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Las Cruces, New Mexico

**Mesilla Valley Community of Hope**

2018

**Hope Stories**

Interview 5

**Hacienda Del Sol with Nancy V. Baker**

Interviewed by David Lee del Norte  
15 June 2018  
at NMSU Public History Seminar Room Breland Hall 258

Sponsored by Doña Ana County Historical Society

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### **Recommended Citation**

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### **Recording Information**

Hope Stories 005 — 1h 35m duration. Recorded 15 June 2018 at NMSU  
Public History Seminar Room, Breland Hall 258.

## **Acknowledgement**

With guidance from public historian Dr. Jon Hunner, and support from Dr. Elizabeth Horodowich and Dr. Peter Kopp, in early 2018 Doña Ana County Historical Society awarded the Hope Stories project generous transcription funding through the Mary and J. Paul Taylor NMSU Student Scholarship.

Archivist and oral historian at New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum, Donna Wojcik transcribed eight interviews of the project, provided invaluable knowledge about transcription craft, and kindly orchestrated narrator appreciation artwork from Ray Ortiz. Donna's interpretive insight and professional workflow support is unmatched.

Kara Andrea Lory's *The Cultural Geography of the Homeless in Las Cruces, New Mexico* remains must-read research. Available at NMSU Library Archives and Special Collections, Lory's 2003 thesis is an excellent historical source on the consolidated services model at Mesilla Valley Community of Hope, an important first step to learning more about Doña Ana County poverty and Las Cruces homelessness.

I am especially thankful to each of the sixteen Hope Stories narrators whose invaluable time, insight, and personal engagement with the homeless community cannot be highlighted enough. Seen together collectively with project oral history transcription and audio recordings, it is my wish as researcher that New Mexico citizens recognize each narrator's contribution alongside the many unnamed individuals who work to end homelessness and hunger in Las Cruces.

## **Project History**

The Mesilla Valley Community of Hope (MVCH) is a homeless services corridor in Las Cruces, New Mexico. In the 1970s, Saint Andrew's Episcopal Church began Soup Kitchen service which later became El Caldito. As need for food and healthcare clinical service increased throughout the 1980s, the Las Cruces community supported Saint Andrew's congregation members with the opening of Saint Luke's Health Clinic. With a long history of compassionate services for visitors, the City of Las Cruces recognized the importance of limiting distance and travel-time between public health and human service organizations located throughout different parts of the city.

Incorporated as a non-profit in 1991, additional support continued to form what became known as a collaborative alliance with operations at 999 Amador Avenue nearby to downtown Las Cruces. In 2011, following a particularly harsh Las Cruces "Deep Freeze" winter that caused health concerns for the housed, and deaths for the homeless due to exposure, Mesilla Valley Community of Hope staff banded together with clients to appeal to the City of Las Cruces for sanctioned overnight camping status to found the Camp Hope transitional living program.

In 2018, the Hope Stories project collected fifteen oral history interviews to learn about the development of the consolidated services model at Mesilla Valley Community of Hope. The term "Corridor of Care" refers to a perspective in the healthcare industry known as the consolidated services model that helps people access health and human service related programs in centrally located "Hub" or "Node" areas.

This public history graduate project asked participating narrators questions about how the Las Cruces community first began to advance, reinforce, and collaborate through the actions necessary to become the Hope Campus at Mesilla Valley Community of Hope. Rather than conduct interviews with those who experienced homelessness, the project features staff and volunteer narrators who shared community engagement stories about the consolidated services corridor concept.

Two additional perspectives from outside the Hope Campus, the fourth interview with Glenn Trowbridge took place at CARE Complex in Las Vegas, Nevada, an out-of-state counter-balance to the history of homeless consolidated services in the United States; while the fifteenth interview with Kit Elliot and Meg Long occurred at Aggie Cupboard on NMSU campus, a satellite food pantry inspired by Casa de Peregrinos.

Today's work to help the homeless in Las Cruces is the result of a compassionate, multi-organizational approach by non-profit service providers. In 2018, these five core non-profit homeless services include Mesilla Valley Community of Hope; Casa de Peregrinos food pantry; El Caldito soup kitchen; Jardin de Los Niños educational program; and Amador Health Center (formally Saint Luke's Health Clinic).

With Hope Campus the geographic center of non-profit homeless service providers in Las Cruces, it is important to note resources offered by City of Las Cruces, State of New Mexico Health and Human Services, and many other local organizations not located at 999 Amador Avenue. For a comprehensive listing of community service organizations, including for those experiencing homelessness, use online search term "Las Cruces Community Resource Guide," or ask for an updated copy.

## **Narrator Summary**

Raised in Appalachian West Virginia, and inspired by her mother's belief in the power of education, Nancy Baker rose above the roots of poverty and into an academic career. Dr. Baker earned a PhD from Tulane University in 1989, joined New Mexico State University that same year, and authored numerous scholarly works about law and government in the United States, including two non-fiction titles on the office of U.S. Attorney General — *Conflicting Loyalties: Law and Politics in the Attorney General's Office, 1789-1990*, and *General Ashcroft: Attorney at War*. A Professor Emeritus with multiple academic honors, including two national teaching awards, Dr. Baker is a recipient of the Westhafer Award for Excellence in Teaching.

Dr. Baker helped establish “Hacienda del Sol,” a shelter for women and children located on the Hope Campus. Although the non-profit organization struggled financially and eventually closed in 2006, its history remains an important blueprint of the competing demands necessary to fund and maintain the day-to-day operational growth of homeless shelter services.

In support of higher education for non-traditional women, Dr. Baker created the “Over the Rainbow” scholarship, a Spring-Board fund with Community Foundation of Southern New Mexico. In 2015, to increase awareness and outreach efforts for those experiencing homelessness, Dr. Baker became a Development Committee member with the Mesilla Valley Community of Hope.

Now a retired Mystery novelist writing under the name N.V. Baker, the book *Vanished* was published in 2016.

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01:29:43 - Jobs training pipeline to self-sufficiency and increased education opportunities

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## Interview 5 of Hope Stories— June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2018

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**David Lee del Norte:** This is the Mesilla Valley Community of Hope Stories at New Mexico State University Public History. [ A project] on behalf of Doña Ana County Historical Society. Today's narrator is Dr. Nancy Baker, and the interviewer is David Lee. The file name is 18HOPE\_0203.wav, and the recording is being held at the New Mexico State University Public History Seminar Room, Breland Hall, 258. The date is the fifteenth of June, 2018. It's about 10:15 in the morning. Nancy, could you tell me your full name, please?

**Nancy Baker:** Yes. My name is Nancy Virginia Baker.

del Norte: And your home town?

Baker: Well, I've lived in Las Cruces, New Mexico since 1989, so I suppose this is the closest I have come. I was an Air Force brat, and we moved a lot when I was a child, and then I spent ten years in New Orleans where I got my graduate degree, my PhD, at Tulane [University] and then I had a job offer here, and I have never looked back. I love Las Cruces.

del Norte: Wonderful. How about your initial role at the Mesilla Valley Community of Hope, the first role that you had there?

Baker: It's a very interesting story because the Mesilla Valley Community of Hope is an extraordinary combination of different agencies that serve the homeless and near-homeless, and the poor in southern New Mexico, who had found themselves competing for this finite pie of resources, and they decided in 1991 to join forces, and sort of work collaboratively, and ultimately, to be on the same campus so that services would all be centralized making it a lot easier for the populations they serve to access those services rather than having to run all over town.

You don't have a car. They may not even be accessible by bus, and buses cost money. So, the idea was to have a place, and it's a really exciting idea, and it's not done in a lot of places, and I think that was in 1991.

And they started working on developing the resources. They were incorporated in 1993, and started raising funds, getting money donated by the city. Well, the city still owns the property, and raising funds for construction, and the campus then opened in— Construction started in 1997, and I think the first phase completed in 1998, and then the agency I was volunteering with, Hacienda Del Sol, moved in there in 1998, 1999. So, I was first brought in in 1997.

I was brought in by one of the movers and shakers, one of the co-founders of this entire idea, and she's a geology professor, department head actually, in geology. Nancy McMillan. I don't know if you've had a chance with her, but she's extraordinary, and we were friends. We both came in 1989, and had sort of gone through the junior faculty status together, and I was really excited to be working with her.

Baker: I was concerned about issues of homelessness. I was still fairly new to the town. I'd not been here a decade yet, and I started working there on the Board with Hacienda Del Sol. Hacienda Del Sol, at that time, was the housing unit, the housing agency. There was actually a physical location on the campus with probably about a dozen apartments. There was a kitchen area, laundry facilities, a large lounge area with toys and TV because of the children. It was only open, however, to women. Homeless women or families with children because those are the most vulnerable populations, women and children on the street. In fact, at the time I started working with Hacienda Del Sol, I learned that a woman's life expectancy on the street is about a year because of violence. So, we were real committed to try to move women off the street, and it was very exciting. That's how I started out, on the Board of Hacienda Del Sol.

del Norte: Wonderful. I have the 2004 mission statement, and that's probably a little bit later than you started. I found it on the Internet Archive.

Baker: Oh, good.

del Norte: And Hacienda Del Sol, their mission statement reads: "To assist families and women to become stable and self-sufficient by providing housing, support, and guidance in a positive environment that promotes lasting change." Can you build upon what you've started, and talk about those origins?

Baker: Yeah. In fact, we were— I was part of the naming of it, Hacienda Del Sol, and then of drafting that mission statement. At that time we did not follow the “Housing First” model, so people had to be clean [from substance abuse] in order to come into the programs and that, I think, was a real disservice to the population we were trying to serve. We’ll talk in a minute about “Housing First” I’m sure. But, so we had case managers that were working very intensely with the clients. Clients could live there from, anything [from] a few weeks to a few months.

The entire purpose of that was to help clients deal with the issues that had triggered the homelessness to start with, and then to get them into Section Eight housing. So, to bring them off the street into a safe environment where working with case managers in a supportive environment they could then ensure that they were prepared to go on, and live in Section Eight housing, and be successful.

But, part of it was, many of them were people with duo-diagnoses, mental health issues and addiction. So, we had to be very— We had excellent staff. One of whom had actually been homeless herself many years before, so she’s very sensitive to the population, and our executive director was Sue Shearer. I don’t think she’s still in town. Sue Shearer was— Really from the very beginning, She was there even before I had even joined, and was able to ensure that people were treated respectfully, that the environment stayed safe, and yet there were these rules in place that we had to enforce regarding alcohol and drug use on the campus. We had to ensure that that did not happen.

del Norte: Was this because “Housing First” was a federal funded, or a state funded . . .

