

Monthly Newsletter



6 March, 2026



Health and Human Resources Topic Day Team: Keith, Ziha, Lazaro, Ed, Joy Advisors: Shana Pompa and Alisha Holley

Keith, Ziha, Lazaro, Ed, and Joy led this year's Health and Human Resources topic day. The team began preparing months in advance with guidance from their advisors, Shana Pompa and Alisha Holley, both former LSMV participants. The evening before the event, the group gathered to set up tables, tablecloths, and decorations. Once everything was organized and ready, they wrapped up the night on a positive note, confident that the following day would be a great one. The morning began early. Joy picked up breakfast and coffee, while Keith and Ed arrived to help with setup. Keith made a last-minute run for plastic cups, and Lazaro prepared the technology and finalized the PowerPoint presentations while Ziha helped organize the thank-you cards.

Breakfast began promptly at 8:00 a.m., with food provided by Panera Bread. At 8:15 a.m., we heard our first life story from Phil. His story included memorable accounts of his military deployment and how he met his wife. They had originally planned to marry before his deployment, but when a new conflict overseas accelerated his timeline, the couple decided to marry just days before he left. Their wedding took place in beautiful Hawaii.



Keith, Ziha, Lazaro, Ed, Joy

Health & Human Services

Speakers:
Ed Carcarey
Sue Andersen

Good Samaritan Shelter

Band of Brothers

Life Stories:
Phil Dix
Monica Carrillo
Manny Curiel

VTC Enterprises, Growing Grounds, and Hope Village



Dr. David Ketelaar

At 8:30 a.m., Dr. David Ketelaar, Emergency Medicine Physician at Marian Regional Medical Center, presented a Behavioral Health Update focused on the outpatient psychiatric unit. He spoke about the mental health challenges affecting the community, including schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, substance use withdrawal, and depression. He also discussed the CDC's biannual behavioral survey of high school students. One of the most striking findings from the 2023 survey showed that one in five students reported seriously considering suicide.

Dr. Ketelaar explained the lack of local resources for adolescent outpatient psychiatric care. Many families must travel to Fresno or Bakersfield to receive services. While the need clearly exists, the process of opening a new facility can be extremely slow. He shared that when his hospital attempted to open an outpatient clinic, the state approval process alone took more than a year. These challenges highlight the barriers our community faces when trying to expand mental health services. The team asked several thoughtful questions, and Dr. Ketelaar provided detailed answers and helpful insights. The group thanked him for his time and dedication to addressing these issues.



Good Samaritan Shelter

At 9:00 a.m., the team headed to Good Samaritan Shelter, where we were greeted by Kristen Kahoon and Nathan Lenski. They welcomed us with warm smiles and introduced us to several staff members before beginning the tour.

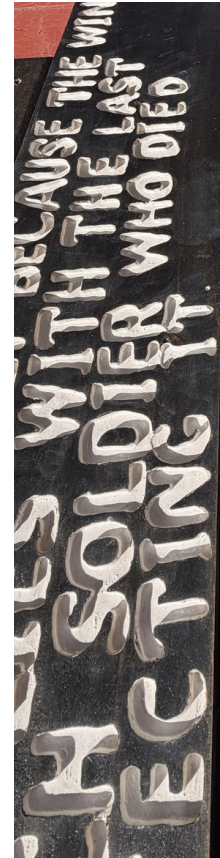
We first learned about the history of the shelter and how it has grown from a small program into a critical resource for the community. Staff shared that homelessness remains a significant issue locally and that, in recent years, the elderly population has been among the most affected. We walked through the main sleeping area, which accommodates about 90 residents. During the day, residents leave the shelter and return later in the afternoon. Families also stay there, including children who attend local schools. For many residents, the shelter is the only home they currently have. Each person receives a plastic bin to store their belongings, and the facility provides essential items such as toiletries, meals, and common spaces for recreation. Staff mentioned that some of their greatest donation needs include blankets and new shoes.

Our tour continued through the dining hall and into the kitchen, where we met the head chef. He explained that the shelter offers an eight-week food handling certification program. One of the kitchen assistants is a former client who completed the training program, secured a job at the shelter, and has since moved into his own housing. It was a powerful example of the hope and opportunity the program provides.

We also learned about an exciting upcoming project. The organization plans to launch a food truck in Santa Barbara and eventually bring one to our community as well. The truck's name will be "Good Samwich," which will serve sandwiches while providing job training and employment opportunities for program participants. Before leaving, the team donated toys for the children and gathered for a group photo.

