As we look at the results of the local 2015 “point-in-time” homeless count — a 14% drop from the 2013 numbers in Santa Clara County and an approximate 30% reduction in San Mateo County — we are gladdened by our community’s progress, yet ever mindful of how far we have to go, not just to get people housed, but to help them stay housed in a way that will enable them to thrive.

We know creating affordable homes benefits our community in a multitude of ways — helping to maintain diversity, raise healthier children, reduce traffic and boost the economy. But to appreciate the toll of homelessness and to really understand the value of our work, we must look to the children, women and men whose lives are changed as a result of it. Like the mother who spent long months sitting alert in her car while her son slept in the backseat, who can now rest at night, knowing her son is safe in his bedroom in a CWG home. Or the man who endured shame and deteriorating health from years of riding the bus all night, who now has his own place at the Opportunity Center with a bed where he can lie down and put his feet up to alleviate the dangerous swelling in his legs.

These individual stories — hundreds of them, and the thousands more we have yet to learn — are the true measure of our progress. Every individual counts. Thank you for helping us share that message through your interest and involvement.

Sincerely,

John Barton
President, Board of Directors,
Community Working Group

Dear Friends

For a little girl with health issues and challenges in school, happiness really is a warm puppy — especially if that puppy’s bed is next to her own in a safe, stable home that her parents can afford.

Today, eight year-old Ahtziri and her family are happy residents of 801 Alma Family Housing, but life was not always as good. Despite careful financial planning and good credit, Ahtziri’s parents, Ricardo and Mirabel, were forced to sell their home of eight years when both lost their jobs during the recession.

It was while they were crowded into a small living space with extended family that they learned that Ahtziri has epilepsy. Living in her cousin’s home was difficult, and school was tough too — she was not doing well academically, and her classmates teased her due to her seizures. Doctors
suggested that a pet would help calm Ahtziri, benefitting her health and stabilizing her moods, as well as providing much-needed companionship. But given the family’s living situation, adopting a pet was not a possibility.

Once the family was accepted into 801 Alma Family Housing, life began to change. Both parents secured new jobs, and Ahtziri was able to enroll in a quality school where she got the help she needed and improved her schoolwork.

Ahtziri now has her own room and has made some new friends, too, including a very special one named Daisy — the little dog she was able to welcome into her 801 Alma home — who thinks Ahtziri is perfect just as she is!

801 Alma Family Housing is co-owned by CWG and Eden Housing. Thank you to Eden Housing for sharing this family’s story and photo.

50 FAMILIES CALL 801 ALMA HOME

A family needs to make $85,000 a year to comfortably afford the average apartment in Santa Clara County. According to the county’s own data, an estimated 44 percent of local residents need help to be able to afford their homes.

That could explain why 801 Alma Family Housing, an affordable apartment complex co-owned by CWG and Eden Housing, has 700 families on its waiting list.

“**Our residents, my neighbors, work hard to provide for their families and save for their futures.**

— Julissa Johnson

Most of the 50 resident families at 801 Alma earn between $20,000 and $30,000 per year. They are active and integral members of our community, working at nearby hospitals, child and senior care facilities, grocery stores and schools. The facility’s manager, Julissa Johnson, works as tirelessly as the residents do to make their lives better — bringing in speakers on financial planning, organizing children’s after-school programs, asking residents what they need, and researching resources and new ways to help. “Our residents, my neighbors, work hard to provide for their families and save for their futures. I want them to know we’ll do whatever we can to help,” said Johnson.

Most weekends, 801 Alma’s community room and outdoor patio are booked with birthday parties, special dinners and other celebrations — even weddings — for residents and their families.

This summer, Johnson has planned a camp to fill the afternoons after summer school ends. Run primarily by volunteers with the assistance of Johnson’s staff, summer camp goes from 1-5 p.m. Monday through Friday and includes fitness, nutrition, and hands-on education activities. In the first week of camp, children made homemade gifts for Father’s Day, and in the second week they held a water conservation poster contest. “We tried to find camps that were affordable or free to our families, but we had no luck, so we decided to make our own camp,” Johnson said.