Baker: It hadn’t— It didn’t exist yet.

del Norte: It was on its way to for—

Baker: It was on its way. There was still— I think, and I have the dates here. I believe it was in 2008 that Mesilla Valley Community of Hope switched to the “Housing First” model.

del Norte: Ah.

Baker: That’s what I believe. You might know more than I.

del Norte: This is new to me. I haven’t heard about this particular model. I think you’re talking about the transitional housing?

Baker: It, well, it was part of the—

del Norte: Like the path—

Baker: Well, it was part of the transitional, but the point was is that the realization— Studies finally confirming that people who are suffering from addiction, whether it's alcohol, or drugs, or mental health, can't get their act together and get off of those things. Take their medications, stay off the dangerous substances if they're living on the street. They need a safe place to live first, then you can work on those kinds of behaviors that are really self-destructive. You can get people stabilized in mental health. You can— You know, they can have access to other kind of services. They can go to, for instance, Mesilla Valley Community of Hope offers, I know you know, a number of courses, including everything from parenting to Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, to conflict management.

So, the idea is you get people in a safe space, then they can work on those issues. The housing has to come first. Back in the 1990s the model was people had to get their act together before they can move in, and that's an incentive for them to get their act together. Reality is, on the street, there are way too many problems. To work, to be homeless, and yet to take charge of your life like that. It was just unrealistic.

del Norte: Sure. I think one of the positive points that I've heard again and again is, as soon as they developed the model where people can move right in, the 911 calls dropped.

Baker: Yes, I— You're right.

del Norte: (Simultaneously) So, that was a big push towards the model, and I just had never heard it termed "Housing First."

Baker: Oh, okay.

del Norte: It makes perfect, perfect sense, though.

Baker: Yeah.

del Norte: So, it's not an actual program. It's, uh, ideology of—

Baker: Well, it's a— Yes. It's an approach to dealing with homelessness.

del Norte: Gotcha.

Baker: And I don't think many commun— I don't think all communities do it. It does make a lot of sense. It saves money in the long term. As you're pointing out, 911 calls. You don't have police responding in the middle of the night to these crisis situations. You don't have this petty vagrancy, and other things that are really— Or violence on the street. Homeless people do not engage in a lot of violent behavior, but that's the perception, right? That's how the people who are homed, people who are in stable homes view— often view the homeless, which is a real tragedy but I think it, in the long term it makes sense for the individuals, the communities, taxpayers, and police. Everything.

del Norte: Before we get too far towards the model that's in place. I think you brought us to about 2008, but can we just back up to where you started?

Baker: Sure will. Yeah.

del Norte: Can you describe the process of providing emergency shelter at that time?

Baker: Yes.

del Norte: In your experience.

Baker: Yeah. As well, and because I was on the Board, and I became then— Like within the third meeting after I was on the Board I was elected Board president, so I served in that capacity, let me see, I started that in 1997. I was that until 2001. Yeah. I was the president until 2001, then I, oh, [Baker seeks correct dates] until 2000, Then I stepped down in 2000. Let me see if I have my dates here to make sure I've got all that. Aye, aye, aye. I'm sorry. I've—

del Norte: Take your time.

Baker: —got these, uh, I have too many notes. Now I can't find what I was gonna say.

Baker: Ah, yes, I left in 2002. So, I was elected the Board president in 1997, in the spring, and served there until the summer of 2001. Then I remained on the Board for another year, and left in 2002.

del Norte: Did you have an emergency shelter program or something in progress at that time?

Baker: Well, in 1999 is when we were able to actually— Yes. In 1990s, between 1997 and the opening of the campus in 1999, people were placed in housing as it could be located, but a lot of the landlords were not— There wasn't the good network that Nicole Martinez has developed, and very strong relationships with local landlords who will now step in, and realize that this is not only an important population to serve, but that if there are any problems they can call the Mesilla Valley Community of Hope staff, and things get resolved. So, they're actually not bad tenants.

Up to that point though, it was sometimes a challenge to find housing. We didn't have any permanent housing. There wasn't anything like Abode, or Sue's House, or the Oak Street housing for veterans. There just was nothing like that so people were just hanging out on the street, and in very hot temperatures like this that was— That's deadly. In our community the problem isn't that it's too cold for the homeless. It's because it gets too hot, and if people have diabetes, especially, they're not conscious that they're putting their health in danger.

Baker: They're not conscious that they're dehydrated. So, that's, I think, part of what spurred all of this. There had been a kitchen at St. Andrew's Church that then evolved into the El Caldito Soup Kitchen. It opened at the campus about the same time. Maybe a little before Hacienda Del Sol moved in, Saint Luke's Clinic, and soon after Hacienda moved in, Jardin de los Niños.

The emergency food shelter [Casa de Peregrinos] didn't move in for another couple years, I believe, but it was part of the program from the very beginning, but the building had— Construction had to occur over phases. So, you had, then, all of these services in one place. If people could come in and find it, that was the initial challenge. Getting the word out to the community. Getting the word out when people showed up in town. Someone will tell them about it.

“You go down here on Amador, and they'll take care of you.”

So, we'd have a lot of people coming there. We were able to house a lot of the women and the children. Across the street, of course, was Gospel Rescue Mission, but they have— at that time in particular, I don't know if it's still true, you only had one night's stay. And they may not accept you at all. And they had a lot of rules in place that made it difficult to stay there, and so it was sort of an area where people who are homeless were clustering, but the men didn't really have a shelter. They didn't have a place to go to. They would hang out around the buildings. But, the fam-, women and children, they were in sort of— Or families with children—

Baker: So, men who were part of families could stay, but they were very secure locations with the doors locked so that— because the whole point was some women become homeless because of abuse in the homes. In fact, that’s a big trigger for homelessness among women. So, you have to ensure there’s a safe environment for these vulnerable populations. But, that left the guys out there, and that’s really, I think, where the origin of the Camp Hope idea came from, was a handful of those guys talking and working together, and basically I think they were the spark that got Camp Hope started, was that:

“We need— Can we just camp here? Can we just pitch our tent?”

And, of course, we had to say “No” initially because it’s city land. So, we have to get that approved by the city. All of that took time, but a number of the people camping there came and testified to the city, and I think it was very powerful to find out these are— and it was empowering for them because suddenly they were the ones defining their future. They weren’t just flotsam and jetsam on, you know, the raging torrents of society. They actually could take charge and lead an initiative, and then be successful. So, I think, the Camp Hope had not yet opened, it was many years later, but it was clearly a need that we could see even in 1999 when we moved into Hacienda Del Sol.

del Norte: Obviously these discussions are taking place across the community.

Baker: Yeah.

del Norte: Can you talk about some of the high points of the Board's activities, and what you tried to address first of all? And the reason I ask this is because I'll follow up with "What were some of the challenges?"

Baker: Okay. Well, for me, the most exciting day was "Move-in day" which was in the late spring of 1999. A number of NMSU [New Mexico State University] students came. In fact, one of my students from my Introduction to Political Science class showed up with her— She's maybe in her thirties, and she brought her kids along, and they were all— We're all moving stuff in because we had to set up bedrooms. These were like these— They weren't full apartments, but they were nice, separate, lockable bedrooms where people could, you know, had to have their basic needs taken care of. So, we're moving things in.

We're moving food in. We're moving in washing machines. That, for me, was a real highlight. It was a warm day if I remember, so maybe it was even early summer, but it could have been here— It could have been late spring.

It was very exciting that the community came together, and saw this as a chance to provide services that many communities denied the homeless. Some of these communities would just give the homeless a bus ticket to the next town, and they think then they're serving the needs of the homeless, and I really, really appreciate that about Las Cruces. It's one of the things I love here, the generosity of spirit, the sense that we're all interconnected. It's not like "Us and them," and "They made their bed, let them sleep in it." No. We're all fragile.

Baker: We're all just one or two pay checks away, or a devastating illness away from, you know, being right on the edge, possibly losing everything. And I was really impressed. That was, for me, the highlight. We had our own little— We were always trying to raise money. We were not very successful. We were a very small Board. If you want to get to the challenges, that was it. We had— Nancy [McMillan] was on for another year or two, and then I was Board president with maybe one or two other people. I had very difficult— I didn't know what I was doing. I'd never gotten any training on how you be a Board member.

del Norte: What were some of your attempts to raise funding?

Baker: Well. We had gigantic, once a year we'd have these gigantic garage sales. We would— Saint Luke's would let us move in, and then move their tables around. So, it's a big space as you know, from Saint Luke's. I mean— Not Saint Luke's. The soup kitchen. El Caldito Soup Kitchen. Move all the tables around, and we had these storage units in town that we would just haul in all the clothes that had been donated that we— That hadn't been needed, that hadn't been claimed by one of the agencies. Any of the stuff that had been donated, like these little statues, or weird stuff people like to donate to a garage sale.

It was a huge amount of work. All night long. The night before we had set, we had to— We couldn't go into the space until the last meal was served for El Caldito, and then it was cleaned up, and then we moved tables around and pulled in everything. All night long, setting it up, sorting. Some people just donated garbage. We had to actually throw it.

Baker: So, you had to do a lot of sorting, and try and make things look attractive, and then we'd just open it up as this giant rummage sale for the community, and it would be an all-day affair. And finally, late afternoon, we'd pack things up, and what was left we would then take to a colleague [who] had a connection in Mexico, and there were other agencies that could use the resources. So, it wasn't like they were trashed because we had already gotten rid of the things that truly were trash. But, we would make, you know, eight hundred bucks. (chuckles)

del Norte: Wow.

Baker: At one point I'm thinking, "You know, maybe I should just write a check. This is a lot of work."

del Norte: Yeah.

Baker: So, we— If I remember, we did it three times, and then we started brainstorming on other things to do.

del Norte: Was this potentially how the Closet de Mesilla [La Tienda Unique Boutique] I believe it's called, or I know it's the, well, separate men's and women's clothing that are available to homeless, or—

Baker: No. I think that started separately.

del Norte: Something else?

Baker: Yeah.

del Norte: Okay.

Baker: It's something else. Yeah. But, there's a lot of parallel needs, so people just made these donations, and we would, you know, what we could use we would use, and otherwise we'd save it up for this giant sale.

del Norte: Well, how about, well, no—

Baker: No, no. I was gonna say we're much more effective now because we have a development committee which I'm on—

del Norte: Excellent.

