

VOLUNTEER NOTES

Board Lauds Participants

The Board of Supervisors recently honored MarinShares volunteers and Marinterns students by unanimously proclaiming April as Volunteer and Student Intern Month in Marin, praising them as “shining examples of our ability to care for one another.”

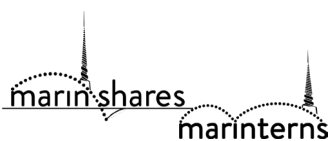
Board President **Dennis Rodoni** sponsored the proclamation, which notes participants’ diverse roles across the county organization, from wildflower docents to office aides, from FIRE Foundry interns to homework helpers. The proclamation continues the board’s 45-year practice of volunteer appreciation.

According to the MarinShares & Marinterns impact report, more than 8,100 people served over 204,000 hours in county departments and programs in 2022–2023, for a financial equivalent of \$10.3 million.

The volunteer program, among the nation’s first central county volunteer programs, was founded in 1979.

Holiday

County offices will be closed Monday, May 27, in observance of Memorial Day.



STAFF

Anne Starr, Coordinator of Volunteers
415-473-7167 • anne.starr@marincounty.gov
Joy Fossett, Student Internships Coordinator
415-473-7447 • joy.fossett@marincounty.gov

VOLUNTEERS

Writers: **Natalie Dybeck, Max Gehm, Ellie Gilbert, Marjorie Grannan, Scott Harrop, Calla McBride, Tiyona Pariani, Alice Wolf** | Photographers: **Bob Dell, Bill Johnston Jr., Doug Kaye, Gregg Turner, Brian Wilk** | Copy Editor: **Pamela Ross** | Copy Editor Intern: **David Balderama** | Graphic Design: **Eleanor Lau** | Intern Writing Coach: **Ed Remitz** | Administrative Aides: **Deborah Fox, Deborah Gregor** | Cartoonist: **John Donaghue**

Photographer’s Portraits Highlight Each Person’s Essence

By *Marjorie Grannan*

MarinShares volunteer **Lea Del Pomo** began her professional career as an employment counselor. She quickly became an advocate for residents in underserved communities. “My mission was to help them develop the skills to find and sustain employment,” she said. “And whole-person care was part of the process.”

Lea grew up back East and earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York. After a year in advertising, she moved to the Bay Area to work in employment and training with nonprofits and later the County of Marin.

In January 2020, Lea retired from her 21-year career with Marin’s Health and Human Services Department (HHS) employment development team and signed up as a county volunteer with the HHS Whole Person Care program.



PHOTO BY WAYNE WEEKS

Lea Del Pomo

“Eventually, I was asked if I would join the Seeds of Hope meetings at a homeless encampment under the freeway in San Rafael. Every Monday there was

Continued on page 4

Student Learns Independent Living Skills as a Youth Volunteer

By *Max Gehm*

Marintern **Kai Schiesser** is learning about office processes as a packet assembly student service volunteer for Marin County’s Health and Human Services Department (HHS). He volunteers on campus through his school’s vocational program.

“Oak Hill School is a place where neurodivergent students build trust, experience safety, and discover how they can thrive now and in the future,” said **Lilly Seaver**, Kai’s teacher. “Most of our day focuses on independent living skills. Students spend time at internships,

volunteering, going to the gym, and cooking for themselves.”

Kai and his peers spend an hour a week assembling 80 to 100 informational packets and applications—both Spanish and English—for HHS-administered programs such as CalFresh and MediCal. The students label envelopes; fold and collate pamphlets, brochures, and applications; and insert sets of documents into manila envelopes.

The packet-assembly role was jointly created by the county’s central Marinterns program and the school.

Continued on page 2

Student Learns Independent Living Skills as a Youth Volunteer

Continued from page 1

Oak Hill Vocational Program Coordinator **Kendra Messer** explained, “This is absolutely an educational and social activity. We set up the workspace in an assembly line, so the students need to work together and communicate. Kai and his peers love assembling packets! They cheer when I walk into their room with the materials from Health and Human Services.”

Kendra and Lilly speak highly of Kai’s kindness and enthusiasm. “Kai is always smiling,” Lilly said. “Kai is an exuberant young adult. He is always happy and he loves his internships.”

