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Mesilla Valley Community of Hope

2018

Hope Stories

Interview 6

Consolidated Services Model with Nancy J. McMillan

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

Sponsored by Doña Ana County Historical Society

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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

Dr. Nancy McMillan grew up in Las Alamos, New Mexico, an area known as a “Glow in the Dark” scientific community because of its history with radioactive elements and nuclear materials’ production. A youth member of Los Alamos Geological Society to spend time in the outdoors, McMillan established an appreciation for minerals, geology, and the natural environment.

Graduated from New Mexico State University in 1979 with a Bachelor of Science in Geology, alongside a Bachelor of Arts in Russian language in that same year, in 1986 McMillan earned a Phd in Geology with an emphasis on Volcanology from Southern Methodist University. Awarded the Dennis W. Darnall Faculty Achievement Award in 2002 at New Mexico State University, McMillan innovated the Laser-Induced Breakdown Spectroscopy (LIBS) portable Chem-Cam instrument to more accurately and easily analyze geological samples.

A Mesilla Valley Community of Hope cofounder, and board president from 1991-1997, McMillan credits Saint Andrew’s Episcopal Church priest Father Jim Galbraith for inspiration to relocate the overburdened day-lunch program which later became El Caldito Soup Kitchen. With little available space for hungry clients visiting the church, including increased service needs at Saint Luke’s Health Clinic, McMillan and others organized, promoted, and fundraised a years-long effort to create an early version of the Consolidated Services Model.

An example for other homeless communities, according to officials from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Mesilla Valley Community of Hope became possible after McMillan accompanied politician John Paul Taylor to New Mexico's Legislature in Santa Fe to gather the initial financial support for design, construction, and staffing of the buildings today known as Hope Campus.

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Interview 6 of Hope Stories — June 29th, 2018

David Lee del Norte: Plenty of time. Alright. This is the Mesilla Valley Community of Hope Stories at New Mexico State University. It's a public history project thanks to Doña Ana County Historical Society. Today's narrator is Dr. Nancy McMillan. The interviewer is David Lee. The file name is 18HOPE_0205.wav, and the interview is being held at the Public History Seminar Room in Breland [Hall at NMSU], 258. The date is the 29th of June, 2018. It's about 2:30 in the afternoon. Nancy, could you tell me your full name, please.

Nancy McMillan: My name is Nancy Jean Stoll McMillan.

del Norte: Are you from a large or a small family?

McMillan: Four kids— Fifteen years between the oldest and the youngest. I'm the second oldest.

del Norte: Where's your home town?

McMillan: I grew up in Los Alamos, New Mexico. "Glow in the Dark," whole nine yards. My dad was a chemist who worked with Tritium, and my mom was a stay at home mom. So, a great place to grow up. Lots of outdoors activities there.

del Norte: I can imagine. So, “Glow in the Dark” is obviously an analogy to—

McMillan: (Simultaneously) A reference to all the radioactive, yeah, stuff that goes on there. Yeah, yeah. We moved there in 1957. I was three months old, so it was still, I mean, it was an open city at that point, but it was still very, well, Los Alamos is still very different, but it was very different back then.

del Norte: So, I imagine one of the waves of the nuclear scientists that came in after the war.

McMillan: Right, right.

del Norte: Interesting.

McMillan: Yeah. Yeah. It’s an interesting place to grow up. My parents both had bachelor’s degrees, and my dad almost finished a master’s, but couldn’t do it while working full-time and raising kids, and my mom, eventually in her 60s, or in her 50s, got her master’s, but we were like the stupid people in Los Alamos because our parents just had bachelor’s degrees. It’s a very strange place to grow up.

del Norte: Would you like to share their names? Do they have, does your mom have a thesis anywhere or, you said she did her—

McMillan: She did her work in social work at Arizona State [University] in Phoenix, and so my dad died young, at [age] forty-four of cancer that he got from Tritium poisoning, and so then, she eventually left Los Alamos with my youngest sister, and went to graduate school, and got her degree, and then was a family counselor for ten years before she passed away.

del Norte: Would you like to tell a story about growing up in Los Alamos?

McMillan: Yeah. I mean, there are so many stories. Mostly just being allowed to run loose in the canyons, and we lived, our house was on the edge of a canyon, and basically our parents said, “Go outside and play,” and so we did. And so, lots of hiking. Things that I’m really glad my parents didn’t know about. Things we jumped off of, and that kind of stuff. I was always pretty happy outdoors, although I was also pretty bookish, too, so, yeah.

del Norte: Where did you go to school? Was it Los Alamos High?

McMillan: Yes. I went through high school in Los Alamos, and then I came down here to New Mexico State [University] and got bachelors’ degrees from NMSU, and then I went on the Southern Methodist University in Dallas [Texas], and got my PhD in Geology.

del Norte: So, I have a question here. What career did you imagine for yourself? Was it always geology?

McMillan: Well, my mom was a member of the Los Alamos Geological Society, which it sounds like kind of a bigger thing than it was. It was mostly amateurs with a few professionals, but they would go on field trips, and I was the only one of the four kids that wanted to go, so it was always “Mom and me.” And I learned that minerals are so interesting, and so beautiful and amazing, and I also learned that geologists were the nicest people. I mean, everyone was so wonderful to me as a child on those trips, and so I pretty much got hooked. And then when I was a senior in high school, I took Physics, Chemistry, and Earth Science together, and I remember going home and asking my parents, “Could you— Would people pay me to do this?” And they were like, “Yes. That’s called being a geologist.”

So, I came down here to NMSU and took Introduction to Geology with Dr. Bill Seager. And I remember the day, it was like maybe two weeks into my first semester here, that he was lecturing about volcanoes, and after the lecture I went and called my parents and said, “I’m gonna get a PhD in Volcanology, and teach at a university just like Dr. Seager.”

They said, “Well, maybe you should finish your first semester of college first.” And I was like, “Oh, yeah. No, it’s a done deal. I’m gonna get a PhD, and study volcanoes,” and that’s exactly what I did. So, I guess I’ve known for a long time that this was where I was gonna end up.

del Norte: Wonderful. Thank you for sharing that.

McMillan: Sure.

del Norte: That's amazing. So, I have a surprise question for you.

McMillan: Okay.

del Norte: Just to make sure that you understand that you're the expert here today.

McMillan: Okay.

del Norte: Can you explain a Laser-Induced Breakdown Spectroscopy–

McMillan: I can.

del Norte: –or LIBS.

McMillan: LIBS. Yes. So, LIBS is the analytical tool that's being used on Mars right now with the ChemCam instrument, but what it does is you shoot a pulse of laser light onto a material, and it causes the atoms to ablate off, or come off of the surface, and there's so much energy there that they burst into flame. And that's what a plasma is, it's just a burning gas. Now, this plasma, for most geologic materials, is about 13-15,000 degrees Kelvin. The surface of the sun is about 6000, for reference.

McMillan: So, it's very hot, but it's also very small, and it doesn't last very long, but it's so hot that the electrons get excited up into upper orbitals. And then, when it cools then they can't stay at those high energy states, and so they collapse back down to lower energy orbitals, and they give off that difference of energy in photons of light. And so, we collect those photons with an optic fiber, and we diffract them out with a spectrometer which just means you turn the color of a rainbow into a series of peaks that you can see. And so, the height of each peak is proportional to the number of electrons that went from shell A to shell B, which is essentially proportional to the concentration of that element.

