



ANNUAL REPORT 2024

Heart + Home
collaborative



Message from the board

In 2012, Heart and Home piloted its flagship women's shelter. Reeling from the closure of a 70-bed women's shelter in Menlo Park, unhoused residents of all genders told us that the county needed more places for women to feel safe. We listened and we acted. Over a decade later, we stay true to this founding ethos: bringing the community together to *be responsive* to needs articulated by our unhoused neighbors. This year, in particular, we took on several key needs:

As pandemic-time safety nets expire, we have been fielding more and more calls from women needing a place to stay. To address the growing need for shelter while acknowledging the continued impact of COVID-19, we decided to return to our pre-pandemic capacity while maintaining many health safety protocols (masks, food service, distancing, etc.).

We also partnered with the Palo Alto Community Fund to address many of the needs participants have been telling us about for years -- by developing a Client Fund that participants can access for small-dollar costs.

And we once again expanded Palo Alto's cold-weather shelter availability. Moved to action by the death of Theodore Clegg in 2022, we partnered with the City's Human Services division to open a pilot overnight warming location at the public library. *(The above photo shows me assembling and waterproofing the shed we stored our cots and supplies in!)*

The result? A 20% increase in our women's shelter capacity; needs met for more than 30 women; and a new overnight warming local that expanded the county's shelter capacity by 112 bed-nights on the coldest days of 2024.



Of course, doing all of this work has meant increasing our capacity. We took on two new major sources of funding (including our first major government grant!), partnered with Stanford to introduce a new work study job (flip to the end of the report for more about our fantastic student, Clarissa!), and worked with new partners in our community. Our board and volunteers also took on much extra work to make this all possible: from managing additional payroll to cooking more meals and doing more loads of laundry.

While this report covers the 2023-2024 season, the Heart and Home team is presently in our FY25 winter shelter season. We continue to reflect every day on how grateful we are for the support we receive from each and every one of you. Thank you for being a part of our collaborative!

MARY WISNEWSKI

PRESIDENT

on behalf of H+H's Board of Directors

Our Mission

Heart and Home Collaborative (H+H) brings together Palo Alto residents, both unhoused and housed, to create dialogue, leverage resources, and develop services (such as shelter, outreach, and community meetings) that respect and respond to the needs and goals of individuals who are unhoused. Our team members invest themselves in personal relationships and in the creation of a loving and supportive community. Individuals who are unhoused participate in program conceptualizing, planning, decision-making, and evaluation, with the understanding that people who use services are the experts.



Our Values

Learning and Growth

Volunteers and participants can learn from each other and form mutually beneficial relationships in shelter.

Accountability

Our ultimate responsibility is to our participants. We are transparent in decision-making and responsive to their requests.

Participatory Planning

We aim to involve unhoused people, service providers, and other community partners in decision-making and program design.

Community Partnerships

Shelter is a focal point for the community to support unhoused women. This includes local service providers and Stanford resources.

Self-Driven

Participants are the experts on their lives and, therefore, should be allowed to set their own goals and articulate their own needs.