Outside of school, Kai likes “going to Goodwill to look for yoga pants and riding his [adult] tricycle with papa around town,” said **Michael Schiesser**, Kai’s father. His mother, **Neelama Eyres**, added, “Kai likes playing basketball and tennis, riding the SMART train, dancing

to ‘Y.M.C.A.’ by the Village People and ‘What Makes You Beautiful’ by One Direction, and doing puzzles.”

“I like cooking quesadillas,” Kai said. “I like to pick up trash in parks.” He also enjoys playing the card game Uno “with Oscar and Tila. Nico is my best friend forever. Lilly is great and she is nice to me. Monica is funny and I like hanging out with her,” he said. “Oscar, Athena, Tila, Jorge, and Adam are all in my new class and they are really funny! Vlad is my bestie!”

Kai started at Oak Hill in 2017. He is in the Olive classroom, which emphasizes vocational skills. Kai credits the school for helping him learn to budget, get groceries, and do laundry. “Oak Hill makes me feel good,” Kai says. His participation in the HHS packet assembly group since November 2021 provides an opportunity to expand his skills while connecting with the Marin community. ■



PHOTO BY BOB DELL

Kai Schiesser places labels on manila envelopes while assembling packets for Health and Human Services clients.

Volunteers Help Evaluate Overdose-Related Water Monitoring



PHOTOS BY DOUG KAYE

Fellows from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) joined Marin County Health and Human Services Department (HHS) staff in April to help assess the utility of wastewater monitoring for overdose-involved drugs. Monitoring wastewater for spikes in substances like fentanyl may provide an early warning system for preventing overdoses. To evaluate how Marin residents feel about monitoring and other overdose-prevention tools, the volunteer CDC fellows conducted focus groups among people with a substance use disorder, collected data from people at risk of overdose, and distributed a community-wide survey. They also toured the Central Marin Sanitation Agency, which participates in Marin’s pilot wastewater-monitoring program.

Pictured (left) while touring, L-R: Marin Public Health Officer **Dr. Matthew Willis**, CDC Fellows **Souci Lewis**, **Zerleen Qadar**, and **Sophie Zhu**, and HHS Epidemiologist **Haylea Hannah**. “Marin County Public Health is so grateful for this collaboration and the time these Epidemic Intelligence Service fellows shared with us,” said Haylea.

Also pictured (right): The sanitation plant’s regulatory compliance manager, **Mark Koekemoer**, tells the visitors how wastewater is cleaned before being released into the bay.

Versatile Intern Develops Perseverance in Multiple Roles

By Ellie Gilbert

PHOTOS BY DOUG KAYE



Stella Vazquez

Marintern **Stella Vazquez** has demonstrated great versatility in her roles with the Marin County Free Library and the Board of Supervisors.

Stella began interning as a freshman in high school, before the pandemic shutdown.

She first spent time with the library's Teen Leadership Crew, helping to create a magazine and hosting online events such as open mic nights and youth support groups.

"This came at a time when interaction was really limited, so it pushed my boundaries because I had to meet new people," she said. "It was really important, and I'm really glad I did it, and did some stuff we're really proud of."

Then in a separate Board of Supervisors internship, Stella had multiple assignments.

She was part of the [Restrictive Covenant Project](#) where she learned about historic restraints on housing in Marin. "My family is biracial with my dad being Mexican and my mom being white, so it was a very personal project for me, learning about what we would and wouldn't have been allowed to buy or live in 100 years ago," she said.

Her family supports her endeavors, which were inspired by a freshman-year requirement at Archie Williams High. She thoroughly enjoyed the library experience and continued long past the one-semester assignment. Although that school program has ended, she

recommends independent community involvement. "Obviously it is up to the student, but my brother Oliver is starting high school next year and I'm encouraging him to try it," she said with a smile.

"From my internships and volunteering I've learned a lot about perseverance."

Stella also has learned the Dewey Decimal Classification system, which she utilizes as a volunteer teen shelver at the Fairfax Library branch.

In addition, she helps library patrons run clubs and has supervised games like Dungeons & Dragons. She assists with administrative tasks and the free [Community Seed Exchange](#), which allows people to leave or take garden seeds from the Fairfax library branch.

"I really enjoy being there. I like being around books and helping people," she said.

"From my internships and volunteering I've learned a lot about perseverance," Stella added. "It's something that I can show up and do every day, even if I'm having a weird or bad day. It always reassures me."

