



Heart + Home
collaborative



ANNUAL REPORT 2025

HEART AND HOME COLLABORATIVE

Message from the board

When we talk about the impact of our programs, you've probably heard Heart and Home cite the extraordinarily high unsheltered homelessness rates in Santa Clara County and Palo Alto; the crushing rates of violence, illness, and mortality that women face on the streets; and the ever-increasing age and physical vulnerability of the participants staying at our shelter.

And while all of these are important needs that our organization meets (with over 1400 bed-nights of shelter!), we sometimes don't talk enough about another core piece of our impact – one that is more critical than ever: Bringing housed and unhoused neighbors together in mutually beneficial relationships, community, and respect.

Heart and Home was founded by a team of Stanford students doing weekly outreach walks "with the belief that compassion and conversation are just as important as food and shelter". Their student group, Night Outreach, created a structured, supervised framework for Stanford students to get involved, learn, and engage with the community.

In many ways, Heart and Home continues the legacy of Night Outreach. Our volunteer program reaches over 100 individuals per season, each of whom is trained in how to respectfully, skillfully, and empathetically engage their unhoused neighbors. Onsite, volunteers and participants are encouraged to share a meal, engage in conversation, and, in the process, build relationships. Our shelters create space for mutually beneficial interactions. Many families volunteer with us because they are looking for opportunities to build relationships and be a part of a constructive solution. And our participants benefit by rekindling community connections that are often lost during episodes of homelessness.

In this way, shelter serves as a focal point to bring housed and unhoused Palo Altans into proximity and, therefore, foster relationships and create greater momentum towards near- and long-term solutions. In 2025, these opportunities for dialogue and mutual understanding are more vital than ever to keep our unhoused neighbors safe.

My own journey with Heart and Home started when the women's shelter was hosted at my church in its pilot year. I was initially a little intimidated by just how "big" offering shelter seemed. Then my church nominated me as our de facto volunteer coordinator, and I was quickly drawn in by just how tangible the role was. One thing led to another, and pretty soon I was our board president.

I am so proud that this year's annual report tells the story of many others who have found a tangible way to be a part of our work: of Stanford students Angela and Christina who have been lead volunteers almost every week for the past three years; of Elizabeth who has never been to shelter but plays one of the most pivotal roles in making sure it runs; of 7 elementary school students who cooked dinner for our overnight warming location so participants didn't have to eat Cup of Noodles every night; and of our beloved staffer Mele. It illustrates how there are many ways to show up for your unhoused neighbors.

Each of you brings value to Heart and Home. To echo Mele's words, we hope that, in return, Heart and Home can help you "feel like you're part of something bigger than you." Thank you for being a part of our collaborative!

Mary M. Wisniewski

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.

Women’s Shelter Impact

Our cold weather women’s shelter gave self-identifying women and trans* individuals space to sleep each night from November 2024 through March 2025. Hosted by four Palo Alto houses of faith, this program operates through a collaborative engagement model, bringing together local residents, Stanford affiliates, our program participants, and trained staff to run shelter.

