



HOUSING AUTHORITY of the COUNTY of SANTA CLARA

Leaders in Making a Difference

Data as of
January 1, 2013

HACSC's mission is to provide and inspire affordable housing solutions to enable low-income people in Santa Clara County to achieve financial stability and self-reliance.

Opportunity Center Showcases Local Teamwork and Multiple Homelessness Services

Situation

During the 1990's, northern Santa Clara County experienced an alarming increase in homelessness, especially veterans, made worse by a reduction of shelters and services for the homeless.

Solution

A coalition of concerned citizens turned to the Housing Authority of the County of Santa Clara (HACSC) for help in developing a unique, permanent and transitional housing facility in the heart of Palo Alto.

Homelessness is a persistent problem, even in the most affluent communities. When the Community Working Group, Inc. (CWG), a non-profit organization dedicated to serving the needs of the homeless in northern Santa Clara County, saw the closure of local homeless shelters and the increase of homelessness, including veterans, on the streets of Palo Alto, Menlo Park and East Palo Alto, it decided to do something.

The result is The Opportunity Center of the Midpeninsula, a unique, mixed use facility combining 88 units of extremely low income transitional and permanent housing with an on-site multiple service center for the homeless and those at-risk of becoming homeless.

The five-story Opportunity Center, opened in the heart of Palo Alto in 2006, is a collaborative effort on the part of CWG and HACSC. HACSC was responsible for executing the transaction, issuing the construction period tax-exempt private activity bonds, arranging for a tax credit-based equity syndication, and administering the project's construction.

Establishing the tax credit-based equity syndication for the Opportunity Center was part of HACSC's unique strategic approach for creating public - private partnerships for affordable housing. Through the creative partnering of public and private parties, HACSC has rehabilitated and upgraded 555 Public Housing units throughout Santa Clara County in the past few years, preserving critical low income housing options in one the country's hottest rental markets.



Architect Rob Wellington Quigley worked collaboratively with HACSC and the city of Palo Alto's Architectural Review Board to design the Opportunity Center to be a civic amenity. "The building is never mute," Quigley said. "It's always communicating with the street."

www.hacsc.org

The Opportunity Center takes a unique approach to combatting homelessness by providing drop-in hospitality services to all, including non-residents, that include showers and laundry facilities, lockers, hygiene supplies, food and clothing, information and referrals, transportation assistance, and rehabilitative counseling and health care services.

This approach has shown great success. About half of the original tenants have stabilized their lives and those of their families. Hundreds of other households have been assisted either through the drop in center or through housing.

The Opportunity Center of the Midpeninsula demonstrates how communities can drive solutions tailored to their own specific problems, how experts such as HACSC can apply long-term knowledge to make ideas reality, and how united efforts with common goals can help transform homelessness into opportunity.

The Opportunity Center's Uniqueness At A Glance

- Concerned community members drove this development as an answer to their specific problems.
- Services are available at all times for the tenants and for the general population.
- There are two services centers on the ground floor: one designed to serve the general homeless and at-risk populations and a distinct separate one designed to serve homeless and at-risk women and women with children.
- Drop-In services include such very basic needs as a cup of hot coffee, and a place to pick up mail and return a phone call.
- Some medical care is provided on the spot by personnel from the neighboring Palo Alto Medical Foundation.
- Services are provided by numerous nonprofit organizations, with *InnVision Shelter Network* providing the overall management and coordination.
- The development enjoys wide community awareness and political support, including unanimous approval by the Palo Alto City Council.
- Approximately 20 faith-based communities conducted their own congregational campaigns in support of the project.
- The Opportunity Center contains 89 apartments in the four floors above the services centers - 70 efficiencies for singles, 12 one-bedroom and six two-bedroom apartments for families, and one manager apartment. Twenty-four hour staffing is provided. Parking is available in a two-level underground parking structure.



The Opportunity Center's apartments range in size from approximately 250 square feet to 548 square feet. There are two self-service laundries, two outdoor decks, and a community kitchen is available to residents of the efficiencies.

"It (the Opportunity Center) is incredibly important. As a community, we have responsibilities to the homeless population, to help those who want help."

Former Palo Alto Mayor Dena Mossar,
Palo Alto Weekly

The Community Working Group

The Community Working Group Inc. (CWG) is a nonprofit organization that emerged as a community response to homelessness in the Midpeninsula of the San Francisco Bay Area. Its mission is to serve the needs of the homeless and those at-risk of becoming homeless in the Midpeninsula area (the cities of Palo Alto, East Palo Alto and Menlo Park) through the development and operation of housing and services, and through strategic alliances with community partners who are likewise committed to the promotion of human dignity. Other CWG housing developments include Alma Garden and 801 Alma Family Housing, both in Palo Alto.

www.communityworkinggroup.org.



The Opportunity Center's rehabilitative services include coordinated case management, mental health and substance abuse counseling, job training and counseling, medical and psychiatric screening, legal assistance, money management training, and support groups.



505 West Julian Street, San José, California 95110

Phone 408.275.8770 • TDD 408.993.3041 • www.hacsc.org