

AN URGENT WISH

WHILE DEMAND FOR FOOD SERVICES has remained high, food donations are down. Because we cannot turn vulnerable people away, every week we're purchasing food to put in the grocery bags of people in need. Would you consider making a food donation today?

Or purchase canned vegetables, tuna, rice and/or beans at your favorite store and drop off at: 10641 San Fernando Road, Pacoima, CA 91331 on Tuesday-Friday, 9AM-4PM.



Scan for our
Amazon Wish List



Sebastian Araujo
Formerly Connections Services Navigator

A DREAM 24 YEARS IN THE MAKING: LUISA'S PATH TO CITIZENSHIP

“**LET ME SHARE A HEARTWARMING STORY** about one of my participants that still brings a smile to my face. I met Luisa during my time as a Connections Service Navigator at MEND. She first came to us seeking help with a bus pass application - a simple request that blossomed into something much more meaningful. Luisa is this wonderful 79-year-old woman who had been quietly coming to our food distribution.

As we chatted the day we met, I discovered her biggest dream - becoming a U.S. citizen. Can you imagine? After 24 years of living here, this was still her deepest hope. When she shared this with me, I knew we had to help make it happen. We connected her with another local non-profit that helps immigrants navigate the citizenship process.

What truly touched me was Luisa's dedication. Every week, she would wake up at 3 AM to study her citizenship questions. We were able to help ease some of her financial burden by covering part of her legal fees. Every time she came in, before she'd pick up

her food from MEND, we'd sit together and practice the citizenship test questions. Those morning study sessions became something I looked forward to - her determination was absolutely inspiring.

And here's the part that makes my heart soar - just yesterday, Luisa passed her citizenship test! In a few weeks, she'll attend her citizenship ceremony, and I'm honored that I'll be there at the ceremony with her family to celebrate this incredible achievement.

Stories like Luisa's remind me why we do this work. Here's this amazing 79-year-old woman who never gave up on her dream, who faced every barrier with grace and persistence. She shows us that with dedication and the right support, beautiful things are possible. I can't wait to share photos from the ceremony - it's going to be such a special moment.

Stories like Luisa's... that's why MEND is here and why our staff love what they do. Thank you for your part in Luisa's journey!”

MEND matters

With dignity and respect, MEND's mission is to meet the immediate needs of individuals and families and increase their access to opportunities that strengthen their capacity to thrive.



mendpoverty.org
SPRING | 2025



STANDING TOGETHER THROUGH NEW CHALLENGES: A MESSAGE OF *Gratitude*

AS WE STEP INTO 2025, the landscape of need in Los Angeles has evolved in ways we could not have foreseen. The devastating fires that swept through our communities have added a new layer of hardship to an already challenging situation. For those we serve who were affected, our hearts break for you. We share in your grief and loss and want you to know that we're here for you, just as you have been here for us. Please reach out to us if there's any way we can help.

Yet, even as we face these new challenges in 2025, your light shines brighter than ever. Your generosity doesn't just provide meals and assistance; it kindles hope in hearts that have grown weary. Because of you, families find the courage to face another day, and seniors discover they haven't been forgotten.

These are the neighbors you continue to help, even as compassion fatigue sets in across our city. Your unwavering support demonstrates that when others grow weary of the constant need, **you listen, you care, and most importantly, you act.**

Your commitment to our community transcends charity—it is a powerful statement that we are all in this together. Thank you for standing with us, for standing with them, and for being the light that guides us all toward a more compassionate future.

Gratefully,

Janet Marinaccio
President & CEO

BECAUSE OF YOU, MARITZA HAS A STORY OF TRIUMPH TO SHARE

MARITZA'S POWERFUL TESTIMONY is a story of resilience and hope that reflects the real impact of your support. Her journey from hardship to becoming the remarkable young woman she is today is a testament to the life-changing work you make possible.

When she first came to MEND in June 2023 on a welfare-to-work opportunity, Maritza was already a changed woman. She'd just finished a 21/2-year prison sentence and her 19-year battle with addiction and gang association was over. ... But restarting her life was proving to be the hardest challenge of all.