So, the cool thing about LIBS, a couple of cool things: one is it's very rapid, so many of the projects I'm working on will shoot, like, at ten hertz. So, ten shots a second. You don't have to do any sample preparation other than have a representative sample, so you just basically point and shoot, and each LIBS spectrum contains information about the entire periodic table, all simultaneously. So, what you collect is like a really unique fingerprint of that material. And so, we're using it to be able to solve all kinds of scientific problems that were not solvable, well, not even approachable before because it collects so much information at once.

del Norte: Was this part of your work with Dr. Seager?

McMillan: Oh, no. No, no.

del Norte: Or kind of something that's happened recently?

McMillan: Something that happened. Yeah. I followed a very traditional volcanology, high temperature geochemistry path, and then I had a student here at NMSU, Kate McManus, who got her Bachelor's in Geology with us, and she wanted to do some kind of research that combined military intelligence and geology for her Master's. She wanted to stay and do her Master's. And I was like, well, I don't know what that's gonna be. And so, but we started reading, and so we started thinking, well, what about conflict minerals, like blood diamonds, or where terrorists are exchanging gemstones for guns, and the cool thing is, well, the cool thing for them is that gemstones are not traceable. And so, it's very, and you can carry a lot of value in a small packet, so it's a very good way to trade if you're a terrorist.

And the nice thing about LIBS is that it's also a portable technique. They make portable ones, and so a soldier out in the field could use it. And so, we kind of started down that path, and yeah, one thing led to another, and Kate [McManus] and I are still working on those things. She got her Master's. She now runs her own material science company called Materialytics, and it's doing amazing work. It has the potential of being a disruptive technology that could change a lot of things. So, it's been really fun.

del Norte: I love to hear that: disruptive technology, as in innovation to the new.

McMillan: Right. Yeah. Disrupt the old. Like cell phones.

del Norte: Sure.

McMillan: Cell phones. Yeah, tech-, I guess cell phones are to land lines what LIBS is to some of the traditional chemical methods.

del Norte: You're obviously extremely innovative throughout your career, and then what you're doing now is super scientific, and super on point. How about moving towards the Community of Hope? Well, tell me about your first experience helping the homeless. And the reason I mention your innovation is because it's very innovative, what's come about.

McMillan: Right.

del Norte: What was your first experience with the homeless, before we get into—

McMillan: Right.

del Norte: —the origin stories.

McMillan: So, really, before the Community of Hope I did not have a history of working with the homeless. My first experience with the homeless was when I was an undergraduate here at NMSU, and I didn't have a car, I had a bicycle, but I got on the public bus one day to ride, and there was, he seemed elderly to me, a man who seemed elderly to me at that point.

McMillan: He was probably [aged] fifty, right, but he was sitting in the front row, and he had not bathed in a long time, and he had dimes stuck in his ear. So, that's where he was carrying his dimes because that was what it cost to ride the bus, and I was kind of mortified by it. I didn't know what to do with that. I grew up in a nice middle class family. We weren't rich, but, there was always money for the things we really needed, and so, yeah, I didn't know what— That was pretty much my experience with homelessness before this project started.

del Norte: Can you describe challenges to maintaining health for the homeless? You mentioned his state, unbathed, and obviously a little bit mentally ill with putting dimes in his ears and stuff. Can you move towards what, the challenges they see on-the-ground?

McMillan: Right. So, I don't have a lot of technical knowledge on this. I haven't studied this, but it's not hard to imagine that the lack of stability in your life leads to a lot of issues. So, the inability to bathe, and the inability for some basic human dignity. What if you have diarrhea, and you don't have a restroom that you can get to in-time. What if you're a woman, and your menstrual cycle starts, and so, I think that it just makes sense that there's a lot of just basic sanitation issues. Of course, food is a huge issue. To get enough food. To get food that is nourishing, and not just junk. It seems like those health issues would be really huge.

del Norte: So, are soup kitchens like El Caldito, and the food pantry at Casa de Peregrinos, are they vital to the homeless community?

McMillan: Absolutely. Absolutely, because where are they gonna eat? And in addition to those central locations, I know that a lot of churches like us at St. Andrews [Episcopal Church], we have what we call the “Reverse offering,” and so a basket comes around, and you take something out, and what you’re taking out is a little slip of paper that says, “You’re bringing in vegetables,” or “You’re bringing canned vegetables,” or “You’re bringing in pasta, or rice, or peanut butter.” And they’re items that have been selected, that they would be useful. Like obviously popsicles, and raw eggs, are not gonna be that useful to homeless people, but a jar of peanut butter is a really good thing.

And then we bring those foods in. And that food does not stay around our church very long at all. I mean people bring it in, and it goes. People come and ask for it, and so even though El Caldito and Casa de Peregrinos are doing an amazing job, I think that the state of hunger in southern New Mexico is huge. Yeah. And I don’t think it’s a problem of there’s not enough food. I think it’s food distribution, and food being able to get there. You think of places like Columbus [New Mexico]. Some of these little towns that are literally in the middle of nowhere.

del Norte: The food desert problem.

McMillan: Right, right.

del Norte: No money to bring the trucks to bring the food.

McMillan: Right, right.

del Norte: No businesses, so forth.

McMillan: Right, right. So, yeah, I think food is a big problem.

del Norte: I'm glad you bring up Columbus [New Mexico]. It's near, but yet far from Las Cruces. Do you have any knowledge of poverty and hunger in the rural areas, and especially, my question that I'm looking for here is, have you worked with clients from any New Mexico colonias?

McMillan: No. That really hasn't been my role. I kind of got the Community of Hope started ages ago, and it has grown into a wonderful, amazing organization, and now I'm back on the Development Board trying to raise more money for it, but I don't really do the day-to-day stuff anymore.

del Norte: Gotcha. So, will you explain the "Duplication and fragmentation" between the services that brought people and services together on what is today called the Community of Hope? And that specific quote there I found on the web site with you and Dr. [Nancy] Baker. So, I'm not sure how old that post is, but—

McMillan: Right.

del Norte: —you explained it that way. A duplication of services, and a fragmentation—

McMillan: Right.

del Norte: –that you wanted to consolidate.

McMillan: Right.

del Norte: Can you talk about that period of time?

McMillan: Right. Well, and I've already mentioned one, right? We have Casa de Peregrinos, and we have the soup kitchen, and yet St. Andrews is handing out food to people. So, before the Community of Hope if you needed some of those basic services, if you needed food, if you needed money for transportation, you had to go from church-to-church, or from social services-to-social services, and they were spread all over town, and wherever they could find the office space, or wherever the church happened to be located, and so it was definitely a fragmented system. And you just think about what if I were [homeless].

When we were developing Community of Hope my kids were young, and I remember thinking, well, "What if I was on the street with a four year old, and a seven year old, and in a single day I had to get them to the doctor, and I had to get us all fed three times, and I had to do whatever I had to do, and I had no car, and we hadn't slept well, and we were all cranky?" It's like, "Oh my goodness." We need a one-stop shop for this. We need a campus where we can offer all of the basic services, so that people can concentrate on changing their lives.

McMillan: Not just surviving, right? You have to reach a certain threshold where your basic needs are met before you can start dealing with whatever the issues are that are keeping you from being stable.

del Norte: Did you have a model to go on?

