AT&T Business

There's no place like home: Sacramento Self-Help Housing relies on AT&T connectivity to help clients move from the streets to safe and decent homes

- **Business needs** - Support to connect unhoused individuals with stable housing and other resources

- **Networking solution** - AT&T mobile phones, tablets, and highly reliable connectivity deliver the services that homeless people need to live successfully in permanent homes

- **Business value** - Strengthened ability to help people find jobs and homes, savings, and strong customer service

- **Industry focus** - Non-profit housing

- **Size** - 28,000+ clients helped this year through housing services to homeless people and a renters' hotline

Sacramento Self-Help Housing (SSHH)

Sacramento Self-Help Housing is a nonprofit organization that assists individuals and families who have insufficient resources for adequate housing. It helps people who are homeless, in crisis, or have special needs to find stable, affordable housing. The organization operates numerous programs, including permanent supportive housing, transitional housing, financial education, a tenant-landlord helpline, housing counseling, and community development.

The situation

Much research is involved in helping people find safe, decent, affordable housing. The housing leaders in Sacramento Self-Help Housing supportive housing units needed a way to help their residents search for jobs, create resumes, and find permanent places to live.

Solution

AT&T Business supplied mobile phones and tablets to enable the work of the organization's staff to support the 700 residents of Sacramento Self-Help Housing with the community resources they need as they work to find employment and permanent housing.

Permanent housing for homeless people

More than half a million people in the United States are homeless. This number is slowly climbing because of a lack of affordable housing, unemployment, poverty, and low wages. California has the highest homeless population, with more than 150,000 homeless people, about 20 percent of the homeless population of the U.S.[1]

Sacramento Self-Help Housing is a 501(c)(3) organization that began in 1990 as a housing counseling service to help homeless and indigent people. SSHH initially worked to help homeless people navigate the rental housing market, but soon they created a shared housing program, called "Friendship Housing." Over the years, SSHH has expanded its housing and service-oriented programs while trailblazing the "Housing First" model.

Derek Corea, SSHH Development Specialist, explained how Housing First works. "Our solution is elegant and very cost-effective in that we take people from the street, find housing for them, and then provide them with services to set them on their way to be sustainably, safely and permanently housed for the future."

Opportunities to succeed

SSHH's program encourages the active participation of its clients. "There is a certain level of buy-in of the work that is associated with getting yourself on track when you are unhoused," Corea said. SSHH provides the opportunities to stay in transitional houses at no cost or for a nominal rent while participants work at becoming permanently housed or living in a sustainable way.

"They have to (join) the program, follow the instructions, and help themselves," he said. "We're only here to give them the opportunities."

The organization operates 240 transitional houses to help people move beyond homelessness. Each is staffed by a house leader, a person who was formerly homeless but received help from SSHH. "Our houses run so well because we have a part-time staff member that lives in the home 24/7," Corea said. "They graduate our program, and we hire them to continue to live there and make sure everything is going okay, given that they have a good ability to relate to the other clients."

1   https://www.usich.gov/tools-for-action/map/#fn[]=1400&fn[]=2800&fn[]=6200&fn[]=10000&fn[]=13200

"Our mission is to not exist"

The success of Housing First garnered government support for SSHH's programming. "That model or theory of change caught the attention of the federal government as well as the county and city governments, who have decided to expand our programs," he said.

The organization's basic funding comes from government contracts and support from financial institutions and healthcare companies such as Kaiser Permanente, Sutter Health, and Dignity Health. A small percentage of funding comes from unrestricted donations. "Our partners allow us to provide services to our clients to help get them back on track," Corea said.

A staff of about 200 full-time staff and a number of part-timers work to eliminate homelessness. "Our mission is to not exist. We're working to make sure that there is no longer a need for our social safety net services," he said.

At the end of last year, SSHH was operating permanent supportive and transitional housing units in Sacramento County to house about 700 people. During the year, it provided 5,000 services per quarter to people who were homeless and helped about 2,000 people each quarter through its renters' hotline.