Baker: —as of 2015, and it's a much more structured approach to handling fundraising. Grants remain the core foundation, and Nicole [Martinez] is extraordinary. I think she has something like seventeen grants. Sue Shearer got some grants, and some funding from the State, and maybe a little federal money. That's really what the Executive Director was responsible for, is grant writing.

Baker: There was a period of time— Sue had a brain aneurism in 2000. She survived, but she didn't have health insurance; therefore, we kept her on for another year so she could qualify for — her husband worked here at NMSU — under his health insurance. That meant that the Treasurer on the Board, Lisa Frey-Hill, who is a Sociology professor here, Lisa took over the grant writing, and I, as president, kind of filled in with the management stuff. It was a tough year for the, again, a major challenge for the Board. “We wanna do right by Sue. The staff love Sue. At the same time, we have to keep programs going.” So, we did the best that we could.

That was a low point for us as an organization, and it made it very difficult to recover from, even once we had a new Executive Director, and starting to try to build the Board up. It was— I think that's ultimately why Hacienda Del Sol just couldn't continue. It didn't have the infrastructure. Even after all those years we couldn't get the infrastructure going, and it was then absorbed by Mesilla Valley Community of Hope.

Up to that point Mesilla Valley Community of Hope served primarily as an umbrella organization for all of the agencies that were at the campus, and then provided day services for the homeless so they could have showers, access to a telephone, an address. You could apply for jobs, and get responses back. The sorts of things that you would need to, at the very basis, to get plugged into the society, your societal needs at large, but it was just a day program.

Baker: Hacienda Del Sol was the only housing component, and it really only served women and families with children, so it was limited also. All of this happened, I think, about the time Nicole [Martinez] came in. Housing First developed, Mesilla Valley Community of Hope, I think, took over probably a little before then, the housing component, and began really building this network of relationships with the community that had been so important in finding apartments, and stable homes, long-term, for people. Our main challenge right now, for fundraising, is Camp Hope. No grant money or Foundation money goes to Camp Hope. It's all community supported.

del Norte: And that's a major difference between the origins of Hacienda Del Sol.

Baker: Yes. Because there was much more government money, maybe because it was the mid-nineties, but there was more government support, and there was some foundation support that we were able to get. That's the overwhelming bulk of support we got for Hacienda Del Sol. And here you still have those pieces, although the veterans' funding, we've had real difficulty in the last few years with veterans' funding from the State [of New Mexico]. So, we've had to think up other fundraising opportunities, and reaching out to, say, vets' organizations, or getting— Some groups in town will have a charity golf tournament, and that's not us as a development committee, but they'll do it for programs, say, for homeless veterans. So, again, the generosity of the community when you get the word out, but the generosity has really been impressive. Astonishing. It's been really exciting to see.

Baker: For the homeless in Camp Hope it's, as you know, a tent city. The point is you're, it's not a— We try not to refer to it as a housing shelter because the point is, it's temporary. It's on your way to permanent housing. We don't wanna build, say, small houses which is a big push in some, many communities, the small housing movement.

del Norte: Yes. Yes, of course.

Baker: And that is the opposite of what we want. We want people to be connected in the community, not in this little ghetto off to the side, in these little, fairly expensive to build, small houses that then keep them separated. We want to get them re-integrated into communities where there's schools, and grocery stores, and, you know, access to jobs. The sorts of things that make, I think, people feel connected. So, Camp Hope is temporary. Our purpose is, our point is, as quickly as possible we want to get you in an apartment, in a home, someplace you are there permanently, and it's, you know, "This is your place now." It's not just like you're there for a couple of weeks, or a couple of months like old Hacienda Del Sol. No. "This is your place now."

And it's really been a successful program, but that means Camp Hope still needs resources. So, we have a major fundraiser every fall called Tents to Rents. It's a great title, and Nicole [Martinez] came up with it. What we do is we partner with participants. Initially just individuals, but more and more we're going with groups. Faith organizations, businesses, other clubs and groups in town will commit to raising, say, a thousand dollars over this six-week period. I think this year it will be late August to mid-September. It's a six-week period.

Baker: And using, really, social media to— And you can, therefore you can send out your appeals to your friendship network on Facebook, all over the country, and you'd be surprised. We have done so well with that. We're starting our third year. The first year we were aiming just to move two people, maybe, into their own homes, or one per— Yeah. How many did we have? I was just looking at the figures yesterday because we're starting to gear up for another Tents to Rents.

We were able to raise double the money we expected. Last year we raised double the money we expected. So, last year we were able to move— There's about, it costs about six thousand dollars for a year for a person in a home, to get the support from the Community of Hope, all the services and everything. And that is with the person putting in, you know, a quarter, I think it is, of his or her monies that they get every month. So, they have, they're pitching-in also. And then Community of Hope steps-in, and the Community of Hope part is about six thousand dollars. So, we need to raise enough.

Our goal is always to raise enough to move as many people as we can from Camp Hope into a permanent home. And this year we're really, we're really gonna be aiming high. Last year, I think we were able to move four [people into rental housing]. This year we'd like to move six [people]. So, we just keep going.

del Norte: Amazing.

Baker: It is, but it's, again, you can't do it without partnerships in the community.

del Norte: So, one of my thesis titles is, from a New Mexico State University dissertation . . . called the [Cultural] Geography of the Homeless in Las Cruces.

Baker: Excellent.

del Norte: And it talks about corridors–

Baker: Yes.

del Norte: –of access, and being able to navigate a new city, for someone coming in. Can you talk about Community of Hope doing that, from a perspective of all inclusive–

Baker: Well.

del Norte: –services. You know, if–

Baker: Yeah.

del Norte: –someone's on their way from El Paso, and they've never been to the Community of Hope, but they know all about Las Cruces, just not that area.

Baker: I think it is a challenge. We do try to get the word out to various, not only various social service agencies in town, but I think also to some other businesses and things around the Interstate [sleeping/camping areas near I-10 & I-25]. That's my understanding of people, because a lot of times people are hitchhiking in, or they're at the bus station or something, and of course all the churches, [and] others know about Community of Hope.

I think the first few years were the real challenge because it was such a new idea to have a campus where all your services are met. It's less so now. I think it's more commonly known in the community that these are sources here. When we see homeless people showing up in town, board members, I'm on a committee, not on the board any longer, but we try to reach out. We try to let people know where to go. [Community of Hope] is on a bus line, but it doesn't have— It's not like in the center of things except it is the centering of those resources, and there is, as I said, a bus line.

Some of the challenges in terms of geography are, when people have proposed, or someone in the community who has talked a number of times about building small houses, getting some land up Highway 70, you would be very isolated up there. You are not gonna be close to anything that— grocery stores, schools, doctor's offices, anything. You're just isolated. At least at Camp Hope, uh, Community of Hope we do have some transportation available if people need to get to doctors, or they don't have to wait for a bus if you're having a health emergency.

Baker: The staff is there, and there's a van, and things like that we'll— Staff in their cars, or a Community of Hope van, I think, that can be taking people to insure that needs are met. That's probably another area where we need to be considering is access to these outside services.

Jardin de Los Niños is great for smaller children, but older kids have to get into the schools, and older kids can't stay, say, at Camp Hope. That's for adults. This is a real issue that I think we're still trying to figure out and address with another group of people. I've met with Yoli Silva, the social worker in the public schools who deals with homeless children, and she's talking about— Some of these are children whose parents have been deported, or for various reasons they're on their own, and they're like maybe junior high. She's not seen the teeny ones, but the ones like in junior high or high school, and yet some of them are graduating, and sticking with it, and yeah, living just right at the edge.

What do you do for high school graduation? So, one of the things she does is try to raise money for people to buy a nice outfit, or to help pay for things that are important for the next stage of a person's life. She gets a huge amount of donations at Christmas and things like that, but she needs support. Her program [Project Link] needs support year round. I know that's also the case with El Caldito. They seem to get a lot of volunteers at Thanksgiving and Christmas. We need them year round. But, you know, the homeless, we're good, but they still fall off the radar unless you're in these particular holiday seasons. So, making more of a regular part of our giving is real important.

del Norte: Would you call the Community of Hope a place that, maybe if not now, the community right around, in terms of geography, will begin to be more supportive, or has the issues between some of the businesses that are around Community of Hope been a barrier? Has the tide changed? I hear lots of different stories about “Some people like it, some people don’t,” and I’m talking about business owners in the area.

Baker: Yeah. I think that’s still the case. I think there’s more businesses in the area than when it was first built. It really was kind of out in the middle of nowhere. So, there’s more business owners, so you sort of think, “Well gosh, you knew this was here when you rented this space.” Right? It’s not like a surprise. But, I think that it’s always the case that there will be people who feel that homeless individuals are a blight, or are scary for customers, or, you know, it’s that, “We wanna see them...” “We don’t wanna see them.” “We wanna...”

Hence, you have in many communities these vagrancy laws that are very draconian, where people who are homeless are being, they’re— Being homeless is a crime, and you’re constantly harassed and moved on. You’re given these citations for sleeping on the sidewalk, but that’s where you, that’s your home, or for peeing in a bush because— But, that’s your home. What do you— So, you’re criminalized for the actions that wouldn’t— That, because you don’t have a home to do them in, it’s now a crime. And that leads me to another area that I really think we have as a gap, and that’s a homeless court system.

del Norte: That was my next question. I spoke with James Sassack—

Baker: Oh, good.

del Norte: –who is attempting to make more corridors between the courts and the community. In fact, I believe he’s the point of contact for the most part.

Baker: Ah, good.

del Norte: There must be more than him–

Baker: Well.

del Norte: –however he’s on his cell phone all the time–

Baker: Oh, good.

del Norte: –with someone that’s in the courts.

Baker: Well. Joy Goldbaum just won municipal judge, not just last fall, when the municipal judgeship largely on a basis of creating homeless courts, and they exist in communities like San Diego, where the court comes to you. You don’t have to go there. If you show up, for instance, I’ve been a juror. I haven’t been a (chuckles) plaintiff or a defendant.

Baker: I show up as a juror, I can't have my cell phone with me. I can't bring that into the courthouse. It's not there's lockers there. I have a car though, and I can go lock it up in the car. What do you do, though, if you're a homeless person [and] you have to go to the courthouse, especially if you're completely on the street, and you don't have any place to leave your stuff. They're not gonna let you bring it in. You're not showered. You can't dress nicely.

