

Long and Winding Road

A newfound wave of optimism has swept over Roxana Alcantara.

Now living at St. Elizabeth's Sonrisa Family Supportive Living Program, she has finally found safety and stability for herself and her two daughters, Alma and Emiko. But it's been a long journey.

Born in Lima, Peru, she met and married a Japanese-Peruvian and the two moved to Japan for employment and to be closer to his family. They lived there for 12 years and had two sons and two daughters. Then the marriage began to fray and finally came apart during a trip to Peru to visit her family. He went back to Japan and took the two boys with him, leaving Roxana and the two girls behind to stay with her mother. A divorce soon followed.

Two years ago she met an American and brought her daughters to visit him in Miami. When it was time for them to return to Peru, he proposed instead. They married and moved to Santa Fe to live with his family.

However, things turned out to be more than a little different



Roxana Alcantara (middle) and daughters Alma (left), Emiko (right).

from what he had promised. They ended up living in a garage at his parents' house and the situation soon became abusive. So Roxana moved out to the house of a friend she had met at church. But after staying five months, it was time to move on again.

She had heard about the Sonrisa program for homeless families with children and applied. Since there wasn't an apartment

immediately available, they had to go to Casa Familia, St. Elizabeth's emergency shelter for women and families.

"I was scared for myself and my daughters," Roxana says.

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CASA FAMILIA REMODEL \$50,000 CHALLENGE MATCH

Two donors have pledged \$75,000 if we can raise an additional \$50,000 toward the current remodeling of Casa Familia. So any donation you make will be matched one-and-a-half times.

See page 5 for more details.

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St. Elizabeth is dedicated to assisting homeless individuals and families by providing emergency shelter, food, case management, counseling, supportive housing and referrals to partnering human-services agencies.

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 505-982-6611
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Director's Corner



Tolstoy opened *Anna Karenina* with the famous observation that "all happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." So it is with each person and family that comes to us and the unique challenges they present – employment, mental

health, physical health, alcohol/substance abuse, family history, legal issues, etc. But the one constant is that they all need housing.

The stories in this newsletter reflect this uniqueness among our guests. It often requires our staff learning new skills in order to help. From finding a payee, to dealing with immigration issues, to working with domestic violence statutes, it is a constant learning curve. Everyone we house is a testament to our tenacity, and each is a victory for the person or family involved as well as St. E's.

Learning the ins and outs of the SOAR program is certainly daunting, but the results bring important victories on the road to stability and housing. Our statistics show that we put 429 people into housing last year, but that number does not reflect the countless hours spent navigating the multiple systems necessary to make it happen.

By ourselves, we could not accomplish this. It takes a myriad of agencies, both non-profit and governmental, to secure all the resources needed to finally locate and place one person or family in housing. During this holiday season, I am grateful to all our partners in this work for showing the same dedication that our staff displays to make this happen on a regular basis. Beyond mere numbers, these are people and families that no longer have to worry about where their next meal will come from or where they will sleep tonight. And that's why all of us do this work.

Deborah Tang,
 Executive Director

Soaring to New Heights



Vickie Gabin counseling a SOAR client at St. Elizabeth Shelter

Poverty and homelessness are inextricably related, as is mental illness, substance abuse and disability. Without an income, it's all but impossible to obtain or maintain housing. Likewise, with behavioral, drug/alcohol or chronic health issues, it's difficult to find and keep a job.

For many people in this category who are unable to work, their only potential source of income is Social Security's SSI (Supplemental Security Income) or SSDI (Social Security Disability Insurance). SSI provides income for those disabled or blind with a poor work history – basically not having worked enough time to qualify for Social Security – while SSDI is for those with a work history who become disabled before retirement age.

To better assist our clients to apply for and access these benefits, St. Elizabeth has hired Vickie Gabin as our SOAR (SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery) representative. The application

for these programs are arduous with detailed documentation of one's medical history required. As a result, acceptance rates are quite low, averaging only 10 percent for homeless individuals and even less for those with mental illness. If denied one can appeal, but that process often takes at least a year for a hearing to be scheduled.

Recognizing this, the Social Security Administration began its SOAR program several years ago to expedite qualifying applications. SOAR representatives receive detailed online and in-person training before becoming certified to assist individuals in preparing their applications. Each representative is given a SOAR liaison at Social Security who can be directly contacted for help during the process.

Vickie, a water rights attorney, began volunteering at Casa Familia in 2014. Impressed by the program, she began devoting

more time there, becoming a shift supervisor and working on special projects. Realizing her abilities and the organization's need for our own representative, St. Elizabeth contracted with her to provide this added service last December.

"It's a real challenge," Vickie says, "so essential and yet so difficult. I do an initial client interview to assess eligibility, namely having low or no income and a documented disability. If a disability is indicated without any documentation, I set up a medical appointment to see if they qualify."

