Building a Strong Community

This issue of “Thresholds” includes stories that offer a glimpse into the lives of our youngest residents, and the services offered through CWG and its partner agencies that help them thrive. You will also meet our newest board member, and learn some details about the likely closure of Palo Alto’s Buena Vista Mobile Home Park.

I attended the meeting at which Palo Alto’s city council reluctantly voted to approve closure of the park. I am still haunted by the devastation expressed by the park’s residents — low-income, hard-working people, most of them families who are trying to create a better future for their children. I am afraid for them.

I am also afraid for the rest of us. As I watch the last affordable neighborhoods shrink away, and with them the socio-economic and cultural diversity that has been foundational to our country’s strength and development, I wonder whether we are at risk of becoming a one-dimensional, homogeneous community. I am afraid for us all. Will there be a shift away

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Serving CWG’s Youngest Clients

What can we do to help the children who live in poverty in our community? With basic necessities like nutritious food, health care, and education lacking, it can be hard to know where to begin. But studies show that helping families find safe and affordable homes is critical, as is offering support to help parents get better jobs, health care, and access to other necessary resources, and providing compassionate care to the children themselves.

CWG does all of these things, providing safe and affordable homes and supportive services at its three properties, 801 Alma Family Housing, the Opportunity Center, and Alma Garden.

More than 20 children live in the upper floors of the Opportunity Center. Downstairs, CWG has contracted with InnVision Shelter Network (IVSN) to manage the

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CWG’s affordable homes and services help children thrive.
service center, which is divided into two distinct areas with separate entrances: one side for women and families, and one side for individuals. Anmol Teer works with children who live at the Opportunity Center. “The kids are very aware that they don’t have enough money — they notice the little things like food, clothing, a birthday present that they couldn’t get; they see they’re not as rich as their peers,” she said. One way the Opportunity Center helps is through its “clothing club,” where children can get new clothes. “When the kids get the littlest piece — a new sweater, new socks — they get super excited to wear it and show it off,” said Teer.

Every day Teer has the children fill out a feelings chart and a goals chart. If she notices a child having a hard time, she’ll make a point to talk with them, check in with their parents, and sometimes refer them to on-site mental health interns or school psychologists. She also attends most of the children’s school meetings and maintains regular contact with their teachers to find out how she can help the children. “We all work together so it’s a collaborative effort with the kids getting support from school, the Opportunity Center, and home,” she said.

Almost 80 children, ranging from newborn infants to age 18, live at 801 Alma Family Housing, a partnership between CWG and Eden Housing. Julissa Johnson, the property manager at 801 Alma, said one mother whose husband had died was working two jobs just to afford rent for a garage that she and her three children shared with cockroaches. Now the family has a spacious affordable apartment at 801 Alma, and the mom was able to quit her second job and spend more time with her children — and the children were able to participate in Eden’s Digital Connectors program, where they learned computer repair skills and performed community service.

Johnson and her team also offer an after-school program for children at 801 Alma, where they have dedicated time and help for their schoolwork and some time to run around the onsite playground or take a walk to the park. Johnson is working on expanding the youth programs, but for now the primary way she supports her youngest residents is by helping their families — personally seeking donations or purchasing backpacks and school supplies, linking residents with other resources, and always being willing to listen. “I want them to know we’ll do whatever we can to help them, and people are out there who are willing to help,” said Johnson. “We provide a pillow so they can breathe … support and hope so they know it’s okay.”

Thank You, Dena!

CWG honors Dena Mossar for six years of service on the CWG Board of Directors.

Thank you for your exemplary leadership, effective advocacy, visionary collaborative spirit, and dedication to creating affordable homes and services in our community.
from that desire after we have raised a few generations of children who lack exposure to the kind of heart- and-hands industry that our parents and grandparents employed to create a better life for us?

Many local families are working multiple jobs to forge a stronger future for their children, just like many of our parents and grandparents did. But more of today’s families are having trouble gaining traction. With rental prices so high, many cannot gain a foothold on which to build that better future. That’s why I am so grateful for our supporters. You help hundreds of individuals and families to stop slipping and step forward onto solid ground.

By helping them, you help us all. There is growing evidence that strategies that reduce socioeconomic disparities are correlated with broad economic success. By working together to create affordable homes, we help to build a stronger economy for us all to thrive, and we maintain the kind of diversity that keeps us rich in more ways than one.

Thank you for your awareness, care, and support,

John Barton
President, Board of Directors, Community Working Group

Save a Tree and Help a Kid!

Please consider providing us with your email address! It will help us to keep you up-to-date on timely issues and the important work you are enabling with your support — and since we will soon offer an electronic version of “Thresholds,” it will also help us keep our planet green and our costs low, so we can keep helping children and adults! To opt-in for electronic news, please go to communityworkinggroup.org/keep-in-touch.

Thank you for all you do to help our community thrive!
We believe that Palo Alto is not a place only for the rich, but is a place for us all. We believe that all people deserve to have their basic needs met, housing chief among them."

With those words, spoken at the Palo Alto City Council meeting, CWG Board President John Barton made CWG’s position to fight for affordable housing for local families known.

For years, the Palo Alto community has been struggling with the proposed closure of the Buena Vista Mobile Home Park, which provides affordable housing for 400 mostly low-income residents, about one-third of whom are children.

CWG urged the community to act ethically. “We submit that our community and our elected officials have a moral responsibility to go beyond the strict requirements of the law, and to do what’s right. We need to find a solution that fairly compensates the property owner for Buena Vista and that allows the community that is Buena Vista to survive and prosper. Surely we have the resources in one of the richest communities in the country to make this happen,” Barton, on behalf of the entire CWG board, said.

CWG also strongly endorses the campaign to save the park, led by Supervisor Joe Simitian and supported by the County of Santa Clara and City of Palo Alto, each of which has pledged $8 million to the effort.

As of this writing, the Palo Alto City Council had given preliminary approval for the closure of the park, while directing the park’s owner to revise the proposed relocation packages to factor in the value of the schools and the safety of the neighborhood.

For updates on Buena Vista and other local affordable housing issues, please sign up for CWG’s email list at communityworkinggroup.org/keep-in-touch. More information on Buena Vista is available at the Friends of Buena Vista site, fobv.org.