Johnson believes in treating all residents and coworkers with respect and as equals, and her attitude has enhanced 801 Alma. “Our residents love where they live. They are proud to say they live here, and they take care of their apartments and the building — if they see trash, they pick it up. If they see a spill, they clean it up,” she said. “They’re really happy to be here.”
Steve recently came into the Peninsula HealthCare Connection (PHC) clinic at the Opportunity Center with a painful ulcer on his lower leg that wasn’t healing. Dr. Enoch Choi, the clinic’s medical director, got Steve a special boot to compress his injured leg, which reduced the swelling so the wound could start to heal. Dr. Choi also diagnosed Steve with congestive heart failure, prescribed medication and follow-up care, and told him to elevate his leg.

That was a good day at the PHC clinic. “With continued care, his leg will heal,” said Dr. Choi. “If the wound was allowed to continue, the infection could have caused serious complications.”

Helping patients diagnose and manage chronic illness such as diabetes and high blood pressure is an important part of the PHC clinic team’s job. With regular care, patients can reduce their chances of having a serious event, such as a disabling stroke, years into the future.

Dr. Choi, who is a full-time primary and urgent care physician with the Palo Alto Medical Foundation (PAMF), said his PHC clinic patients face different challenges than his other patients — more of their health problems are related to exposure and other complications of living outside, such as skin infections that progress or underlying issues that go undiagnosed. “When you’re homeless, it’s hard to do things like stay in bed and elevate your legs so the swelling can come down,” he said.

As the only fully licensed medical facility providing free, direct healthcare to homeless and low-income residents of North Santa Clara County, the PHC clinic is a critical resource for the approximately 600 individuals it serves every year with primary care, pediatric care, psychiatric services, referrals to specialists, and assistance obtaining healthcare benefits. The clinic’s location at the Opportunity Center is key; many of its extremely low-income patients live in the 88 apartments on the floors above the clinic.

Santa Clara and San Mateo county health clinics are, respectively, two hours away and one hour away by bus — if patients can afford the fare to get there.

All services at the PHC clinic are free, and insurance is not required. The primary care doctors and dermatologist are volunteers, and all but one of them, who is retired, work at PAMF, which encourages its staff to volunteer and covers malpractice insurance for physicians who do.

The clinic is open five days a week. “We try to operate on an appointment basis; that provides respect and the expectation all clients are being treated as they would be as a paying patient. Also, part of getting well is being organized enough to make it to appointments,” said Dr. Choi. “But we know it’s hard, so we also try to accommodate people who drop in and really need to be seen.”

*Fictitious name used to protect client’s privacy

Keep in Touch!

We are working on ways to better keep you informed of housing issues in our community! Please visit our website at www.communityworkinggroup.org and fill out the Keep In Touch form today!
Palo Alto residents lost a friend, community advocate, and longtime volunteer leader in the recent passing of Ray Bacchetti. Until his death at age 81, Ray worked tirelessly to help make our community better for all who call it home, including the individuals and families at risk of homelessness served by CWG.

“Ray was a quiet giant of a mentor. He taught a whole generation of Stanford administrators how to engage a community in values-based conversation and decision around some difficult topics.”
— John Sack

Some of Ray’s efforts were visible, such as his work as a member of the Foothill-De Anza Community College District Board of Trustees, or his service on the Palo Alto Human Relations Commission. But much of his volunteer work took place quietly behind the scenes, like his service on CWG’s Board of Directors, which included serving on the Opportunity Center Management Committee, heading up CWG’s Finance Committee, and being CWG’s liaison to the Peninsula Healthcare Connection Board. Some of Ray’s volunteer work even took place outdoors and in the dark, like his work as a nighttime guard doing Track Watch, to catch emotionally distraught individuals before they lost their lives to suicide on the train tracks.

Those who knew Ray say that his driving force was his compassion. A highly educated man, he worked consistently to help create and preserve a good life for all community members. Palo Alto is better for Ray’s involvement. We at CWG are honored to have known him and grateful that his legacy will live on in every individual and family thriving today in a CWG home.