



community working group

Thresholds

Developing Opportunities for Affordable Homes

To Our Friends

With Thanksgiving around the corner, I find myself reflecting on the good fortune we have enjoyed since launching the Community Working Group 16 years ago. Consistent support from caring individuals enables us to provide affordable homes and rehabilitative services for nearly 150 families and individuals every day, not to mention the drop-in clients who regularly visit the Opportunity Center for services and solace. We are grateful to the supporters who make this possible; before I sip my cider this holiday, I will raise my glass to you.

Over the years, our community has survived some harsh winters. The Great Recession had local low-income families running for cover, as so many lost jobs and homes. With that event behind us, and the economy growing, we see a new kind of threat for extremely low-income people: homelessness driven by the general economic prosperity of the region. High-tech employees are competing for homes and willing to pay top-dollar to get one near their office. As the economy brightens, rising rents are squeezing out low- to moderately-paid workers, literally leaving many out in the cold. So we continue with our work, more determined than ever to help provide housing and services that transform lives for our neighbors in need. We couldn't do it without you.

Wishing you the warmest of winter holidays,



John Barton
President, Board of Directors,
Community Working Group



Shay survived on the streets for five years before finding a home at the Opportunity Center.

FORMERLY HOMELESS SENIOR

Thriving in Affordable Home

Shay was three months shy of his 65th birthday when the edema set in and his doctor told him, "Find a way to get off the streets or you're going to lose your legs."

It was the second time he realized he was in serious trouble. The first was years before, when he lost his job during a company lay-off and couldn't find another.

"There wasn't much of a market for an old, blue collar guy," he said. "After I went through my savings and couldn't pay rent, I just kept thinking, 'How will I survive?'"

See "*Shay's Story*", page 3

Inside...

Opportunity Center Service
Manager Philip Dah

Read About Us in
Wish Book!

801 Alma Honored for
Outstanding Design

Brighten the Holidays for

Someone in Need!

Help Opportunity Center clients with gifts of NEW socks, underwear, warm winter clothes, or gift cards for CVS, Target, or Trader Joe's. Donations can be dropped off at 33 Encina Avenue, Palo Alto, between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. Questions? Call 650-853-8672.



SERVING THE HOMELESS FOR A DOZEN YEARS

Opportunity Center Service Manager Philip Dah

Philip Dah has served the homeless in Palo Alto for a dozen years and is well-versed in helping them find their way off the streets, or at least improve their situation while they are there. As senior director of Inn Vision Shelter Network's (IVSN's) multi-service centers, Philip is charged with overseeing the services offered at the Opportunity Center, Community Working Group's (CWG's) flagship project.

CWG has contracted with IVSN to deliver services such as case management, and to handle the enormous task of coordinating services delivered by the multiple agency partners that operate out of the Opportunity Center. "IVSN has a wonderful relationship with CWG," said Philip. "They give us money to subsidize rents for clients who don't have an income, so they can move in; then we provide support to residents to make sure they stay housed."

The ultimate goal is for everyone to be self-sufficient, but Philip and his staff at the Opportunity Center know

“ It's wonderful to be able to provide all these services in one place and to see people directly benefitting. ”
— Philip Dah

that they need to meet each individual where they are. To enhance their ability to serve clients most effectively, staff recently implemented three program tracks at the Opportunity Center.

Drop-in clients who are able and willing to make a commitment to work toward self-sufficiency are placed in the Program Track, where they work with a case manager to develop a personal plan. A client's plan might include job training or financial literacy workshops, mental health or substance abuse counseling, medical screening, and legal assistance with disability or Social Security benefits.

"If they're motivated, we capture the moment, because that motivation can leave at any time," said Philip. "Clients are often very overwhelmed and severely depressed after living on the streets. Under those circumstances, it's very difficult to commit to participating in training opportunities, so we like to show them they can make progress right away."



Philip Dah has supervised service delivery at the Opportunity Center since the building opened in 2006.

Some people with mental illness or other disabilities are not able to follow a structured program; they are invited into the Opportunity Center's Guest Track, where they receive the same level of attention and services as those on the Program Track. Others who are simply not ready to work toward self-sufficiency are put into the Social Track, where they are welcome to stop in as often as they like for coffee, visiting, a shower, and a safe place to sit and rest.