Our Impact

34

Participants

1,515

Bed-Nights

9.35

Beds Filled per Night

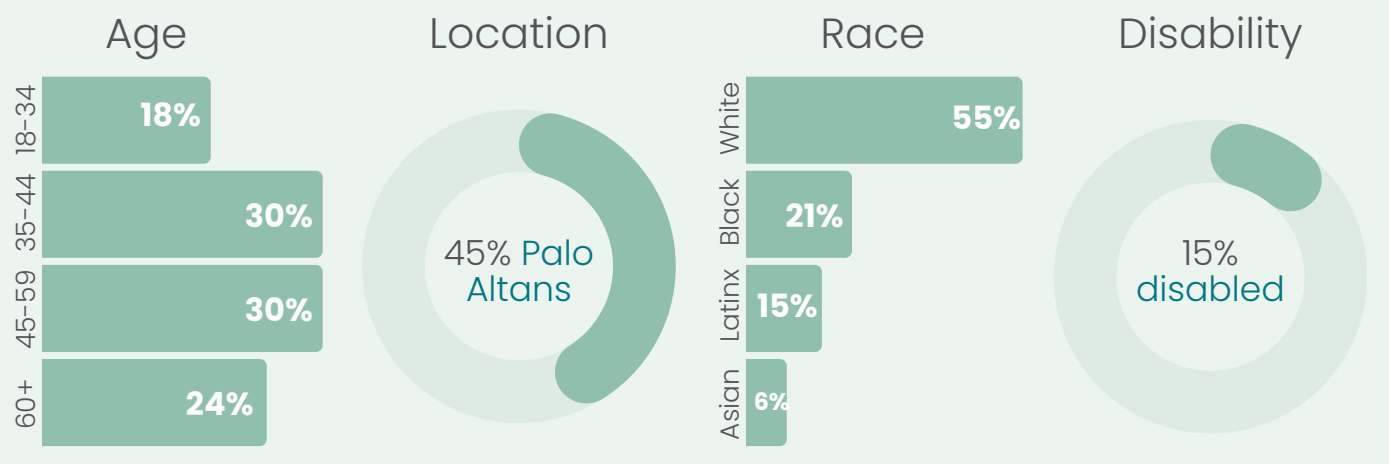
20%

*Increase in Capacity
since 2022/2023*

"Every day at all times, Heart and Home staff are respectful and treat all guests like real humans, with cares and concerns they are trying to overcome."

- Anonymous 2024 participant

Participant Demographics



Volunteer Impact

As a volunteer-run organization, our shelter operates because volunteers contribute in many ways, including being present onsite, bringing needed food and supplies, and keeping the organization running! Here's a snapshot of what volunteers accomplished in the 2023-2024 shelter season:



At the core of Heart and Home's values is the idea that volunteers and participants experience reciprocal benefits from the work. Yes, volunteers are supporting unhoused women -- but they're also benefitting from the relationships they form. This brings volunteers, like Katie, back for an average of 4-5 engagements each season:

"I have been a volunteer with Heart and Home for many years. After each season I come away feeling good about the work I did for shelter participants. I have enjoyed engaging with the participants one on one and as a whole by doing various tasks that help H+H with their mission."

~ Katie, long-time neighbor and volunteer

Volunteer Spotlight

Remembering Marina Correggia

We will greatly miss our dear friend Marina who has dedicated the past 4 years serving as a volunteer at Heart + Home. During the pandemic, Marina signed up to bring dinner as a way to help her daughter reconnect with the world. Before we knew it, Marina and Celeste were our most prolific dinner duo, often signing up to bring 1-2 dinners per week! Before long, Marina's son Lorenzo was also cooking us meals. Our participants were delighted by their authentic Italian dinners (always with a side of fresh soup, salad, and bread -- because that's how we do in Italy!), thoughtfully accommodative of a range of dietary needs.

Marina passed away on February 5, 2024. We extend our heartfelt condolences to Celeste and Lorenzo. As we reflect on Marina's legacy, we recognize her loving enthusiasm and commitment to making a difference in her community.



Recognizing Abby Cromwell



This year, Palo Alto High School student Abby was our top dinner volunteer, cooking 24 meals during the 23 weeks when shelter was open! We are amazed and certainly grateful for Abby's ability to balance a demanding high school schedule with preparing delicious dinners featuring cuisine from 4 continents. We are inspired by her commitment and confident she will go on to do amazing things!

A surprising number of dinner donors to Heart and Home turn out to be high school students. In the Cromwell family, Abby saw her brother Kyle cook shelter meals in Spring 2021 before leaving for college. Abby reflects on her experience: "Watching my brother cook meals for others inspired me, so I followed in his footsteps. It felt amazing to know that I could help and make [participants'] days a little better through home-cooked meals. I also enjoyed spending time with my mom, learning all kinds of ethnic cooking, often inspired by our travels."

Life At Shelter



All set up for dinner!

A Typical Evening

Participants make their way into shelter in the early evening, where they are welcomed by staff and volunteers. Each person gets a sleeping area furnished with pillows and blankets. Volunteers from the local Palo Alto community cook and serve a homemade dinner. Whether it's savory shepherd's pie or warm lentil soup on a cold winter night, sharing these meals creates dialogue amongst participants and volunteers and adds to the warm atmosphere we strive to foster.

