

## SUCCESS STORY

# Families in Transition

Families In Transition (FIT) – located in South County near the Watsonville City Plaza – provides housing, education programs and services created specifically to help families who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. They've been doing this work since 1992.

Each year, FIT helps approximately 150 families find and maintain stable housing. Families are referred to FIT after completing a uniform assessment through Smart Path, Santa Cruz County's coordinated entry system that streamlines access to housing assistance and services. FIT offers a number of "rapid re-housing" programs, which provide short-term rental assistance and services. Core components of rapid re-housing include identification of housing, rent and move-in assistance, case management and other services.

For families, particularly those with children, the sense of urgency to re-house is felt on a daily basis. FIT staff and case managers – many of whom have experienced homelessness themselves – understand the pressure, frustration and trauma that homelessness causes for families and children.

Just as there is no singularly common reason families become homeless, there also is not a common path out of homelessness. For this reason, when a family comes to FIT, they receive an individualized "housing stability plan" to ensure that once they are housed, they stay housed.

FIT helps families develop short- and long-term action steps to reach their goals, including teaching financial literacy and budgeting skills, making referrals to employment, providing rental subsidies, and connecting to services such as California Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), Cal Fresh and CalWORKs.

FIT manages the complicated process of identifying and accessing housing, and ensuring that paying rent is a top priority by educating families on finances and budgeting.

Landlords play an essential role in ending homelessness for families. A core competency for FIT is the cultivation of trust with landlords, which is critically important to ensure success for both the landlord and the client. To this end, FIT provides a wide range of programs and services depending on the family's individual needs and their personal goals for housing stability. For example, FIT case managers work closely with families to locate housing, help fill out lease applications and interview with landlords.

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“The biggest hurdle we have in Santa Cruz County is housing affordability and availability. FIT is part of real-life solutions for ending homelessness, one family at a time.”

Melisa Vierra, Executive Director

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