

Laguna Commons: Breaking New Ground



Our journey to provide 64 new homes to veterans and others priced out of the Bay Area's soaring housing market is nearing completion, with construction underway on Laguna Commons, our new permanent supportive housing community.

In just over a year, Laguna Commons will stand on Fremont Boulevard, transforming a former tow yard into homes for individuals and families who have struggled for too long without a home.

"We're very proud to be able to serve these individuals and families," Executive Director Louis Chicoine said. "As home prices continue to rise in the Bay Area, more and more people are finding it near impossible to find a place to live."

Veterans will move into almost half of the units currently under construction. A partnership between our organization, the Housing

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It's Never Too Late to Move Back to a Home

Annette is a survivor. She lived on the streets of Sunnyvale and San Jose for more than 20 years, finding shelter in any way she could.

Annette lived behind warehouses, in wooden makeshift shelters beside train tracks, and in small encampments located in industrial areas of both cities. She used whatever materials she could find to carve out a shelter in the most inhospitable locations.

"I'll tell you what it was like in four letters, H-E-L-L," Annette said recently. "I was just trying to survive. I had lost everything, and I was just hoping I'd have a safe place to rest each night."

The instability that came with not having a home only exacerbated Annette's barriers to housing, setting off a cycle of homelessness and hopelessness.

"I'd get up and then fall back down," Annette said. "I had nothing."

However, at age 55, Annette knew she could not last much longer on the streets. It was 2012, and fortunately, she had just met a caseworker who put her on a list for permanent housing. That list connected Annette with Abode Services through Housing 1000, a community campaign in Santa Clara County that re-housed 1,000 people in three years.

"What a blessing. I thank God every day," Annette said recently from her studio apartment in San Jose. "When I come home, it's just a great feeling. I now have a front door, and I can lock it!"

The stability Annette gained from not having to worry about where she would sleep every night has helped her both physically and mentally. She said she's never felt better.

"I'm just so very, very grateful," Annette said. "I don't ever want to be sleeping on the street again.

"I'll tell you something," she continued with a laugh. "I make sure my rent is paid well before it's due!"



Annette is thankful to have a home after spending more than 20 years on the street.

A Reading Family is a Happy Family

When our Children's Program Coordinator Emily Carmona noticed some of the children we serve were having difficulty reading — and were not too thrilled with the prospect of practicing — Emily and her staff came up with a plan.



They turned reading into a game, and included parents and guardians to create a family event that would spark continued reading sessions when the activities were completed.

The staff created trivia competitions based on the books being read, gave awards to children who volunteered to read aloud, and promised to hand out new donated books to children who participated the most during an event.

Before long, children were literally jumping at the chance to read aloud and eager to participate in trivia contests.

Since the first “Literacy Event” in February, dozens of children and their parents have attended the games, eagerly anticipating the next round of books to read and activities to conquer.

The events, which began during February’s Black History Month celebration, included donated books we received from the American Library Association through the organization’s Coretta Scott King Book Donation Grant.

Using the more than 100 books awarded to our organization, Emily and her staff created a series of games that encouraged children to read aloud, answer questions afterwards, and win the chance to borrow new books for reading after the event.

“By the end of the first event, we had children lining up for a chance to read to their peers,” Emily said. “We had so many people volunteer to read aloud that we ran out of time and promised to hold another event in the next month.”

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Nice to Meet You, Google

Abode Services is constantly looking for innovative ways to help the thousands of our neighbors who do not have homes.

For example, when rents soared in the late 1990s and affordable housing options dwindled, we expanded beyond just being a shelter program by creating housing opportunities for participants. More recently, when Santa Clara County sought a non-profit partner to end chronic homelessness using a cutting-edge Pay For Success funding model, Abode Services eagerly joined the effort.

So, when one of the world's most innovative companies reached out to offer their help, Abode Services enthusiastically welcomed the support.

During a four-day stretch earlier this year, four employees from Google came to Abode Services and shared their professional knowledge with us. Abode Services was one of four nonprofits selected to work with Google employees through a program called Google Reach Local.

The program sends Google employees to nonprofits each quarter for a week of intensive work. Employees select the organization they want to help, as well as a project they wish to focus on during their week of service. The entire process is organized by HandsOn Bay Area, a San Francisco-based nonprofit.



