

# Newsletter Grace at Work



Lutheran Social Services of Northern California

FALL 2022

## CEO Corner: LSS Takes Site Control of Three Housing Complexes



I am pleased to share with you that the California Department of Housing and Community Development granted site control of three Stockton housing complexes to LSS. The three properties are located in the City of Stockton, respectively, on North Hunter Avenue, Coral Lane and Edan Avenue. We are currently undergoing a rehabilitation of the properties to prepare them for the emancipated foster youth and transition age youth (ages 18-24) that we serve in Stockton.

This opportunity is a direct result of our successful operation of our MiCasa Program for transition age youth in Concord.

For the last 10 years, LSS has been providing permanent supportive housing in Stockton to emancipated foster youth and transition-age youth who have a documented disability. Each year, we serve approximately 30 youth by first providing housing and then the critical supportive services that guide them to stabilization and self-sufficiency.



Additionally, LSS provides extended foster care to youth who have elected to receive additional services (including housing) after the age of 18, when traditional foster care ends. The hallmark of services provided by LSS include housing first, trauma informed care and strong racial equity practices.

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**OUR MISSION:** To promote stability and honor the dignity of those we serve by providing supportive housing services that lead to self-sufficiency.

## Community Pilar Award

LSS is honored to receive the first Community Pillar Award from our longtime partner Mutual Housing of California. Mutual Housing is a leading provider in the Sacramento area of affordable housing. Currently, LSS provides supportive services at Mutual Housing at the Highlands and Lavender Courtyard by Mutual Housing, with several upcoming projects under construction. “We are honored,” says LSS CEO Carol Roberts. “Being able to place our participants in new, well-designed and well-managed housing is a game changer for LSS and a life changer for our participants.” ■



# Our Backbone

## Silvia Marquez - 20 years in Money Management



Silvia Marquez joined the LSS Money Management team 20 years ago, because she was drawn to the happenings in and around the San Francisco office.

“When I was in my late 20s, I lived on Turk Street, and I used to walk through the Tenderloin with my kids to the park at City Center,” she says. “I always passed 191 Golden Gate and wondered what the lines of people were all about.”

She decided to apply and was hired as the receptionist. She admitted that the climate in the Money Management office took her some getting used to.

“Sometimes it was hard. There was a lot of tension, and a lot of challenges with the clients. I couldn’t always help them,” she admits. “There was one client who caused me particular heartache. She always came in with a golden retriever. When you are hurting and going through hard times, and you don’t have family to help you, you can be very irritable and insensitive.”

Only a few months after she started, on a check distribution day, Silvia was asked to assist the participants directly. (At the beginning of the month, LSS distributes checks to all of the participants for their living expenses.) This is one of the tasks of a Caseworker, and Silvia found herself acting as if she was a Caseworker. “I thought, ‘This is something I can do,’” she explains. With the encouragement of one of her colleagues, she applied for a Caseworker position and was promoted.

*“This company has shown me so much belief in myself and so much support around me as I was growing—and I am still growing—and I am grateful.” - Silvia Marquez*

“When I was very young, I came to this country from Mexico—I was a dual-citizen. I had no money in my pocket, pregnant, nothing to eat. When I went to human services, the people there were rude and mean. The person I talked to told me that I wasn’t going to get anything and that I should just go back to where I came from. I couldn’t go back, and I somehow knew that if I stayed around the office, something good would happen. It had to. A woman came out and saw me. She asked me if I was okay, and I said no. She asked me to explain. I told her my situation and how the first person was not helpful. And this person helped me.

“She was a person who wanted to help another human being in the world. And that was the kind of person I wanted to be,” Silvia explains.

“Silvia is extremely attentive to her clients, especially those with special needs,” says JP Soto, Deputy Director of the San Francisco region. “In her many years with us, I cannot tell you how many clients have graduated from the program and returned to thank her for her due diligence in keeping to planned budgets, prioritizing rent and important bills, like utilities.”



Silvia Marquez working with one of her clients

In 2014, Silvia was promoted to Lead Caseworker, where she not only assists her own 150 clients, but also provides support and advice to other Caseworkers. (Each Caseworker serves between 150 and 200 individuals.)

Additionally, when LSS initiated our Money Management for Seniors pilot program this past winter, Silvia took the lead. We now have 32 seniors enrolled toward a goal of 50.

“I talk to our clients,” she says. “Money is complicated, and I like to explain. I just want to do whatever I can for them. Whether you are the receptionist or a Case Worker or someone higher than a Case Worker, we are here to help people.”

