Dear Friends

In a past issue of “Thresholds,” we shared a story about Shay, a man who spent the better part of his golden years riding a bus around the Peninsula to stay sheltered. He ultimately found a home of his own at CWG’s Opportunity Center, where he lived comfortably for nearly four years. We were sorry to learn that Shay recently passed away. He was a bright and interesting man who generously shared his personal story with us so we could share it with you. We are grateful to him.

Shay explained how he coped with being homeless for seven long years. He said that when he finally moved in to the Opportunity Center, he would occasionally wake in the morning a little disoriented. When he realized he was in his own home, he would relax, knowing all was well. He said, “I am so grateful to these compassionate people. So grateful to be safe and warm. I have made some friends, and I’m not afraid anymore.”

Knowing Shay spent his last years in a safe home with a support system he could count on, and that CWG had a hand in that, is gratifying. It is easy to feel overwhelmed by the challenges we face in fighting against homelessness. With so many in need of assistance — more than 700 on our waiting lists alone — it can sometimes feel like we are taking very small steps on a very long journey. Fortunately, we’re not traveling alone. We partner with an array of caring nonprofit providers whose collective experience and resources help us along the path to creating lasting change for the individuals and families we serve.

And we don’t have to do it all at once, as long as we persevere. Mother Teresa, who helped so many while she lived among some of the world’s most impoverished, was known to say, “Never worry about numbers. Help one person at a time and always start with the person nearest you.” Shay

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Please, Mister Postman!

Before the ball drops in Times Square, before Charlie Brown saves that little tree, even before some people have finished putting away their Thanksgiving china, something very important will arrive in your mailbox: Community Working Group’s fundraising appeal! Please look for our letter in early December. Your gift will help change the world for someone in need!

Your gift provides affordable homes for families and individuals.

Inside…

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Doctor Finds Help at Opportunity Center

As told by Philip Dah, OC services manager.

“T had a gentleman who came in one day, probably in his mid-60s, very frail, his pants were falling off. He was very weak. Some clients were calling him ‘Doc.’

“I invited him to my office and asked him if he needed help. I was talking to him and trying to find out who he was. He mentioned he was a doctor. He hadn’t talked to his family in a long time, so I tracked them down.

“His sister in Indiana confirmed that he had gone to Stanford and was a doctor. He had practiced medicine in Los Angeles and been well-to-do.

“But then he got sick. After he had a stroke, he decided to move closer to his alma mater (and Stanford football). He lived in motels with the proceeds from the sales of his house in L.A. until his money ran out and he became homeless.

“When he came to the Opportunity Center, maybe five years ago, at Christmastime, we found out that he had severe diabetes.

“Luckily, the Opportunity Center is a one-stop shop; people don’t have to look all over for services. Everything is right here, so it’s easy to sit down and draw up a case plan and follow through with it.

“Doc would have died, but we helped him get admitted to the hospital. Then when he came out, we put him into a shelter while we looked for permanent housing for him.

“He was eligible for disability benefits, so we worked with the Stanford law clinic and got him his benefits. And right away, we got a place for him to stay here in the area.

“For every homeless person, the ultimate goal is to be self-sufficient — taking care of their health, getting permanent housing, an income. Doc got all those things, as well as getting to live near Stanford football.”

Neighborhood News

Buena Vista Offer Rejected

The owner of Buena Vista Mobile Home Park, the last mobile home park in Palo Alto, recently rejected an offer made by Caritas Corp. to purchase the site. The deal would have allowed its approximately 400 residents to continue living in the park and would have preserved the property as a site for affordable homes for years to come. Some community leaders are still hopeful that a deal can be negotiated. For information, visit folv.org.

Palo Alto Raises Minimum Wage

In an effort to help low-income earners, the Palo Alto City Council recently approved an ordinance that will establish an $11-per-hour minimum wage within the city limits, as of January 1, 2016, with the goal of increasing to $15 per hour by 2018. The state’s current minimum wage is $9 and is scheduled to increase to $10 on January 1, 2016.

We applaud the council’s decision to take this positive step to help low-income residents in our community.
In the beginning, before caring citizens in Palo Alto joined forces into a Community Working Group to build the OC, there was the Urban Ministry. The Urban Ministry ran the Palo Alto Drop-in Center behind the Red Cross building, where they distributed food and supplies, coordinated the Hotel de Zink rotating emergency shelter program, and provided some case management. When the drop-in center flooded in 1998, Urban Ministry staff were among the first people who came together and started working on what was to become the OC.

By the time the OC opened in September 2006, the Urban Ministry had merged with InnVision the Way Home, a well-established provider of emergency shelter and support services for the homeless in Silicon Valley, and CWG had contracted with InnVision to oversee service delivery at the center. Philip Dah, senior director of the agency’s multi-service centers, has been coordinating and managing the delivery of OC services ever since.

In 2012, InnVision merged with the Shelter Network, a provider of homeless support services in San Mateo County, to become InnVision Shelter Network (IVSN). IVSN distributes emergency financial assistance, runs a clothes closet, and provides case management, family education and support services, and basic needs at the OC. IVSN also administers rental subsidies provided by CWG, which enable clients who are working with a case manager and are ready to move but who have not yet secured their income, to move into the OC. In addition,

IVSN team members work with staff of the OC’s onsite health clinic, run by Peninsula Health Care Connection (PHC), and coordinate with the OC’s housing manager, John Steward Company, to help OC residents stay healthy and in their homes. “Social services, property management, and the health clinic all need to be in sync in order to help people,” said Dah. “Providing services onsite is the key to maintaining housing for a lot of our residents.”

The services that IVSN provides at the OC align well with IVSN’s “Beyond the Bed” model, through which the agency provides education, employment and life skills support and training, physical and mental health care, and other services to meet clients’ unique needs and help them become self-sufficient.

Since the inception of the OC, CWG has paid for all non-staff operational costs, including utilities, janitorial services, maintenance and computers, for the OC’s drop-in and family centers run by IVSN, as well as the health center run by PHC. CWG also covers the OC’s front desk staff, who provide support for all the facility’s clients and service providers, and recently helped fund a new IVSN case manager at the OC.

Cold Weather, Winter Holidays

CWG partner agencies are collecting items to help those served at the Opportunity Center (OC) and 801 Alma Family Housing. OC drop-in clients need cold-weather gear (hats, umbrellas, blankets) and NEW underwear. Call (650) 853-8673 for more information.

Families at 801 Alma would be grateful for gift cards for teens, children’s books or toys, or household items. Call (650) 600-8886 or (310) 772-2425 for more information. Thanks to InnVision Shelter Network and Eden Housing for coordinating these efforts!

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was one of those nearest to us, and his words put our efforts into perspective. When we feel we cannot do enough to change the world, we realize that the world is changed for every individual person we serve. And that feels like a giant step forward.

Thank you for walking by our side.

John Barton
President, Board of Directors, Community Working Group
Opportunity Center is Turning 10

It's been nearly a decade since the Opportunity Center, CWG's flagship project, first opened its doors to serve our neighbors. Since then, the Opportunity Center has helped thousands of people who live in its apartments, come for medical care or employment assistance, or just drop in for a hot cup of coffee.

We're considering the most fitting way to commemorate this milestone — to celebrate our accomplishments, plan for the future, and to invite the broader community to learn about our critical work!

How do you think we should recognize the Opportunity Center's 10th anniversary? Please let us know at www.communityworkinggroup.org (Our survey will only take 60 seconds!)

Community Working Group's original logo, with a sketch of the envisioned Opportunity Center.

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