In a better place

Helping unhoused people is often complicated by those people's health problems. Like most other places, Sacramento County has seen an uptick in mental health conditions, Corea said. "A survey found that something like 65 or 70 percent of people who are living on the street or in a place not meant for human habitation have had one or more physical or mental health conditions."

People are much more likely to get services if they first have a decent place to live. "Then they are more receptive to services like meeting with a doctor or

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Development Specialist,
Sacramento Self-Help Housing

therapist, applying for food stamps, and looking for work," he said. "We think this is because once they have a place to live, they're no longer thinking about where they are going to eat or where they can go to be safe for the night."

People who receive care for physical or mental health problems are better able to look for work and follow the SSHH housing rules. "It's because they're usually off to a good start and find themselves in a better place than when we met them," he said.

Computers and connectivity

The barrier-breaking services that SSHH case managers provide help people learn how to fill out a rental application, use the internet to search for houses, and make an appointment with a doctor, therapist, or treatment center. But these tasks require computers and a reliable internet connection.

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic changed how staff would meet with homeless people and with each other. "When COVID hit, our outreach workers, case managers, and program directors were trying to figure out a way to provide services to the people who need them, including people on the streets and people living in the 240 houses we operate," he said.

The organization needed a cost-effective way to provide computers and connectivity to assist the people living in SSHH housing and to enable staff to collaborate virtually during the pandemic.

Better access to resources

A grant from one of the organization's corporate supporters enabled SSHH to provide technology resources and trainings to staff, including house leaders. The organization purchased mobile phones and tablets powered with AT&T connectivity.

"This has allowed our house leaders to better communicate with our staff and directors and enable them to get training to oversee the programs in our housing units," Corea said.

The technology empowers residents to email their healthcare providers, build their resumes, search for jobs, and look for apartments. It also helped SSHH livestream its annual fundraiser, 'Let Them Eat Cake.' "It worked really well. All of our stakeholders were able to view (the event) on Facebook and YouTube, which was kind of fun," he said. "We're also adjusting to communicating and gathering as a workplace online."

"Typically, non-profits are last to the table in terms of technological advancement," Corea said. "I feel like we're doing really well in adjusting the way we provide services and communicate with our program participants and donors. This is partly because of AT&T's help in allowing us to save some cash for the deal that we were able to get."

Responsive customer service

Corea said the AT&T account team went above and beyond in providing customer care. "We had inactive lines and we didn't have the appropriate training to be able to remove those lines or even figure out what networks we had," he said.

They were also paying too much for Wi-Fi service. Every penny matters at a nonprofit. "We run on tight budgets," Corea said.

SSHH's AT&T account representative met with the organization's development director to work through the problems. "To my understanding, our AT&T account rep helped us save thousands of dollars every month," Corea said. "That's a huge deal for a small local nonprofit like ours that's trying to make ends meet."

The account rep has continued to stay in touch with the organization. "In addition to the savings, which is absolutely number one, she is very responsive to whatever questions or concerns that we might have," he said. "She's helpful, too. Whenever we have an issue, she figures out how to fix it."

Working for an end to homelessness

Success in creating lasting social change is always difficult to measure. Corea said one marker is the number of people SSHH has transitioned off the streets and into permanent housing. But there is still much work to do. At the end of last year, a one-night study found around 6,000 people living on the streets in the Sacramento region," he said. "Because of economic and other fallouts from COVID, we expect that number to grow."

To deal with the growing numbers of unhoused people, SSHH plans to expand its services into other regions of Northern California and to build upon the transitional housing program it recently started at Sacramento State University. The university and many others across the country are struggling to make it affordable for students to live on campus.

"As many as one in ten of the university's students have experienced homelessness," he said. Sacramento State's numbers were higher than the average across California State Universities' 23 campuses, where nearly 11 percent of the system's 484,000 students have been homeless for a night or longer.

To help these students, SSHH has opened a series of transitional living houses. "We hope to expand that program to meet the need for affordable university housing," he said.

SSHH plans to continue to grow its services as part of its mission of ending homelessness. "At some point, the hope is that the number of homeless will go down and Sacramento Self-Help Housing will no longer need to exist," Corea said.