I have some family situation that relates to homelessness, but I had a brother who got caught up in the— He had dementia at the time. He's passed away since, but he was saluting, he had this notion he had to go and salute every monument he saw, so he got on private property, and saluted this monument. This was in Houston [Texas]. The police showed up, and got really belligerent with him, and he gets frightened, and starts acting out, and so they arrest him. So, we had to go down and bail him out. The judge in that courtroom was horrible. Was horrible! Threatened to send my brother to a state hospital for the criminally insane. Because he had stopped to salute a statue?

And because my brother was so nervous at that point he was kind of singing a little song to himself, which the judge took as disrespectful. And before my brother's case even came up, the judge looked [into the courtroom] and trashed a young man who was sitting out there in a t-shirt and jeans, clean, but it was a t-shirt and jeans, and the judge excoriated him for being disrespectful in the courtroom, and made him leave. So, I think there's this message from some judges that you better look good if you wanna come in. That doesn't help people who are homeless, who are intimidated anyway by this very, you know, hierarchical legal system.

Baker: And it's confusing and it's frightening. It's not like they have an attorney or know anything. So, what Joy Goldbaum found out about this— We've had one meeting on it last fall, but she wanted to then start building networks with other judges. How it operates in San Diego is that there's a courtroom that goes to their homeless facility. So, for example, it would go into the Resource Room at the Community of Hope.

Once a month a judge would show up, and prior to that, the week or so beforehand, residents, people at Camp Hope, or others who are homeless, would appeal and say, "We'd like— I'd like to have my case heard." The case managers would work with those folks to see if, "Alright. Do you have your ducks in a row? Can we go forward? Is this gonna be successful this time?"

People can show if they have been going to AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] meetings. If they've been taking any of these special classes. Anything they've done to get their act together counts in their favor, and the judges will usually, then, according to this experience in San Diego, say, "Alright, you've already done your time. You're now free to go. Your records been expunged. You no longer have that hanging over your head, this arrest warrant for these petty misdemeanors," or something. What a relief. People have— I've read some of the testimony from the people in San Diego who went through this. Now they can feel they can go to get driver's licenses. They can apply for apartments. They can get jobs. Before, they were afraid. They always had to stay a step ahead of the law because if they stayed still long enough they'd get caught and sent to jail.

Baker: So, this is— I think having a court system, the homeless court system, actually come to where people are, and, of course, they can do showers there. There's a clothes closet there. You can get, as you know, prepared in advance. You go in, and it's a much less adversarial of a system. It's more conversational, and the case managers are there to help present the person's case on what he or she has been doing. The written record is all prepared. It makes it easier for judges, even traditionally trained judges who might not be that sympathetic to start with, to see, "Yeah. Okay. This is working. Let's get this guy out of the legal system, and on to bigger and better things."

So, I think that's real exciting, but I didn't know that about the corridors, and the access. See, and those are all things that are complimentary, but we sometimes don't know what we're all doing in terms of building these resources.

del Norte: That's the argument of the [Cultural] Geography for the Homeless in Las Cruces, that the mapping is territorial when the access services are there.

Baker: Yeah.

del Norte: [Services are] all around us.

Baker: Yeah.

del Norte: However, do you know where they are? They might be around the corner. Do you know the direction around the corner? You know, that type of thing.

Baker: Yeah.

del Norte: Is it left, or right, or—

Baker: It really is.

del Norte: —the one person that you need to solve a problem—

Baker: Yeah.

del Norte: —might be across town. “You’re in the wrong place.” That type of thing.

Baker: Yeah. Well, hopefully if you can get into the Community of Hope, although the staff isn’t there on weekends, so it—

del Norte: That’s interesting you bring that up. In your experience, is that a major issue at the Camp? I always wonder when I’m at the Great Conversation on Tuesday mornings, how it works beginning Friday night all the way to Monday morning.

Baker: Yeah. Well, one of the things that we were able to get a lot of community support was the outdoor bathroom and shower building, which is very important because before then you had to go to a Porta-John [portable restroom] once the staff left and the building locked.

del Norte: They locked the bathrooms?

Baker: (Simultaneously) And that was it.

del Norte: The showers?

Baker: Well, that was it, there was no bathroom.

del Norte: Back then.

Baker: I mean, it was only—

del Norte: Before.

Baker: —in the building.

del Norte: Oh, goodness.

Baker: That was the only, those were the only restroom facilities until a few years ago. And the community came forward and, what was it? Seventy or seventy-five thousand dollars to build a very nice, it's like a campground, nice campground shower. Men's and women's bathroom/shower. So, that has been good. What I'm worried about— and, of course, there's an outdoor kitchen now at Camp Hope. There's a lounge area with DVDs and TV. The scary part this time of year is how hot it is because, again—

del Norte: Yeah.

Baker: —you know, people can hang out in the air conditioned building, during the [heat] in the resource room during the week.

del Norte: Yep.

Baker: Evenings aren't as much of an issue for the heat, but now, weekends? No. So, they have big ice chests, and I just posted, in fact this morning, on Facebook, "Las Cruces friends. Consider dropping by a bag of ice at Camp Hope," and so-and-so address because they have these huge ice chests, and that's the only way to keep anything cool. So, every once in a while I'll drag a bag of ice down there, or a couple of bags, which won't last terribly long, but it's something for keeping things cooler. I believe they have fans, but it's not— Yeah. This can be very, and they do have shade, but this is a very brutal area in the summertime.

Baker: Or, in winter if we have a hail storm or something like that, we have to— But, I think right now that still remains as a challenge. To try to help with hail and wind, we're building those three-sided structures over the tents, again, we can't close them in completely because if they're enclosed completely, under the City [Ordinance], you have to have sprinkler systems, and that is like thirty thousand dollars per unit, and that money's better spent, in our estimation, of getting people out of there in the first place, and into homes. That's a lot of money.

So, by having this three-sided [structure for tents], they don't have to have a sprinkler system for fire danger, but at least you get some shade on your tent so the tent itself doesn't disintegrate as quickly. Hail and snow, terrible winds, you can have some shelter from those with your little housing unit. One step at a time we're trying to take care of these things, but the heat, still I think, is a major issue, and I'm not quite sure how to do that.

del Norte: On Tuesday, when I was there, the mister [water mist spray system] was the big problem. They run the mister all weekend long. Of course, you can't leave it on all the time, but that's the issue. Well, whose gonna turn it off?

Baker: Yeah.

del Norte: So, people walk away from it. And then, as well, they're allowing people into the resource room to get some air conditioning.

Baker: Oh, they are now? Good.

del Norte: During the day.

Baker: On the weekend?

del Norte: No.

Baker: See, that's it.

del Norte: That's what I didn't realize until recently, how it shuts down.

Baker: Because there's no funding.

del Norte: Exactly.

Baker: I mean the staff here does incredible things. We just saw the audit, and I don't know if you did but, you know, for most non-profits eighty percent goes to programming, of funds raised, and twenty percent goes to overhead, to the administrative. Ninety— at Community of Hope, ninety-one percent goes to programs. Nine percent for overhead. It's extraordinarily affective with a very finite pool of money. But, that's really it, is we just have to keep figuring out other ways of bringing in money. It's just hard to—

del Norte: Is there something that happened to change that traditional Eighty/Twenty to the Ninety-one percent?

Baker: Well, I think it's just the way that Nicole [Martinez]— Well, first of all, many of the residents at Camp Hope volunteer, so a lot of the staff needs are met by volunteers. That is always something I bring up when I go, say, and talk with the Unitarians or the Progressive Voter Alliance, or whatever, and I'm trying to get community support for what we're doing— Is that these people aren't looking for what is the hand out. They're looking for the hand up. These people are working. It's just that they're not getting paid for it, but now they're getting some work experience which would help, but more than that, they really feel like this is giving back.

So, it gives dignity to the people who volunteer. Who are living in the tent city. Some people, even when they are in apartments, come back and do volunteering. They are very good voices for the interests of those who are homeless because they themselves are just like there, or just a step away from there. I think that has kept down some of the costs for staff needs. And I think the other is that the staff, just whenever we have, for instance, a big open house. We used to have it at Thanksgiving, but we've now moved it, our last one was this spring.

It's a community outreach [Spring of Hope] event. It's not a fundraising event, although we end up getting some gifts at that, but the whole point is donor engagement, and in engaging with our donors, thanking the community, and educating the broader public about what it is the Community of Hope does. So, they get tours.

Baker: They get all these— Anyway, it's on a Saturday, and the staff is there donating their time. I mean, the paid staff is there donating their time, so they do a lot of things off the clock, and I think that's another way that we're able to keep the administrative cost small, is because we just have people who are absolutely committed to what they're doing, and it's, I tell you, it's inspiring.

del Norte: Do you think that more people should be employed at the Community of Hope, to maybe move the volunteers into a position where they have more ability to be there?

Baker: If—

del Norte: And not necessarily volunteers being paid—

Baker: Yeah.

del Norte: —but that, those opportunities.

Baker: If money was available, but what we're finding is there's less and less money available.

del Norte: Is that state or federal?

Baker: (Simultaneously) Both.

del Norte: Okay.

Baker: State and federal. Yeah.

del Norte: State and federal.

Baker: Yeah, because as you know from the university [NMSU], looking at the accounting, and the budget battles going on there, the state has been really hit financially, and therefore is looking to cut what they can. So, at this point we're just, I think it's kind of— We're doing better than just maintaining because of these other programs, you know, there are avenues we're seeking out for raising funds, but maybe someday (chuckles) when the economy's— When you have a more generous spirit, let's say, in the State houses [and] Washington [D.C.].

del Norte: The reason I bring this up is because I'm looking— If you could talk about the specific challenges that someone helping clients, paid or volunteer, what are the specific challenges that they have, and, of course, I'll be moving this conversation toward some of the benefits that they might get, or don't get.

Baker: Okay.

del Norte: What is some of the weight that they bear? The heavy lifting that gets done?

Baker: Well, I think psychologically it's hard. I think there's a real emotional toll, where you might feel that it's just endless because you're always, there's always— There's always need. There's always someone in crisis. It's not like you can ever just kick back and relax, and go, "Okay. Good. Took care of all homelessness in Las Cruces." We're doing well as a community, as I've said many times, but it's like this, I won't say a black hole, but it's a huge need, and it's not going away, and if anything, what we find is that health care needs increase. I mean, home [and] housing needs increase with problems, with access to health care, which could—

So, we don't know. Say, with the cutting back on the affordable health care act. Will that cause more people, then, to not be able to afford health care, or to go into bankruptcy because they have to— They haven't paid for healthcare, and then that makes them loose their homes? And you can get into these cycles. I know you know this as a student of history, that there's a tipping point where people then suddenly can't recover. They can't find their feet again. I worry that we might be on the cusp of something like that depending on what federal and state policies are in place, and I say that, of course, as a political scientist. I would, wouldn't I? Because I think policy really makes a difference on the ground, and how people live their lives. It's not like— disjointed. Yeah. "They're doing that in D.C., and therefore it doesn't—"

del Norte: Sure.