41

Participants

1,208

Bed-Nights

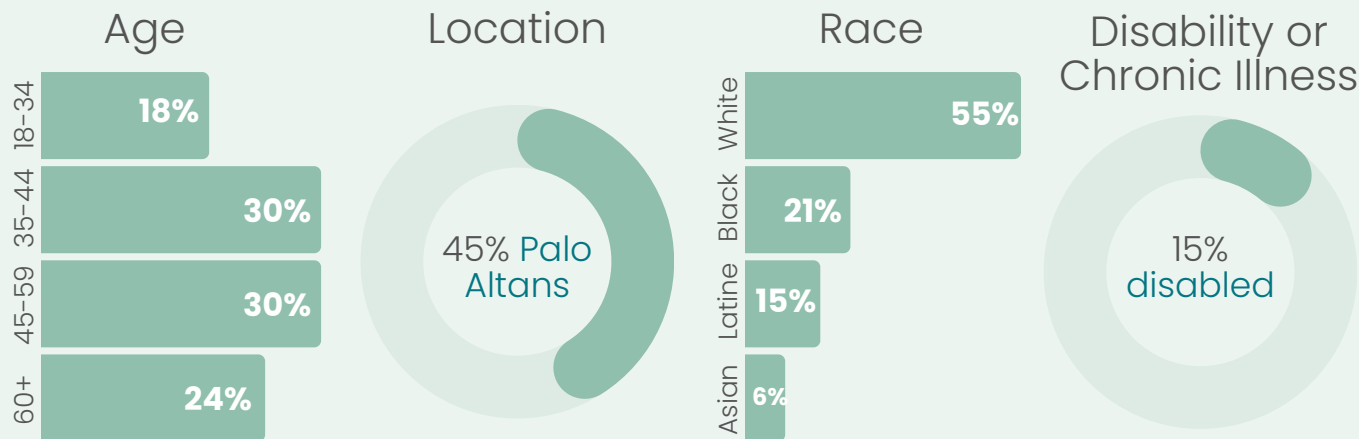
8.71

Beds Filled per Night

2,320

Client-Volunteer Interactions

Participant Demographics



OWL Impact

Our year-round overnight warming location (OWL) allows unsheltered residents to sleep indoors at the Downtown Palo Alto Library during periods of inclement weather. Operated in partnership with the City of Palo Alto, the OWL is intended as a life-saving measure and opens when the county determines that weather conditions made it unsafe to sleep outdoors.

33

Participants

207

Bed-Nights

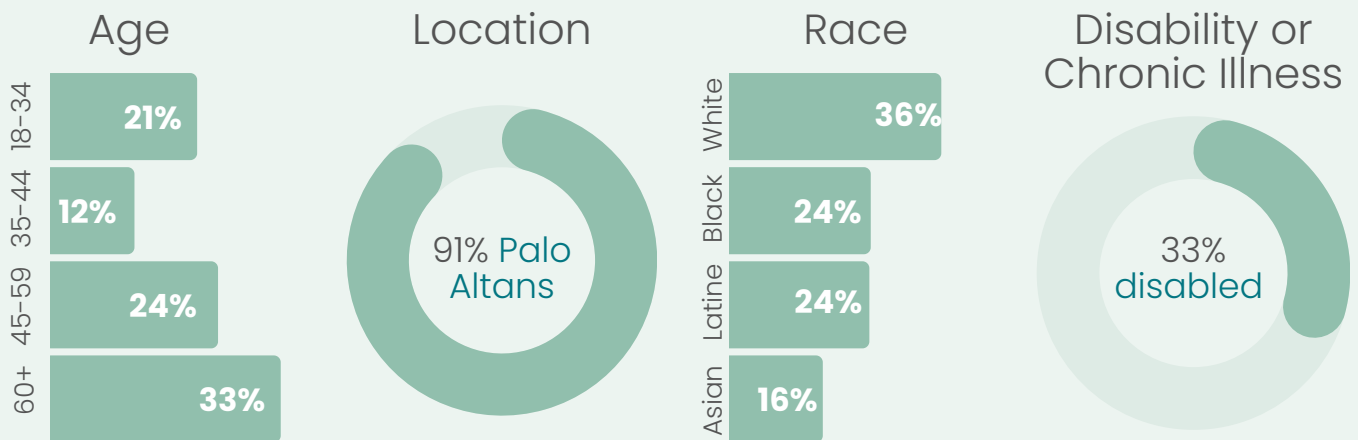
10.89

Beds Filled per Night

19

Nights Open

Participant Demographics



Our Volunteers

143 volunteers powered the 2024–2025 shelter season – providing care, consistency, and a lot of muffins

As a volunteer-run organization, we rely entirely on the dedication and generosity of our community. From staffing shifts and delivering meals to providing essential supplies and behind-the-scenes support, volunteers made this season possible. Here's a look at what our volunteer community made happen during the 2024–2025 shelter season:



701

Hours Onsite



558

Muffins Baked



1,356

Meals Cooked

2,493

Payroll Hours
Processed

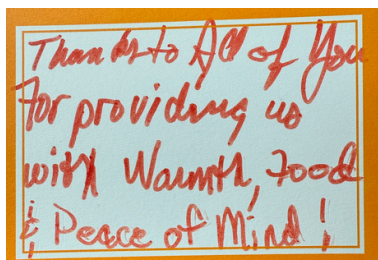
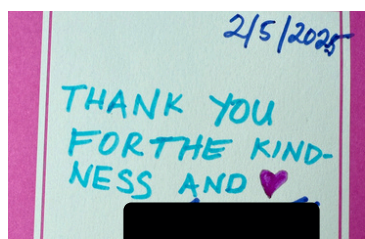
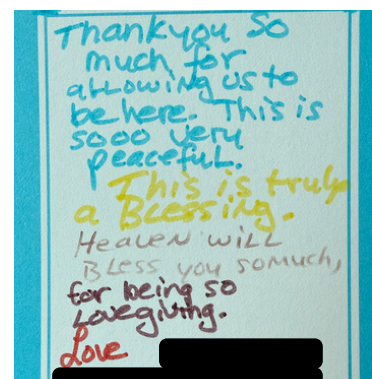
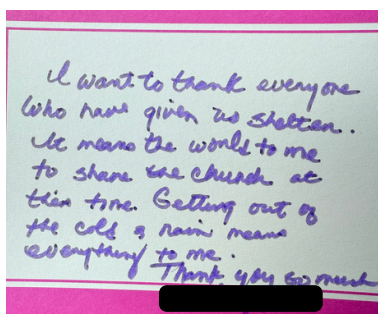
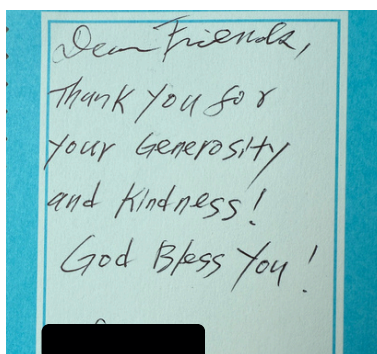
84

Loads of Laundry
Washed

8,995

Words Written For
Grant Applications

Our participants speak to the impact of our volunteers and host sites in their own words:



Board Spotlight

Heart and Home is operated by our volunteer board of directors, who donate their time to creating policy, managing finances, managing volunteers, and coordinating the operational logistics of shelter. This year, we have chosen to spotlight two special board members who have been instrumental to our organization's success!

Coco Lemberg

It is with great gratitude that we say farewell to our wonderful board member, Coco Lemberg. Coco began volunteering at Heart and Home during her freshman year at Stanford, subsequently joined the student core team her following year, and eventually joined the board of directors in 2022. She has been pivotal in securing funding support for our organization as well as coordinating communications with our generous supporters. Coco reflects, "My time volunteering taught me to lead with kindness and build friendship across different lived experiences. H+H is an amazing place of connection in the community and my experiences at shelter have shaped my perspectives and how I approach those around me." We wish her the best of luck in medical school at Albert Einstein College of Medicine!



Elizabeth Yow



While we are a volunteer-run organization, our shelters cost roughly \$100,000 per year to operate. That means we have to receive donations and grants, submit payables, run weekly payroll, file taxes, produce financial statements, and maintain insurance and banking relationships. Meet Elizabeth, the mastermind behind all things "money" at Heart and Home.

Elizabeth has been our Board Treasurer since 2019. With a Master's degree in Accounting and immense respect for our participants, Elizabeth jumped right in to the gargantuan role at a time of major organizational growth. Under her leadership, Heart and Home has transitioned its financials from spreadsheets to Quickbooks, its taxes from a 990 postcard to a 990-EZ,

and, what she's most proud of, remained operational and financially solvent when we had to unexpectedly extend our 2020 shelter season during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Elizabeth's deep commitment to Heart and Home's mission manifests in many ways: from her diligent attention to fiduciary obligations, to the basket of hearts she helped knit for shelter participants on Valentine's Day. She says, "Heart and Home is well-named in that everyone who's involved in it puts their heart into the work and are driven to help the people we serve feel like they have a home to come to. Although I live too far away to be physically present at shelter, I am able to be a part of this mission through my work as treasurer. Talking to board members who volunteer in person helps me see how the spreadsheets I work on at home ultimately support participants at shelter."

Staff Spotlight

Meet Mele Genaro, whose big heart makes shelter home



If you ask any of our women's shelter participants, they'll tell you that shelter lights up in a unique way on nights when Mele Genaro is staffing. Mele comes in determined to make a difference by practicing one of Heart and Home's core values: kindness. In fact, getting to form reciprocal relationships with participants is a big part of what keeps Mele coming back year after year. "I quickly saw how much the women needed someone to just listen to them," Mele reflects. "My first time onsite, I asked a participant, 'How was your day?' and it put a smile on her face. It meant something that I'd care to ask her that." Once she started to see the unique impact that her kindness could have, Mele was hooked. "I feel I'm in the right place. I look forward to coming back every winter."

