



generosity
compassion
kindness

NVCF

THE FOUNDATION
FOR MAKING
A DIFFERENCE

North Valley

COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION

Much more than a way to remember

GRIEVING PARENTS LAUNCH
NATIONAL SUICIDE CAMPAIGN
WITH HELP FROM NVCF

I always thought that if my son Alex could just make it through those difficult teenage years he had a bright future ahead of him. He was a high-achieving, athletic high school senior who was a lot of fun in his own, quirky way. And, like most teenagers, Alex was connected to the world by his thumbs: I learned to text from him.

I also learned so much about how

challenging life can be for a young person who doesn't fit in socially. Alex and I shared an office at home where we talked a lot. We also went out on Friday afternoons since he was 18 months old. Alex was loved—he had friends who cared and a family to whom he was precious. But our world changed when we lost Alex to suicide on Oct. 11, 2010.

The next week and the funeral were a blur. Then all the people went away—except for a few dear ones—and the waves of grief started to pile on. The “valley of the shadow of death” became very real: It is the place darker than death. We knew only our faith in God could carry us through and sustain us. Still, even with the promise of reuniting in Heaven, we were faced

could not just move on. Alex's life counted, and we'd paid an unbearable cost in losing him. Something good had to come from something so costly. Thanks to our trusted friends (Brian and Karen Sweeney) who had experienced a similar loss, we met Alexa at the North Valley Community Foundation and the idea for The Alex Project fund was born.

“Alexa became a safe person in our lives to help us do something good with the pain.”

with an unimaginable void. As one person put it, the presence of Alex's absence was everywhere. Anyone who has suffered the loss of a loved one knows this emptiness; the weight on your chest. The term ‘heartbreak’ makes sense now.

What were we going to do? We found that we

Making goodness easy

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE NORTH VALLEY
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

“We all have the ability to do something that will truly make a difference in the world,” said Alexa Benson-Valavanis, who has served as CEO of the North Valley Community Foundation for the past seven years. “The problem is that most people don't have the infrastructure to do that. Not everyone wants to start a nonprofit, and not everyone wants to start a for-profit with a social agenda.

“Every facet of our foundation has been designed to make it easy for community members, businesses and nonprofits to create positive and lasting good,” she continued. “That's what we are about—making goodness easy.”

That philosophy and the services offered by the NVCF have worked for both those opening and managing funds and the beneficiaries of funds. Under Benson-Valavanis' guidance, the NVCF has opened more than 400 individual charitable funds advised by community members, businesses and nonprofits and helped raise more than \$30 million for public good.

Benson-Valavanis has worked with social entrepreneurs, local and international humanitarians, business owners, nonprofit executives, hurting families, students and exceedingly generous philanthropists. Some approach her with specific goals in mind (like building water wells in Africa) while others simply want to donate modest or large amounts of money to a good cause. In some cases, the goal is simply to leave the world a better place through a bequest. The size of the idea and the amount of money involved are not the most important factors, Benson-Valavanis said. The desire for good is what motivates her. In all cases, she is eager to understand and help in any way she can.

“Whether their action comes from the death of a loved one or from a life-long passion to address a social injustice, everyone who opens a fund here is sharing something precious to them,” Benson-Valavanis explained. “Caring for each and every one of those funds is something we take very seriously. Stewardship is not just a hip word we

throw around here, it's our compass.”

Though many people may have a desire give back to their community, the logistical aspects of philanthropy (particularly handling finances, property and investments) can be discouraging, Benson-Valavanis said. The NVCF specializes in fund-management oversight, asset allocation and investment, allowing donors to focus on raising money for their goals rather than becoming overwhelmed by financial minutiae.

Extensive back-office services offered by Karen White, the foundation's CFO, include processing donations, tax-receipts and day-to-day accounting needs to provide strategic fund development for

“The only thing greater than the challenges we face is the goodness in the people who want to do something about those challenges.”

Alexa became a safe person in our lives to help us do something good with the pain. She understood the importance of remembering, of establishing Alex's significance in the community and hearing his name. Alexa made it possible for us to concentrate on what the fund would accomplish. She and was the ideal partner who took care of all of the nonprofit complexities, connected us with the right people and cleared the way so that we could concentrate on The Alex Project.

The Alex Project (www.TheAlexProject.org) promotes texting access to crisis centers. We distribute thousands of cards through schools and other organizations. These cards make it easy for youths in crisis to reach help in a way that is comfortable for them. Alex would

say that is a "no brainer." The fund also provides financial support to pioneering crisis centers with texting access. Saving lives with texting; that's what fit Alex best.