Baker: “No.” You know. “It matters.”

del Norte: Aside, can you explain a little bit the difference between policy and law? And this is a current question that I have—

Baker: Cool.

del Norte: –but in terms of “On-the-ground.” And the reason I bring this up is I heard the difference between the policy happening on the border, and the laws in place. Can you point that towards our issue of homelessness?

Baker: (Simultaneously) I sure will try.

del Norte: What’s the difference between policy and law?

Baker: Laws are generally statutory, or they’re ordinances. If, at the municipal level, their ordinances are passed by a legis-, they’re passed by a lawmaking body, whatever the lawmaking body is: legislature, city council, county commission. And then they’re written, and they’re usually more general because you can’t just be— You don’t want to make laws all the time. So, you’re trying to do something that will address the issue. But, it doesn’t have to— If it can’t be super specific, or it becomes antiquated really quickly— Policies are how those laws operationalize. How they’re interpreted.

del Norte: And how they're put into place.

Baker: (Simultaneously) I have a— Exactly. For example, and this has nothing to do with the homelessness, but it's because I was looking a little bit at border issues recently. Under the statute that gives the Customs and Border Patrol [CBP] authority to have checkpoints, the law specifically states those checkpoints can operate with any reasonable border from a reasonable distance from an international border. The policy as defined by the agency itself is that's a hundred miles.

del Norte: The buffer zone.

Baker: The buffer zone.

del Norte: Yeah. Okay. Yeah.

Baker: The law does not say anything about a hundred miles. I mean, I don't, and since that includes two-third, two— Yeah. Two out of every three Americans are in that hundred mile zone from an international border. One could argue, "Well, that doesn't sound too reasonable to me." But, that's a policy decision that was made, in fact, a number of, well, years and years ago, but that's not part of the legal language. That's— It's how they operationalized the term "Reasonable Distance." So, that's— I'm trying to think, in terms of the homeless, what might be an example.

del Norte: I have a question that would help.

Baker: Okay.

del Norte: What is your knowledge of poverty and hunger in rural areas of New Mexico, and specifically, in the Colonias?

Baker: None.

del Norte: If we're talking about the border, there's definitely a type—

Baker: That's huge.

del Norte: —of Colonia on both sides.

Baker: Yeah.

del Norte: And all through Doña Ana county [New Mexico].

Baker: Yeah.

del Norte: So, my focus is the Community of Hope. Of course, I have the chapter on the Colonias.

Baker: On the Colonias. I wish I had more information for you.

del Norte: That's okay.

Baker: Have you talked at all with Diana Bustamante.

del Norte: No. Is that a professor?

Baker: She was a professor—

del Norte: Okay.

Baker: —when I got here, but she is now, I think she's now a probate judge. But, she has been the head of the Colonias Development Council for a long time.

del Norte: I need to visit that office. Yeah.

Baker: She is, and she still may be there, but Diana Bustamante. Dr. Bustamante, although she doesn't go by that anymore because she left the university to do more of this kind of activism work. She is terrific! And she will be able to give you a much better idea of how those issues are being handled in the Colonias. Yeah, the Colonias Development Council.

del Norte: I'll kind of run through some of the questions I have.

Baker: Okay.

del Norte: We're not in any hurry.

Baker: (Simultaneously) I'm gonna—

del Norte: It's been about fifty minutes. Would you like to take a little break?

Baker: Yeah. Let's take a little break.

del Norte: Absolutely.

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[Recording stopped — New recording file started]

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del Norte: I'm back with Nancy Baker, and we have a new file name for the recording which is 18HOPE\_0204.wav. Nancy, can you give us a little bit of background about how law, and the rights of women helped shape not only your career, but your perspectives on working at Hacienda Del Sol, and in the Community of Hope?

Baker: Yes, I think that's a good question. Actually, my research area is on law and the executive branch. So, I was one of the first faculty to ever publish on the Attorney General's office, so that's what I was focused on. When I came here I was hired to teach Presidency and Constitutional Law, Civil Liberties, and then in 1993 I was given a class called Law and Sex that had been on the books for a while, but not taught. So, I picked it up, and then from, basically, every few semester at NMSU, I'd taught it for over twenty years, and really saw a lot of the evolution in the law, in how women's rights, and not just women's rights, but rights for same-sex couples, rights for men who were stay-at-home fathers, all of these rights evolving as, sometimes these are the areas that are the slowest to change because they're the closest to home. It's the most intractable kind of social issues to deal with.

I also then, in my first sabbatical I was in Turkey, and traveling a little bit, and began getting interested in the whole notion of honor killings, and the killing of women by their husbands and boyfriends, and my husband at that time became interested in the topic. He was a faculty member back here as well, and we began doing research, and publishing a little bit in that area.

So, while I stayed primarily on Presidency, and the Attorney General's office, a real important component of my research and teaching was in this area of women's rights. I'm especially concerned with sexual violence against women by partners, and repeatedly I have seen, when I look at studies relating to homeless women, that violence in the home is major factor in them fleeing, and sometimes just with the clothes on their back.

Baker: We do have La Casa in our community, which is a very good battered women's shelter. But, maybe people choose not to go there, or they get on a bus and they set up, suddenly they end up in Las Cruces, and they're identified first as someone who needs a home. Not someone who needs the violence counseling, even though I think that's an issue. So, the violence against women, the sexual harassment in the workplace, or on the street, or just in getting social services.

I think those things remain real, when I've talked with a few of the women at Camp Hope before they've moved over, say, into Sue's House. The violence is something that has been a real issue for them. Maybe as children in the home. Maybe with abusive spouses or boyfriends, and that lowers self-esteem. That lowers a sense that you can actually accomplish anything in life.

It makes you very fearful. Including fearful of putting down roots, and yet having those roots. Having that community connectedness is really important for healing, and for progressing onto the next stages of your life. You can't just spend a life on the lam, but I— a lot of these women, I think, see that as the only way to survive, and that is extremely terrifying to me. That, to see people brought to that situation. Sometimes because of the violence, and they have fled, they've gone— They've gone into drug abuse or alcohol abuse. Sometimes, because they don't have any money, they'll turn to prostitution, and then they have all the legal issues, and the health issues that come out of those behaviors. So, I think having a stable place to live is a really necessary first step for the healing for women in these situations.

del Norte: I'm reminded of one of the— Almost a hundred years ago, there's a book called, *One Thousand Homeless Men*. And I can't recall the author [*One Thousand Homeless Men: A Study of Original Records* by Alice Willard Solenburger.] but it's about hobos—

Baker: Yes.

del Norte: —and the stigma of being on the streets, and also the romanticization—

Baker: Yeah.

del Norte: —of being a hobo. That changed, and now we see homeless women, and their children. Can you talk a little bit about our area, and I believe we talked about this off-the-record—

Baker: Yeah. Yeah.

del Norte: —and that, how women are affected by not having these— access, or traditional men's territory, access to the services.

Baker: Yeah. Well, in fact it ties into the point you were making during our break that when you do go, and you're working at El Caldito, you see it. It's predominantly a male clientele.

Baker: Very rarely do you see a single woman, or a woman with children coming in, and yet we know that, or I have heard from the experts in the local community, that the face of homelessness in southern New Mexico is a single woman with children. You don't see them panhandling. You don't see them hanging around outside of Wal-Mart looking for money, or by the side of the highway. You don't see them even here at El Caldito. There's very— There's a few that have stayed at Camp Hope, even though there are other alternatives.

For some of them they don't wanna be in— They have expressed a concern about being found if they're in a permanent address. Others like the wide open space, but generally speaking I think that women are out there, they're homeless, and we need a better job at finding them, and letting them know that they can have, that they can be safe, that there's alternatives. I think that's the main thing that people need to hear, is that there's options. There's alternatives. There's support networks to help make it possible.

del Norte: Do you know of programs available through Hacienda, or what's developed since Hacienda that have—

Baker: Boy. Hacienda's so old.

del Norte: Right.

Baker: That's like fifteen years. So, since I've been on the board—

del Norte: (Simultaneously) I don't wanna leave it because it focuses on women.

Baker: Yeah. Yeah.

del Norte: And I think now it's kind of all inclusive, but this was specifically, and you mentioned La Casa.

Baker: Yeah. Yeah.

del Norte: And I didn't know that La Casa's not in Las Cruces. It's—

Baker: No, it is. But, it's not part of the Community of Hope.

del Norte: (Simultaneously) Okay. Gotcha.

Baker: Yeah. It's separate agency. Yes. There's certainly overlap in the clientele that we serve, and the people that we're trying to help.

del Norte: And that's exactly what I'm looking for.

Baker: Yeah.

del Norte: The types of overlap that, maybe they're programs, maybe they're specific agendas that the development committee may have had.

Baker: I think there are courses. I think one of the approaches at Mesilla Valley Community of Hope is that we've got a lot of courses that are offered in the Resource Room that are available to the people who are served through Community of Hope. And I believe some of those have dealt with issues — well, for men — of anger management, and for conflict management, and for women as well. I don't know if there are self-defense classes. That would be probably a useful thing to find out. Some of them are just efforts to, I guess— There are possibilities of courses [classes].

I believe, well, Sue's House was the major innovation, and the fact that women are not now being housed immediately when they are found, if not at Sue's House, in Section 8 housing. I was invited to a luncheon in 2015 by the Mesilla Valley Community of Hope.

They were seeking new board members, and community committee members across a number of their programs, so they had sort of a general invitation to people who had been involved before, but when I went that was my first question for Nicole [Martinez] is, "You've talked a lot about these programs. Well, what about homeless women?" Because that was the whole thing with Hacienda Del Sol, and she said, "We— because we get women into housing right away." They aren't at Camp Hope, except for the very rare instance where the woman has wanted to stay at Camp Hope. They aren't— We try our very best to get them into a safe place immediately.

Baker: There's counseling available. There's medical help available. There's a lot of resources that Community of Hope can pull together that mental health, physical health, there's some legal advice that comes, advisors that come on campus periodically, and offer free legal services to people who are served through the Community of Hope. So, I think there's a whole support network that women who come to Community of Hope can tap into. It's finding other women who don't have those, and getting them aware of what Community of Hope has to offer.

