



# community working group

## Thresholds

Developing Opportunities for Affordable Homes

### Welcome to “Thresholds!”

**W**elcome to “Thresholds,” the newsletter of Community Working Group. This is the first in what we hope to be many quarterly publications. They are designed to educate our readers about who we are, what we do and how we do it, the compelling need for affordable housing services in our community, and most importantly, the ways in which you can help.

#### Why “Thresholds”?

We chose the title “Thresholds” for multiple reasons. The first, of course, is being the literal stepping into a doorway, as people do when they come home. CWG’s mission is bringing families home, at a cost they can afford to pay, so they can go about the business of living productively and raising healthy families.

But a threshold is also a start of something new. For many of our clients, a safe place to call home is the foundation from which they can start improving their lives and planning for their futures. Having an affordable home means they can put more of their income toward tending to the needs of their families. It can mean the possibility of college or trade school, which can be the key to breaking the cycle of poverty. And it can mean more involvement in the community — participating in their children’s school or getting to know their neighbors. Our clients are crossing into a brighter future.

#### Serving and strengthening our community

In “Thresholds,” you will learn about the individuals and families served by our three affordable housing communities: the Opportunity Center, 801 Alma, and Alma Garden. The people who live in affordable homes like ours mirror the larger community. Some are unable to work, but many are our children’s teachers, our nurses, our grocery store clerks, our gardeners, and our restaurant



staff. You will also hear from our supporters, as they share their interest in safe and diverse communities. Finally, you will learn how affordable housing benefits our region by preventing expensive social problems that drain cities and counties of precious resources.

#### Please join our conversation!

We hope that “Thresholds” will be the start of an ongoing dialog about homelessness and poverty in our community. We want to hear from you! Call 650-299-8700 or send a message to [cwg@communityworkinggroup.org](mailto:cwg@communityworkinggroup.org) to reach us at any time!

Sincerely,

John Barton  
President, Board of Directors, Community Working Group



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## There's No Place Like (an Affordable) Home!

**H**aving a home you can count on makes a big difference. Managing all the trials of the day is easier when you know you have a safe place to sleep at night.

But when a family's housing situation is unstable, its well-being wanes. When rent takes up most of a family's income, then nutritious food, medical care, and education become luxuries. In time, poverty increases, and the risk of homelessness looms.



“*The ache for home lives in all of us, the safe place where we can go as we are and not be questioned.*”

— *Maya Angelou*

At Community Working Group's three affordable housing complexes, clients live in safe, decent homes for a price they can afford to pay. CWG keeps rents at or below 30 percent of the residents' income, so they have more resources for other necessities. In addition, CWG residents have access to rehabilitative and supportive services — many delivered at the housing site — funded in part by CWG and provided by its partner agencies.

At the **Opportunity Center**, 88 extremely low-income families and individuals live in the upper floors. Residents have access to two service centers on the first floor, which provide health care, adult education, computer access, child development activities, and case management. InnVision Shelter Network manages the services.

**801 Alma Family Housing** provides 50 apartment homes for very low-income working families. Eden Housing, a partner agency, provides supportive services and referrals, connecting residents with youth activities, computer-assisted learning, financial literacy training, and more.

**Alma Garden Apartments** offers 10 affordable homes for very low-income residents whose incomes are at or below 80% Area Median Income. CWG has contracted with Palo Alto Housing Corporation to manage the property.

For more information on CWG's affordable homes, visit [www.communityworkinggroup.org](http://www.communityworkinggroup.org) and look for upcoming issues of “Thresholds.”



### Want to Know More?

Check out our new website [www.communityworkinggroup.org](http://www.communityworkinggroup.org) and sign up for email updates about our work and affordable housing in the Midpeninsula. If you have questions, comments or suggestions of topics for future issues of “Thresholds,” please email us at [cwg@communityworkinggroup.org](mailto:cwg@communityworkinggroup.org).

"I'M JUST SO GRATEFUL"

## Affordable Home Helps Son Thrive

**F**or Tara, the most important thing is to take care of her son, Alex. So years ago, when Alex, now 9, was starting Kindergarten, Tara was delighted to find a special day program near her Palo Alto home.

When the economy went downhill, Tara lost her small business, and she and Alex lost their home. For about a year they stayed with friends and moved from place to place, going as far away as Newark, in the East Bay. Sometimes they slept in their car.

Tara's main concern was keeping Alex in his school, in the program that met his special needs. So no matter where they slept the night before, Tara always made sure Alex was back in his class for school the next morning.

Tara found a new job doing customer service for a local company. Meanwhile, she called every affordable housing complex she could find. When she reached Colleen at the Palo Alto Housing Corporation (PAHC), her search neared an end. "She treated us with open arms; she had the attitude, 'What can we do about this? Let's figure out something,'" said Tara.

As soon as a space opened up at Alma Garden Apartments, a small complex owned by the Community Working Group and managed by PAHC, Colleen called Tara right away. She also called Georgina, the below-market rate administrator at PAHC, to work out a payment plan so Tara could manage the deposit.

Tara and Alex have been living at Alma Garden for about 1½ years. Tara works 60 hours a week to make ends meet and notes that without the affordable housing program — and Colleen's and Georgina's help — she would not be able to manage. She wishes that there were more places like



Alex proudly displays the Lifeskill Award he earned at school.

Alma Garden, because she knows there's a huge need for affordable housing here.

"I'm just so grateful," she said. "The amount of stress that I don't have now that I had before, it's just ... my son is happy."

### HOW CWG WORKS

## Carving a Path Toward Home

**A**t Community Working Group, we believe that bringing affordable homes to the Midpeninsula not only helps those directly served; it strengthens the community as a whole.

Thankfully, we are not alone! A broad cross-section of our community supports our efforts, demonstrating growing concern for this issue and, we believe, revealing the compassionate nature of our region.

CWG is comprised solely of volunteers whose work reaches deep into the community. Through relationships with diverse individuals and organizations, we stay aware of critical needs and potential opportunities for collaboration to serve individuals and families who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

We keep an ear to the ground and are poised to react quickly when opportunities arise. Then it's on to specific inquiries and negotiations, permits and approvals, and

“Home is where one starts from.”

— T. S. Eliot

eventually, construction or renovation. Year-round, we must research and raise funds from diverse public and private sources, not only for new project development and construction, but also for ongoing building maintenance, rent subsidies, and client services. We are always working to create and maintain homes for very low-income families and individuals, so more members of our community have a safe respite and a stable foundation to work from. And in most everything we do, we partner with other nonprofit agencies that share our goal to eliminate homelessness in our region, leveraging resources and expertise to help as many individuals and families as possible.

We would love to tell you more about Community Working Group! If you would like to learn more or volunteer to help, please contact us at [cwg@communityworkinggroup.org](mailto:cwg@communityworkinggroup.org).

## The Good, the Bad, and the CWG

**T**he good news is that the Midpeninsula is buzzing with economic growth! Salaries for high-level earners are increasing, new industrial complexes are being built, and many high-tech firms are hiring.

The bad news is that growing prosperity means rents are rising, outpacing low-income wage earners' ability to keep up. And while higher-level salaries are growing, low-income wages have remained mostly stagnant, leaving many families one extra bill or fee increase away from losing their homes.

For more than 15 years, Community Working Group has been developing affordable homes for families and individuals in the Midpeninsula. Find out more! Visit [www.communityworkinggroup.org](http://www.communityworkinggroup.org), and while you're there, sign up to get email updates so we can better keep in touch.



“ I had three chairs in my house; one for solitude, two for friendship, three for society. ” — Henry David Thoreau



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