From Mending Fences to Mowing Lawns: How Helping Hands OV Spreads Kindness in the Community

BY LAURA I. WINN | PHOTOS PROVIDED BY HELPING HANDS OV

DURING ONE OF the darkest seasons of Sydnie Anderson's life, one neighbor's small act of kindness cracked open the light at the end of the tunnel and sparked the idea for Helping Hands OV, a charity "connecting our community one hand at a time."

In 2019, Anderson was an overextended single mom, drowning in a sea of obligations. "Time was scarce; money was tighter, and even the simplest household tasks like mowing the lawn, changing a light fixture or fixing a broken gate could feel impossible," she said.

One day, a neighbor noticed Anderson's lawn had become overgrown and mowed it.

That small gesture was like a life preserver. "It wasn't just about the grass; it was the feeling that someone cared enough to help," she said.

Buoyed with hope, Anderson created a social media post asking what the community needed. Among suggestions of a water park and another chain restaurant, one comment resonated deeply: "I wish my neighbors would check on me."

"That's when I realized I wasn't the only one struggling," Anderson said. "There were seniors, veterans, people with disabilities, single parents and families throughout our community who simply needed a helping hand, a moment of hope and someone to acknowledge that they matter."

From that revelation, Anderson founded Helping Hands OV as a Facebook group in late 2019. The vision was clear: to connect neighbors in need with volunteers who could help with small household tasks.



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The execution was initially murky, but after some early logistical bumps, Anderson created the current system that takes a request, verifies the need, issues a call to volunteers and makes a match.

To qualify for help, neighbors must live within 2 miles of Orangevale or Fair Oaks, meet the California low-income guidelines, be unable to complete the task themselves and have no one else to assist. As a 100%

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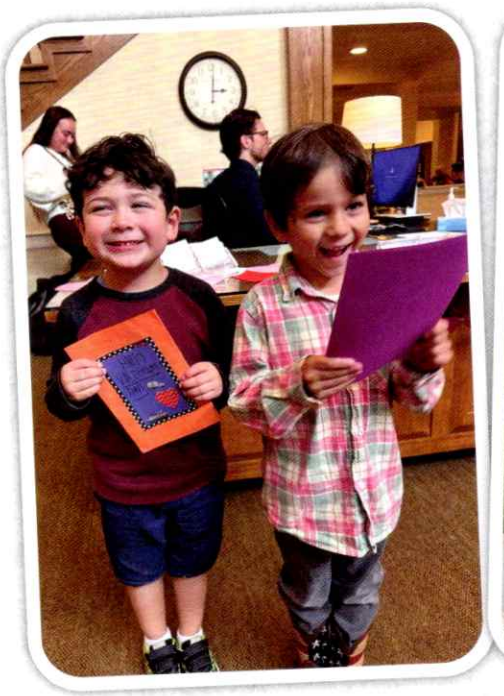



volunteer-run organization, Helping Hands OV only accepts projects that do not require special licensing or more than a few hours to complete.

For the group's first project, Anderson and volunteer Eric fixed the gaps in a fence where the owner's dog kept escaping. "That first completed job filled my heart," she said. "Knowing we were the ones who answered the call for help confirmed that this was exactly what our community needed."

As more volunteers joined the cause over the next two years, the group expanded its services from completing household tasks to spreading holiday cheer.

Since the winter of 2021, Valentines for Seniors has delivered more than 12,000 handmade cards to over 300 assisted living, independent living and memory care communities. "Every card serves as a reminder that our seniors are loved, valued and never forgotten," Anderson said.

Each spring, volunteers with Easter Baskets for Kids in Need fill 180 baskets with surprises personalized for each child. And come Christmas, the organization partners with other local nonprofits to fulfill children's wishes in a magical winter wonderland through the Let It Snow Toy Project.

While these programs have touched thousands of lives, household projects remain the soul of the mission. In 2025, the organization received 25 requests for small household jobs. Halfway through 2026, that number has already tripled.

To meet the growing demand, Helping Hands OV has encouraged skilled trades workers to volunteer their time and talents. It has also enlisted local teens to supply the service that inspired the organization.

Through the Green Teen Project, teens mow, rake leaves and perform other basic landscaping chores. The project not only helps neighbors in need, who are often seniors, veterans or individuals with disabilities, but it also rewards the teens for their labor.

Teens earn prizes for their service, but more significantly, they invest in their futures — developing strong work ethics and earning valuable volunteer experience for college and job applications.

"Just as importantly," Anderson added, "It builds bridges between generations, showing that today's youth care deeply about the people and neighborhoods around them."

That sense of community is what Helping Hands OV is all about.

"Kindness is contagious," Anderson said. "When people are given the opportunity to help, they almost always rise to the occasion." ■

Helping Hands OV will host its major fundraiser, the Salsa Cook-Off, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday, Aug. 15, at the Orangevale Grange (5807 Walnut Ave., Orangevale). Community members are encouraged to enter their salsa for the contest, taste-test the submissions, and grab a beer or margarita in support of a good cause. Tickets are $8 and up, and children 5 and under are free.

For more information, visit www.helpinghandsov.org.