McMillan: No. No, no, no. So, what happened was, St. Andrews had started the soup kitchen a long time ago. I don't know when it started.

del Norte: That was before El Caldito.

McMillan: Yes. It had been going on in our church for probably fifteen years before the Community of Hope happened, and so it started off like every Friday or something, and then it just grew, and grew, and grew, and we started to have problems. Our plumbing could not handle the plumbing needs. We had one men's and one women's [restroom], and we couldn't handle seventy people. So, we ended up putting Porta-Potties on the lawn, which the neighbors were offended by, but what can you say? It was better than, yeah, our floor to our parish hall really couldn't handle the wear and tear, and it was just more than our physical plant could handle.

And so, then we started Saint Luke's Medical Clinic. We had purchased a house next door to our church, and started the medical clinic there, and that, too, was kind of getting bigger and bigger.

McMillan: And then, Saint Andrews is downtown in the historic district, and so people were starting to grumble because we were, those services were bringing the homeless into kind of the heart of Las Cruces, and the whole Pioneer Park, that whole area. And so, there was starting to be some grumbling.

And so, our priest at that time was Father Jim Galbraith, and he had an instrument that was a talent bank. Okay. So, it listed all— The idea is that when you tithe to the church it shouldn't just be your money, but it should be your talents, and your, you know, everything you have. And so, it listed everything that you could possibly do. You know: "Do you sew?" "Do you play with kids?" "Do you fix cars?" "Do you—" Blah-blah-blah-blah-blah? And one of them was grant writing. And like, "I'm a scientist." Check. I checked grant writing. And so, he came to me, and he said, "Well, let's write some grants to move the soup kitchen, and the medical clinic, off of the Saint Andrew's property. Let's keep them together, but find some place to move them, and then we can solve all of these problems at once." Right?

So, then we started thinking, well, that's when we had a group of people, and we started thinking, well, this is actually a bigger problem than food and medical. There's also, you know, everything: Childcare; there's mental health services; there's just a place to take a shower; there's a place to have a phone number, so someone can call you; there's, I mean, all the things that Community of Hope, and Jardin de los Niños, and Saint Luke's, and El Caldito now offer, and then, also the transitional living facility. And so, that's kind of where that idea of creating a campus where someone could go, or a family could go, and have access to all those services. So, that's how it evolved.

del Norte: Can you describe writing a grant for the first time, for something like this? When I think of a grant writing process for a complexity problem such as homelessness, and especially the different organizations, I can't imagine trying to cover everything on five pages or whatever.

McMillan: Right.

del Norte: How did that go?

McMillan: Well, we— Oh gosh, this is a long time ago. There were a number of grants. The very first one was to the National Episcopal Church United Thank Offering, and we got, I think, five or six thousand dollars with which we bought a laptop, and hired a very, very part-time person. We got a post office box and— but like someone to just do the very minimal, keep us going, and take notes, and so that one [grant] was not that hard. And then, I'm trying to think. The money that built the first phase of Community of Hope came from— J. Paul Taylor got us, I think, six hundred thousand dollars of State appropriation, which was an amazing thing. I'm just gonna put in a plug for him.

del Norte: Did you say six hundred [dollars]?

McMillan: Yes.

del Norte: Just a small six hundred dollar grant to get—

McMillan: Six-hundred thousand.

del Norte: Oh, I knew heard that.

McMillan: Yeah. Six hundred thousand dollars.

del Norte: Amazing. That was the initial push?

McMillan: Well, that was, it was— there were three things. So, J. Paul [Taylor] got us that, but I just wanna say, he hauled me up to Santa Fe to take me around to everybody, and I would tell them the story, and every single one, every single Congressperson or Senator that he spoke to, said, “Paul, is this what we should do?” And Paul said, “Yes.” And they said, “Well, then you’ve got my vote.” I mean, he’s like a politician the way politicians should be. Amazing!

And so, and then we had— We did a fundraiser, so I think we raised maybe one hundred and fifty [thousand] or two hundred thousand dollars, and then, but the rest of it came from Community Development Block Grant, CDBG money. So, these are Federal funds that come to Las Cruces because of our low income status, and, in the past, what they had been doing was, basically, taking that pie, and splitting it between all of the different agencies. And the big issue was that we needed like eighty percent of the pie that year in order to build the campus. So, even though I checked off grant writing, it really didn’t turn out that we wrote that many grants. It really turned into mainly private fundraising.

McMillan: So, we were trained on how to run a capital campaign, and then, also, testifying at the State, and then working with City Council. So, it turned into a political shuffling monies around politically more than grant writing.

del Norte: Sure. My understanding is that the grant funding has mostly gone away, and it's more community driven. A lot different than it used to be, is what I keep hearing—

McMillan: Right.

del Norte: —and it surprised me at first.

McMillan: Well. It depends on what part you talk about. So, if you talk about Camp Hope — Camp Hope is the tent city, and, because of the nature of the tent city, it cannot get State or Federal funds because they're not stable housing. So, that's a hundred percent donations, but Nicole Martinez, who's the director of the Community of Hope, writes a lot of grants, federal grants, to move people into, from—

del Norte: The Tents to Rents?

McMillan: No. Tents to Rents is the fundraiser for Camp Hope that can't be supported.

del Norte: Ah. Nicole [Martinez] was just telling me that, too.

McMillan: But, yeah, for all the other things that Community of Hope does, they have so many programs to support people in so many different ways, so that, I mean, Nicole [Martinez] has like seven or eight grants going at once. She's an amazing person. So, yeah. Community of Hope has a lot of grants, but Camp Hope, that part of it, is not eligible for State and Federal grants.

del Norte: I'm doing my best to get it all on the same page for myself, and others—

McMillan: Right.

del Norte: —but it's so complicated.

McMillan: Right.

del Norte: Who were some of the players? And also, what time period are we talking about when you first started this with, is it Father Galbraith?

McMillan: Yeah.

del Norte: I just wanna make sure we have our foot in “When.”

McMillan: Right. So, I should know that, but I don't. But, I arrived back in Las Cruces in the fall of 1989, so it probably was like 1991-ish when we started, and the Community Development Block Grant money came through the city in the fall of 1994. And then, so we must have built, that was the last piece we needed, and so, we must have built it in 1995. So, that's kind of the time we were talking about. So, some of the people who were involved are no longer in town. I don't even remember everyone.

del Norte: It's not necessary.

McMillan: Yeah.

del Norte: If there was someone there [from memory] that would be great—

McMillan: Yeah.

del Norte: —however, it's like a piecing thing, piecing people together as I go.

McMillan: (Simultaneously) Yeah, I know. Yeah, I know Maggie Fallen was a woman who was very active. She was mainly in the assisted living facility. Oh, this is embarrassing that I can't remember everybody's names.

del Norte: No, that's okay. No, not at all. That's how memory works. I mean—

McMillan: Right.

del Norte: —I'm surprised that we're talking about the late 1980s moving into early 1990s. Everything that comes up online is pretty much 1998.

McMillan: Right.

del Norte: I mean, it's really difficult to [understand] it unless it's from the people.

McMillan: Well. That's because there wasn't an Internet then.

del Norte: Exactly. We got the beginnings of this.