During the challenging COVID-19 pandemic, Silvia went above and beyond expectations. “She helped our clients and our team successfully navigate a very difficult and intense time,” Michael Brezinski, Money Management Program Manager explains. “Her expertise and professionalism have allowed us to not only keep our doors open, but to take on new programs and staff at the same time. She is the backbone of our Money Management Program.”

## CEO Corner *continued from page 1*

While these new properties do not formally indicate an expansion of our Stockton youth programming, having 24 one- and two-bedroom units under our control will alleviate some of the stress that LSS staff undergo in securing housing for our participants in a very competitive market.

Having multi-unit locations for groups of participants will also enable us to have more fluid and concentrated contact with them and develop more social programming to guide the youth into self-efficacy and stability.

Ultimately, the site control will transform to full ownership, and at that time, these properties will enhance our real estate portfolio, which includes MiCasa in Concord and the V Street complex of apartments and offices in Sacramento. In the constantly challenging and lucrative real estate market, the housing complexes will be important assets for LSS.

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As we are now in the season of gratitude and celebration, please know that we at LSS are eternally grateful for the opportunity we have to serve the most vulnerable in our community, as well as partner with you to make a significant difference in their lives and all Northern California. Thank you for your partnership! ■



## Enhancing Youth Employment



Guiding and supporting transition age youth into stability has always included employment support with LSS Case Managers providing whatever it takes to assist youth in obtaining and maintaining employment. In 2020, LSS launched our Youth Education and Employment Initiative, which includes job readiness, individual career and education support and two social enterprises – A Novel Idea (bookstore) and A Clean Start (cleaning business) to provide youth with paid work experience.

With financial support for the Governor's Office via a California Community Reinvestment Grant, LSS has expanded this important initiative to include job development.

Melissa de la Cruz joined LSS as our new Job Developer whose primary responsibility is to create partnership with employers and trade schools to provide our youth with a variety of options as they pursue employment and stability. "It is my mission to plant seeds of self-discovery and joyful permanent employment for our participants," she explains, "and connect employers and partners with employable and confident job seekers."

In a short time, LSS has developed relationships with Diligence Security Group and Juma Ventures. Diligence Security Group is a security firm that provides security staff for athletic events, festivals and other special events. Opportunities to work at these events are posted and shared with the roster of talent, who then select which shifts and activities they want to work. In many instances, transportation to and from the event is provided, as well. Already youth have worked sporting events and Coachella.

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Help Make Your  
Neighbor's Holiday Special

Join the LSS  
Holiday Gift Drive!

[www.lssnocal.org/holidaygiftdrive](http://www.lssnocal.org/holidaygiftdrive)



## Holiday Gift Drive

Please join us in making this holiday season a fantastic one for your vulnerable neighbors. LSS currently serves approximately 4,500 individuals in Northern California, 400 of them are children, and we are planning to give each one a holiday gift. We need your help to do this. For adults, we need blankets (\$25 value), and we're also asking for hand-knitted scarves and hats, holiday candy, travel-size hygiene items, yo-yos, activity books for adults and wrapping paper. We're also looking for handmade holiday cards for our 500 seniors. For more information (and links to our participant wish lists, please go to [www.lssnocal.org/holidaygiftdrive](http://www.lssnocal.org/holidaygiftdrive) or contact us at [development@lssnocal.org](mailto:development@lssnocal.org). Give a gift; brighten someone's holiday.





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## Housing the Unhoused



Every day, LSS staff have the great honor to guide individuals from tents, their cars, couch-surfing and other challenging situations into housing. “The moment that one of my clients first unlocks their door, the look on their face, it’s an amazing experience!” says one of our case managers.



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Founded in 1993, Juma Ventures provides job training and job placement services to homeless and other vulnerable youth to enable them to transition into stable adulthood. Juma partners with major sports and entertainment venues and educational partners in six different cities (including Sacramento) to provide practical work experience through its social enterprises.

These are just the beginning of the partnerships that LSS is developing. The goal is to have a portfolio of partners so that each of the youth entering into the initiative has the opportunity for a job that meets their own interests and skills, and thereby embarks on an employment pathway that leads to job satisfaction and stability. As Melissa notes: “We will transform everything our youth have experienced into a catalyst to endless possibilities and an introduction to learn new skills and attitudes.” ■

visit us online at [www.lssnorcal.org](http://www.lssnorcal.org)

STAY CONNECTED