Special Activities

Our organization believes that shelter should be a space where participants feel valued. This past year, participants had the opportunity to attend a local Stanford tennis match, three craft nights onsite, and our Valentine's Day knitted hearts event. Activities like these help foster a deep sense of community among shelter participants, and ultimately help shelter feel a little more like home.



Our staff's creation from craft night

A Community United

The Journey of Three Women Moving Into Permanent Housing



One of two carloads of donated items.

In Palo Alto, the spirit of community and compassion shines brightly. This year, Heart and Home Collaborative witnessed local residents and organizations support three participants transitioning from homelessness to permanent housing.

As news spread, the community rallied to provide move-in supplies. Donations poured in, including nearly 100 household essentials like bedding, kitchenware, and furniture. Many also contributed to our move-in fundraiser, ensuring the women could each have close to \$250 to purchase personal items to make their new spaces feel like home.

This effort reflects a shift in Santa Clara County, where more permanent housing options are becoming available. Recent initiatives have developed affordable housing units, providing hope for those striving to escape homelessness. The community's response highlights growing awareness and willingness to tackle this crucial issue.

However, the journey to a stable home is challenging. Many participants lack financial assistance to cover initial costs like security deposits and first month's rent. The scarcity of move-in supplies and absence of support from friends and family add to their difficulties. The trauma of homelessness leaves lasting scars, making the transition daunting. Transportation issues hinder their ability to move, obtain supplies, and connect with new neighborhoods.

Often, permanent housing options are concentrated in San Jose, meaning many participants must move out of Palo Alto and into a new environment. This presents additional challenges like building new support networks, finding new doctors, navigating public transit, locating grocery stores, and adapting to new areas without familiar support systems.

Despite these challenges, our community's support has made a significant impact. Donations allowed the women to furnish their new apartments, making them feel like home. This kindness provided not just material support but also a renewed sense of belonging and hope.

This story highlights the importance of community involvement in addressing homelessness. As more permanent housing becomes available in Santa Clara County, ongoing support from residents and organizations will be crucial. Together, we are not just providing shelter; we are fostering a kind, inclusive community where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

New Programs

Client Fund

A pair of reading glasses, colored pencils to help destress from a long day, the filing fee for a new ID, \$10 for a couple gallons of gas, a new haircut. For over a decade, we've heard so many ways in which a relatively small amount of money could make a big difference in our participants' lives. This year, thanks to a generous grant from the Palo Alto Community Fund, H+H was able to respond to these needs through our pilot Client Fund!

The idea is simple: We set aside a fund of ~\$200 per participant that anyone who stayed with us for at least two weeks could access. Our goal was to empower participants with the freedom to use the money in the ways they felt best met their needs. We tried to make the fund easy to access and administer. To make it last as long as we could, we only purchased items that couldn't be easily accessed elsewhere.

We saw first-hand the value of empowering participants with this flexibility, as they spent the money on a wide range of needs:

- **Employment:** Two participants invested in their small businesses, buying supplies to manufacture handicraft items for sale, and one took a class she needed to get a better job.
- **Transportation:** Several participants used the fund to buy a couple gallons of gas so they could get to work or appointments on time. One participant bought a bus ticket home after she was the victim of a crime, so she could stay with family and ensure her safety.
- **Wellbeing:** Several participants bought clothing, items for personal care, and even art supplies.

At H+H, we believe in letting participants set their own goals and articulate their own needs. Our Client Fund showed the power of this approach.

"The Client Fund empowered participants to work towards needs they could not afford on their own."

~Lori Mills, Shelter Director and Case Manager



A participant used the fund to bootstrap a small soap business!

New Programs

Overnight Warming Location

"It was the first time I slept through the night in ages."