McMillan: (Simultaneously) And so, and I'm a really bad historian.

del Norte: (Chuckles)

McMillan: So, I probably had a shoe box full of stuff that sometimes I get in the “Clean it out” mood. It’s like, “Okay, all this is going in the trash. I don’t care.”

del Norte: (Simultaneously) “See ya—” Yep.

McMillan: Yeah, yeah. So, yeah. I’m a really bad historian. You can put that on-the-record: “I’m a really bad historian.”

del Norte: (Chuckles) It’ll stay here.

McMillan: It’s okay. I think anyone who knows me knows that’s true.

del Norte: Well. How about: Can you describe the city’s process of providing shelter and transitional placement in the 1980s and 1990s before you got here? I mean, what was the city doing for the homeless?

McMillan: I don’t think there was anything going on. One problem we had as we, I mean, this was in the news a lot. The [Las Cruces] Sun News had the, was it called the Round Up? No, the, where you could call-in, and it’s like Letters to the Editor, but with no accountability.

del Norte: The Local—

McMillan: The local newspaper.

del Norte: —“Voice.” Or something like that.

McMillan: Yeah, yeah. And so, my kids would get up every morning, and open that up, and see if Mom was in that, because people were calling into the Sun News all the time about this horrible thing, like we’re building “Mecca” for the homeless, and we’re gonna become the homeless center of the United States, and “If you build it they will come.” And it was just a huge, yeah, a huge issue.

And we tried different arguments. I said, “Well. If we build it, and they come, and we have the tools that they need to have stable lives, and become tax-paying citizens, then bring it on.” That was not the right thing to say, but I thought it was brilliant. (Chuckles)

del Norte: Too ambitious for the community’s version of what they wanted.

McMillan: Right, or admitting that people might come because of this [Consolidate Services Model]. And so, yeah, I learned a lot about leadership during those years, but I don’t think there was anything going on.

McMillan: And people were very sensitive about pan-handlers, and they didn't like that, and so, yeah, I don't think there was really much of anything going on for the homeless.

del Norte: I'll read the 2004 Mission Statement that I found. So, we'll jump over to when there is something online, that I found.

McMillan: Right.

del Norte: And it says, "Hacienda del Sol..." the mission statement in 2004, "... is 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 speak about the origins of Hacienda?

McMillan: Yes. So, when we figured out that we really thought that this plan of having a campus that offered a variety of services, we kind of figured out that that seemed pretty smart. And so, it was like, well, what is missing, and what was missing there was this transitional living facility, and, yeah, that was pretty much the mission statement that we started off with, too. That was certainly the idea.

del Norte: Why were women the focus for Hacienda?

McMillan: Well, because that's who takes care of the kids. If you're homeless, the kids hang with the moms, and yeah.

del Norte: What I learned just recently is that women are at risk much, much higher than men because of that very reason.

McMillan: Right. Right, and often in very traditional families the man is the wage earner, and so if the man walks, then so do the wages, and there is “Mom and kids” with nothing.

del Norte: Can you talk about the initial Community of Hope relation building process between local landlords, to city officials, and those potential new housed clients? I mean... It’s such a difference when you read about it now, compared to what I’m learning.

McMillan: Right. When I was President of the Board for, I think, seven years — which was one year longer than the by-laws allowed — but I finally had to quit, right, and let the baby walk on its own, and I had to walk away because non-profits can become the property of the people who start them, and they become very inbred. I mean, they’re not really the property, but the people who start non-profits are very passionate, like I was, but I don’t know the answer to that question because we didn’t, we weren’t there yet.

Nicole [Martinez] could tell you, to the third decimal point, the answers to those questions, but we didn’t, we were just very passionate about, you know, we have to give people the tools that they need to change their lives for the better. These people are not here because there’s something wrong with them, or because there’s something bad with them. It’s because sometimes life just sucks for people, and so, yeah, I never did that hands-on stuff.

McMillan: So, my job was building the organization, and putting the organization together, and one thing I learned about myself was, like I did go to El Caldito, and hand-out soup, and I was actually very uncomfortable doing that. I will stay up all night ranting, writing grant proposals, and I will work all day getting this going politically, and then, stay up all night doing my NMSU work because I didn't get it done, but one-on-one services, that is not me. I spent a lot of time "GUILTING" myself out over that until I realized that everyone has their own gifts, right? I have the gift of administration, and it's not very sexy, but I was making it happen.

del Norte: Can you discuss notable, positive changes that Hacienda brought to the community? You've mentioned a few already, but this just leading into some of the challenges.

McMillan: Well, I think it was, well, the other facility was the Gospel Rescue Mission, which is right across the street, and they mainly serve men. I think they do serve women, but they certainly don't focus on families, and so the family part of it was a big issue. And so, that's why we wanted to do it, and I think a very brief life span, and I think it was a good thing. It was really. We had a great facility, and we had a good run at it.

del Norte: Are there challenges that persist today that you wish you could solve even, that are reoccurring?

McMillan: Yeah.

del Norte: I don't wanna leave it right away, before we move on.

McMillan: Right. So, while I'm thinking for this, I was thinking about, can I give you my take on why it failed? Is that useful? Is that what you're asking?

del Norte: I can ask the question: What occurred that dissolved the Hacienda del Sol name?

McMillan: So, in— I think what happened is— It has to do with the lifespan of non-profits, right. So, generally when non-profits start it's people who are very passionate and compassionate about their issue, and so a lot of us who were trying to get Hacienda del Sol going were more in the social worker kind of perspective, where we know what these people need, right. We know exactly what they need, but to really run that, what we needed was a leader who not only had all of those characteristics, but was also an incredible manager.

They could write million dollar proposals at the flick of the wrist because we needed like six of them every year, because if you have twenty-four hour supervision then that is wicked expensive, and then you also need someone who is willing to be— [I'm] trying to think of a word that isn't "Hard-ass."

del Norte: Is it the heavy-lifter?

McMillan: Well, not the heavy-lifter, but the disciplinarian, right? And in this [homeless] population, sometimes it's hard to tell when someone's telling the truth versus a lie, you know, manipulation is, I mean, who doesn't manipulate someone, right? But, when you're struggling for your own survival you're— you manipulate everything you can manipulate, right? I mean, you take the gloves off, and you manipulate, and so you need this person who's so compassionate, and so wanting to, “Ugh,” just help everyone, but they also have to be able to raise the money, and they also have to be able to be really tough, and make the really hard decisions, and throw people out if they need to be thrown out.

And I think the needs, those kind of structural needs for Hacienda del Sol, were there from the very beginning, and we weren't, it wasn't mature enough as an organization to solve all of those problems. So, I think my memory is that, basically, it just didn't get enough funding. We just couldn't sustain the funding, and that's because the people who were running it were the very incredible, giving people, but they weren't like the writers, and we didn't— I didn't know enough about non-profits, and like the big picture of non-profits to know, “Oh. We're missing this. We need to go get these people over here.” And so—

del Norte: Just on a side note, as a trailblazer, there's still success in that other's picked up what you had began, right?

McMillan: Oh, absolutely. The whole thing is amazing. I mean, I get teared up every, almost every time I go over there because it's like, “Oh. We got this right.”

McMillan: When they had the grand opening for the second phase, and Pete Domenici was there, and he, because he got the funding for the last phase.

del Norte: (Simultaneously) Oh. I gotta go look at that archive then.