"I only spoke slang and had never worked in an office," she says. She felt unsure, distrustful and overwhelmed about where to start.

But, at MEND she found the help she needed. Maritza shares: "Everyone is so kind and patient with me. I wanted to be better. ... I wanted to succeed and do the good stuff but didn't know where to start."

Her complete story lies buried still and is hers to tell. But what we know is that Maritza had a caring and loving childhood until the age of 12 when dependence on substances became a way to escape. The gang became her family. "I felt welcome and belonged."

In her early twenties she became pregnant and gave birth to her, now 10-year-old, son.

"I wasn't ready to be a mom, so my mother took him," she says.

"Everything clicked when I got pregnant with my second child. ... a daughter. I was still struggling between I'm not ready and I'm pregnant and I need to stop but I want one more day. ... *one more day.*"

On November 16, 2020 Maritza quit drugs "cold turkey." It's one of her proudest moments.

Though she had a prison sentence to serve she felt like her life was finally headed in the right direction.

Two and a half years later she was at MEND hoping to be accepted for work experience. She says: "I wanted to find a place where I can get to be a better person."

Maritza completed her work experience in July 2024, applied for a job as the "Welcome Desk Coordinator" and got it!

As she puts it, **every day is a gift now**. "At MEND they serve all people with diverse needs, and I see myself in them. When I leave work, I feel I made a difference giving back."

Maritza is the first point of contact for people who are often in crisis. With a warm smile and positive spirit, she is making a difference in their lives thanks to people like you.

"I'm finally positive about my future and that of my children. I'm married to my daughter's father and my son is back living with me. We're taking one day at a time but I'm so happy about what's in store for us."



To view Maritza's story, scan here:



A NEW BEGINNING - JUAN'S STORY OF HOPE.

EVERY THURSDAY MORNING, Juan greets our volunteers with a gentle smile and a heartfelt "thank you." His kindness touches everyone he meets at MEND, where he's been coming for essential support for the past year and a half. At 45, life hasn't been easy—he and his wife currently live in their vehicle in Pacoima—but his spirit remains unbroken.

"MEND helps me with getting something to eat," he says simply. Each week, Juan receives ready-to-eat meals through our First Step service, a vital lifeline for those who are homeless. His weathered face, aged beyond his years by an autoimmune condition and years of outdoor work, brightens when he receives fresh clothing and hygiene items from our Homeless Bundles.

But Juan isn't just surviving—he's working toward a better future. Despite the challenges of part-time work, he's determined to find stability. Recently, he attended MEND's job fair and worked with our staff to obtain his ITIN number, a critical step toward employment and self-sufficiency.

"My life has gotten better since coming to MEND," he shares. With your support, he's found not just relief, but a pathway forward—access to food, essentials, and opportunities that bring hope for the future.

Juan's story is at the heart of MEND's mission: providing not just immediate relief, but real pathways to lasting change. With your generosity, more people like Juan can move from hardship to hope, gaining the tools they need to build a better tomorrow.

Thank you for opening doors for people like Juan.



ESTATE PLANNING

TODAY, BECAUSE SOMEONE CHOSE to include MEND in their estate planning, Maritza's story is one of hope and renewal. By including MEND in your will, you're investing in the future of people who are deeply vulnerable. Your legacy gift, regardless of size, extends your values and compassion beyond your lifetime, creating lasting change in the community.

If you've already included MEND in your estate plans, we are deeply grateful. Your generosity will help ensure that hope never dies in our community. You can decide on a specific amount, or you can allocate a percentage of what's left after taking care of your loved ones.

Your lawyer will need the following:

- MEND – Meet Each Need with Dignity; 10641 San Fernando Rd, Pacoima, CA 91331
- EIN: 23 – 7306337

For those considering this impactful step, our Chief Development Officer, Chanya Blumenkrantz, is available to answer your questions. You can reach her at (818) 686-7320 or chanya@mendpoverty.org.

Thank you for standing with us, *for standing with them*, and for considering how your legacy can build a more compassionate future for all.