing, utilities, or gasoline. Dispatchers provide information, direct requests to FISH coordinators, and link those in need with the services FISH provides.

A single story:

Jon, a 62-year-old artist, owned his own construction company until the 2008 recession. One year later, Jon was diagnosed with Parkinson's that affected his spine, legs, and feet. As his health deteriorated, he was unable to work. His medical debts mounted up. He was unable to meet his monthly mortgage. Being a proud and resourceful man, Jon moved out of his house and into an outbuilding to generate income from his now newly-rented home. He also placed a number of paintings in several galleries. However, none of this was enough to cope with the increasing pain and huge medical bills.

FISH intervened and provided Jon with food, clothing, rides to doctor appointments, a used exer-cycle, and more recently, a walker. FISH volunteers also accessed additional resources to cover three months' mortgage. Jon has now determined that keeping his home is impossible, and he is waiting for a room to open up at FAHA. FISH will help him move and assist with the initial rent of \$450 per month. Jon will remain independent, and FISH will continue to assist him and keep him from homelessness and hunger.

Beyond these services, FISH has provided Jon with a number of friends. These FISH volunteers continue to visit Jon, address his basic needs, and monitor his health. In return, Jon has given FISH and his new friends his artwork and his friendship.

Our future:

Currently FISH provides over 140 rides to Napa and Petaluma for dialysis treatment each month. FISH is building a coalition of interested residents to address the lack of dialysis treatment facilities in Sonoma Valley.