Mele has been staffing at Heart and Home Women's Shelter since 2017. From her eight years of service, the moments that most strongly stand out to Mele are ones where she's made a lasting impact. This could be as simple as encouraging someone to pursue their dreams or as involved as helping a participant navigate the maze of services in Silicon Valley. For instance, a participant named Peggy asked for help with finding a recovery program, after a family member passed away from persistent alcohol use. Mele helped Peggy find the resource she was seeking, which became a turning point in her life. "I saw a new happiness in her," Mele recalls. Newly sober, Peggy started applying for jobs, and then for housing. Mele was there every step of the way, helping Peggy find clothing for interviews and fill out waitlist applications. After the shelter closed, Mele was thrilled to receive an email from Peggy, proudly announcing that she was in her own apartment, employed, and maintaining sobriety. "I will never forget how this person wanted to make her life better and really did. I remember going to bed that night thinking that I made one difference in someone's life, which makes all the difference in the world." The part of this story that makes Mele the happiest? "Peggy has not been back to shelter since" – which is Mele's wish for all of our participants.

Mele is quick to acknowledge the wonderful team of staff she gets to work with. "We all have connections with participants. We all care about them and help them stay in shelter." She is particularly grateful to Shelter Director Lori Mills, for "always making sure that staff members know she's behind us all the way." Mele thrives at Heart and Home because it has a culture of continuous improvement, including offering new programming onsite and expanding the pool of resources we offer participants each year. She is proud that her daughter is the newest addition to Heart and Home's staff. Her advice on her daughter's first day was to "approach the role with an open heart."

Mele also particularly values Heart and Home's commitment to community. One example that stands out to Mele is the bingo night we started this past year, which quickly became a huge hit with every single participant joining in. "Activities like this build morale and make you feel like you're part of something bigger than you," Mele notes. "As a result, I've heard from women that they don't feel lonely when they come to Heart and Home." "In fact," Mele continues, "Participants will often refer to shelter as 'home'! That's because they feel they're coming to an environment where they can talk to others and feel safe with the people around them."

Shelter Director Lori Mills reflects on how much Mele contributes to this sense of safety and community through her kindness and skilled interactions. Lori says, "Mele is passionate about the work she does. She displays that by being attentive to each woman's needs. She sincerely cares about the women and what's going on in their lives. She does her best to make each individual feel comfortable and valued." We are so grateful for Mele's long history of service with Heart and Home and are excited to continue working with her for many years to come.

Student Spotlight



Christina Andronesco

Volunteering with Heart+Home has been such a meaningful and grounding part of my life over the last 4 years. Spending time at the shelter has taught me the importance of listening—of being fully present in conversations, whether they're lighthearted or deeply personal. I've loved working with our incredible team of participants, volunteers, and community members; I am so excited to continue working with this special program going into next year!



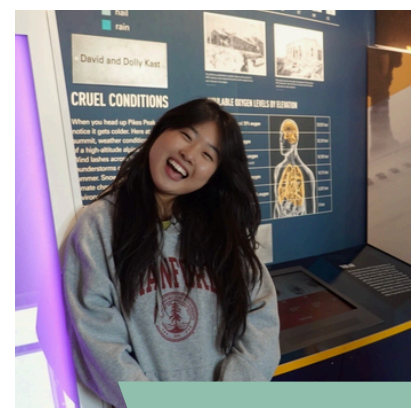
Tamsin Hurlbut

I am Tamsin, a sophomore here at Stanford and one of the two new Heart and Home student leaders. Last year I encountered Heart and Home on a Cardinal Service webpage and immediately knew I wanted to get involved. Having previously worked with unhoused folks and in high school run a Women's Empowerment club, this shelter was a nexus of causes I care about. Throughout last winter I had the opportunity to volunteer and help serve dinner many times, meeting and building relationships with both other volunteers and the women the shelter serves. I applied for this role last year after talking to Christina, a fellow board member and longtime student lead. She inspired me to apply and I am so excited for the opportunity to learn, serve, and help run Heart and Home this year and winter!



Angela Lee

Over the past four years as a student leader, Heart and Home has allowed me to develop long-lasting relationships within a wonderful community of participants, volunteers, and H+H team members. I have enjoyed learning and sharing in people's stories and interests and getting to know each woman over the course of the season and over the years. It has been particularly rewarding to see how events at shelter, special holiday efforts from volunteers, and student-packed goody bags make nights at shelter feel warmer and closer. The spirit of teamwork and deep personal investment from everyone involved makes H+H a truly unique community and special place for me.