McMillan: Yeah. And so, they invited me to come, and so, it's okay. So, I come, and I'm just standing. I'm just like one of the people, right? I'm like "No one's made a big deal out of me." I'm just standing in the crowd, and he stands there, and he says, "This is the mission of the Community of Hope," and it is like exactly the original vision, and I was just in tears. I was like, we, you know: We got it right! We got it right. We gave birth to something that is— was so on-target that it's still lasting. You know. We got it right, and so—

del Norte: Good for you.

McMillan: —that was—

del Norte: Good for you.

McMillan: —it was very exciting, yeah. Yeah.

del Norte: Just on that same note. Which services absorbed the need that you had begun, and was it what happened with Saint Luke's? Because I just wanna be clear on, if the non-profit dissolved, where did the services end up?

McMillan: Okay. Maybe I should explain the way this works. Community of Hope. The Mesilla Valley Community of Hope is both an umbrella organization, and its own organization. Okay. So, if you think of it as an umbrella it has its own stand, and the services it offers. So, it offers Camp Hope. It offers showers. It offers a place to have telephones, so when you do your job application you can write down a phone. You can get your mail there. It offers all those services, counseling, all of those services.

But then, it's also the umbrella organization for all of the other organizations that are on the campus. So, Hacienda del Sol, Saint Luke's, Casa de Peregrinos, El Caldito, and Jardin de los Niños. So, yeah. And then, so each one of those is independently funded. Right. So, Hacienda del Sol was part of the Community of Hope campus, part of the sisterhood, but they— if their funding went it didn't take everything down, and they had their own board, and their own leadership.

del Norte: Thank you for explaining that.

McMillan: Yeah.

del Norte: I always imagined that it just, someone else took on what you were doing instead of, it just didn't—

McMillan: It just didn't have— It ceased to exist.

del Norte: It ceased to exist. I had no idea that that was the case.

McMillan: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, so they're each independent 501c3s, which, I have to say, turned out to be brilliant but annoying, but because it's—

del Norte: I'm having a hard time understanding how the organization works, but that—

McMillan: Yeah. Well, you can—

del Norte: There's a very succinct—

McMillan: You can think of it, you can think of it as they reside on the Community of Hope property rent-free, in a way. Okay. So, there's— like we all agree, they all agree to work on homelessness and poverty together. Everyone does their bit.

del Norte: Amazing.

McMillan: But, they're not linked by, you know, there's not a board that everyone, there's not a common board. Each one has its own 501c3. Yeah. Each one has its own board.

del Norte: Just on the side. I think that's important that, the time that I spent there in each spot, the only places I haven't been is Casa [de Peregrinos], and I haven't spent much time at Amador Health Center just yet. At Saint Luke's.

McMillan: That's right. It has a new name. I forgot that.

del Norte: Right. However, it seems like their functions are vastly different when you go to each spot.

McMillan: Yes.

del Norte: Audrey [Hardman] Hartley was kind enough to offer recording space over at Jardin [de Los Niños]. It's a whole different space than the Camp and Great Conversation.

McMillan: Right. Right.

del Norte: And that was hard for me to adjust to.

McMillan: Right.

del Norte: Can you talk about people that come on for the first time, and how you would give them a tour of Community of Hope? I mean, it must be overwhelming for someone who's never seen this model, as it was for me.

McMillan: (Simultaneously) Right, right. Yeah, I mean, I think I would treat it as if I were going to a shopping mall. "And now we're gonna go to this shop, and now we're gonna go to this shop." And yes, it's a completely different shop. There, they have the same mission.

They all wanna sell you their stuff. They all wanna save you, they all want it, well, not save you, you know, at Community of Hope they all wanna help you, but each one has its own thing. They're collaborative, but very different, and the reason that happened was because of turf battles, right, because it was our way of not fighting the turf battles.

It's like we want: "El Caldito, we want you to be you. We want you to have your own board. We want you to have your own funding. We want you to continue to be you. We don't wanna change anything you're doing except we wanna build you a new kitchen, and we wanna move you over here." Well, I mean, there were people who argued about that because there's always someone who's gonna argue, but it's hard to argue.

McMillan: But, if we said, “We’re building a new board, and we want to assume your board, and we’re gonna be like The [Star Trek Generations] Borg, and assimilate your board into our board.” You know, it never would have happened. We had to do a handshake, and the handshake has worked pretty well. I mean, I understand it hasn’t worked perfectly, but it’s worked pretty well.

del Norte: And you mean, a handshake agreement. Not necessarily contractual, or not, you’re not reporting to the State, and–

McMillan: Right. I don’t–

del Norte: –it’s all understood what’s going on.

McMillan: There’s probably some kind of legal, you know, “We’re all gonna occupy the same space.” I actually don’t know what that looks like now, but–

del Norte: Sure.

McMillan: –yeah. There was no, I think, actually we did make them all agree that they would be a part of the Mesilla Valley Community of Hope. That’s what the “Community” is, the community of non-profits. That’s what the “Community” started off as.

del Norte: That was the name?

McMillan: Well, no.

del Norte: Oh. Okay.

McMillan: But, the day we came up with the idea, “Oh. This is the Community of Hope,” the idea was the member of the communities were the different non-profit.

del Norte: Gotcha.

McMillan: It’s the, yeah, those non-profits make up the community, that provide hope.

del Norte: Amazing.

McMillan: Yeah.

del Norte: I have this imaginary title for a chapter which is “The Five-Pointed Star of Hope.” Maybe that’s the poet in me. But, it just feels that way. And I’m really excited to spend time at Casa, and, you know, just move around. I’ve seen a lot of the campus—

McMillan: Right.

del Norte: –but it really is a whole different thing going on right next door.

McMillan: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

del Norte: It's just vast.

McMillan: Yeah, because each one has its own history, they have their own culture; they have their own gig going on, which is good. It's a good thing because then now each of those boards has the pride of their area. And so, they reach out, and get more people involved where if it was just one board running the whole thing you wouldn't have as many total people involved in the total project.

del Norte: So, we've got about another forty minutes or so.

McMillan: Okay.

del Norte: Are you okay to continue?

McMillan: I'm good. I'm having fun.

del Norte: Awesome.

McMillan: And I can be late. I am not needed where I have to be at 4 [o'clock].

del Norte: Okay. I think, I mean, we're—

McMillan: We're cruising.

del Norte: This is a great interview so far.

McMillan: Okay. Good.

del Norte: I wanna transition into what I call Hope Self-care, and that's those that reach out for self-care that are staff or volunteers. We talked about, a little bit about, how you feel about spending time on the Camp, or on the Community of Hope. Can you talk about specific challenges for staff and volunteers helping clients?

McMillan: Yeah. I don't have any really direct knowledge. I know that, I think every one of them is a saint, because how do you do that job all day long, and, you know, not feel— How do you not take despair home with you? I don't know how. Yeah. Nicole Martinez is, I think, the most amazing person I've met. I don't know how she does it, but that's the body of Christ. Right.

McMillan: Everyone has their own thing, so that together humanity can provide for the rest of humanity. So, that's how it's supposed to be. So, yeah. I don't know. I don't know what programs they have to help themselves.

del Norte: And I'll explain a little bit, the direction I'm going, I'm looking to find methods of self-care that work best for those that help, and I just wanna ask the question, has any method of self-care surprised you? Like, is it hiking? Is it counseling? Is there anything that stuck out that might be good for the community? Because that's, what I'm getting is that that [staff and volunteer care management] portion is still fragmented. It's very individual. It's personal.