"It's wonderful to be able to provide all these services in one place and to see people directly benefitting," said Philip. "The only problem is there is still not enough affordable housing. If someone does everything they're supposed to — cleans up, gets a job, has a salary, and is ready to move on, where's the next affordable home?"

Read About Us in *Wish Book!*

For the first time, CWG will be featured in the San Jose *Mercury News Wish Book!* On Thanksgiving Day, the *Mercury News* will publish 24 stories of need in our community, one of them about a CWG resident. Read and share the CWG *Wish Book* story and help us provide affordable homes for more low-income individuals and families!

<http://mercurynews.info/wishbook/>

Shay did survive, living on the streets for the next five years.

"I was afraid all the time," he said. "It's a horrible way of living. The worst thing is the humiliation. You see these fresh young kids with their briefcases and their laptops, with good jobs and a place to live, and you're on the edge, ready to die. I'd just want to cover my face."

Then Shay went to the Opportunity Center, where volunteers were serving drop-in clients a meal. He got talking to a volunteer around his own age, and was stunned to learn that the volunteer was a Stanford professor with a Ph.D.

"I said, 'what — *you're* serving *me* breakfast?!' But the volunteer said, 'I'm honored to be serving you,'" said Shay.

“*I'm not afraid anymore.*”
— Shay

Touched by the compassion, Shay took the next step and met with a caseworker at the Opportunity Center. He couldn't believe that he was eligible for Social Security benefits, even though the caseworker told him, "You've worked all your life; you earned this." Shay put his name on the years-long wait list for an affordable home at the Opportunity Center.

The apartment came through in the nick of time, just after Shay's doctor warned him he needed to get off the streets so he could rest, elevate his legs, and get some regular sleep.

Now, after three years of living at the Opportunity Center, Shay's life has greatly improved, as have his outlook and his health. "I still have nightmares sometimes, thinking I'm on the street, but then I wake up and look around at the walls and remember I'm safe. I can pay my rent.

"I am so grateful to these compassionate people. So grateful to be safe and warm," he said. "I have made some friends, and I'm not afraid anymore."

The Opportunity Center, CWG's flagship project, houses 88 apartments and provides a wide range of services for individuals and families who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. ▶

Shay's Tips for Survival on the Street

- Never sleep on the sidewalk; concrete will suck all the warmth out of you.
- Learn to live like a cat: take short naps during the day and stay awake and alert at night.
- Go to public places like parks where a lot of people gather. You can sometimes blend in enough to catch some rest.
- Get some scented spray. It will help for those weeks you can't afford a shower.
- Sleep on any bus, any train, anywhere to get out of the cold.
- If you buy French fries or a soda at a fast-food place, they will let you use the restroom.
- Develop some sort of routine so you have a sense of purpose. You need to find a reason to wake up.



HELP BRING PEOPLE HOME!

Please Give Today!

Please help us meet our goal to raise \$150,000 to help us provide affordable homes and services for extremely low-income individuals and families. Your donation of any amount can help transform the lives of those we serve!

Visit www.communityworkinggroup.org.

801 Alma Honored for Outstanding Design

C WG has a new reason to celebrate! Not only do we have the distinct honor of helping local residents live in stable, affordable homes; now another of our buildings has been recognized for its outstanding design!

On October 16, 801 Alma Family Housing received an Honor Award from the American Institute of Architects (AIA) Santa Clara Valley. The award is AIA's highest tribute.

A jury of five AIA members from out of the area selected 801 Alma for the award, saying that the building "raises the bar on housing" and noting its "great use of daylight," "excellent" noise mitigation, and "brilliant" floor plan.

CWG credits architect Rob Quigley with creating a design that not only meets tough regulatory and functional requirements, but also provides a bright and comfortable environment for the people who call 801 Alma home.

CWG's Opportunity Center, also designed by Rob Quigley, won a design award from the Architectural Review Board in 2010.



Each of the 50 affordable homes at 801 Alma opens onto a courtyard that brings sunlight and fresh air into the apartments; the courtyards are planted with bamboo that will mature into lush natural privacy screening between homes.



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