

Permanent Housing Changes Lives and Outlook of Homeless Santa Clara County Residents

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The most important strategy for ending chronic homelessness — in Santa Clara County, the Bay Area and America — is as simple as it is effective: provide permanent housing to those most in need.

It is an approach supported by [Destination: Home](#), a San Jose-based public-private partnership to end homelessness in Santa Clara County. Destination: Home supports the “Housing First” model, a nationally recognized, evidence-based approach that focuses on placing chronically homeless individuals into housing as quickly as possible, followed by additional support services to help address other needs, like medical care or job placement.

“We spend way too much time talking about drug use and mental health, but those sorts of problems affect people at all socio-economic levels, not just people experiencing homelessness,” said Jennifer Loving, chief executive officer of Destination: Home. “The lack of permanent housing for individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness remains one of the biggest and most overwhelming failures of our government and society. We know Housing First works. We just need more places for people to live.”

A growing body of studies have found that the Housing First model is an effective and cost-efficient way to help formerly homeless people get into housing and remain housed. The National Alliance to End Homelessness cites Housing First as the essential approach to permanently ending homelessness.

[Destination: Home](#) facilitates the Housing First approach in Santa Clara County by driving public and private sector collaboration to end homelessness. Founded in 2008, the organization works to create more permanent housing and develop sustainable support systems that assist residents experiencing homelessness, or who are on the verge of becoming homeless. To achieve these goals, Destination: Home has embraced a collective impact model, in which the organization convenes and collaborates with a wide array of public, private, philanthropic, and nonprofit stakeholders across the community.

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“A collective impact model is perfect for huge issues like homelessness or food insecurity because these challenges do not have a single ‘owner,’” said Loving, who has spent more than 20 years working to find solutions to the homelessness crisis.

“Solving these kinds of challenges requires a series of mutually reinforcing activities, funding and strategies focused on the same goal. And in our collective impact model, all the individual ‘owners’ — in our case, government, the private sector, nonprofit organizations — leverage their piece of responsibility into the same effort to create fundamental change,” Loving said.

The collective impact model approach took a giant leap forward in 2016, when a broad coalition of public and private partners in Santa Clara County came together to secure passage of Measure A — a \$950 million Affordable Housing Bond that will fund 120 new housing developments and 4,800 deed-restricted affordable apartments over the next decade.

The vast majority of the bond will go toward housing for extremely low-income (ELI) households (those making less than 30% of the region's average income) — a segment of the population that includes families experiencing homelessness or that is at greatest-risk of being pushed onto the streets.

“The Gap, A Shortage of Affordable Homes,” a study by the National Low Income Housing Coalition, shows that 7.8 million (71%) of the nation's 11 million ELI renter households are severely housing cost burdened, and in the San Jose metropolitan statistical area, there are only 30 available and affordable homes for every 100 ELI renter households.

“Far too often, conversations about our housing crisis ignore the disproportionate need among households at the lowest income levels,” Loving said. “If we want to end homelessness in the Bay Area, we have to address and prioritize housing affordability for extremely low-income households.”

Along with the successful passage of Measure A, Destination: Home launched the Supportive Housing & Innovation Fund in 2018 to channel private, philanthropic investments toward building more permanent housing and advancing strategies to prevent homelessness. The Supportive Housing Innovation Fund was launched in partnership with Cisco, which contributed \$50 million into the fund.

“This isn't an issue the public sector can solve alone, and having support from private sector leaders can be a game changer,” Loving said. “The enthusiasm from Cisco Chairman and CEO Chuck Robbins and other senior executives has permeated throughout Cisco, and it has led the company to think about this issue in a really important way. They see a bright line connecting their business and the health of their community, and this allows them to think much bigger and far beyond what directly affects their bottom line.”

[Destination: Home](#) has already deployed more than \$13 million from the Supportive Housing and Innovation Fund to support effective strategies for reducing homelessness. Through the fund, Destination: Home financed pre-development costs for six new affordable housing projects that will include 472 units for extremely low income and formerly homeless households. In addition, it has helped fund a promising Homelessness Prevention System pilot program, which has helped prevent homelessness for close to 700 on-the-brink families and individuals, at a cost of just over \$4,000 per household.

Despite these bright spots, there is much more work to do. Throughout the region, a growing number of families and individuals are still falling into homelessness. While the progress made through Measure A, Destination: Home, and Santa Clara County's collective impact model has laid a foundation for success, more resources and funding are needed to meet the enormous need in the community.

“We need to dramatically increase resources and investment for those at the lowest level of affordability, and we need to increase the supply of housing that's accessible for homeless people,” Loving said. “That's not just our government's job. We all have to do this.”