



community working group

Thresholds

Developing Opportunities for Affordable Homes

Dear Friends



As I look back on the last 10 years of having the Opportunity Center in our community — and the eight years of work required to open our doors — I am struck by the transformative power of hope.

It was hope that kept us pushing ahead in 1998, when we set out to create the Opportunity Center and many told us “it will never happen.” It was hope that inspired community volunteers (now longtime CWG board members) Don Barr and Litsie Indergand to keep walking around Palo Alto, looking for sites, calling property owners and facing rejections until we found a place to build the center. It was hope that inspired so many diverse community members to contribute to making this dream a reality. And it is hope that drives some of our most downtrodden neighbors to show up at the Opportunity Center day after day and do the hard work required to stabilize their lives, improve their health, and become more self-sufficient.

See “*President’s Message*”, page 2

WE ARE CELEBRATING

Ten Years of Transformation

Since its opening 10 years ago, the Opportunity Center has helped hundreds to transform their lives and futures. The building was designed to deliver services effectively to drop-in clients experiencing homelessness and residents who make extremely low incomes.



“It is a carefully crafted and designed building with lots of soft edges, overhangs, and angled walls. **It’s a homey place** that doesn’t feel institutional. That architectural language and vocabulary augment the ideas behind the building and the service provision.”

— John Barton, Director of the Architectural Design Program, Stanford University, and CWG Board President



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Save the Date: April 29!!

When Opportunity Knocks



■ **Mae** started using drugs as a young woman and ended up living on the street. After struggling for years, she kicked her addiction and landed a job she has kept for more than eight years. The Opportunity Center helped her regain her health and confidence, and she now enjoys a peaceful life in her Opportunity Center home.

■ Emotional abuse at the hands of two alcoholic parents left **Reese** ill-equipped to manage her life. She ended her homelessness after connecting with a case worker at the Opportunity Center and getting help to heal her emotional scars. She is fully employed and living in an apartment of her own.



■ **Shay** spent years on the street living “like a cat” — a trick he learned to help him survive homelessness — blending in and staying alert at night. Just when his health issues had become dire, Shay found his Opportunity Center home, where he lived in safety and community for the rest of his golden years.

■ **Lydia** remembers being happy until age four, when her mother died and her father became abusive. She ran away as a young teen, which led to a series of destructive relationships. She ultimately ended up living on the street. After finding the Opportunity Center, Lydia learned to trust others again, found her strength, and is enjoying increased self-sufficiency while living in her own affordable home.

Most client names and images have been changed to protect their privacy.

Our hope was not — and is not — misplaced. It was made up of both the dream and the plan to get us there. People from all facets of the community came together to design a real, practical solution to homelessness in our neighborhoods. We went through seven public hearings and never got a single “no” vote!

In this issue of “Thresholds,” you will read memories of some of the dreamers and planners that brought the Opportunity Center into being, as well as a sampling of stories about those who took the opportunities offered there and changed their lives.

Reflecting on the past gives me hope for the future. It took the whole community to build the Opportunity Center more than a decade ago. We have achieved much since then. And together, we continue to work on shaping a community that reflects the best of our valley’s most intelligent minds and compassionate hearts, a community in which, one day, no man, woman, or child will experience homelessness.

Thank you for your trust and support,

John Barton
President, Board of Directors
Community Working Group

“Amazingly, someone knew a woman who owned two parcels of land at the very north end of Palo Alto. **She was unbelievably generous and kind.** She agreed to put these two parcels into a “charitable remainder” trust. This enabled us to buy the land which is where the Opportunity Center now stands.”

— Litsie Indergand, CWG Board Member



“I remember helping to introduce a new resident to her apartment when the Opportunity Center opened. Before entering, she paused. I asked what was wrong and she said, “I have a doorbell. People have to ask permission before entering my room!” **She was so touched by the idea that she could once again expect privacy in her life.**”

— John Sack, CWG Board Member

CHANGE HAPPENS HERE

Creating Opportunities

Over the past 10 years, hundreds of men, women and children have found help at the Opportunity Center, ranging from a hot cup of coffee to help securing a permanent home. Our success is the sum of incremental progress individual clients make each and every day.

In 2016 alone, the Opportunity Center:

- Helped 30 homeless individuals at the drop-in services center find permanent housing.
- Helped 98% of its residents engaged in case management to maintain their housing and their employment or source of income.
- Got 122 homeless individuals shelter through Hotel de Zink.
- Provided support services to more than 400 individuals.
- Fed an average of 65 clients per day, providing more than 16,500 meals.
- Gave away almost 2,400 bags of clothing.
- Helped 57 households, including 39 children, stay in their homes through providing \$65,000 in emergency rental and utility assistance.

Opportunity Center services are housed on-site and delivered by several nonprofit organizations. Since our opening day, we have contracted with LifeMoves (then InnVision) to coordinate service delivery and conduct the case management that is so critical to client success.

AFFORDABLE HOMES AND SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

Brightening Futures

The Opportunity Center serves children as well as adults. Approximately 20 children currently reside at the center, many of whom attend an after-school program on-site, where they have healthy snacks, reading time, quiet time, homework time, and playtime. Both resident and non-resident children also receive counseling and other support, as many are transitioning out of homelessness and back into school.

“The goal is to make sure that, in school, they can assimilate very well.”

— Philip Dah, Senior Director, Opportunity Services Center, LifeMoves



SAVE THE DATE: APRIL 29!!

Let's Celebrate!

The Opportunity Center, the first permanent supportive housing community in Santa Clara County, is having a birthday! (And in the 10 years since its inception, we have already seen many happy returns!)

Help us celebrate with a tour and some festivities at the Opportunity Center! Check your mailbox or inbox for more information. For the most timely updates, join our email list at <https://communityworkinggroup.org/keep-in-touch/>



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YOU MAKE IT POSSIBLE

Making a Difference

Thank you for making the Opportunity Center's affordable homes and services possible. Your support is improving lives for adults and children, and strengthening our community overall. Visit <https://communityworkinggroup.org/> to learn more.

“*The citizens of Palo Alto responded enthusiastically to the need to have a place for the unhoused members of our community to come for food, showers, clothing, support, and a sense of community. (Now) walk down University Avenue, look in the area around San Franciscito Creek — you'll see the difference.*”

— Don Barr, CWG Board Member



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