Elliott Robinson has spent 27 years as a steadfast advocate for social work, social workers, clients and the community. Now he is going to spend more time on another path.

Those who know him know that hiking, rock climbing and artistic sketching are key among his hobbies; activities which both ground him and provide an outlet.
and fresh perspective.

For 17 of his 27 years of public service, Robinson has been at the helm of Monterey County’s Department of Social Services, where he has overseen the implementation of programs and expanded access to services. He has also played a leadership role in bringing governments and agencies together to bring services and search for solutions for our area’s homeless population.

Robinson final day on the job is August 10th. He reflects on his time with Monterey County.

Q. When you came to the County in 2001, then CAO Sally Reed touted your fiscal management prowess. How has that skill helped you maintain stability in Social Services?

A. Having a background in finance has helped me work with so many partners, both in the public sector and non-profit sector, to maximize financial resources to improve quality of life for the people we serve. It’s also helped to assure an environment of stability for those who do the hard work of directly serving the community. This stability gives our workforce and the workforce of our non-profit partners the security they need to deliver services with compassion and commitment.

It’s always been important for me to think about strategic value in the public sector, particularly local government where everything we do truly touches a resident...a neighbor. In local government, our value comes from carrying out our mission, public support for our mission and delivering those services effectively and efficiently.

Q. The Social Services title covers a huge array of services and the last 17 years have seen many changes. How would you describe the social services landscape ‘then and now?’

A. Over the past 17 years there have been several wonderful opportunities to improve the conditions for the most vulnerable in our community.

One of the biggest changes that has made a huge, positive change is health reform. Health reform allows us to provide Medi-Cal health insurance to nearly 190,000 residents who work in low wage jobs that don’t offer health insurance or who are disabled and unable to work.

In Child Welfare we’ve implemented a strong community based prevention system - Pathways to Safety - that helps keep families together and we’ve expanded our frontline child abuse investigation efforts to make sure we can reach families early to either provide the supports they need to care for their children or to protect the children when the family cannot.
We’ve also worked very hard to better support children in foster care with wrap-around service to help them stay in family-based care instead of group homes and our employment programs for families on welfare have been expanded to support the whole family through housing assistance when needed. But really, there is one constant that is always with us: our systems are always changing to be more responsive, effective and efficient.

Q. Are there particular challenges, events or accomplishments that you see as milestones?

A. Health Reform and Pathways to Safety which I mentioned earlier are milestones. I would also say building a health insurance program for IHSS providers and chairing the Interim Statewide Automated Welfare System Consortium which brought a better more modern computer system to our county and three dozen other counties are two others.

Q. Social Services is one of those services which is designed to help but often gets a ‘bad rap.’ What would you like people to know that might give them insight into the true value of social services?

A. Too many people in our community work hard but on their wages alone they can’t afford to put food on the table, pay rent or get health care. Our services help these folks meet basic needs and still keep our community vibrant. Social Services is also a huge economic development engine for the county, bringing hundreds of millions of dollars into economically challenged neighborhoods, supporting grocery stores through CalFresh, housing through public assistance among others.

In Child Welfare, most importantly, people should know that our first goal is to help families not remove children. Our social workers do incredible work helping families facing difficulty get resources and supports they need to succeed and stay together. At the same time, when there is evidence of harm to children we partner with local police and sheriff’s deputies to bring children into protective custody. Protective custody is not just based on the social workers assessment, it is a legal process overseen by our local courts.

Every day our social workers are confronted with so many complex and difficulty decisions – they all deserve to be honored as true local heroes.

Q. What are your next adventures now that you are leaving the workforce?

A. It’s hard to say. I love California and Monterey County so I hope to be able to spend a little more time at home hiking around Big Sur and the Santa Lucia Mountains, climbing in the Sierras and Mojave and maybe learning how to grow my own vegetables.
Probation Thanks Providers, Volunteers

While the Probation Department oversees and manages local youth institutions, it is grateful to those who assist in rehabilitation efforts.

Each year, the department thanks its many providers and volunteers at the Monterey County Youth Center with a luncheon. This year was the 15th Annual Appreciation Day, honoring some 20 programs.

At this event, the appreciation comes not only from staff but the youth who are the focus of service. During the lunch, young residents of the Youth Center spoke about how the programs had impacted their lives; some played music thanks to their participation in music programs provided by Guitars Not Guns and art done by youth in the Arts as Healing Intervention program provided by the Arts Council for Monterey County decorated the walls.

The Youth Center is a boy's residential facility and aftercare program which offers educational and rehabilitation opportunities through these collaborations.

“These agencies and volunteers are vital to the daily operations of the Youth Center program,” says Probation Chief Marcia Parsons. “They provide the residents with exposure to all types of pro-social behaviors and activities. Their commitment to our youth is extremely appreciated!”

PROBATION IS GRATEFUL TO THESE VOLUNTEERS AND PROVIDERS

Monterey County Arts Council
Guitars Not Guns
Sacred Heart Church
California Youth Outreach
Restorative Justice Partners, Inc.
MILPA
Bicycle Repair and Safety
Calvary Chapel
Monterey County Health Department
Salvation Army
Bunny Crown Packing Co.
Partners for Peace
Monterey County Child Support Services
Christ the Rock
Catholic Charities
Turning Point

(Left) Appreciation Day attendees applaud as Youth Center residents play guitar music.
Employee Giving Coming Soon

If those ‘Christmas in July’ advertisements or movie marathons didn’t get you in the giving spirit, perhaps the annual Employee Giving Campaign will do the trick.

The annual campaign is set to begin August 13th and run through September 7th.

Also returning this year, the popular online auction so get ready to bid early and often!

While the campaign has lots of fun activities, its true mission is to give county employees the chance to support local organizations through easy to arrange payroll deductions. Many of the charities you can select support departments such as libraries, the hospital or animal shelter; some are service partners such as Red Cross and Family Resource Center - just to name a few. You can easily set up or modify donations you’d like to make through the website which will be up and running soon.

Will you be a superhero for a good cause?

Some departments are so excited about the campaign they are starting early. The Department of Social Services held a bake sale and drawing for two prize baskets and raised more than $520.00 that will be donated directly to a selected charity.

If you would like to get involved in fundraising efforts, check with your department coordinator.