McMillan: So, you're talking about counseling for the homeless, or support of the people who support the homeless?

del Norte: That's correct, the latter.

McMillan: The latter. Right. Yes. All I can tell you is, like, my experiences, for me. I don't know if that's what you're after.

del Norte: I am, but how did you manage that stress, and that burden.

McMillan: Well, when we were developing the Community of Hope I was also in my tenure years, and it was kind of dicey. So, from—I don't know why I'm telling you this. It isn't pertinent.

del Norte: We can move away if you want.

McMillan: Yeah. Anyways. So, that's where my stress comes from, but again, when I was working, when we were putting together the Community of Hope it was more about forging the alliance of the non-profits, and getting the campus built than, for me personally I didn't, I had very little direct contact with the clients themselves. That's not my role. It turns out that's not really what I'm good at.

del Norte: Sure.

McMillan: And so, yeah—

del Norte: You totally explained that. I just wanna—

McMillan: Right.

del Norte: —let you know the reason I go this direction is because I see so little help for folks.

McMillan: Right. Right.

del Norte: I mean it's maybe a culture on the campus between those that help each other.

del Norte: Someone like myself that is there five hours a week since January, you know, and as the project goes on. It'll come to an end at some point. I don't see my five hours as adding up to much compared to people that are there for years.

McMillan: Right, right.

del Norte: And that's not, I don't even wanna say forty hours a week. It's a lot different than that.

McMillan: Right. Right, right.

del Norte: So, I'm kind of approaching complexity then.

McMillan: (Simultaneously) Yeah. I don't know. I don't know what programs they have. I know that people who feel called to work in these areas have a different view of life than a lot of us. They don't measure it in forty hours a week. They don't measure it in forty-five thousand dollars a year, or sixty thousand dollars a year, or twenty-five thousand dollars a year. They measure it in: "The Quintana family is better off this month than they were last month" or whatever. They measure it in terms of people. It is, I agree, it's very selfless, selfless work, and I don't know what's in place for them.

del Norte: I don't wanna press. Okay.

McMillan: Yeah. I just don't know.

del Norte: Yeah. That's completely fine. So, we're on [Questions] page four.

McMillan: Hey!

del Norte: It's just like that.

McMillan: Excellent!

del Norte: You have an excellent crack whit to speak on record.

McMillan: Oh. Good.

del Norte: It's all good.

McMillan: Excellent. I hope you can get some sound bites out of it.

del Norte: Tons.

McMillan: Good.

del Norte: If you're gonna speak up, it's just gonna make it easy for me.

McMillan: Okay.

del Norte: And you've done that already.

McMillan: Okay.

del Norte: So, here's page four, and it's Hope Future. Do you know anything about the homeless court system by chance? This is a new question.

McMillan: I don't know anything about that.

del Norte: –and I just learned about it. So, I think they're gonna try to do that over at the Community of Hope with a judge or a probate judge that just got elected?

McMillan: Oh. That's right. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I heard about that.

del Norte: I can't remember her last name.

McMillan: Yeah. I can't remember, but to bring, basically bring the court–

del Norte: To the resource room.

McMillan: Yeah, yeah.

del Norte: So, I'll be going that direction with James Sassak. He was already an interviewee, and he wants to try to get the—

McMillan: Right.

del Norte: He wants to hold the court with a judge from Las Cruces.

McMillan: Very cool.

del Norte: So, I'm looking for more information on that.

McMillan: Yeah.

del Norte: What level of funding could allow the Mesilla Valley Community of Hope to provide service over the weekend? I know that it's a very big problem for a lot of people—

McMillan: Hmm, right.

del Norte: –that five o’clock Friday to eight o’clock Monday.

McMillan: Right.

del Norte: Every time I’m at the Great Conversation there’s this whole new story–

McMillan: Right.

del Norte: –and I don’t go every week, but the weekend issues are a big problem there.

McMillan: Right. I don’t know. I don’t know the dollar amount. You know, the complexity in that is not only dollars, but finding people who want to work the weekends. You know, you practically, I would imagine you’d have to have a weekend staff, and a weekday staff. So, it’s both. You know, it’s both money, and the right people.

del Norte: Do you think it’s possible to do that in the future?

McMillan: Well, like I was saying about Hacienda del Sol. My take on that experiment was that was one of the things that caused them to fail. If you have people living there, it’s 24/7, 365 [days a year], right, and that’s a lot of money. That’s a lot of money— Yeah, if the world was made of money, you know?

McMillan: Of course, of course it's possible. There's plenty of money in the world. There's plenty of food in the world. No one should starve. No one should. No one should live in poverty, but wealth is not distributed evenly, so—

del Norte: Can we talk about that for a minute or two?

McMillan: Sure.

del Norte: Can we return to how wealth is distributed in New Mexico? And I ask that because you're a native New Mexican, and there's a vast difference between Los Alamos and Las Cruces.

McMillan: Um hmm, um hmm.

del Norte: How does wealth get distributed? Maybe the income east and west Las Cruces, that type of thing that makes it so difficult for Doña Ana County. Outside of Columbus, that type of thing.

McMillan: Right. I'm not enough of an economist to answer that, but I think from a spiritual point of view that money in a western culture, money is how we measure our wealth. Right. So, if you have money you are not going to share it. You might share if you have excess. If I was making a million dollars a year I could probably afford to share a thousand dollars a year because I wouldn't miss it.

McMillan: But, if I was making a million, I'm not gonna share a half-a-million. I mean, well, I would. I could live off a half a million dollars a year— pretty. I'm living off a lot less than that right now, and so, but I think that wealth is identity, and wealth is power, and wealth is good. If you have stuff, then you have— Then you're a success. And so, you know, my husband and I worked up to a tithe. So, ten percent. And it started off as ten percent of our post-tax, and then it got to be ten percent of pre-tax, and we've made it past ten percent, and it's all good. We actually don't, it makes me [feel] very good that I can re-distribute some of the wealth that I have even though I'm not paid a ton of money, but to re-distribute that.

But, that's not a very American idea. You know, that's not. And so, I don't think that it's necessarily New Mexico. I don't understand why New Mexico is always so poor, but that's just not my expertise, but I think there's a tendency if you have money, you hold onto it. Which means that if there's only so much money to go around, and you're holding, a bunch of people are holding onto theirs, that means other people aren't gonna have it. "Too bad. I don't see you. I'm in my house with my car, and I don't see you, and I don't care." That's really cruel. Sorry.

del Norte: I agree. One reason I wanted to go in this direction is because what you mentioned about the cost of food, and food distribution. Is there a way to lower the cost of food, that you know? I know that you're not an economist or anything, but it's kind of driving me a little bit crazy about how high food costs are.

McMillan: Well, so you should research the Roadrunner Food Bank.

del Norte: Yeah.

McMillan: Yeah. In Albuquerque. So, we donate to them, and the other thing about food is how much is wasted. Like “Ugly food.” You know, how much produce is imperfect? Like I have a zucchini plant that’s putting out zucchinis, but most of them are pretty ugly, and I’m growing my own potatoes, and I think they’re gonna be really ugly because I don’t think I’m doing it quite right. But, they’re gonna be perfectly edible, right, but they’re not gonna be pretty. You could never sell them at a grocery store, and so, yeah, I think there’s plenty of food.

