

June 23, 2020
For Immediate Release

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Employees rally to keep one of a kind café open

ZILLAH, Washington – Employees with autism and other disabilities at the Community SEEDS Calico Cat Café are in danger of losing their jobs and the café closing due to the effects of the pandemic. The cafe is the only café of its kind in the world. The restaurant offers employment and job training for those who have autism and other disabilities, and features a separate cat adoption lounge for rescue cats that provides therapy rich activities for people of all abilities. The café is a pilot social enterprise program of the nonprofit Community SEEDS, employing nine people, the majority of them with disabilities.

The café opened in August of 2019, but was forced to close on January 15 due to water damage from a pipe that burst in the attic and collapsed the ceiling. Repairs were finally completed the first of May. SEEDS was able to bring staff to the café for take-out orders with the help of a Small Business Administration paycheck protection loan. Those funds run out at the end of June, and the café will be forced to close unless funding can be secured to cover operating expense over the next few months while Yakima County restaurants struggle through the effects of covid-19 and lack of revenue.

Rickette York, an employee at the café has written a letter to the community about how the café has changed her life. Coworkers have signed the letter to help raise support and spread awareness of the struggles they face in finding employment.

“I have been so happy, but now there is a chance that the doors might close . . . just when we finally found a place to belong, where we fit in, and now it might be taken away from us.”

Rickette York, employee

The organization is not eligible for Yakima County coronavirus grants because those grants are not available to nonprofits. A Zillah supporter has offered to donate \$1,500/mo as matching funds to help the cafe get back on its feet over the next few months. The café needs at least \$7,500/mo to survive the pandemic. If a \$1,500 match is found the organization will be close to having half its funding. If adequate funding is not found immediately the café will be forced to close, release staff at the end of June, and liquidate assets in July. Donations can be made by check or Paypal, or direct deposit to the Community SEEDS KeyBank account. To learn more visit www.seedsyv.wix.com/communityseeds or www.seedsyv.wix.com/calicocafe

Board members are also needed. Applications can be found on the Community SEEDS website.



Rey learns culinary skills at the café, his “dream job”.

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Dear Community,

Hi, my name is Rickette York and I work at the Calico Cat Café, a program of Community SEEDS, a nonprofit. If you don't know about SEEDS and the work they're doing, I will tell you. They help people with disabilities get into the workforce. This program is very important to people like me who have a disability. I have applied for tons of jobs only to be denied and turned down. It really makes you want to just give up, which I had done before I heard about the café opening up in Zillah. I applied and was so happy to get the job!

I show up early and give it my all each and every day because I love it – and love the fact that someone finally gave me a chance to work to have a normal life. It improves my mental health, and gives me a reason to get up and get out of the house each day. I'm not the only one at SEEDS with a disability working at the Calico. There are nine employees. We all feel the same way.

At the Calico Cat Café I have been so happy, but now there is a chance that the doors might close because of the pandemic, just when we finally found a place to belong, where we fit in, and now it might be taken away from us. If you don't have a disability, you won't understand how hard it is to find work at a place that will accept you, and work around your disabilities. We have to compete with people who have full function of their bodies and minds, so it's not that simple for us, and even worse now during this time when so many others are also losing jobs. I don't know where we will turn.

If anyone can help us in any way to keep the café open, you would be a blessing to us. We've been so thankful for the support we've had in getting open last August, but we need a lot more now to get us through the pandemic when so many restaurants are closing. I hope this letter is not swept under the rug like most of my job applications in the past. Our challenges in finding jobs is real. I hope that you can understand how much this job means to me and all of us who work at the Calico Café.

Thank you for taking the time to listen.

Sincerely,

Rickette York

And my coworkers at the SEEDS Calico Cat Café:

Rey B

James W

Pedro G

Rose R

Leandro R

Tasha C

Our Mission *Community SEEDS is dedicated to enhancing the lives of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families through activities that promote inclusion in the community through social enterprise.*

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