I guess that's probably the big challenge right now. I think that people at Community— at La Casa that deals with the— It's the rape and violence shelter for women. They would know about Community of Hope, obviously, at this point, and vice-versa. So, there's services that could probably be offered with some overlap. I'm not sure. I don't know though. I'm just making that up. I presume. It makes sense.

del Norte: There should be lots of overlap, and I think that's what we were talking about during the break, is that we need to find ways to connect quicker rather than the traditional channels that take a day, or a week, or even longer, and then people disappear.

Baker: But, you also can't force people to take services if they don't want. I mean one of the surprising things was sometimes having women living in Camp Hope, and not wanting to leave. Not wanting to be inside a building. I mean, kind of freaked out by that. They had PTSD. They don't wanna be in enclosed spaces.

Baker: So, sometimes that takes a while with counseling to get to the point where they then feel comfortable moving into an apartment. So, it's not always, you have to go, not only— You have to have the resources available right away, and the knowledge available right away, but you also have to let people evolve in their pace, when they feel comfortable accessing those services.

del Norte: Do you have experiences with Hacienda and working with counselors that would also be a case worker type format?

Baker: Well, in fact, yeah. I think a lot of the case workers, when we dealt with Hacienda, were also counselors. I'm not— I don't know how the professions are divvied up with Community of Hope. They may have separate social worker counselors that are distinct from, well, see, I think case managers and social workers often have the same skill set, and come from the same educational background, so they may be perfectly, may be following the same model that Hacienda did all those years ago in terms of providing both.

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[End first hour of interview]



**Interview 5 second hour — June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2018**

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**David Lee del Norte:** The reason I ask is, I just don't have a lot of narrators that know the beginnings from the 1990s.

**Nancy Baker:** Yeah.

del Norte: It's mostly people that are on-the-ground now.

Baker: Sure.

del Norte: And in light of taking on counselorships, or case work management, can you talk about maybe some of the programs that might help alleviate the stresses for those that are working at the camp, or in the community in general? I'm just looking—

Baker: I think you're right. There's a real potential for burnout. As we were talking during break, too, especially if you have empathy, and you come in with an open heart, and there's some real horror stories here. Things that really touch your soul, and you just can't forget them easily. And as a consequence you might be internalizing.

Baker: You don't wanna go and, you know, tell other people what's going on in your workplace because you don't wanna lose, you know, there's confidentiality issues, and you have to be discreet with, you know, careful with people's privacy.

But, at the same time, you have to have a way to deal with it, and I'm sure individually people deal with it. The people that I know of that work with Community of Hope: camping, hiking, strong friendship relationships, strong partnerships, and family units. Those are the things off-hand. I don't know of formal classes. I suppose that some people might have their own therapist to help them deal with the kind of emotional toll these things can take, but I believe [in] being in nature.

The fact that our community is right next day to a National Monument helps. We have gorgeous country, just within thirty minutes you're on the trail, and that's from downtown. I think this is something that some of the people I know that work at Community of Hope do take advantage of, but I don't know what other people do. I think that's a very good question to follow up with Nicole [Martinez] is, and some of her staff when you meet with them is, "How do you handle this? How do you . . . ?"

I know for us, as a board, one of the things that makes it doable for us, and we're just a committee that's fundraising, right? One of the things that makes it possible for us is that we all, even though we're— I'm new to many of the people on the board. I've known a few of them a number of years, it's a real nice, it's a really nice supportive group of people.

Baker: Everybody's working hard, and yet when we have meetings we can laugh. We'll bring a meal. We'll just share fun times, too. We'll have, sometimes, like a little retreat, or we'll have a debriefing after a major event, after an open house.

We'll have a debriefing that somehow involves beer, and a fire in the fire pit, and trying to make it something where we ourselves don't feel dreading to come to work on these projects because, as volunteers, we are all essential. Volunteers are really— help make Community of Hope operate. So, volunteers, also— We have to take care of our own mental health, and to ensure that we can keep giving to all these very important causes. And we don't have nearly the pressure that the professional staff faces day-in and day-out, week-in and week-out.

del Norte: This is why, or this question is why I've been prying for this. Are there employer support systems, or city and state programs available at all, and to any degree, that might benefit social workers, or people on camp?

Baker: I don't know.

del Norte: Because I know the answer to the question, but I always like to ask, and "I don't know" is what I get because that's what's going on with care for the community.

Baker: Yeah.

del Norte: That there is nothing. There are no benefits to this.

Baker: I don't know of anything like that. I mean that individuals will seek out therapy, but I don't know of having institutionalized, or with cost covered by city, or— and that would actually make sense for a number of people. For people who work in a number of professions in the city, and the county, and the state. Like in law enforcement, or in fire fighters, or a school. Social workers, where you could also be exposed to a lot of high, high stress situations. I don't know of any formal mechanisms to take care of people's mental health and wellbeing.

del Norte: One of the reasons that I go that direction is because—

Baker: Yeah.

del Norte: —I haven't found anything yet that does that type of—

Baker: Because I was thinking, well, maybe you know something I don't know, and I can find out.

del Norte: Well. The thing is, is it seems like it should be a part of a health care society.

Baker: Yes.

del Norte: We don't live in that society. We live in a different type of approach to delivering health care, and mental well-being.

Baker: Especially mental health, especially mental health. There is at least a recognition that mental health issues plague a large number of the homeless, and the staff is very good at ensuring that people get into mental health if they're willing to take the initiative to go to, you know, to see mental health therapist and counselors, or get on medications, and help them stay on medications, but again, you know, you also have the willingness of the participant. You can't force it on people, but many times people are hurting enough they really do want to see mental health— mental health care.

I had a very sad experience with a young man who was one of the movers-and-shakers in creating Camp Hope, and then was working part-time with Community of Hope, and he bought my old RV, and fixed it up as an apartment, you know, home. And he would send me a little money every month, and, oh well, and then he just disappeared. Well. He had a big blow-up. Something came up at Camp Hope, and— I don't know what it was, but it was very disruptive, and extremely disturbing to the rest of the staff, and a number of the residents, and Nicole [Martinez] said he had to leave.

And he had no other job. And he had no other— And he started really cycling down, and then the last I know of, a couple months ago, I got a knock on the door from the police saying, "Is this your RV?" Well, I mean, we'd already passed title over to him so, "No. We sold it to him." And he'd just abandoned it in a parking lot up here with his dogs inside.

Baker: So, they don't really know what happened to him. And it's really, he— Nicole [Martinez] said she understood that he had PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder], but he refused to go in, and get help, and she kept trying to push him to go in, and get help, but from his early childhood — horrific early childhood experiences — he told me a little bit about. Clearly those issues had not all been resolved, and he was absolutely adamant that he could handle it.

del Norte: So, again, that's why I ask these questions, because this is a case of someone that is at Camp that might benefit from just having a little bit more than what's available, or—

Baker: Well. He was offered, and he didn't want it—

del Norte: Yeah.

Baker: —because he was a staff member, you see.

del Norte: Oh.

Baker: He was a part-time staff member—

del Norte: Okay.

Baker: –but he was a staff member by then, and— bright, funny, you know. Someone who should— It'd be hard to imagine, “Why are you homeless?” because it seemed like, he seemed to have his act together. But, we're all fragile.

That to me is, you know, you didn't ask me the real background questions, but my background, my family comes out of Appalachia. My father from West Virginia, my mother from— My father was the son of an older single woman who took in laundry to support him, and my mother was the oldest of a large coal mining family. So, for both of them, World War II was the avenue out, right? These were job opportunities, and my dad went in the Army Air Corps. It wasn't the Air Force yet. Came out on the GI bill, and became a geophysicist, but then he became ill with Multiple Sclerosis, and suddenly our family fortune would go back down again because no one would hire him.

He was so, you know— You didn't have any ADA, you know, Americans with Disabilities Act, really. But, as a consequence of all that, I think it's made me really sensitive to the vagaries of life, and how vulnerable we all are, and at any moment these mechanisms we build around ourselves, they're all fragile.

I have a younger sister who has had mental illness issues from a very, very young age, and she now has Multiple Sclerosis as well. She would be homeless. She would be homeless if it wasn't for the MS getting her then, and she was in Arizona, at the time, getting into the Arizona long-term care system.

Baker: She would be— She would have spent— Well, my mother took care of her until my mother was close to dying, and then Susan— So, as a result, I know within my family, a number of people who are just— Who could have been right on the edge.

del Norte: Do you think—

Baker: (Simultaneously) And it's really important we take care of mental health and physical health, and— anyway.

del Norte: Well, I'm curious. Growing up in Appalachia, do you think that that experience is what made you so sensitive in your adult life?

Baker: Well, actually, I didn't. My parents both left Appalachia, but I spent— As a young woman, I went back and lived with my grandmother for a while at the Holler [Housing on small valley land area]—

del Norte: Oh.

Baker: —and I wrote the county history book, so I could travel around and, you know, all these old-timers, my little California plates, and my Volkswagen. That was a real life experience, but I think it did— That period of time, living with her, and then my parents' sensibility, coming out of it, is where we— We have to support one another as a community.

Baker: We're not these rugged individualists, you know, "I pulled myself up by my bootstraps." That's a real nonsensical view of human relations. We are part of a web. We are not individuals. I mean, I think individual rights are really important, having taught some liberties for thirty years, but I think the important thing is that we are each other's brother and sisters' keepers. We have to be. We have obligations to others, and they have reciprocal obligations to us. We're not separate from other human beings.

del Norte: This brings me to a question: How about, can you talk about the Over The Rainbow Scholarship that you have?

Baker: Oh, yeah.

del Norte: You mentioned the co-, the web— and that's kind of what it's based on.

Baker: Well, I'm glad that you asked me that even though it's not with Community of Hope.

del Norte: Okay.

Baker: This is through the Community Foundation of Southern New Mexico. I set up with my husband a scholarship fund for non-traditional women returning to school.

Baker: They can either go to Doña Ana branch Community College, or they can come over here to NMSU main campus, but every year we provide at least one scholarship, sometimes two, to help support someone's dreams for an education.

My mother, as a young woman growing up in Appalachia, had always wanted to go to college, and it simply wasn't a financial option. She looked into some, well, first of all she wanted to study architecture, but that was at the University of Virginia which didn't accept women until the 1970s, so that avenue was closed off back in the 1940s and 1950s. Then she wanted to— She looked into going to some school, but there was no work-study at that time, and young women not only were not supposed to work, they were supposed to arrive with ball gowns and riding outfits — very elitist.