Clients who qualify sign a Consent for Release of Information form that Vickie faxes to Social Security to begin the process. This initial filing establishes the date from which benefits will accrue if approved. Within 48 hours, Social Security faxes back the client's work history and the real work begins.

"Now we have 60 days to complete and file the full SOAR application," Vickie says. "It requires a substantial amount of information – work history, family history, medical history, military record, financial assets, criminal record, etc. – all of which must be fully documented. I do all the calling and running around needed to assemble and then prepare this into a medical summary."

Besides the initial consent agreement, Social Security requires a Checklist for Initial Claims, Authorization to

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"I thought it might be a dangerous place, but I quickly learned differently. The staff was so caring and concerned, and most of the people there needed more help than us."

Soon thereafter an apartment opened up at Sonrisa, and they moved in to it last December.

"It's a new start here," Roxana says. "I feel comfortable and always keep up my hope. I remember when we didn't have anything and now we have the promise of a better tomorrow."

Sonrisa staff provided the family with donated furniture, registered them in TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), Medicaid and SNAPs (food stamps), paid for Roxana to take a driving class and get her license, arranged for a donated car, enrolled Emiko, the youngest daughter, in a summer gymnastics class, and worked together with Esperanza (because of the domestic violence situation) and an immigration lawyer to obtain a temporary special immigration

permit for Roxana while shepherding her application for resident visa status.

"My daughters don't want to go back to Japan or Peru except for a visit," Roxana says. They say they have more opportunity here and a better chance for a future."

Alma, 15, a freshman at Capital High, likes history and math, is on the school's dance team and choir and plans to go to college. A budding vocalist, she sang at St. Elizabeth's recent Hungry Mouth Festival. Emiko, 14, is in 8th grade at Nina Otero, plays on its basketball team, is interested in archaeology and plans on college, too. As an added plus, the girls have a mentor in Sue Rundstrom from Envision Santa Fe.

"I help expose them to different people, experiences and organizations," Sue says. "We go out and do things such as volunteering at the International Folk Art Market, visiting the petroglyphs off Airport Road, attending

the Japanese Festival and Santa Fe Opera's Apprentice Concert."

Neal Windham, Sonrisa's program manager, has witnessed firsthand the family's improved circumstances during the past year.

"They came here with nothing, and we helped get them back on their feet," he says. "Now Roxana has a really good chance of getting her permanent resident status. That will allow her to apply for work and citizenship, and with her language skills – Spanish, Japanese, English, French and Portuguese – she has a lot to offer an employer."

Roxana, too, is looking forward.

"At last we have some stability," she says. "Now I want a better life for my daughters. That's why I'm taking an English class at Santa Fe Community College and will be looking for a full-time job once I get my visa. In the meantime, we're very thankful for all the help St. Elizabeth has given us to get this far."



St. Elizabeth staff, residents and volunteers at their most recent River Clean Up for the Santa Fe Watershed Association on October 22. For many years, St. E's has adopted and kept clean the stretch of river at Guadalupe and Alameda.

Stock Gifts Make Big Impact



Grant Davis is St. Elizabeth's new treasurer.

You can enhance the value of your contribution to St. Elizabeth by making a gift of appreciated securities. If you own a stock that has grown in value since you bought it, donating it will not only give you an immediate charitable deduction equal to its current value but also eliminate the capital gains tax you would normally have to pay upon selling it. In addition, you'll be supporting our goal of growing our capital base beyond funding basic operating cash needs with a gift that increases in value over time.

As an example, a gift of Amazon stock made five years ago worth \$10,000 then would be valued at nearly \$40,000 today, all the while greatly benefitting St. Elizabeth's long-term

mission and the many at-risk people we serve.

Your gift will be closely monitored and supervised by those members of our Board of Directors that have many decades of investment management experience. If interested in this or other win-win situations for you and St. Elizabeth, please contact Grant Davis, our board treasurer, at grantcdavis@me.com. He will provide wire transfer instructions along with other details and options depending on your financial situation. After making your gift, you will receive an official thank you letter from St. Elizabeth providing the market value on the day it was received for IRS reporting purposes.

Casa Familia Remodel \$50,000 Challenge Match

Casa Familia, our emergency shelter for homeless single women and families with children, opened in 2009 at the height of the recession. Since then, it has housed nearly 2,000 women and children and provided more than 60,000 bed nights of shelter. More importantly, it has helped more than 70 percent of these individuals successfully move into housing. And it's the only such facility dedicated to women and families in all of Santa Fe and Northern New Mexico.

But the building was never designed as an emergency shelter. While we've made many renovations during the years to make it more accommodating to our guests, now it's time for a more major remodeling. We're planning on adding a new front entrance and outdoor children's playground while reconfiguring the

current office space and indoor play area. Doing so will enhance security, provide more privacy and confidentiality for guest-staff engagement and case management, as well as more opportunity for child-parent play and bonding.