"We love having Stella here in the library," said Library Assistant **Aaron Fong**, her staff supervisor. "She brings a warm smile and positive attitude everywhere she goes, and she is a phenomenal problem solver."

Stella graduated in 2023 from Archie Williams High School and is taking a gap year. This fall she is scheduled to attend Saint John's College in Sante Fe, New Mexico, studying the Great Books curriculum.

Outside of the library, Stella loves to write, cook, and spend time in nature, whether it's walking or hiking.

"I have no doubt that she has the initiative, the skills, and the positive demeanor to be successful in anything she chooses to pursue," Aaron added. ■

Students who want to get involved are welcome to email Marinterns program coordinator [Joy Fossett](#).



Stella Vazquez gets a kick out of keeping library materials in order.

Photographer's Portraits Highlight Each Person's Essence

Continued from page 1

music, meditation, games, and community outreach.”

Seeds of Hope is a partnership among HHS, the City of San Rafael, and leaders in the homelessness community. It is a collaboration to increase social connection in the homelessness community—housed and unhoused—to avoid deaths related to alcohol and other drugs.

A collection of Lea's photographs will be displayed at the Marin Civic Center in late October through November, which is National Homelessness Awareness Month.

The work Seeds of Hope was doing appealed to Lea, and she volunteered her skills as a photographer and interviewer.

“It begins with one person's narrative—a face and the narrative,” Lea said “People start to relate when I take pictures. It brings out their story.”

Lea's staff supervisor is HHS Senior Department Analyst **Charis Baz**. “I've been with Lea while she's taking people's pictures at the encampment and at other locations,” Charis said. “Lea has an uncanny ability to capture the beautiful essence of who someone is. I've seen how someone at first can be unsure they want their picture taken—their body language is hesitant; they say they aren't looking how they want to look for a picture that day. Lea engages with them briefly, takes a few shots, and they warm

up to her. She can connect one human to another so quickly and authentically.

“Then the day comes when she brings them the envelope of their pictures. They open it, and it's like the sky parts and the sun shines right down on them. They see the pictures and it feels like they can instantly see how she really did capture their true self, beautifully, beyond any surface level inconveniences of the current situation. They smile. They cry sometimes. They hug her and thank her. Her goal is for them to feel truly seen, and watching this unfold is like magic.”



Portrait of Susanna created by MarinShares volunteer photographer Lea Del Pomo.

PHOTOS BY LEA DEL POMO



This photo of Steve, a resident who has experienced homelessness, will be included in an exhibit at the Marin Civic Center this fall.

Such responses make Lea “feel excited for them. I like it when people see the beauty of themselves in the photograph—when they see their essence.”

She explains: “It fascinates me how a camera can capture a moment in time. I'm interested in the human condition and see the beauty and tragedy in all of us. Who is behind the skin; how do they survive in the moment? My goal is to make the unnoticed, noticed. Like haiku, it draws attention to what otherwise might be dismissed. My intent is to find the core—the core within us that represents our universal connection in humanity.”

A collection of Lea's photographs will be displayed at the Marin Civic Center in late October through November, which is National Homelessness Awareness Month. “The exhibit's working title is Remember My Name,” she said. “It will spotlight the dignity, the struggles, and the commonality of us all.” ■

Who's New & Welcome!

Tejash Beemini Ajith (San Rafael), Student Service Intern, South Novato Library

Maureen Caslavka (Corte Madera), Employee Arts & Crafts Fair Coordinator and Event Aide, Human Resources

Leon de Leon (Novato), FIRE Foundry Intern, Marin County Fire

Polina Gologorskaya (Mill Valley), OD Free Marin Youth Action Team Intern, Board of Supervisors

Jordan Harrosh (Mill Valley), Student Elections Ambassador Intern, Registrar of Voters

Evan Lichtblau (Mill Valley), Consumer Protection Program Student Writer, District Attorney's Office

Souci Louis (Atlanta, GA), Epidemiology Aide Volunteer, Health & Human Services (HHS)

Elias Olson (Mill Valley), Wellness Program Consultant, Human Resources

Elle Philp (Mill Valley), Student Elections Ambassador Intern, Registrar of Voters

Zerleen Quader (Atlanta, GA), Epidemiology Aide Volunteer, HHS

Jack Richards (Sebastopol), Marin Civic Center Tour Docent, Cultural Services

Lyla Stanger (San Rafael), Suicide Prevention Youth Action Team Intern, Board of Supervisors

Noemi Suarez (Novato), Volunteer Graphic Designer, South Novato Library

Sophie Zhu (Oakland), Epidemiology Aide Volunteer, HHS

Happy Anniversary

We congratulate these volunteers who celebrate their anniversaries this month and thank them for their ongoing involvement.