If you have lost a loved one, the details of your story will be different. Even with the hope of Heaven, we are left with questions about how to heal and how to honor the memory of a loved one in the years between. For us, establishing a fund with a mission related to Alex was the means to do something good with the pain. With the NVCF's help, our memorial fund became a way to show hope and revel in the prospect of saving lives. May your fund provide healing and honor your loved one in its own personal, precious way.

Dan Strauss

Indeed, understanding and addressing the community's needs is at the forefront of the foundation's work. On average, the NVCF grants or re-grants more than \$2.5 million a year to hundreds of charitable causes and nonprofits. The foundation's most recognizable grant program is Annie B's (see page 3).

"We face great challenges as individuals as well as in our communities," Benson-Valavanis said. "We look around and see people close to us overwhelmed by personal circumstances. At the same time, we can all feel powerless in the face of the vast needs of schools, families, the homeless, the elderly, animals, health care, public safety and our environment. But I take great comfort in knowing each of us can do our part; each of us has a gift to give. I truly believe the only thing greater than the challenges we face is the goodness in the people who want to do something about those challenges. That is why the foundation exists, and that is what drives me."

effective charitable giving.

"Thanks to our integration in the community, we can leverage the highest level of financial sophistication while staying intimately connected to the community's needs and those willing to help," Benson-Valavanis said.



PUT TO GOOD USE

Annie B's Community Drive provides example of NVCF's services

NVCF's Annie B's Community Drive is the result of two philanthropists who wanted to make a positive difference and were willing to commit an annual donation. Rather than earmark it for a specific cause, the anonymous donors provided \$500,000 to be used in \$50,000 increments over 10 years (beginning in 2007), trusting the foundation would put it to good use.

NVCF has managed to do just that many times over, each year matching the

\$50,000 and creating a pool of \$100,000 to be distributed equally to local nonprofit organizations on top of what they raised during the eight-week drive. That kind of financial leveraging is an excellent example of how the NVCF can adeptly manage a fund even when the donor's intentions are vague.



"WE'RE NOT JUST CHANGING HOW THE MONEY FLOWS INTO THE NONPROFITS, WE'RE EXPANDING THE POOL."

"I don't know of any other scenario where you can give an organization \$50,000 and help generate \$1 million for the nonprofit sector in eight weeks," CEO Alexa Benson-Valavanis said. "But what I want people to know is how they can create an effective grant programs like Annie B's, at all different scales."

The success of Annie B's illustrates how far the NVCF can guide donors whether they have a specific goal in mind or not. Benson-Valavanis

considers the foundation a "social bank," a financial institution that expertly promotes charitable investment in the community. For example, donors participating in Annie B's have reported giving more to nonprofits through the drive than they would have otherwise, Benson-Valavanis said.

"If someone was going to give to the Jesus Center, they'll still give to the Jesus Center, but they actually give 25 percent more," she said. "So, we're not just changing how the money flows into the nonprofits, we're expanding the pool."

I want to make a difference...

STARTING A FUND WITH THE NORTH VALLEY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

If you want to make a difference in the world, the NVCF is here to help. Whether you want to honor a loved one, create a charitable legacy for your family or business, support a specific cause or just want to find a meaningful way to give back, the NVCF will find a way.

The NVCF serves thousands of residents in Butte, Colusa, Tehama and Glenn counties, offering a range of charitable funds tailored to each individual's philanthropic goals. Because the foundation is an independent public charity, all contributions are eligible for an immediate tax deduction, and many

contributions qualify for a larger tax deduction than those to other charitable entities, like a private foundation.

With all funds, the NVCF handles the due diligence—they issue checks and provide staff assistance through a wide range of first-class donor services, making it easy for individuals, families, groups of friends, businesses and organizations to create permanent charitable funds that help meet the challenges of changing times.



Types of Funds:

- **Donor-Advised Fund:** make your charitable giving easier by making grants to your favorite nonprofits from one fund.
- **Committee-Advised Funds:** a small group of like-minded people pool their contributions towards a common charitable purpose.
- **Scholarship Funds:**
 - **Donor-Involved Scholarship Fund:** actively participate in the scholarship process from beginning to end.
 - **Community Foundation-Managed Scholarship Fund:** the donor creates scholarship criteria, but the community foundation staff oversees the entire scholarship process.
- **Field of Interest Fund:** create a resource to support the causes you care about such as the arts, education, health and human services or the environment.
- **Named-Endowed Fund:** support the communities or causes you cherish in perpetuity and leave a lasting legacy.
- **Designated Fund:** support your favorite charitable organization(s) in perpetuity or over a set number of years.
- **Memorial Fund:** a way to turn memorial gifts into a lasting legacy in your loved one's name.
- **Individually Managed Fund:** for donors who prefer to recommend an external investment advisor to manage the fund and ensure its growth.

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