



HOMELESSNESS SERVICES

Sonoma County Continuum of Care (CoC) Board
2023 Nomination Form

Name of Nominee: Karla McLaren

Agency: Sonoma County Acts of Kindness

Telephone: [Redacted]

Email: [Redacted]

The CoC Consolidated Application requires CoC Lead Agency to include specific race and ethnicity information for those included in CoC Board, committees, and activities. Responses must specifically identify the race(s) and ethnicities overrepresented in our homeless care system and provide the percentage of their over-representation. Please select all that apply.

How would you describe your racial/ ethnic identity?

- Latino (North America) Latino (Central America) Latino (Other group)
Another Race or Ethnicity Asian Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander Black or African American
Afro Caribbean Indigenous or Tribal Nations White Other: Prefer not to answer

Geographical Area or Subpopulation(s) Represented: Central Sonoma County from Healdsburg to Petaluma, and some West County/Sebastopol.

Other reasons the nominee should be considered for the CoC Board: I've been working as a volunteer outreach worker for the past 3 years, and have become involved with the homelessness services system here in the county. I was on the LEAP board and am also on the HMIS board. I am a Coordinated Entry Access partner, and I've been a part of many working groups (see below).

Please fill out this section only if you are nominating someone other than yourself. Please ensure you forward the Statement of Interest form to the individual you are nominating for completion.

Name of Nominator: Agency:

Contact Information: Signature of Nominator:

Vacant Seats for Election by the CoC Voting Members

1 At Large: No CoC membership requirements and anyone can apply; elected by voting the CoC voting members.

1 Homeless Service Provider: One representative of a homeless services provider different than the one with an appointed seat, as elected by CoC voting members.

1 Licensed Health Care Organization: One representative from a licensed health care organization, as elected by CoC voting members.



Candidates may run for no more than two seats. Should a candidate run for two seats, one of them must be an at-large position. **Please select which seat(s) the individual is being nominated for:**

At Large    Homeless Service Provider    Licensed Health Care Organization

**Nominations and Statement of Interest must be received by 5:00 pm on November 29th, 2023, to [Araceli.Rivera@sonoma-county.org](mailto:Araceli.Rivera@sonoma-county.org)**

## Sonoma County Continuum of Care (CoC) Board 2023 Statement of Interest

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This section is to be filled out by the individual being nominated and will be shared publicly.

Name of Candidate: Karla McLaren                      Agency: Sonoma County Acts of Kindness

Please provide a statement of your interest in the Sonoma County Continuum of Care Board:

During the pandemic, when we had the massive encampment on the Joe Rodota Trail, I saw that the homelessness situation in our county was dire. I wanted to help, and I searched for an organization that was out there doing hands-on work.

As a former unsheltered person myself, I was looking for people who brought something special and real to the many unsupported people in our county. In 2020, I started doing direct street outreach with Sonoma County Acts of Kindness (AoK).

### **My Volunteer Work**

In 2021, I joined the board and became the donations coordinator for AoK. In my volunteer position there, I gather, organize, and distribute all of the supplies, while board president Heather Jackson coordinates daily meal preparation and delivery seven days per week. Our work is to remind unsheltered folks that someone not only cares, but shows up day after day to support them, empathize, mourn, laugh, connect them to whatever services are available, and provide whatever we have.

AoK is entirely run by volunteers, and has no funding beyond what we get from members of the community (and the Redwood Empire Food Bank). It's a sort of miraculous organization, and I'm proud to be a part of it.

### **My Work in Sonoma County's Homeless Services Organizations**

As the pandemic continued, Heather and I realized that we needed to be more connected to county services so that we could better support our unsheltered friends. We both joined the LEAP board, and have branched out since then.

I am now a member of the HMIS board, and I'm a member of the Street Outreach Standards work group and the Coordinated Assessment Access and Prioritization Redesign workgroup. I was also a member of two completed workgroups: The HMIS working group that reformatted the new Combined RoI, and the 2023 COC Competition and Evaluation workgroup.



Heather and I are also Coordinated Entry Access Partners, and members of the CE Case Conference Meetings.

I've been able to see the homelessness structure in our county from many different vantage points, and besides my direct and regular access to our unsheltered neighbors, I also have ten years of lived experience as a homeless young mom.

### **My Experience of Homelessness and Endangering Poverty**

For many years, I and my then-husband were homeless nomads, traveling in hopes of finding a better place in many areas of Northern California, Oregon, and Washington. I and my son eventually ended up in a battered women's shelter in Monterey, and I put myself through school and slowly pulled myself out of poverty (though we experienced many bouts of homelessness as I did).

I have since become a social science researcher specializing in ethnographic research, which is a form of participant observation that focuses on the lived experience and direct accounts of the people I'm studying. I become their voice, in a way.

It wasn't clear to me before I saw that massive encampment on the JRT back in 2020, but I was drawn to this form of research due to the startling ways I was treated during my years of endangering poverty.

From passersby to service providers to social workers, my homelessness was seen as a sign of failure, ignorance, or stubbornness on my part. We see this attitude on display every day in our county.

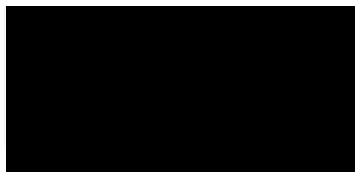
Though it was incredibly endangering, I was fascinated by the way that my homelessness could shut down empathy in others. In my education and career, I've focused on empathy, emotions, stigma, bias, and stereotyping.

I'm now an author, publisher, and educator focusing on emotions and empathy (and everything that gets in the way of empathy). I'm also a workplace consultant focusing on the ways that social structure supports or impedes communication, efficiency, and workplace mental health.

I would like to contribute my lived experience, my awareness of (and work in) various county organizations, my research skills, and my advocacy for the poorest, most stigmatized, and most vulnerable among us to the COC board.

Thank you for your consideration of my application.

Signature of Candidate:



Date: November 20, 2023