It’s distributing it, and yeah, and the other problem is that fresh food doesn’t last that long. Right. So, yeah, and it costs gasoline to take those trucks down to Columbus, but it can be done. What it takes is people like the Roadrunner Food Bank people who have that vision, and they’re like, “Well. Damn it. This is what’s gonna happen.” It was kind of like Community of Hope when my— “Sound Off,” that’s what that thing was called in the Sun News.

When I was in Sound Off, and my kids were like, “Yay, Mom. So-and-so hates you today.” Or when I was getting flack here for promotion and tenure because I was spending too much time working on the Community of Hope. I’m like, “You know what? If I was in a different department this would be my ticket to tenure.”

del Norte: Sure. Yeah. The inter-disciplinary, maybe a ceiling of some sort.

McMillan: Right, right. Right, but you have— these problems can be solved. Just someone has to have the passion, and someone has to have the stubbornness to do it.

del Norte: About vision. You mentioned Roadrunner Food Bank, and their vision. Are there other potential programs which show promise, that you know of as a development committee member?

McMillan: Yeah, I'm not on— I haven't thought about that stuff in a while, so I have no response.

del Norte: That's perfect. This is the two last questions.

McMillan: Okay.

del Norte: And it's a big one, this one I'm about to ask.

McMillan: Okay. I'm ready.

del Norte: Can you name three of the most valuable contributions or levels of support, that are not present today, that would help the homeless in Las Cruces immediately? I guess that's the golden ticket—

McMillan: I should have thought about this more.

del Norte: You know. That type of thing?

McMillan: Well. I think certainly education is definitely one of them. I mean if we were, if they're all tied together, right, but you have to solve family stability before the kids are really gonna be able to take advantage of school. And also, they have to have enough nutrition so that their brains mature. So, it's all tied together. But, I think education and jobs. I mean you need to grow the economy so that you have the ability for people to get a job, and which then means that they can pay their rent, which means that then their kids are stable, and their kids can go to school, and then the kids can thrive, and which is why I think the problem still exists. Right.

[End first hour of interview]

Interview 6 second hour — June 29th, 2018

Nancy McMillan: Because it's so many problems that are all inter-dependent that it's hard to solve one and not the others. Like, as big as the Community of Hope is, the Community of Hope is far more than a bandaid. Far, far more than a bandaid, but it is not yet a body cast. Right. I mean, they're not changing the economy of the State of New Mexico, so that there's more jobs. They're not, you know, yeah. It's way beyond their scope, but that's what needs to happen. And that's gonna be the Governor, and the Legislature, needs to really understand all of these issues. I was so sad that report that came out in the Sun News about the progress about all the different, you know—

David Lee del Norte: The “Kid’s Count” [2018 report].

McMillan: Yeah. Where the teen pregnancy rate is down half a percent, but we're still worse. We're still worse than every other state, and we've been worse than every other state since I moved here in 1957. You know, it's like there's so many bright people in this state. Why can't we figure it out? But, part of it is that everything is linked to everything else, and so, you can't just put— like Community of Hope is amazing, but it hasn't solved homelessness in Doña Ana County. It's amazing. It's done this huge stuff. It's going so well, but the problem is, it's not that the problem is so big, it's that the problem is so complex, and it has roots in the economy. It has roots in cultural bias. It has roots in so many different arenas that it's hard to solve it.

del Norte: You mentioned cultural bias. I recently read, *The Color of Law* by Richard Rothstein, and it talks about red-lining, and federal housing authority creating “White only” cities, and you know, blocking neighborhoods from African Americans, and what not.

McMillan: (Simultaneously) Right.

del Norte: Do you know instances of that in the past here in Doña Ana County?

McMillan: I don't.

del Norte: That's something I'm moving toward.

McMillan: Yeah. I don't know of any. I mean, I don't know, but I wouldn't know. I'm ignorant in that, but I do know that I've been in discussions where people were talking about, “Well, we should have a school, an elementary school set aside for the homeless kids.” Right. Because then we get, all the services would be for the homeless kids. And it's kind of like, but then you tell them that they're homeless kids. I'd rather tell them they're kids. I'd rather mix them in with the other kids because they're gonna learn from those other kids, but then it's hard on the regular kids. I don't know. I don't know what the answers are. That is not my— Can we talk about LIBS now, because I'm a lot more comfortable talking about that. (Chuckles) I know something about that.

del Norte: We can definitely talk about LIBS–

McMillan: No, just kidding.

del Norte: –but I’ll finish this question.

McMillan: Right.

del Norte: And I think it’s the easy one. And please take your time to think about it.

McMillan: Okay.

del Norte: There’s no rush to get through this.

McMillan: Okay.

del Norte: In light of your work for those in need, how do you envision the future of the Mesilla Valley Community of Hope? I know a lots changed, but, the future, now that you’re on the Development Board.

McMillan: (Simultaneously) Well. The easy way to get out of this is the future is not in my hands anymore. I'm on the Development Board, so my role is to raise money, and mainly we focus on Camp Hope because it cannot be funded by anything but charitable donations, but I really think that the Community of Hope is going to continue in much the same direction that it is. I think that when we had that vision we had the right vision, and there's a lot of people involved. Each board has its own group of volunteer supporters, so there's a lot of diversity, a lot of people working on the same problem, and I think that's how to solve it.

So, yeah, I can't see real far down that road, but I think that it's lasted. I mean, we're talking twenty years? 1994? Twenty-five years? I mean, it's a quarter of a century. I'm patting myself on the back. Let the recorder say that, you know, I mean, I didn't do it by myself by any means, but we had the right idea. It was the idea that needed to happen, and so I think it will continue to be the idea that needs to happen. So, I would probably say, more of the same, continually adapting.

Like Camp Hope was an adaptation, and an added thing, but the structure of it kind of yields itself to that, or lends itself to that, so that if there was a decision that we needed a new service, I don't know what that would be—

del Norte: Hmm. Wow. Another new service.

McMillan: Say we needed, say we needed driving lessons. You know, everyone needs to be able to drive. I don't know. But, you could, you know—

McMillan: What would happen if you would form another non-profit, and with that mission, and it would be part of the community, and they would do that, and they would get their own volunteers. You know, go get, go get more people who were focused on that issue. And so, it kind of has a structure that lends itself to being able to be flexible to meet needs, as long as you were willing to spin off businesses, spin off non-profits, but it has a nice basis, so that it could be adaptable for whatever the needs are in the future. You know, like when Jardin [de Los Niños] came in, it was not a big deal to have Jardin join the group. They were not one of the originals, but it was like, “Of course. Come on in.” You know.

del Norte: You made me think about self-governance over at Camp Hope.

McMillan: Right.

del Norte: At the Safety Shack. The self-governance of the homeless folks. And, as well, where did children go before Jardin [de Los Niños] was on the campus?

McMillan: In their car, maybe.

del Norte: So, they stayed off the campus, or mothers didn't have access?

McMillan: Or they went to lunch. They went to, you know, so they would go to El Caldito.

del Norte: They didn't have a place to stay overnight necessarily?

McMillan: No. I think there was a lot of sleeping in cars, and a lot of, there still is, I'm sure, a lot of "Five families" in a one bedroom apartment, and—

del Norte: House sharing.

