



Keep the Doors Open

An Open Letter to Our Community

There are some letters an executive director hopes never to write. This is one of them.

Over the past several weeks, I've spent a great deal of time thinking about how to explain the challenges facing San Joaquin Pride Center. I could begin with budgets, funding changes, and delayed grants. Those things matter, and I'll explain them. But they aren't why we exist.

I keep thinking instead about a family who came to us after their child was relentlessly bullied for being LGBTQ+. Like any parents, they wanted only one thing: for their child to be safe.

Instead, they found themselves navigating a system that left them feeling unheard and, in many ways, forced their child to relive the harm they had already experienced. They didn't know where to turn, so they came to us.

Our staff stood beside them. We advocated with the school district, helped facilitate difficult conversations, and worked toward meaningful changes that created a more supportive environment for LGBTQ+ students. Today, that family remains one of our strongest advocates, not because we solved every problem, but because they knew they no longer had to face those challenges alone.

That story has stayed with me because it captures what San Joaquin Pride Center has always tried to be.

Not simply a nonprofit or simply a collection of programs, but a place where people know someone will stand beside them.

For almost 15 years our doors have been open to young people searching for acceptance, individuals seeking affirming mental health care, people working toward recovery, parents looking for guidance, schools striving to create safer environments, and community members simply searching for a place where they belong.

Every day, people walk through our doors carrying fear, uncertainty, grief, loneliness, or hope. Every day, our staff meets them with compassion, dignity, and the belief that everyone deserves to be seen and supported. Today, for the first time in nearly a decade, that promise is at risk.

For many years, SJPC's work was supported through California's investment in reducing behavioral health disparities. Those investments allowed organizations like ours to build lasting programs that communities desperately needed.

We knew those funding sources would eventually come to an end, and we prepared for that transition. Over the past year, we pursued new grants, strengthened partnerships, held fundraising events, reduced expenses, invested in our long-term sustainability, and began preparing for future participation in Medi-Cal reimbursement. Like many nonprofits across California, we believed new funding opportunities would be available as longstanding programs came to a close.

Instead, those replacement funding opportunities have been delayed, changed, or have not yet materialized. At the same time, one of our largest grants ended a year early because of changes in federal policy, creating an unexpected gap between funding that ended and funding that has yet to begin. No nonprofit can absorb losses of this magnitude overnight.

In response, we made one of the most difficult decisions in our organization's history by eliminating two staff positions in an effort to preserve as many services as possible. We have not stopped planning. We have not stopped advocating. We have not stopped serving our community. But today, we have reached a point where we must ask for your help.

Without additional community support, our Board of Directors will need to determine on October 1 whether SJPC has the financial resources necessary to continue operating beyond this fall.

That is not a decision anyone wants to make. The painful reality is that the need for our services has never disappeared. Young people still need safe places to belong. People still need affirming mental health care. Individuals still need recovery support. Schools still need partners committed to creating welcoming environments for every student. Families still need someone to call when they don't know where else to turn.

We are not asking our community to rescue a failing organization. We are asking our community to protect services that San Joaquin County still needs and deserves.

If SJPC has ever made a difference in your life, your family's life, your school, your workplace, or your community, we invite you to stand with us.

Give if you are able. Share our story. Introduce us to someone who believes in this work. Help others understand what is at stake. Every act of support helps ensure that when the next family, the next young person, or the next neighbor reaches for our door, it is still open.

Almost 15 years ago, our community came together to build something that did not exist in San Joaquin County: a place where LGBTQ+ people and their families could find safety, affirmation, support, and hope.

I believe our community can do something remarkable once again. Together, we can protect this promise for the next generation. Thank you for believing in the San Joaquin Pride Center. Thank you for believing in our community. And thank you for helping us keep the doors open.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Alita". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "John" and the last name "Alita" clearly distinguishable.

John Alita
Executive Director
San Joaquin Pride Center