

Sonoma Family Meal (SFM) will acquire and assume operations of the SOS Unity Kitchen. Essential meal services will continue.

Sonoma, CA – August 25, 2025. After six months of diligent and collaborative conversations, Sonoma Family Meal is set to acquire SOS Unity Kitchen and assume operations next month.

To meet a rising demand for meal service and the financial strain that comes with it, SOS Unity Kitchen of Sonoma began a conversation with Sonoma Family Meal (SFM) of Petaluma in March. Both nonprofits run independent community kitchens serving meals to those in need – a shared purpose that laid a foundation for further exploration.

By unanimous vote of both boards, the transfer of Unity Kitchen's assets to SFM will take effect September 2, 2025. SFM's board agreed to continue daily meal service, retain the Unity Kitchen name (to become SFM Unity Kitchen), operate in partnership with complementary organizations serving SOS's clients, engage SOS's staff and volunteers, and recruit board members from the Valley.

By acquiring the Unity Kitchen, SFM will now be able to improve operational efficiency and lower the cost-per-meal, while extending its culinary training programs and social enterprise activities into Sonoma Valley. These programs benefit seniors, Latinx residents of the springs, transitional youth, and the unhoused. With deep cuts to federal funding to help people when they fall on hard times, this kind of collaboration is now more important than ever. This means every dollar of support goes farther to benefit those in need.

Without any disruption to ongoing daily meal services at either location, SFM's social enterprise activities will expand. Planned activities include catering, contract meals, cooking classes, pop-up dinners, and kitchen rentals, all of which offer trainees real-world food business experience while simultaneously generating revenue to offset costs.

SFM's leadership team will oversee programming across both sites, with longtime Sonoma Valley resident and native Spanish speaker Leslie Gonzalez serving as the primary site director at Unity Kitchen. Gonzalez will collaborate with local partners to design programs that offer hands-on training, work

experience, and business support — addressing the root causes of food insecurity by helping individuals and families become more financially independent.

“It is an honor to uphold the legacy of SOS and the Unity Kitchen, and we are grateful to have the opportunity to address the deeper causes of food insecurity in Sonoma Valley with our expanded programming,” said Whitney Reuling, Director of SFM.

“Our mission at SFM is to give everyone a seat at the table,” says Reuling. “That means welcoming people in for a hot meal made with care, and offering job training, support, and work experience so people can make a living while giving back to the community. As grateful stewards of SOS’s legacy at Unity Kitchen, we are honored to inherit their mission and build on it.”

SOS has roots dating back to the 1990s when volunteers organized themselves to find and feed those in need. Since then, the organization operated an overnight shelter before pivoting to food service in 2020. After extensive renovations, they opened the Unity Kitchen in 2023, providing upwards of 200 meals a day.

Community support for SOS has been robust over the years, with volunteers and donors—of funds and food—contributing to the safety net services being provided. Special assistance to support the negotiations between the two organizations was provided by the Sonoma Valley Catalyst Fund as part of its commitment to building the capacity of the local food security system in the Valley.

Future upgrades are planned for the site to expand the cooking line, install a fire suppression system, and add a transfer switch so a generator can be used to ensure meal service can continue in the event of an emergency. These upgrades to Unity Kitchen infrastructure will support higher production capacity to meet the demand for meals and programs, and make sure that SFM can support the community in the event of disasters.

“The combination of SOS’s community-driven support and SFM’s entrepreneurial model means those in need in Sonoma Valley will be able to

count on meals from the Unity Kitchen for years to come,” said Judith Walsh, SOS Interim Co-Executive Director and Board Secretary.

“We, the Board of SOS, have been honored to serve the community, and we wish to thank the countless volunteers and donors who made our vital services possible,” added Elena Alioto, the other Interim Co-Executive Director of SOS and Board President. “We want to assure all of SOS’s supporters that the next chapter of the Unity Kitchen is safe in the hands of Whitney and her team at Sonoma Family Meal, and you are able—and encouraged!—to continue to support the Unity Kitchen through them.”

About Sonoma Family Meal

Sonoma Family Meal was founded in 2017 as a grassroots organization to provide meals for people suddenly without kitchens during the Tubbs fire. It quickly evolved to serve flood survivors, first responders, and wildfire evacuees, and in 2021, it opened its first permanent community kitchen after borrowing eight kitchens since its founding. Sonoma Family Meal continues to provide prepared meals to food-insecure families through partnerships with other local organizations and has provided more than 850,000 meals across Sonoma County since 2017.

In 2022, SFM launched a tuition-free culinary job training program and evolved it into an employment social enterprise model. By giving trainees work experience through a catering business and monthly cooking classes, students get valuable business experience and generate revenue to offset costs. In the fall of 2025, SFM will be launching a globally-inspired food truck and small business incubator.

About SOS Unity Kitchen

Since its inception, SOS has made many adjustments—responding to changes in the environment, in the availability of resources, and to community needs. Its first chapter goes back to the 1990s when a concerned group of volunteers – the Brown Baggers – scoured the streets of Sonoma Valley to find and feed the hungry and homeless. Incorporated as a nonprofit in 2003, the organization assisted unhoused individuals with finding overnight shelter through ad-hoc arrangements.

In 2007, they began operating an overnight shelter, The Haven. In 2020

former Executive Director Kathy King led the organization as it shifted its focus to providing prepared meals to Sonoma Valley's most vulnerable residents, first at the Grange, and since 2023 at its Unity Kitchen in the heart of the Springs.

For More Information Contact

Whitney Reuling
Executive Director, Sonoma Family Meal
(707) 694-6420
whitney@sonomafamilymeal.org
SonomaFamilyMeal.org

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