

JUSTA CENTER

Wendy Johnson, Executive Director

The Faithfulness and Trust of God's People

We acknowledge that this has been the hardest and probably the most defining point in Justa Center's history. Our financial crisis last year, much like COVID-19, changed everything. Without the trust and support from the Conference, the Churches and God's People, Justa Center wouldn't exist today. We are grateful to you.

The challenges have become opportunities.

Stability

Our facility was for sale, and it appeared we would have to move. The *Arizona Republic* article in August opened up an opportunity for an expanded partnership with the Area Agency on Aging (AAA). Their board approved the purchase of our current property and the empty lot next door with a nominal lease payment. As of December 20, 2019, the Agency became our new landlord which allows us the security to continue to meet the needs of seniors in crisis.

Severe budget cuts, personnel lay-offs, and program redesign has helped create stability. In spite of the increased demands on services and supplies, especially with COVID-19, we have been able to provide what is needed. We are partnering with other agencies and community groups to make lasting change for seniors.

A Foundation for the Future

Intentional restructuring and ongoing assessment of programs, personnel, and board has allowed us to focus in essential services that support the return to housing and housing retention. These are two program areas that will see increased demand as senior homelessness continues to rise.

On-site, we are making improvements every day to keep the seniors safe, healthy, and socially distanced. Our landlord, AAA, is rehabbing our bathrooms and showers for health and safety—those will be complete by end of June.

Volunteer groups are helping us open up more space for activities and supportive services. A volunteer group donated funds for a restaurant-grade coffee system so we can stop using the 100-cup 'church' pots!

We even had a rowing machine and a treadmill donated for fitness and a senior-fit program will start in September (too hot before then). Whole person activities are key to seniors' survival.

What is the Future?

The last several months have proven we cannot anticipate or predict the future. However, good research data informs us that the nation's senior population will reach 78 million by 2035, with up to three million residing in Arizona. Sadly, seniors are at a greater risk of becoming homeless now than at any time in recent history due to rising living costs and other factors. The number of homeless people in Maricopa County rose 200% since 2014 and one-third of these are seniors.

Many other groups and agencies are trying to help, but without the experience, background, and trust that Justa Center provides, many of these programs will fail. We are responding by increasing our focus on a Housing Success Program—a bridge from homelessness to housing. We are building a program that will help those waiting for housing begin to prepare for that transition to success with life-skills, budgeting, planning, and staying healthy. We continue to seek grant funding that will support the growth of programs and services to alleviate homelessness for seniors in the Valley



What do the Churches and Congregations need to know?

- 1) New website – May 17
 - a. We are launching a redesigned website that will provide information and resources.
- 2) Donated Goods – Until recently, over half of the building was utilized to store and distribute donated goods. That space is needed for social distancing and additional programs.
 - a. No longer collecting donations from private homes
 - b. Not accepting any furniture
 - c. Through September (during building rehab) – not accepting clothing or household items
 - d. Please refer to the website for current needs and limitations.
- 3) Donation Drives – Health and safety are our primary concern. We are asking all groups considering a donation drive to focus on NEW items only, except for fall/winter coat drives which can be used.
- 4) Volunteer Opportunities – We can always use committed individuals who would like to work with seniors in homelessness and those in housing.
- 5) Summer Heat Relief – Extending hours through the peak-heat of 3-7 PM to provide shade, hydration, and an evening meal, June 1 through September 30.
- 6) Prayers – Justa Center is serving a growing population of frightened, embarrassed and depressed population who feels increasingly invisible. Your prayers can change lives and bring hope.

The faithful members of The United Methodist Church and the generosity of the churches in the Desert Southwest Conference are continuing to support Justa Center with prayer, donations, and financial support. We value being a part of this community of faith.