

A Moment in Time with Trudy Hoekstra Lakeside Church Host Volunteer

What brought you to HART? I have always been a big advocate for helping the unhoused. Back in 2004, I started flipping houses. On my first flip, I partnered with Loaves and Fishes to hire unhoused people, hoping to teach them a trade they could use to get good employment opportunities. It worked for one man, Anthony, who went from living in his car to becoming an electrician! The real estate downturn put a pause on my home flipping, and my interaction with the unhoused since 2008 was minimal. Then, when my church, Lakeside, hosted one of HART's first meetings and advertised it to the church attenders, I was extremely excited to hear about HART forming to help our neighbors in Folsom and learn how I could help.

How did you hear about the winter shelter? At the HART meeting I attended, they announced the Winter Shelter. I brimmed with excitement about the possibility of helping people, not just with a meal and a place to stay overnight, but with hope for a future through the mentoring program. This was right where I wanted to be!

How did your church get involved and become hosts? My pastor, Brad Franklin, knew how much I cared for the unhoused. At the end of that meeting, HART asked for a leader from Lakeside, and Brad asked if I would like to do it. I didn't know what it involved, and I was scared at the commitment level, so I gave him the Christian way of saying no: "I'll have to pray about that, Pastor." He pointed across the room to my friend Katie. He said, "If Katie does it with you, will you do it?" Now, Katie is an amazingly compassionate and heartfelt individual, and I just love her. I wanted to work with Katie! So, I said, "Yes, I'd love to!" Pastor Brad joked at me, "So you don't have to pray about it anymore?" I have led the Lakeside host church Winter Shelter ever since the first year.

What would you say to people who are thinking about volunteering with HART? I was so scared the first year. I sat down with some of the guests at my first dinner at the Winter Shelter and thought, "Are these people really homeless? Where do they sleep? What's it like to be homeless? I don't know what to say! I can't ask the typical questions like where do you live, or what do you do for a living?"

Eventually after the uncomfortable silence, one of the guests asked me, "How was your day?" and it was revolutionary to me, that was a question I could ask! After just one dinner with the guests, I was hooked. They loved talking, and I loved hearing their stories. I remember the last morning of that first year. Exhausted but exhilarated from two weeks of hosting, I cried and hugged each one of my new friends on their way out. Winter Shelter is a terrific way to dip your toe in the water and see what it's like to volunteer with HART and help the unhoused. Push through your fear, and you can really make a big impact in the lives of people who God loves so dearly!

How do you feel about HART in general? What an amazing organization! I love how enthusiastic the leadership gets. I love how the Winter Shelter volunteers are so methodical and organized. I love the opportunity HART gives us to help in an area where help is becoming increasingly desperately needed. I truly appreciate the leadership and the Board and all the Winter Shelter HART leaders. It's such an honor, privilege, and blessing to get to work with all of you!