Ella Wen

Heart and Home has been one of the most rewarding experiences I've had the privilege of having in college—every shift, I get to spend time with our incredible women and have deep conversations about their lives, families, struggles, and outlooks on life. I've grown extremely close to them, and they've helped me realize how far a simple shared meal goes: a reminder that community exists and should exist everywhere.

Featured Events

Harmonia California Benefit Concert

This year, we closed the 2024–25 shelter season in symphony at University Lutheran Church. Harmonia California hosted a beautiful spring concert at one of our generous shelter host sites in support of Heart and Home. Conceived by former Heart and Home Board President Alan Hebert, the event brought together over 60 community members from all walks of life, united by a shared commitment to compassion, generosity, and the transformative power of music.

The concert was more than just a musical performance; it was a celebration of what can happen when a community comes together with open hearts and shared purpose. At a time when kindness and connection matter more than ever, this gathering offered a space for reflection, unity, and hope.

The afternoon featured moving performances by Harmonia California, including Mozart's String Quartet No. 19 in C Major, K. 465 "Dissonance", Kodály's Serenade for Two Violins and Viola, Schumann's String Quartet, and the first movement of Dvořák's Piano Quintet. Each piece added emotional depth to the occasion, underscoring the joy and warmth of the community spirit in the room.

With nearly \$1,000 in donations going directly to Heart and Home's mission, the event served as a powerful reminder that generosity can spark meaningful change. Thank you to Harmonia California and everyone who attended, contributed, and helped make the event a resounding success. Together, we created an unforgettable afternoon of music, connection, and hope.



Harmonia California playing Kodály's Serenade for Two Violins and Viola to an audience of over 60 supporters on 10 May 2025

Featured Events

Evenings and Outings

Building community among participants, volunteers, and staff is part of our mission to make our women's shelter a safe and welcoming space. This season, we were thrilled to host a variety of educational and recreational events on-site.

In February, a group of students from Stanford's Cardinal Free Clinics conducted a health workshop over dinner. They discussed tips and habits to manage chronic diseases, including hypertension and diabetes, as well as prevention for opioid overdose. The women attending the workshops were asked several questions, leading to an engaging and fruitful discussion.

With many sports fans in shelter this year, we were excited to attend a Stanford women's basketball game at Maples Pavilion. Participants, students, board members, and staff gathered for lunch prior to carpooling to the courts to watch an exciting and action-packed game. We were grateful to the women's basketball team for their hospitality, and five dollars from each purchased ticket was donated to Heart and Home!



Many women additionally enjoyed activities conducted during shelter nights, such as bingo nights with prizes, weekly "house meetings", and kit-making, in which participants were able to fill bags with water bottles, socks, and other goods of their choosing. Participants also engaged in art activities led by neighborhood volunteers and staff, which brought our community closer together and allowed participants to engage with each other in new ways.

Featured Programs

Rides during a Public Transit Strike

This year, none Heart and Home's participants had personal use vehicles. This meant that, during the VTA bus strike in March 2025, many participants had no way to get from shelter on Charleston Rd. to their work, case managers, medical appointments, and other sources of community. Since our shelter – and many other cold-weather shelters – were coming to a close for the season, disruptions in daily routines could have meant losing access to critical support systems for several months. While we strongly support unionized workers in their fight for better pay, we also felt it important to provide our participants with another transportation option. We chose to partner with Palo Alto Link, an on-demand rideshare service operated by the City of Palo Alto.

Crucial to our decision was affordability and accessibility. Palo Alto Link offers low-income riders fares as low as \$2 per ride and accepts cash payments, so riders do not need a bank account. Additionally, rides can be requested by app or telephone, so riders do not need a smartphone. Thanks to the generous financial and in-kind support of board member Nancy Noe, we were able to get this program up and running in under one day. For ten evenings near the end of shelter season, we offered \$4 in cash to any woman planning to use Link the following day and provided a flyer explaining how to use the service. On the first two evenings, Nancy assisted participants with putting the app on their phones or calling to set up a Link account. In the spirit of mutual aid, participants then started assisting each other and even sharing rides to make the most of the funds.

Over a period of ten days, Heart and Home provided our participants with a whopping 118 Link rides! When buses resumed operations, we were also able to purchase bus passes for three participants who did not have one. Participants shared how crucial it was to have an alternative mode of transportation when the buses were not running. Beyond Link's practical value, many shared that they felt hopeful and supported seeing how the community came together to address this need in a timely and tangible manner.