As mentioned, two donors have pledged \$75,000 if we can raise

an additional \$50,000 toward the current remodeling of Casa Familia. So any donation you make will be matched one-and-a-half times. Take a look at the architect's rendering and help make these plans a reality for our community.



Thank You Donors!

Please visit our website – www.steshelter.org – to view the list of our generous donors from November 1, 2015 – October 31, 2016.

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If you are interested in joining our fabulous kitchen team, call Maria Lopez, Men's Emergency Shelter program manager, at 982-6611, or Kehala Two Bulls, Casa Familia program manager, at 983-2042.

Soaring ...from page 3

Disclose Information to SSA, Agency Release of Information (signed by every organization – medical, human service, government, etc. client has had contact with), Appointment of Representative, Application for SSI, Application for SSDI, Adult Disability Report and Medical Summary Report. And these are just the forms needed, not the supporting documentation.

"The job is part detective – acquiring evidence – part lawyer – assembling evidence – and part journalist – writing a compelling narrative," she explains. "I've been a practicing lawyer for 35 years and it's easy to see why these forms are difficult for the average person to fill out correctly."

Another challenge is the clients themselves. Most have mental issues, can't recall needed details, have difficulties keeping appointments and meeting deadlines, while others lose their phones, end up in jail or just give up all together.

"Any condition that disqualifies you from holding a regular job makes it equally difficult to follow through and complete the entire demanding application process within the required time frame," Vickie says. "The key is to stay optimistic and keep trying."

For those who persist and succeed, the results are transformative. A guaranteed income brings housing, stability and connection to the community.

"It's a hard job, and we couldn't have a more perfect person step in and help our guests than Vickie," says Kehala Two Bulls, Casa Familia program manager. "It's indicative of how difficult the application process is that it takes someone with a law degree to provide guidance and even then it's daunting. And to think until recently homeless people were expected to do this all by themselves."

A law degree isn't necessary to be a SOAR representative, and Santa Fe and New Mexico need more of them. If you're interested in helping others access the benefits they qualify for, call the New Mexico Coalition to End Homelessness (505-982-9000) for more information.

Thank you

To Everyone Who Made

THE HUNGRY MOUTH FESTIVAL A HUGE SUCCESS!!



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If you missed this year's
Hungry Mouth Festival
there is still time to donate!

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Winter Wish List

MEN'S EMERGENCY SHELTER

Please call (982-6611) or bring the smaller items to St. Elizabeth at 804 Alarid Street.

Clothing - Hats, gloves, scarves, boots, socks, men's jackets, sweaters, hooded sweatshirts, long underwear.

Personal hygiene - Shaving cream, disposable razors, toothbrushes, toothpaste, shampoo, deodorant, combs.

Other - Sleeping bags, sleeping pads or mats, blankets.

Food - Milk, juice, fresh fruits, bottled water, cheese, ground beef, chicken, pork, ham, turkey, roasts.

Non-food items - Non-alcoholic cough syrup, Thera-Flu, multivitamins, Emergen-C® packets, cough drops, Vitamin C, lip balm, band aids, Alka-Seltzer Cold®, Pepto-Bismol®, hand sanitizer, hand wipes, tissues, Lysol spray, foot powder

Volunteers - Handyman/woman for repairs, front-desk receptionists for four- to eight-hour blocks of time, cooks for dinners any night.

CASA FAMILIA

Please call (983-2042) or bring the smaller items to Casa Familia at 1604 Berry Ave.

Clothing - Women's underwear, socks, warm jackets, shoes, weather-appropriate boots; girl's/boy's clothing, school uniforms.

Personal Hygiene - Shampoo, conditioner, feminine hygiene products, disposable razors (female), toothbrushes, toothpaste, band aids, hair brushes, foot powder, body soap, nail clippers, nail files, deodorant (women's) Alka-Seltzer Cold®, Pepto-Bismol®, over-the-counter medication (ibuprofen), baby wipes, baby powder.

Food - Non-perishable food, water, juice, spices.

Other - Blankets, bed sheets (twin), diapers (all sizes, particularly 2-5), cleaning supplies, dish soap, toilet paper, paper towels, laundry detergent, latex-free gloves, kitchen utensils, kitchen pots & pans, water bottles, shower shoes, AA/9-volt batteries, backpacks (adult & children), bus passes (Santa Fe Trails one-day, round trip or monthly), passes for community activities (eg. Chavez Center or Children's Museum)

Volunteers - Front-desk receptionists from 4- to 8-hour blocks of time, cooks for dinner.

CASA CERRILLOS

Please call (471-3456) to discuss their current needs before bringing them to the facility at 3811½ Cerrillos Road.

Household Items - Cleaning supplies, pet food.

Larger Items - Van in good working condition, flatscreen tvs, computers & laptops, fencing materials.