McMillan: —that kind of stuff. Yeah. One thing that occurred to me, I think it was actually after I got off the Board, and had some time to reflect, that basically what Community of Hope has done is, has developed the same thing that families often provide. You know, for your family member that has... you know, on hard times, and because I mean, I'm madly in love with my— I have two brothers, and a sister, and I adore them, but if anything like, you know, if they reached a point in their life where they were homeless, I would drive to them, throw them in my car, and drive them back to my house, and we would go from there.

Whatever counseling they needed. Whatever food they needed. Whatever medical they needed. I mean, that's how it would roll, and they would do the same for me and my family, and so, but that's not how families are, and some families don't have that capability.

McMillan: Even if they want to they don't have the wealth or the stability themselves, and so, but in a way that's kind of what [Community of Hope] provides, the basic fundamental things that humans need to keep going.

del Norte: Amazing. Thank you so much.

McMillan: Sure.

del Norte: Dr. McMillan, do you have any questions for me, or any thoughts that you'd like to wrap up the interview today?

McMillan: I'm just gonna tell you one story.

del Norte: Yeah. Please.

McMillan: So, when we— Okay. Central to the Community of Hope being effective was to build this campus. Right. They all have to be on the same property, so we had gotten the money from the State [of New Mexico]. We had raised our private funding, but we needed this big chunk of CDBG [Community Development Block Grant] money that was politically very, very dicey because other non-profit agencies were gonna have to give up their funding, for a year, so that we could have it to build. Right.

McMillan: So, there was only, I can't remember, seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars, or something, of CCBG money in the city, which was usually divided up like ten ways between all these agencies, and it was operating money for them. And we put in our proposal. We need basically all of that, for one year, so we can build this property. Right. So, I knew what we were saying.

And so, it was really difficult, and I had spoken to City Council so many times that— Do you remember the old Peanuts [Charlie Brown] cartoons when the kids are in class, and the teachers up there just “Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah,” you know, that they weren't even hearing?

They would see me coming, and you could see the shade go across their eyes. “We know what you're gonna say.” “We know what you're gonna say.” And it's like, “Well. Yeah, and I'm saying it again because you need to hear it.” Right. But, it had gotten to that point where I was not being effective no matter— I tried the hard sell. I tried the soft sell. I tried the medium sell, and I had pushed it as far as I could push it.

And so, the vote was coming. The vote was coming, and there's seven city councilors, and we have three “For” and three “Against,” and a “Swing” guy. And I'm just like “Ohh,” you know, because we're so close, but without that huge chunk of funding, that's like half the funding. Right. “What are we gonna do?” “What are we gonna do?”

So, of course, a bunch of us are praying, and praying, and praying, but I was just, you know: I knew. I knew that I couldn't do anything.

McMillan: Well, in the meantime, my mom, got really sick, and she passed away that fall, and the vote was in November because we— My family had all met in Phoenix at Thanksgiving to basically divvy up the belongings, and the house. Right. So, not only do I know that I can't do this thing for Community of Hope, but I'm also absorbed in my own grief, and my own family stuff. But, you know how you see those things? You know, it's like you can feel it out there, but I was really having a lot of angst because I could feel it out there.

There was this swing vote, but I could not do anything. I couldn't because I was involved with my family, but also I knew that if I touched it I would screw it up just because I had pushed it as far as I personally could push it. And I was so busy I didn't even have time to call anyone. I was a mess as you can imagine. Well. Steve Newby, who's an architect in town who was not part of the architect that finally got the, the, uh—

del Norte: I know what you're talking about. The site—

McMillan: He hadn't worked on it. Right.

del Norte: Gotcha.

McMillan: So, he has no interest. No financial interest in this, right, but he's always come to some of the meetings, and he's like, "Yeah. This is the right thing to do." Right. Steve Newby, on his own, goes to the house of the swing vote, talks to him for three hours. Yeah.

McMillan: He just ups-and-goes, and talks to the city councilor — the swing vote — who was leaning the other way. And so, I get back from Thanksgiving. I'm really not functioning very well because I'm in the middle of this big, huge, you know, my mom died. It's a huge grief.

I go to the vote, and I'm just kind of barely keeping it together, and we won "Four" to "Three," and I didn't even know that Steve had done that, but he just, and, you know, I really think that that's a "God" thing. That this thing was born from, "Love God, and love your neighbor."

I think that the reason we got the mission right was because, you know, I can't say there was writing on the wall or anything, but for a geologist to, I don't know. I just think it was guided that way. I really do think it was, and I think Steve was motivated, and he went, and he talked to that one city councilor who voted for us. And people were shocked, right. So, the vote came, and we got it, so we were all like, "Yeah!" And some people were just like, you know, "What? What happened?" You know, it was, yeah. It was an amazing thing. It was really an amazing thing.

del Norte: Is Steve Newby still in town?

McMillan: I don't know. I think I saw him. I don't run in those circles anymore.

del Norte: Maybe I'll have to find out what he's up to.

McMillan: Yeah. He will always be my hero for doing that. And I don't know what motivated him. I don't know, but that made the difference. That one vote, you know, "Four" to "Three." That wins. Sorry, you three [city counselors]. And we got the funding. And all those agencies who suffered that year, they survived.

del Norte: They're still here.

McMillan: Yeah.

del Norte: It was just a year of gap, that type of thing.

McMillan: Yeah. Really hard. I know it was really hard, but yeah. It was an amazing— an amazing thing.

del Norte: And we keep on.

McMillan: We keep on. We keep on because it's the right— And I know, I can't really take credit for getting it right. I'm amazed, and pleased, that we got the vision right. I'm not gonna say, "Well, we're so smart. We figured it out." It was like, "Thank God we did it right." It seems to be working. It's still working a quarter of a century later. It's still—

del Norte: Absolutely.

McMillan: –it’s still the right thing. So, it’s, yeah— It’s a great thing.

del Norte: I hope you understand how important this interview is to me. Especially, and we’re concluding here. You’ve done a great service to this project—

McMillan: Thank you.

del Norte: –to fill in the gap, and I didn’t hear your name until two weeks ago, during Dr. Nancy Baker’s interview.

McMillan: Well. She’s amazing. Can I say that on the record? She’s an amazing person.

del Norte: I’m pretty sure that’s what she felt about you, on the record.

McMillan: Oh, yeah, we—

del Norte: I haven’t seen her transcript yet.

McMillan: Yes, we both think each other’s— We were hired at NMSU the same time, so we met at the new employee “Blah-blah-blah” thing. Yeah.

del Norte: Right.

McMillan: Sat next to each other: “Hi, what’s your name?”

“Nancy.”

“Ah, that’s my name.”

And it was just like: “Okay. Now we’re friends,” So—

del Norte: It’s just really amazing to get this piece of the puzzle. I didn’t know it existed. Dr. Jon Hunner recommended Dr. Baker. And now it’s just kind of—

McMillan: Right.

del Norte: –clicking together.

McMillan: Um hmm, excellent. You are very welcome. It was really fun to talk about all this.

del Norte: Wonderful.

McMillan: Lots of memories.

del Norte: Let me know on down the line, once you get your transcript, if you'd like to do a second interview. I'd be honored.

McMillan: Okay.

del Norte: If you've got more thoughts, or a short interview.

McMillan: Okay.

del Norte: If there's anything in the future.

McMillan: Okay, great.

del Norte: Thank you.

McMillan: Yeah, sure. Thanks. Bye.

[End of recorded interview]