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Working together to help Bisbee's homeless

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"Love" has been living in the camp on public land behind the Safeway store in the San Jose district and appreciates the food and supplies Cochise Harm Reduction supplies.

Shar Porier [herald/review](#)

BISBEE — It's the last stop of a 10-hour day by Cochise Harm Reduction and as they pull in to the camp, people living on city property behind the Bisbee Safeway begin to gather to get their food and supplies for the week.

CHR offers free harm reduction supplies, education and legal advocacy with the aim to decrease overdose deaths, prevent the spread of infectious disease while increasing employment and access to harm reduction services and community care. The agency operates regular food and supplies delivery and outreach in Sierra Vista, Douglas, Bisbee, and Benson.

On Oct. 6, Lu Funk, CHS founder and executive director, and employee Samuel Bernard handed out socks, sleeping bags, tarps, first aid kits, flashlights, hygiene supplies, clean needles and disposal containers, Narcan, small first aid kits, small propane tanks, sack lunches and hot meals and canned and packaged food.

The people there have managed to build makeshift homesites, which may look like junk to those who have an address to call home. To those at the camp, their homemade shelters are just as important to them.

As can be expected, the folks living there are not inclined to talk with the press for fears of harassment, yet they are cordial. They all appreciate the help from CHR.

"They're awesome," one woman said. "Life is better with Lu."

A young man called "Love," for his gentle nature, said he has angels watching over him and they help him play his guitar. He is excited about the temple he is building to share his original music with others. He has been at the camp a long time and is appreciative of the help Funk and associates.

CHR services the big and small communities across the county and recently added Elfrida and Pearce to their delivery route.

Funk said a woman found a business card for CHR lying on the ground at a gas station in Pearce serendipitously and called for help. A new stop was added.

However, the nonprofit is in dire need of a much larger van to load all the items and food they deliver to all the communities in Cochise County. They could also use a pickup truck, a computer and more donations, Funk says.

Funk has been very successful in obtaining funding from foundations like the Legacy Foundation of Southeast Arizona, who awarded CHR with a \$50,000 grant. She just received a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to support the effort.

CHR partners with various nonprofit organizations to serve this population, like Goar Park Lunches. It, too, was started by an individual, Dan Maldonado, who founded the nonprofit in his mother's kitchen with his own money.

"We help support each other," Maldonado said. "I support Lu one-thousand percent. We help supply Lu with food and supplies."

When his father became an invalid, Maldonado moved in to help his mother care for him. But, it left too many hours in the day with nothing for him to do with his free time.

He happened to see an elderly couple handing out sandwiches in Goar Park in Old Bisbee and decided to start Goar Park Lunches to feed those who were down on their luck and having a hard time making ends meet.



"Love" gets his weekly supplies from Cochise Harm Reduction staff member Levi Rodriguez on Sept. 29 at the camp behind Safeway. The nonprofit provides food, assisted by Goar Park Lunches, and living supplies to those across the county who are in dire straits.

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Goar Park Lunches founder and Cochise Harm Reduction member Dan Maldonado serves lunch at the Masonic Lodge in Bisbee last year. Grant money heading to Bisbee will help groups like Goar Park Lunches continue to feed those in need.

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A typical lunch served during Friday's Goar Park Lunches.

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Commercial kitchen space allowed GPL to become a stronger source with regular volunteers and donations. While at the Bisbee Royale building in Tombstone Canyon, GPL went from serving 2,000 to 10,000 meals a year. Maldonado founded a nonprofit, called Healthy Bisbee, in order to qualify for grants and expand services. In addition to meals, GPL provides overdose prevention kits, emergency and hygiene supplies, and connect people in need with free community services.

Over the past 10 years, he has managed to bring hot food to those in need and found a place large enough to add to his success.

When the Royale was sold, he found a new home in the Masonic Lodge just across the street. He talked to Freemason Chris Linden after peeking through the windows to see what the first level had to offer. He asked about a lease for the downstairs kitchen and dining area and soon had a five year-lease approved by the Lodge's officers.

It was not move-in ready for the scale Maldonado needed. He needed a commercial kitchen which required a lot of equipment like a grease trap, a far larger stove, a new stove hood, a freezer, a refrigerator and a three-sink cleanup area for dishes.

With \$30,000 from The Legacy Foundation and another \$10,000 from the Bisbee Community Foundation, Maldonado built a full-service commercial kitchen on the first floor of the lodge. He and his volunteers, who put in 5,000 hours a year, can cook, bake and roast whatever they choose. Many of the appliances were donated or sold to GPL dirt cheap.

One of his major achievements was acquiring good, usable food donated by Safeway and the growers at the farmers market which turned into hundreds of hot meals and sandwiches. Perfectly good food which would have landed in the waste stream was diverted and turned into wholesome meals. The food situation is also helped by the Community Food Bank of Southeast Arizona which provides a pallet of food each month.

After the move to the lodge, he had more space and was able to begin offering personal hygiene items, condoms, toilet paper, naloxone and even at home HIV tests.

Maldonado added a clothing rack, which is cleared almost weekly as those in need take advantage of the donations from the community. With cooler nights ahead, the need for winter clothing increases. Donations of clothing are accepted on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays from noon to 1 p.m.



Dan Maldonado works at the Goar Park Lunches facility located in the Masonic Lodge on Bisbee's Main Street.

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cochise harm reduction

For information visit the Cochise Harm Reduction website at: <https://cochiseharmreduction.org/> or call or text 520-485-9698.

Email: info@cochiseharmreduction.org

Donations are needed.

Goar Park Lunches

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