

## Advocating for Affordable Housing

Sponsor: St. Joseph Health System

Location: Orange County, CA

Headquartered in Orange County, California, St. Joseph Health System (SJHS) includes 14 acute care hospitals concentrated in three regions: Southern California, Northern California, and Western Texas. The SJHS mission statement includes a declaration to “improve the health and quality of life of the people in the communities we serve.” This language clearly denotes a charitable commitment that extends well beyond the delivery of medical services. One of the best examples of St. Joseph’s broad commitment is a major effort to increase the stock of affordable housing in Orange County.

The economic expansion of the late 1990s increased the demand for housing in the region, and rising costs have resulted in the displacement of both low- and moderate-income families. Despite the need for workers in service and manual labor industries, there is an acute shortage of affordable housing. One of the members of the SJHS senior leadership with prior experience in housing and community development began to contact stakeholders from different sectors to explore interest in shared action. After some preliminary outreach, SJHS convened a “Future Search” process that brought together representatives of more than 20 groups for two and a half days of visioning and strategic planning. Five working groups focusing on different aspects of the issue were established. One of the groups provides technical assistance to cities for the development of their Housing Elements, a public policy document required of cities by the state of California. Another focuses on building public support through presentations and other forms of media communications.

The partnership has expanded to 70 members, representing various sectors and interests. There is significant involvement of local policymakers, including a state senator who was recently appointed to the Senate Housing Committee. The partnership meets quarterly, and each member participates in one of the working groups, which meet monthly. At every quarterly partnership meeting, each member is required to report what she/he is doing to advance the agenda of the partnership.

The partnership works closely with a regional organization, the Kennedy Commission, which advocates for affordable housing and provides technical assistance to local advocacy groups. Commission meetings are hosted at the SJHS system office. SJHS staff heads the Fundraising Committee, which has raised over \$60,000. It has begun the process of establishing formal 501(c)(3) status and has just hired an executive director.

SJHS also provides ongoing staff support to the partnership, including one individual who focuses on legislation to advance the issue at the state and federal levels, two representatives from local SJHS facilities, and one member of the senior leadership who serves as a co-facilitator of meetings with the county director of housing and community development. In addition, SJHS and Catholic Healthcare West have pooled resources to establish Southern California offices for Mercy Housing California, a nonprofit housing development organization.

There are currently 82 low-income housing units for seniors slated for development in Anaheim and there are plans to build a development for large families in the near future. Funding for the senior housing was secured from the City of Anaheim and loan funding

for the land from SJHS. The chair of the County Board of Supervisors recently informed the partnership that its support resulted in the allocation of \$35 million from the county's general fund to support low-income housing over the next five years.

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