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New Mexico State University
Las Cruces, New Mexico

Mesilla Valley Community of Hope

2018

Hope Stories

Interview 6

Nancy McMillan Transcript Index & Excerpt

Consolidated Services Model

Interviewed by David Lee del Norte

29 June 2018

NMSU Public History Seminar Room, Breland Hall 258

Sponsored by Doña Ana County Historical Society

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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 a small lunch service which later became El Caldito Soup Kitchen. As need for food and healthcare clinical service increased, the Las Cruces community supported the Saint Andrew's congregation 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 shape collaborative alliances with operations at 999 West Amador nearby to downtown Las Cruces. In 2011, following a particularly harsh "Deep Freeze" winter that caused health concerns and exposure deaths for the homeless, Mesilla Valley Community of Hope staff banded together with Hope Campus clients, appealed to the City of Las Cruces for sanctioned overnight camping status, and soon founded Camp Hope transitional living program.

In 2018, the Hope Stories project collected fifteen oral history interviews to learn about the legacy of organizational homeless services at Mesilla Valley Community of Hope. The term "Corridor of Care" refers to a healthcare industry perspective known as the Consolidated Services Model that helps people to access health and human service related programs quickly, reliably, and within centrally located "Hub" or "Node" areas of potentially consistent preventative care.

This public history graduate project asked participating narrators questions about how the Las Cruces community first began to advance, reinforce, and collaborate with 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 consolidated services “Campus” concepts.

The project ended without narrators to represent the community’s food pantry. Founded in 1979, Casa de Peregrinos relocated to the Hope Campus as an alliance member during the 1991 opening, and today continues to serve Doña Ana County with increased food delivery and expanded satellite locations. 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 Elliott and Meg Long occurred at Aggie Cupboard on the 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 organizations 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 assistance and resources offered by the City of Las Cruces, the New Mexico Department of Health, and the New Mexico Department of Human Services. For an updated and comprehensive list of regional community services, insightful for anyone experiencing homelessness, inquire City of Las Cruces or MVCH with search term “Las Cruces Community Resource Guide.”

Narrator Summary

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.

Index of first hour

00:08 - Interview introduction

00:48 - Family biography Las Alamos, New Mexico

03:05 - Education and Geology career

05:50 - Laser-Induced Breakdown Spectroscopy (LIBS)

08:12 - Geologist Kate McManus, tracking Blood Diamonds, and Materialytics

10:40 - First memory of those experiencing homelessness

12:12 - Health issues, maintaining stability, and dignity preservation

13:23 - Soup kitchens and “Reverse Offering” food drives with Saint Andrew’s Church

14:21 - Food insecurity, food distribution, and “Food deserts” in southern New Mexico

16:22 - Fragmentation of Las Cruces basic services before MVCH

18:04 - Saint Andrew’s Church overburdened; Saint Luke’s Health Clinic origins

19:42 - Father Jim Galbraith talent bank; Consolidated Services Model grant writing

21:41 - National Episcopal Church “United Thank Offering” grant

22:22 - John Paul Taylor effort for six hundred thousand dollar state appropriations

23:15 - Phase-one construction of Hope Campus and Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)

Index of first hour (cont.)

- 24:43 - Transitional housing federal grant funding versus private donation sources
- 26:11 - Consolidated Services Model MVCH origins timeline 1991-1995; Maggie Fallen
- 28:18 - Homeless services before Hope Campus; Las Cruces community controversy
- 30:09 - Hacienda del Sol women's shelter mission statement
- 31:57 - President of MVCH board and non-profit organizational tools
- 34:12 - Gospel Rescue Mission for men versus Hacienda del Sol family services
- 35:00 - Lifespan of nonprofits and the closing of Hacienda del Sol
- 38:03 - Recognizing success with second-phase mission of Community of Hope
- 39:21 - Non-profit 501c3 organization structural makeup and the importance of leadership
- 42:30 - MVCH Consolidated Services Model created to avoid "Turf battles"
- 46:28 - Self-care support and addressing stressors of homeless service providers
- 52:10 - Complexity of potentially funding Hope Campus weekend staff
- 53:54 - Distribution of economic wealth from a "Spiritual point of view"
- 56:24 - Roadrunner Food Bank, "Ugly food," and fresh food distribution
- 58:54 - New Mexico need for education, family economic stability, and childhood nutrition

Index of second hour

01:03:21 - Future of Mesilla Valley Community of Hope

01:04:40 - Adaptation for necessary new services like Camp Hope and Jardin de Los Niños

01:06:57 - Hope Campus “Developed the same thing that families often provide”

01:08:34 - Political and personal challenges to obtain Community Development Block Grant

01:11:42 - Architect Steve Newby solicits Las Cruces city councilor swing-vote for 4-3 win

01:14:46 - Closing conversation with praise for Dr. Nancy Baker

Interview 6 Excerpt — Narrator Nancy McMillan:

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. 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?

Nancy 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.

Nancy 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—” 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?

Nancy McMillan:

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.

Recommended Citation

McMillan, Nancy, interviewed by David Lee del Norte, June 29th, 2018.
Hope Stories oral history project, New Mexico State University
Library Archives and Special Collections.

Recording Information

Hope Stories 06 — 1h 16m duration. Recorded at the Public History
Seminar Room, Breland Hall 258 on the NMSU campus.

Transcripts and Recordings

Listen, read, and request Hope Stories complete transcripts, sound
recordings, and 2018 project research box at New Mexico State
University Library and Special Collections.