Google volunteers with Abode Services Executive Director Louis Chicoine and Abode Services Director of Properties and Assets Jon White. (from left to right): Marie Collins, Louis, Iveta Brigis, Jon, Chris Valle, and Amy Sunderman.

The Googlers who arrived at Abode Services earlier this year chose to work with us because they are passionate about ending homelessness in our community.

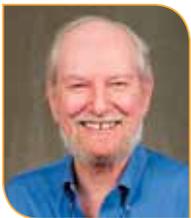
In their days with us, the Googlers helped research information about micro-homes and the possibility that such a project could work in the Bay Area. Micro-homes, commonly referred to as tiny houses, are single-occupancy, detached dwellings that offer the basic amenities of a house. Their size and relative ease of building make them considerably cheaper to develop than apartment buildings or single-family homes.

The Googlers' intensive volunteer effort also helped introduce Abode Services to Google. The four volunteers said they were impressed with the work we do, and left with a greater knowledge of how effectively a Housing First model, like the one Abode Services uses, helps people transition back into housing.

"Working with Abode was an eye-opening experience," said Amy Sunderman, one of the Google volunteers. "The amount of success the organization has in ending homelessness gave me faith that we were partnering with the right group to make a change."

We're thankful for the help from Google and hope to have many more opportunities to work together.

Building a Legacy by Restoring Self-Esteem



"Self-esteem" is a word that Abode Services Board President Doug Ford uses when talking about the organization. He says our efforts help restore self-esteem in people's lives.

Doug's decision to include Abode Services in a bequest provision in his will grew out of his commitment and his beliefs. He values social justice and thinks everyone should have a home that is stable, safe, and nurturing.

Housing is a primary need that a person must secure before addressing any other personal issues. In order to achieve self-fulfillment and success, a person must first have a home.

"It is very humbling to think about all those people who are now housed because of the work Abode Services does," Doug said. "We are changing lives!"

To receive information on making your own legacy gift to Abode Services, contact Carol Arata at (510) 657-7409 x203 or carata@abodeservices.org.

LAGUNA COMMONS (cont. from page 1)

Authority of the County of Alameda, and the Department of Veterans Affairs resulted in the award of 25 VASH (Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing) vouchers, which will allow us to serve veterans who are exiting chronic homelessness and living with disabilities and other special needs.

The remaining units will serve individuals and families who are formerly homeless and very low income.

Laguna Commons will meet a critical need for housing that is affordable for local families and individuals.

Abode Services and our partner MidPen Housing are developing the housing community at a time of unprecedented increases in housing costs. Just last year, rents in the San Francisco Bay Area/Silicon Valley community increased 11.4 percent. The average monthly cost to rent an apartment in the Bay Area rose to \$2,234, the highest it has been since the tracking of rental rates began two decades ago.

Laguna Commons will not just be a location for people to live. Each person moving into the community will have access to supportive services provided by Abode Services, including job training, health care referrals, and other services tailored to address the needs of each resident and help them maintain their housing and meet their other goals.

We're excited that construction has begun and look forward to providing more individuals and families a place to call home.



“We’re very proud to be able to serve these individuals and families.”

— **Louis Chicoine**
Executive Director

For more information about how we’re working to end homelessness please visit www.abodeservices.org.

READING FAMILY (cont. from page 3)

The Children's Program hopes to have a different theme for each month, including a spelling bee at one of our permanent supportive housing communities. Each spelling bee participant will receive an award, and the children in first and second place will win a special prize.

The Literacy Events are also benefitting from an ongoing partnership we have with the Alameda County Library. Last year, the library installed a PULSE (Pop-Up Library Services for Everyone) site at Sunrise Village Emergency Shelter and children are using books from the site during the Literacy Events.

Emily said the Literacy Events have changed the way many of the children we serve approach reading. When in the past they viewed reading as a chore, Emily said the children now view it as a fun activity and are eager to pull out the next book and begin reading aloud.

Stay tuned to our social media channels to see updates and pictures from future Literacy Events!

If you're interested in volunteering with the Children's Program, or have new or slightly used children's books you'd like to donate (especially books for children five years old and younger), please contact Community Outreach Director Jean Morgan at jmorgan@abodeservices.org or (510) 252-0910 ext. 804.

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***Because everyone
should have a home.***

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