~Anonymous OWL Participant

In 2024, H+H partnered with the City of Palo Alto to open the city's only overnight warming location (OWL). Located at the Palo Alto Downtown Library, the OWL was open on 15 cold, rainy nights from January through April when the county determined that weather conditions made it unsafe to sleep outdoors. The OWL was intended as a life-saving measure in the winter, providing essentials like: a warm library, mattress, some Cup of Noodles and hot chocolate. The OWL's pilot season offered:

112 *for* **33** *of whom* **1 in 3**
Bed-Nights Indoors Participants were in vulnerable health



Mattresses set up for the Overnight Warming Location (OWL)

Beyond the opportunity to get out of the cold and rain, participants appreciated the shelter's calm atmosphere and caring staff. From the first night we've been open, participants expressed a desire to stay with us again -- mainly because of the accessible location (a library where participants often already spent their days), kind staff, and the fact that they felt safe.

After a successful pilot year, the City of Palo Alto has decided to continue operating the OWL in 2025. We look forward to our continued partnership with them, to build on the foundations we created in the 2024 season and expand the program's impact.

Our Financials

During our 2023–2024 season (FY24), Heart and Home remained in good financial position. Expenses increased by over 25%, in part due to the inflationary pressures in the global economy, but also from expanding our services with the OWL program during extreme weather events. We also allocated funds for direct support to our participants, helping them pay an outstanding bill, or even assist in starting a small business! While donations from our network of supporters were down, we were able to partially offset this through increased funding from the city of Palo Alto and their Human Services Resource Allocation Process (HSRAP) grant in support of the services we provide to the community.

	FY 2023	FY 2024
<i>Beginning bank balance</i>	\$ 33,900.00	\$ 45,300.00
Revenues		
Gifts and Donations		
Benevity	\$ 38,900.00	\$ 14,300.00
Individual Donations	\$ 11,400.00	\$ 20,200.00
Online Donations	\$ 12,200.00	\$ 7,300.00
Other groups	\$ 3,400.00	\$ 9,000.00
<i>Total Gifts & Donations</i>	\$ 65,900.00	\$ 50,900.00
Grants	\$ 45,000.00	\$ 64,800.00
Total Revenue	\$ 110,900.00	\$ 115,600.00
Expenses		
Payroll	\$ 80,100.00	\$ 98,900.00
Insurance	\$ 5,900.00	\$ 8,800.00
Food/Supplies	\$ 8,200.00	\$ 9,500.00
Overhead	\$ 3,600.00	\$ 4,000.00
Permits	\$ 1,700.00	\$ 2,300.00
Client Fund	\$ -	\$ 4,000.00
Total Expenses	\$ 99,500.00	\$ 127,400.00
<i>Ending bank balance</i>	\$ 45,300.00	\$ 34,100.00

Note: Heart and Home Collaborative uses cash basis accounting.

Our Partners

Shelter Host Sites



University Lutheran Church: supporters and host site since 2014.



Peninsula Bible Church: host site since 2018.



Covenant Presbyterian Church: host site since 2021.



First Presbyterian Church of Palo Alto: host site since 2019.



UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST
CHURCH OF PALO ALTO

Unitarian Universalist Church of Palo Alto: host site since 2017.

Grants



CITY OF
PALO ALTO

**Ram and Lakshmi
Sundaram
Foundation**



Palo Alto
Community Fund.



Grace Lutheran Church

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
PALO ALTO, UCC



University
Lutheran
Church

Our Partners

Partnering Organizations



Thank you, Clarissa – our first work study student employee!



For the 2023-2024 season, we collaborated with Stanford's Community Services Work Study program to deepen our engagement with students. Meet Clarissa! Our first ever Community Outreach Coordinator -- who had the job of supporting H+H's core community touchpoints. She served as H+H's volunteer coordinator, developed many of our fundraising campaigns, did all of the laundry for our overnight warming location (over 40 loads!), helped participants fill out housing applications, brought her kind presence to shelter once a week, and so much more!

In her own words: "My time as CSWS intern for Heart and Home provided me with an invaluable opportunity to meaningfully contribute to addressing a social issue. Heart and Home is a close-knit and collaborative community that is significantly impacting the lives of vulnerable women in need of compassionate support. I'm profoundly grateful for the experience to collaborate with revolutionary advocates and volunteer alongside kind-hearted individuals making the world a better place."

Thank you!



We thank you for your continued support of and participation in our community!

Your donations continue to fund our ability to serve people in need in the Palo Alto area and beyond. Contributions of all types are welcome at hhcollab.org/donate.

Contact

Heart and Home Collaborative

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