Band of Brothers | Casa de Flores

At 10:00 a.m., the group traveled to La Casa de Flores, a home operated by Band of Brothers that provides housing for veterans and their families. There we met Steven Bard, who shared the remarkable story of how he came to run the program. Steven explained that his connection to the name began years ago during a court appearance where he met Judge Flores, whom he described as tough but fair. Years later, when the home was established, the group chose to name it La Casa de Flores in recognition of that experience. In a meaningful twist of fate, Judge Flores later officiated the wedding for Steven and his partner more than seven years ago. Steven also shared several personal stories from the home. One involved a road sign placed nearby that serves as a reminder of the dangers of alcohol abuse. He spoke about the residents who have lived there for years and about two current roommates who are now in the process of purchasing their own home. Stories like these highlighted the stability and support the program provides.





Ed Carcarey

At 10:45 a.m., the group returned to Shepard Hall to hear from community entrepreneur Ed Carcarey. He spoke about leadership, decision-making, and the importance of taking action.

Ed encouraged the group to find a cause that matters to them and pursue it with intention. He emphasized that mistakes are often the best teachers and that success alone can sometimes lead to complacency. According to Ed, commitment is like a furnace that must continually be fed.

He also stressed the importance of having a true mentor. In his view, the best mentors are those who care less about protecting your feelings and more about helping you grow and succeed. His message left the group feeling energized and motivated. Afterward, we gathered for a photo and thanked him for sharing his insights.



Sue Andersen

At 11:30 a.m., Sue Andersen, President and CEO of Dignity Health, presented an overview of the CommonSpirit Health system, which serves roughly one quarter of Americans. She described the growth of healthcare services in our region, including the addition of a Level II Trauma Center that allows families involved in accidents to receive treatment at the same location rather than being separated. She also highlighted programs such as Mission Hope Cancer Center and the OB/GYN residency program. Recruitment efforts continue to bring new physicians to the Central Coast, and many are drawn by both the professional opportunities and the quality of life in the region. After the presentation, we took a photo with Sue and transitioned into lunch.

Life Story - Lunch was served at noon, generously donated by JFT Insurance Agency



At 12:15 p.m., Monica Carrillo shared her life story while the group enjoyed lunch. A graduate of CSU Chico with a degree in Criminal Justice, she spoke about her background and how her career has influenced her life. She enjoys running, hiking, and spending time outdoors, and she also shared how much she values time with her grandmother.



At 12:30 p.m., Manny Curiel shared his life story. One of the lessons that guides his life is simple but powerful: live with love and happiness, and even the impossible can become possible. He spoke about taking his mother on regular outings, spending time with his daughters, and appreciating the life he has built with his family.



VTC Enterprises | Growing Grounds | Hope Village

At 1:00 p.m., the team headed to VTC Enterprises, where Polly Hoffer and Azucena Vargas welcomed us and guided us through the facility. We saw firsthand how the organization provides vocational training and life skills for individuals with disabilities. Participants were actively learning, dancing, and enjoying themselves, clearly proud of their contributions. Polly and Azucena explained that VTC is not only about employment opportunities. It is about dignity, independence, and creating spaces where everyone in the community can thrive. We were then taken to the A Street Café, where they are open 365 days a year serving delicious and well-priced items. The group took a photo by the restaurant.

Our next stop at 2:00 p.m. was Growing Grounds, led by Keith Barlett. This social enterprise operates under the Transitions Mental Health Association and functions as a therapeutic nursery for adults recovering from mental health challenges. Keith explained that caring for plants often helps individuals rebuild confidence and stability in their own lives. Walking through rows of California native plants, vegetables, and flowers made it easy to see how this environment supports healing while preparing participants to return to the workforce. Our group had the luck to harvest carrots and taste the real flavor of organic. The group took a photo afterward.

At 2:45 p.m., we visited Hope Village with Brian Mason. This community of tiny homes provides interim supportive housing for individuals transitioning out of homelessness. Brian explained that housing offers more than shelter. It also provides security, privacy, and something as simple but essential as a mailing address. These basic elements are often the first steps toward long-term stability. Seeing the village in person helped us better understand the Housing First philosophy, which recognizes that people are far more likely to address health, employment, and personal challenges once they have a safe place to live. The group took a photo afterward.

By 3:30 p.m., the group returned to Shepard Hall after a full day of learning and site visits. Cookies donated by Crumbl Cookies gave everyone a chance to recharge while reflecting on everything we had seen and heard. At 3:45 p.m., we gathered for one final group photo in front of the mural behind the library (non-public area), a colorful reminder of our legacy project. The final hour of the day focused on that project, which involves painting a mural at Arellanes Elementary School.

Thank you for reading!

From Dr. Ketelaar's warnings about adolescent mental health to Ed's encouragement to find a cause and take action, the day served as a powerful reminder that while the challenges in health and human services are significant, the dedication of local leaders and organizations continues to make a difference.

A special thank you goes out to JFT Insurance Agency, Crumbl Cookies, Panera Bread, and the many organizations (Good Samaritan, VTC, Hope Village, Growing Grounds, Band of Brothers) and individuals who helped make the day possible.