Up until World War II, even through World War II, the educational system in America was pretty darn elitist. What changed it was the GI Bill for men. It really democratized access to higher education. So, you had a guy like my dad, as I told you, his mother's taking in laundry, and I think it was on a wash board, I think that's the kind of laundry we're talking about here, to try to survive economically, and he ended up becoming a geophysicist. Do you see how incredible this is? These life stories that just, in one life-span, the access to education.

Baker: So, I'm passionate about access to education, both for my mother's sake and my father's, and I think there's fewer opportunities for women especially here in southern New Mexico which is why the scholarship is specifically geared to women versus a number of people in these circumstances. We also know from studies in economic development that if you pull a woman up, a whole family and a whole community benefits. It really does have a ripple effect that's very documentable on a broad scale.

So, that's why, and I was very fortunate to find this other scholarship program, because I thought, "Well how do I start giving a scholarship? I can't just like run ads in the newspaper?" But, the institutional structure I found at the Community Foundation, because they offer a scholarship called Spring Board, also for women seeking higher education, or a graduate record— We'll even fund a graduate record exam, not a graduate record exam, but a GED (General Education Diploma), to get your high school equivalency, or if you just wanna, you know, you need the tools.

You're now a dental hygienist, but you need— Or a hairdresser, you need tools. So, they provide financial support on a broad spectrum of getting women where they need to be to support themselves, and their families, and to survive, and to thrive.

del Norte: Is it still active?

Baker: Oh, yeah, yeah. Yeah, yeah. We're meeting Monday to pick more candidates.

del Norte: (Simultaneously) I'm so glad I asked the question then because it seems like, with your history of helping women have greater access, and, as well, through monetary sources, or whether it's at the Community of Hope, or in Las Cruces, there must be an umbrella of organizations, and I'm trying to get at that web you were talking about earlier.

Baker: Oh. Okay. Yeah.

del Norte: What other connected organizations are there? You mentioned Doña Ana Community College?

Baker: Yes. Although [scholarship students] can go there, I don't administer the scholarship through say, NMSU or DACC because they take a little piece of the pie.

del Norte: Oh.

Baker: There's a smaller piece of the pie that's taken by the Community Foundation, and I can then, we have the Community Foundation of Southern New Mexico has its own scholarship committee which does not— It's not geared, a lot of that's based on financial need, or on other factors that we don't really take into— Citizenship, we don't take that into account.

del Norte: Interesting.

Baker: Yeah. We just saw their application form, because by mistake that, our application, their application form was used for our applicants this year, so we have to kind of pull out . . . Well, this is ire-, I don't need their ethnicity. I don't need to know if they're a cit-, I don't need to their family salary income. You know, you need to talk to— We're interested in people with need, but we don't need, like, your W2 forms, or anything like that. You know what I mean?

del Norte: Right.

Baker: But, I think the Community Foundation has some services— They're kind of an umbrella, but it's a little more of a— It's not geared necessarily. I think they do a little bit with homeless issues. I think Nicole [Martinez] has gotten some support from them through some of their foundations, but they basically administer the kinds of programs that individuals in the community have set up, whether it's a scholarship, or it's an arts program, or, if say, I don't know, if you knew Ammu and Rama Devasthali.

They've given a lot to the arts in this community, and she got her art masters at NMSU, and he was a retired physician here in town, and they're on, she actually is, I know her through the Spring Board, and the Over the Rainbow, because we've combined our two scholarships so we're all on the same committee.

del Norte: Gotcha.

Baker: They have another [Devasthali Family] Foundation just for the arts, and so that's how these things are set up, is people in the community setting up either endowments, or funding certain programs, and the Community Foundation is the operator kind-of-thing. They handle the investments. They do, they raise funds as well, but, say for scholarships that are strictly under their Board, but we're kind of part of the tentacles coming out there, is how our things—

So, I know that that's a good resource. I think there's other groups like with the Colonias Development Council, but I don't really know a huge amount about them, but I bet they have a network also, of agencies that they work real closely with along the border. I know the ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union] does border rights work, or had been doing border rights work here, so those often pick up border communities of people in need, financial need, migrants, things like that. I know that there's an organization that will place, that looks for people to come and visit federal prisoners who are migrants in El Paso.

del Norte: The Lutheran folks?

Baker: I've just heard about it.

del Norte: Or maybe it's Catholic Charities. I've heard about this, too.

Baker: Maybe it had a different name, but it could, I don't know who the sponsoring group is, but a friend of mine who's a faculty member here, well, maybe she's retired now, a French professor, has been meeting with— There's a lot of African migrants, and she's been, who speak French, and she's been going down with this one fellow, and he's had no—

del Norte: Oh, to translate.

Baker: Yeah. To translate, and just to visit.

del Norte: Wow.

Baker: And then she's helping to raise, she's worried about him. He's getting ready to be deported, and she wants to make sure he has enough of a little nest egg. At least a couple hundred bucks. So, when he's deported he has clothes. He has taxi fare to get to whatever his village is, or something.

del Norte: Right. So, you bring that—

Baker: So, there's so much need.

del Norte: Right.

Baker: We're in an area with a huge amount of need.

del Norte: And that's what I was gonna suggest, is that these connections, and these webs, are because there's so much need.

Baker: Yeah.

del Norte: And the importance of not only partnerships, but being in access to each other, and—

Baker: Yeah.

del Norte: —each of the organizations. I don't wanna leave what the [MVCH] Development Committee is doing presently, but with that in mind, what's going on in our area? What is the Development Committee up to in 2018? You mentioned, I believe, the Tents to Rents? Is there anything else that might suggest 2019 for the community?

Baker: Well, that's a very good question. We're excited this year because for the first time we're gonna to have someone who's been hired through Vista, so it will be a short term. I think it's like a six month, or one year, position through the Vista program to help us sort of go to the next stage in fundraising, because that's development is basically fundraising and community outreach, community education. So, with her—

Baker: And what's fun for me is, not only was she a former student of mine, she also was one of the recipients of Over the Rainbow. Don't you love this? That's like the—

del Norte: (Simultaneously) I met her on Tuesday. Susie.

Baker: Susie Johnson. I love Susie.

del Norte: Okay. Great. I met her for the first time, and she knows about this project, so this is perfect.

Baker: Oh, good.

del Norte: So, this is perfect. It's— And I'm sorry to interrupt.

Baker: Okay, see, I'm telling you, it's like everything is, in spite of ourselves things are—

del Norte: Yeah.

Baker: So, Susie is, yeah, she's really come full circle. So, I think when she comes on board she'll probably take more of an active role. We don't handle volunteers with our committee.

Baker: There's another committee that handles volunteers, but has been sort of dormant, and if Susie takes more of a leadership role, both with helping us formalize and institutionalize the fundraising side of it, and then with the volunteers, I really think we're primed to move into the next level where we really can start to talk about, not just these bare bones things out at Camp Hope, it's important getting people into homes, but what next?

We've almost, we've raised plenty of money now for the three-sided structures, which surprised me. I know we need another seventeen, but we have something like, or another twenty-something, and we have like, we have seventeen, and we need another twenty-something, we have money like for fifty-two. So, people have liked that idea. That's a—

del Norte: More structures.

Baker: I think people like to give. Those little three-sided over your tent—

del Norte: Oh, yeah.

Baker: Each one is like seven hundred and fifty dollars, and I think because it's such, it's concrete, and people like to connect to something real when they're giving money. Not just sort of general administrative costs.

del Norte: I do know that it's an issue in Camp—

Baker: Yeah.

del Norte: —that some people get the structures, and others are in tents.

Baker: We have the money. Right now, it's getting the labor force to put them up.

del Norte: That's what I understand, is that the folks that put them up originally aren't ready to do it again, or something.

Baker: And yet, well, or they've fallen through the crack. It's the construction trades program at Doña Ana Community College, and it was, I think, it was a really— They were designed, and initially built through the auspices of the instructor, the faculty member over there—

del Norte: Yeah.

Baker: —and I think nobody really wants to step on his toes because it was his idea, but I think we really need to get (unintelligible)— I'll say it, even though it should probably be off the record or something, but the Home Builders Association, or somebody, you know, "People, come in and help. We can put one up in a weekend."

del Norte: Sure.

Baker: Get the boards all cut, have it all prepped.

del Norte: Right.

Baker: Have a barn-raising, right? The money is there. So, now we have to think about, okay, what other projects do we wanna do? We've got the bathrooms which was a huge, wonderful and huge, and that had a great— That was called Project Dignity. That was exactly what that was about.

del Norte: What's the name?

Baker: Project Dignity was the one fundraising initiative for the bathrooms.

del Norte: It's such an important topic at Camp—

Baker: Don't you think? Yeah.

del Norte: —that the issue now is cleaning up after yourself.

Baker: Oh, yeah.

del Norte: So, they're there.

Baker: And having enough, and having enough toilet paper.

del Norte: Exactly.

Baker: One of the things we try, and think, "Alright, if you're picking up a roll for yourself, drop off some over at Camp Hope, or drop off ice, or just to keep that in our consciousness, that there's needs over here." Yeah.

del Norte: It's there. That's the important part.

Baker: Yeah.

del Norte: They might have their own issues with cleaning up, but—

Baker: Yeah. Yeah.

del Norte: —it's there.

Baker: Well, and that's why what Randy [Harris] does over there with The Great Conversations—

del Norte: Yep.

Baker: –is incredible. I have such respect for him, and–

del Norte: The first interviewee was Randy Harris, yeah.

Baker: Yeah, and it's truly, it is self-governance. They, with their own patrols, and, of course, it's very active volunteer stuff that they do with Camp Hope, and the Community of Hope. Yeah, it's incredible.

del Norte: Bringing up self-governance. Can you talk about that model of the Camp, in your knowledge? Because I just spoke with Jack Turney on Tuesday. Why isn't there someone like a security guard at the shack? There's problems with the shack being, well, overnight issues come up, and people aren't always there to address the issues.

Baker: And I think there was someone the first couple of years, who was at Camp Hope, and they were permanent there, a very long time, who sort of served that role. Once he is in permanent housing though, there's not an institutional mechanism for electing another mayor, who says, "Alright. Now that's your responsibility to do—" that I know of. I don't know of anything like that.

del Norte: Well. It's part of the self-governance that came out; however, the issue is that they don't wanna put a security guard with a badge.

Baker: No.

del Norte: They want it to be self-governed; however, there's that leeway.

Baker: That means there's responsibilities.

del Norte: Exactly.