27 YEARS

Richard Fay (Novato), Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service/Auxiliary Communications Service (RACES/ACS) Volunteer, Marin County Fire

26 YEARS

Eric Cutler (Tomas), Volunteer Firefighter, Marin County Fire

19 YEARS

Janice Hitchcock (Novato), Senior Peer Counselor, Health & Human Services (HHS)

15 YEARS

Margaret Roberts (Novato), Marin Medical Reserve Corps Volunteer, HHS

Pat Williams (Corte Madera), Fire Lookout, Marin County Fire

14 YEARS

Hans Adler (Mill Valley), **Diane Cokely** (San Anselmo), **Oak Dowling** (San Rafael), **Kathleen Forte** (Tiburon), **Irwin Gubman** (Mill Valley), **Roberta Robinson** (San Anselmo), **Paul Roye** (Greenbrae), **Sylvia Roye** (Greenbrae), Financial Abuse Specialist Team (FAST) Volunteers, HHS

11 YEARS

Martin Grant (Greenbrae), **Kathleen Kopp** (Santa Rosa), **James Okumura** (Point Reyes Station), **Bob Stein** (San Anselmo), **Michael Warner** (Petaluma), Fire Lookouts, Marin County Fire

8 YEARS

Rory Hewitt (San Francisco), **Steve Johnson** (Pacifica), **Steve O'Keefe** (Novato), **Peter Van der Naillen** (Oakland), Fire Lookouts, Marin County Fire

6 YEARS

Catherine 'Cathy' Bottarini (San Rafael), Marin Medical Reserve Corps Volunteer, HHS

5 YEARS

Ken Adams (Woodacre), **Owen Clapp** (Woodacre), **John Gazzoli** (San Anselmo), **David Puglisi** (Lagunitas), **Amy Valens** (Forest Knolls), **Tom Valens** (Forest Knolls), Fire Lookouts, Marin County Fire

Noreen Kimelman (Greenbrae), Marin Medical Reserve Corps Volunteer, HHS

David Mosha (San Anselmo), Digital Literacy Aide, Marin City Library

4 YEARS

Ian Duncan (Inverness), **Janet Frankfield** (Fairfax), **Jane Stringer** (Inverness), **Marie Waters** (Fairfax), Marin Medical Reserve Corps Volunteers, HHS

3 YEARS

Chris Gould (San Rafael), **Tyler Phelps** (Oakland), Fire Lookouts, Marin County Fire

Candace Key (San Rafael), Friends of the Family Volunteer, HHS

James Saltzgeber (Fairfax), Radio Communications Volunteer, Department of Public Works

2 YEARS

Stephanie Collins (Mill Valley), **Daniel Dillingofski** (Stinson Beach), Fire Lookouts, Marin County Fire

Olivia Koeppel (Larkspur), **Maisie Pipitone** (Corte Madera), Homework Helpers, Corte Madera Library

Daniel Marsh (Mill Valley), Fire Lookout, Marin County Fire

Calla McBride (Corte Madera), Newsletter Writer Intern, Human Resources

Iliana Milan (Greenbrae), Friends of the Family Volunteer, HHS

1 YEAR

Denzel Chang Castillo (San Rafael), **Meily Jimenez** (San Rafael), **Marlon Mejia Ramos** (San Pablo), **Nathan Morales** (Greenbrae), FIRE Foundry Interns, Marin County Fire

Aarya Chowdhry (San Anselmo), Event Aide and Writer, Human Resources

Anna Diaz (Berkeley), Pre-Law Intern, Public Defender's Office

Lisa Engelbert (Novato), Volunteer Shelves, Novato Library

Stephanie Gallegos (Petaluma), California Department of Public Health Fellow, HHS

Ken Huang (Tiburon), Search & Rescue Volunteer, Marin County Sheriff's Office

Bill Johnston Jr. (Richmond), **Brian Wilk** (Novato), Volunteer Photographers, Human Resources

Alison Paxtor (San Rafael), Public Health Pathways Intern, HHS

