

SUCCESS STORY

Pajaro Valley Shelter Services

Pajaro Valley Shelter Services (PVSS) is an essential provider of short- and longer-term housing and supportive services that have helped more than 7,500 people avoid homelessness in the Pajaro Valley since 1983. PVSS works with more than 50 families per year, comprising over 150 individuals, two-thirds of whom are kids under the age of 12.

PVSS helps the community's most vulnerable families by providing emergency shelter, transitional and permanent housing. Clients are assisted in their efforts to move on to stable housing by providing the parenting, interpersonal and financial literacy skills necessary for self-sufficiency. PVSS programs are critical to Santa Cruz County's overall response to homelessness, especially given that 90 percent of PVSS clients are single mothers.

PVSS operates a "mixed housing model," including a 90-day emergency shelter for women and children, 15 units of one- to two-year transitional housing for single- and two-parent households, as well as six units of long-term affordable housing for single- and two-parent households. They operate an annex program that serves single fathers and mothers with teenage boys. PVSS has a total of 136 beds in its shelter and housing programs.

A high rate of success is a point of pride for PVSS. For example, last year 55% of families exited emergency housing and moved to transitional or permanent housing, and 100% left transitional housing for permanent housing. Overall, PVSS graduated 70% of all exiting individuals into permanent or transitional housing last year.

"These astonishing results are made possible because we believe that the highest expression of our compassion for our families is our relentless pursuit of better housing outcomes for them," said Mike Johnson, executive director, PVSS.

The success is due to an accountability-based model that begins with case management support and personal goal setting for all families. Goals are individualized for each family, but all families are required to participate in financial literacy, budgeting and savings programs. Four and eight-week classes on financial literacy, Triple P Parenting and nutrition education are provided to all families on a rotating basis throughout each year.

The program model is focused on building skills for long-term sustainability of permanent housing, including budgeting to save money, parenting/ personal development and accountability. Commitment to participate in these programs are requirements of clients of PVSS and what makes its program so successful.

PVSS families don't stop at securing permanent housing. In fact, 38 PVSS families have gone on to actually purchase their own homes.

While not everyone may be able to purchase a home when they exit the program, every family leaves with the resources needed to sustain themselves – including those who have at least one member who lives with a disability.

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"Our vision is that we don't have any families waiting to get into our shelter. We want to be there for them immediately, so that no child ever has to sleep in a car or under a bridge," said Johnson. "Our philosophy is that a happy home takes much more than a roof over your head, it takes a firm foundation under your feet. PVSS provides both the roof and foundation."

"We will continue to build and improve our accountability-based programs so our families thrive, not just survive," Johnson added. "We put families on a path to long-term sustainability, not short-term survival. Being able to afford rent is the first step. The ultimate goal is home ownership. We have a responsibility to help hard working families that want to do better and help themselves."

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