Baker: If you're doing it yourself that means you have to step up. That means even if you just wanna go sleep in your tent: "No, not tonight. It's your turn." And that is what Randy [Harris] does, from what I understand, and what I saw, that little bit that I went, is that you really have to create a norm, and a strong enough norm that will last as people come and go. You get newcomers coming-in who aren't yet socialized on what the norms are for the Camp.

You've got old-timers who are the institutional memory, and they are now in permanent housing, and they're not around, and it's a tough thing, I think, because it is by definition a transient population. The Great Conversations are important for doing some socializing, and as I understand it, Randy [Harris] begins every session with this— About taking care of yourself, and taking care of others.

del Norte: The Spirit of the Camp.

Baker: The Spirit of the Camp which communicates that we're all responsible for each other's back here. All of us need to look out for each other. And I think that's a very important ethic, but operationalizing it, getting it into, alright, what does that mean? Who's gonna be on duty here, and there, because hierarchy doesn't work with this population, and plus, I'm not big on hierarchy anyhow. I'm kind of an anarchist. I think it's important that people take ownership of the Camp, and feel pride in what the Camp represents, and then make sure, then, that you don't have an outside force like a law enforcement person or a security person.

I think that's the opposite of what, that would chase me away. And especially for people who feel like they're already on the edge of the law. They've been harassed by law enforcement. They're worried about this, you know, these misdemeanor charges out against them, or— And then they're, then they've been, extra charges because they've had missed court dates, and then now there's an arrest warrant. This is not where you introduce a security guard.

del Norte: And I think that it's vital that we introduce other camps to that principle—

Baker: Yeah. Yeah.

del Norte: —that it's— That they don't need security guards, and I wonder about that because of numbers in different bigger cities. However, if it's a model where there's only so many people—

Baker: Yes.

del Norte: –on the campus–

Baker: Yeah.

del Norte: –it can happen.

Baker: Yeah.

del Norte: And I'm wondering—

Baker: Because we've had more luck. Camp Hope has fifty tent sites, but I think the optimum number is like thirty, thirty-five.

del Norte: Yes. There's usually between thirty and thirty-five people in Camp.

Baker: Yeah. And we're not really pushing to have it full up because I think it adds— more population adds other issues. But, it is— This is a population that may not, that is still maybe kind of new at trust.

Baker: New at building the kind of relationships with each other where they trust the other person. And I think they, the transiency issue that I mentioned, that people are coming and going, and Randy [Harris] is incredible, meeting there every week, week-in and week-out to, “At least, let’s talk about it.”

Because the Community of Hope staff, the paid staff, don’t wanna come in with, “These are the policies.” It has been much more effective when Camp residents say, “Okay. These, this is what, how we want this to operate,” and then they create the structure, and then they have the “Buy-in” that— So, for the people who aren’t fulfilling their responsibility to man the little [Safety Shack] entryway, staged kiosk. That means that there’s a conversation that they have to have, is, “You know, you’re letting us down when you do this.”

del Norte: It’s an issue. I can—

Baker: Yeah.

del Norte: I’m trying to find a way that teeter-totter, of trying to get rules in place, but yet there being leeway in self-governance.

Baker: Yeah.

del Norte: I’d like it to be—

Baker: I suppose they have to feel [that] the rules are legitimate, and if they don't–

del Norte: Yeah.

Baker: –then they have to have a conversation with their fellow Camp members, fellow campers on, “Well. How do we change these rules? What should the rules look like then? If we don't like these rules, what should these rules be?” And you do that also through the democratic process.

del Norte: Right.

Baker: And that's empowering.

del Norte: I agree with that.

Baker: Again. It gives you just, I mean, “I've got ownership over my life here.” It means also, “Golly. I have responsibility over my life here.” It's, these are extremely important, these are extremely important values for a sense of self-worth, a sense of ownership of the world, of being able to negotiate this larger world. That we're not just, as I said earlier, cast about on these winds of destiny.

Baker: But, I think these are very good questions, and I hope that in the Great Conversations those things can be addressed because it really is essential that you not, A: what a waste of resources that could be going to something else other than paying a security guard, and B: getting people to actually fulfill their responsibilities. I don't know if maybe that's something raising a little bit of money. So, whoever has that responsibility overnight gets a little stipend. Maybe that's something we ought to be thinking about.

del Norte: That might make tension in the community, but, at the same time, that tension might be good.

Baker: (Simultaneously) Yeah.

del Norte: I think there's actually, that's been suggested—

Baker: Okay.

del Norte: —that people that step up more often get to go to a hotel for a night. There's one thing for—

Baker: Oh, yeah. There's a little bit of an award thing.

del Norte: —like, you know, they can be away from the community, and come back, type.

Baker: Yeah.

del Norte: At the same time, I don't know if that's the answer.

Baker: I know.

del Norte: It's so volatile, and every time I attend Great Conversation I do my best to be quiet, and then do my little—I let everyone know what I'm doing. Randy [Harris] always makes sure to put me on the spot; however, what I tell them about my perspectives—

Baker: Yeah.

del Norte: —is only that sheen of the project, and I'm a student, and so forth. It's never really addressing what—

Baker: The issue is.

del Norte: —could be. It's only listening to what happens—

Baker: Yeah.

del Norte: —during the Great Conversation.

Baker: Well, that's a— You've got to have some wonderful conversations that you've heard.

del Norte: I have. I'll send you my notes at the conclusion of the project.

Baker: Well. I'll be really interested—

del Norte: That's— Well.

Baker: —in reading your thesis. Yeah.

del Norte: Excellent. I have just two more questions.

Baker: Okay. Okay

del Norte: And it's definitely conclusion type questions, and it's a three-parter, sort of. Right.

Baker: (Simultaneously) Okay. Alright.

del Norte: Can you name three of the most valuable contributions or levels of support that are not present today that would help homelessness in Las Cruces immediately? Like an overnight fix.

Baker: If we had resources for, say, a jobs placement. I think that could really help. Or jobs training. Something that would help the people immediately get into a pipeline of financial self-sufficiency. Now, that wouldn't work for everybody. Some people have severe, physical or emotional, mental health issues, so that wouldn't work immediately. But, for those who want it, that would be a way of accelerating independence. Having some financial independence. I would think that could help. That would be one.

I think the health care piece has been pretty well taken care of. I think that's absolutely critical. Obviously this was a huge need back in the 1990s. You couldn't even get— You didn't even have phones so that you could call, even to make an appointment. If you knew where to get an appointment. And you didn't have the health insurance to cover the appointment. So, I think some of that is being addresses with things like the Affordable Care Act, and with Medicaid, Social Security, Medicare for the older homeless. So, I think health care is good.

And education. I know these workshops are available, but— Which has been very important, I think, in helping the community. One time, we were, for example, at a Community of Hope meeting. We had a board meeting, a committee meeting down at the [Hope] campus on a Saturday morning, and one of us, walking out, noticed the police were here. And we walked over, and we found out there had been some fisticuffs, you know, between one guy, but that they, but that there was, other residents themselves were chatting with the police saying, “No. It's under control, da-da-da.”

Baker: I mean, because of their training in conflict management, they were able to diffuse a situation, so that, even though someone else had called the police, when the police arrived everything was resolved. So, you didn't have an overreaction on the part of law enforcement, and I think that's the type of training that's really cool, that's going on.

But, I think it wouldn't be bad if we had more of a pipeline, from Community of Hope, for people who are more stable, once they're in homes, to see about maybe taking classes at Doña Ana [Community College], right? Start looking at the educational path available, again, for those who are interested, and capable of doing it. You know, plan to stay around for at least a semester, to start picking up classes, because, of course, I would believe in education, wouldn't I? I think education is ultimately so empowering, and really is the—

del Norte: I'll put that on number one.

Baker: Oh, good. Thank you. So, that's my thinking, off the top of my head.

del Norte: Perfect. The final question I have is kind of directed towards someone who's on the Development Committee, of course.

Baker: Okay.

del Norte: How do you envision the future of the Community of Hope?

Baker: I think it is poised. It [has] come so much further than when I left the organization in 2002. It is so much more dynamic, and broad, and serves so many more people than we were able to at that time. I'm just completely impressed. If we can add that number of years in the future, I just see us continuing to move on that trajectory that Nicole [Martinez] and the staff have laid down, which is serving more-and-more people in more-and-more ways, requiring more-and-more resources, which means our Development Committee has to be working harder than ever to see that funds are available because the ideas are there.

The need is there. The project ideas are there. I think it's just for us to keep looking for not only state funding and federal funding, but private sector funding, foundation funding, and then the community funding. So, all of those pieces have to work together, and that's where public education comes in, as well, because we want the community to put pressure on their state legislators if these programs get cut. We want the community to understand that the homeless are not a pariah.

They're not invisible. These are people that we want to re-bring into our society, that have family members themselves. So, all of this is part of our goal as a Development Committee, is raising awareness as well as raising money, and I think if we do our jobs then Nicole [Martinez] and her staff can keep doing theirs. I just hope Nicole doesn't get burned out. She's just incredible.

del Norte: Nancy. Thank you so much for doing this interview.

Baker: Truly my pleasure.

del Norte: I hope that I can live up to all the folks that have been making waves over at the Community of Hope with my thesis, and this project. Of course, this is—

Baker: Well. I'm just pleased you're seeing how important this is, because this is not something that's not normally done. So, this is a really terrific thing that you're doing.

del Norte: Well. I came here to focus on poverty and homelessness from a short oral history background, but I did notice there hadn't been specific histories done on the individuals.

Baker: Yeah.

del Norte: There's been lots on the Community as a whole. So, I wanted individuals to have a voice.

Baker: No. This is a real important piece that you're filling in, too. If we've had stuff on nutrition, we've had stuff on, maybe, transportation, and met these corridors, and the accessibility issues. You're really looking at, "Well. What is the history of these agencies?" "How have they evolved in response to—" I mean it's this indirect process, isn't it?

Baker: The people— Like, Camp Hope was invented by the people who are staying at Camp Hope. It wasn't a top-down decision. So, this is really a real dynamic, a real— Oh, what was that, dialectic, if you will.

del Norte: Wonderful. I'm so glad you see it that way. That's my intention, to make it a dialectic, for those that listen later, and those that can reflect on what's come, to where—

Baker: Well. Your questions have caused me to reflect a lot on the past—

del Norte: Ah. Good.

Baker: —and I sort of— This is terrific. I really appreciate being part of this. Thank you, David.

del Norte: Absolutely, Nancy. Thank you very much.

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[End of recorded interview]