

THE LAGUNA BEACH INDEPENDENT

OUR TOWN, OUR PAPER



Holding his Certificate of Appreciation, Director of Shelter Programs Carol Carlson greets Laguna Beach Chief of Police Jeff Calvert. Framed between them is LCPD Corporal Alex Diaz. (Spencer Grant/LB Indy)

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For Homebuyers & Owners
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Waymakers Laguna Beach Youth Shelter Relocates

By Spencer Grant and Mara Casey

Despite Waymakers moving the Laguna Beach Youth Shelter from its longtime location at 980 Catalina Street to its Tustin facility, the nonprofit remains dedicated to providing the same services it has offered for 46 years: short-term crisis intervention and shelter for runaway, homeless and at-risk children aged 12-17.

Waymakers CEO Ronetta Johnson explained the change during the organization's "Cheers to Laguna: It Takes a Village" community gathering on Friday, Aug. 29.

"California has changed funding for mental health programs because of the passage of Prop. 1, which shifted the focus to homelessness, primarily for families and adults, and then to substance abuse," Johnson said. "We think that over time, it will hopefully shift back and focus on mental health issues for youth as well. Our mission has always been about creating safe places for youth to find stability and hope, and that will remain the same in Tustin."

She added that Waymakers is grateful for the support it has received from Laguna since 1979.

"It's really a bittersweet situation for us to have to leave because the community has been great and so supportive," Johnson said.

"Since some of our funding has gone away, we can no longer maintain the Catalina Street building," said Carol Carlson, director of shelter programs. "We're going to sell this house and move those funds to our Tustin Youth Shelter,



Director of Shelter Programs Carol Carlson gifts Laguna Beach Shelter Advisory Board Member Kelly Cornwell his Chrystal Heart award for his long service. (Spencer Grant/LB Indy)

where we're able to afford to continue to serve the children from Laguna Beach. I hate to use the term closing. We're not closing. We have recently relocated our services, but we continue to serve Laguna Beach."

Waymakers serves all of Orange County.

"We do a lot of counseling programs and crime victim services and community education programs," Carlson explained. "And so, we do those throughout the county, but our shelters have been in Huntington Beach and Tustin."

Waymakers board member Patricia Romero explains the plight of the youths the organization strives to serve.

"Teachers have failed them, parents have failed them, hospitals, police (too). This is how they come to us feeling hopeless and helpless," she said. "So, when they enter, we give them a safe place and teach them coping skills that they will have for life when they feel down and out."



Waymakers CEO Ronetta Johnson greets Mayor Alex Rounaghi. In the background is Director of Shelter Programs Carol Carlson. (Spencer Grant/LB Indy)

"The basketball courts, the sitting area - it's a place where they can find peace and solitude," Romero continued. "We teach them that they don't have to depend on others. They have it within themselves. And then if they're not ready after three weeks, they transition to other facilities. We've had situations where they come back with their child and say, 'This is where I learned to be a better parent.'"

Carlson said that nothing was going to change as far as Waymakers services were concerned.

"The six beds that were located in the Laguna Beach shelter have just been moved to our Tustin shelter," she said. "We're not losing any beds."

Youths access the help of Waymakers in many ways. A school counselor, police officer or hospital nurse may call on their behalf, or it can be the centralized assessment team, or CAT team, with the county or the county clinic.



Barbara Steensland and Director of Shelter Programs Carol Carlson chat at a historical display of news stories about Waymakers. (Spencer Grant/LB Indy)

"We're just happy to be able to continue to serve the city of Laguna Beach and all South Orange County residents," Carlson said.

To celebrate the legacy of the Laguna Beach Youth Shelter, Waymakers hosted a "Cheers to Laguna: It Takes a Village" community gathering on Friday, Aug. 29. Guests included Mayor Alex Rounaghi, Laguna Beach Police Chief Jeff Calvert and a representative from Sen. Tony Strickland's office. Longtime Laguna Beach Shelter Advisory Board Member Kelly Cornwell was honored with a Crystal Heart Award for more than three decades of volunteer service.

The phone numbers for Waymakers will also remain the same: 949-494-4311 or 714-714-0780.