Dinners at the OWL

This year, food at the Overnight Warming Location (OWL) got a major upgrade! While participants were always appreciative of our standard meals – Cup of Noodles, apple sauce, and hot chocolate – they were particularly thrilled when a group of seven children from Duveneck Elementary School in Palo Alto teamed up with their parents to cook delicious dinners for the OWL. From a lasagna described as “hauntingly delicious,” to salmon burgers, fried rice, meatloaf, and spaghetti, our participants found great comfort in a homemade meal at the end of a cold rainy day. The OWL often opens on under 48 hours' notice, so finding dinner donors can be a challenge. Our participants valued the care and intentionality these students put into preparing balanced and wholesome meals on short notice. Parent Mary Kate Stimmler reflects on the impact this had for her kids:

“My daughter and I love providing meals for the OWL. Little kids are often not able to volunteer due to age restrictions, so it was great to find a volunteer opportunity that allowed us to do a fun activity together and have an immediate impact.”

Our Financials

During the 2024-25 season (FY25), Heart and Home remained in a strong and stable financial position. Total revenue exceeded expenses by approximately \$40,000, reflecting increased community support through individual and online donations, expanded grant funding, and a slight reduction in expenses resulting from a shortened shelter season due to unforeseen circumstances.

This positive financial position enabled us not only to sustain our core shelter operations, but also to steward resources intentionally. Surplus funds are being directed toward the development of a suite of services designed to more fully support our participants during the 2025-26 shelter season.

We are deeply grateful for the generosity and trust of our donors and partners, whose support enables continued program growth.

	FY2025	FY2024
Beginning bank balance	34,600	45,300
<u>REVENUE</u>		
Gifts and Donations		
Benevity	10,800	14,300
Individual Donations	27,900	20,200
Online Donations	14,400	7,300
Other Groups	4,300	9,000
Total Gifts and Donations	57,400	50,800
Grants	104,200	64,800
Total Revenue	161,600	115,600
<u>EXPENSES</u>		
Payroll	91,700	98,900
Insurance	9,400	8,800
Food and Supplies	11,400	9,500
Permits	2,400	2,300
Client Fund	0	4,000
Other	6,900	2,800
Total Expenses	121,800	126,300
Year end adjustments	5,400	0
Ending bank balance	79,800	34,600

Note: Heart and Home Collaborative uses cash basis accounting.

Our Partners

Shelter Host Sites



University Lutheran Church: supporters and host site since 2014



Covenant Presbyterian Church: host site since 2021



First Presbyterian Church of Palo Alto: host site since 2019



Unitarian Universalist Church of Palo Alto: host site since 2017

Services



Peninsula
Bible Church



CITY OF
PALO ALTO



Stanford
University



Our Partners

Grants

The
WOMAN'S
CLUB of Palo Alto



Ram and Lakshmi
Sundaram
Foundation



Rotary 
Club of Los Altos



Ram and Lakshmi Sundaram Foundation

The Ram and Lakshmi Sundaram Foundation is a long-time supporter of Heart and Home. Started in 2017 with the mission of “providing resources and support to improve the lives of culturally, socially and economically disadvantaged persons,” the foundation is committed to providing ongoing support to smaller organizations that have deep connections in their communities and can point to the tangible ways in which their services have an effect on people’s day-to-day lives.

As a small organization themselves, the Sundaram Foundation is acutely aware of how far every dollar goes when budgets are limited. They find that this often means smaller nonprofits spend their money in ways that directly and strategically support members of their community. Lakshmi Sundaram, who runs the foundation along with Ram Sundaram and Nallan C. Krishnan, explains that many of their grantees have found creative ways to make the most of their donations, including Heart and Home. “As a volunteer-run organization, it is inspiring to see not only how Heart and Home brings community members together but also how they are able to leverage these contributions of time to make the most of monetary contributions,” she says.

The foundation’s team takes pride in staying true to their mission, including how consistently they have offered support for the nonprofits in their portfolio year after year. It has been hugely valuable for Heart and Home to receive ongoing, unrestricted support from the foundation. They see this as their way of “doing our small part in helping the organizations we have chosen to participate with and their communities,” and Lakshmi Sundaram encourages everyone to find their own ways of doing the same. “Pick something you’re passionate about and contribute to it. You can give your time, your money, or your skills – but, in whatever way, shape or form, make sure you consistently do a little bit to help. It benefits the organizations and it benefits you.”



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

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