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# The Many Faces of Affordable Housing

Meet the families and individuals who live in the diverse, inclusive communities developed by East Bay non-profit organizations—people of all ages, backgrounds, needs and circumstances. In the pages that follow, these inspiring people share their stories about how their affordable housing—the healthy environment, community spirit, and services—allowed them to build better futures for themselves and others.

**Steve and Jennifer Hart** Lorenzo Creek, Castro Valley — Supportive Housing by Abode Services



*Steve says, “We are not as worried as before and are able to cherish [our] time with our kids.”*

Like many families, the Harts found their housing security threatened by the recession, but affordable housing helped them get back on their feet. Steve and Jennifer Hart and their three children used to live in a one-bedroom apartment in Fremont. When Steve was laid off from his machine operator job, they fell behind on their rent. After living in a motel and then in their car, they stayed at Adobe Services’ Sunrise Village Emergency Shelter. An Abode caseworker, Pam Nash, helped them secure a place at Lorenzo Creek Apartments in Castro Valley, where they’ve lived since April 2010. [See “A Worthwhile Investment” on page 7 to read more about how agencies like Abode are getting families back into housing.]

Jennifer likes the building and also “the help that [we] get with managing [our] lives” from the

family’s caseworker, Sarah. For the Harts, affordable housing “kept us off the streets” and allowed the family to become “way more stable.” Jennifer plans to continue her education as a medical assistant and Steve has landed a new job with a moving company.

Steve says, “We are not as worried as before and are able to cherish [our] time with our kids.” The family enjoys relaxing at nearby Don Castro Park, and the kids recently travelled to Disneyland with their grandmother. Also, their new home has allowed them to save money and buy a car. They have even become activists: Steve advocates for affordable housing residents and enjoys speaking about affordable housing issues.

**Shakaricka Hughes** Ashby Lofts, Berkeley — Family Housing by Affordable Housing Associates

As a young, single mother raising four-year-old twins, Shakaricka Hughes needed a bigger place that she could afford. After hearing about Ashby Lofts through a public health nurse, she applied and was surprised and pleased to win a place at the new development in West Berkeley. Shakaricka has lived at Ashby Lofts for three years, and she likes her home and neighborhood. She is close to public transit and shopping and can easily visit her family in San Francisco.

The convenience of Ashby Lofts suits Shakaricka’s busy life. She juggles two jobs, including working for Affordable Housing Associates, the property’s developer. And while the twins, Oreana and Orestes, are in preschool, Shakaricka is studying part-time at Berkeley City College,

hoping to transfer to Cal State University East Bay and perhaps become a social worker for foster youth. Shakaricka is determined to accomplish her goals and says that “being in college gives me that push.”

Affordable housing has made Shakaricka realize how valuable financial and educational support services can be. She feels a sense of acceptance and validation at her new home. She is “appreciative of...the services” and feels that residents’ needs are met with encouragement, support, and a feeling of community.



*“[Living here] strengthens individuals and family.”*



*"Oh, I love it!" Patricia says.  
"I have good neighbors."*

### **Patricia Moore** De Anza Gardens Apartments, Bay Point – Family Housing by EAH Housing

Like many other people, Patricia Moore discovered that health problems and family circumstances could threaten her housing situation. After her husband passed away, she moved from Berkeley to an apartment in Richmond, where she became disabled after a series of heart attacks that culminated in a triple bypass. Though Patricia had worked her entire adult life, she suddenly found herself unable to stay at her job at an assisted living facility in Berkeley. After struggling with an inattentive landlord, Patricia decided to begin applying to affordable housing communities.

One day, Patricia was taking a walk with a friend on a trail near De Anza Gardens. She liked what she saw and decided to investigate further. She has now been living at De Anza since early 2010. "Oh, I love it!" Patricia says. "I have good neighbors." Fortunately, her friends and family are not far away. Patricia has three wonderful adult children,

Willie, Jason and April. Her youngest child, Leslie, lives with her and recently started taking accounting classes at Los Medanos College. While Leslie is at school, Patricia enjoys watching her grandson, Kyree.

So what is Patricia planning for the future? She plans to spend as much time as she can enjoying her new home and spending time with her kids and grandkids. This is Patricia's first time living in affordable housing, and she really appreciates being able to live in a nicer, more secure and affordable apartment where she feels the management cares about residents. Patricia also likes being in a neighborhood that has plenty of stores and restaurants as well as access to BART and buses. "I can afford things now," she says. She has learned to save and spend her money better, which has made her life less stressful. "I'm able to see things differently now."

### **Delfina Torres** Oroysom Village, Fremont – Family Housing by MidPen Housing Corporation

Delfina Torres has worked since she was 13 years old, but even when she's working overtime, she has always found time to help others. Delfina possesses an independent spirit and she's determined to meet the challenges in her everyday life and make a good life for her family: her adult daughter Deserae and her teenaged daughter Thalía.

In 2006, Delfina was injured on the job and went on disability. She was renting from her good friend in Hayward but wanted a more independent living situation when she got a call about Oroysom Village. After spending years on the waiting list (and after three school transfers for Thalía), the family moved to their first home at Oroysom in 2009. There, Delfina was blessed to find many helpful and friendly neighbors during her convalescence: "This place is very serene for me." When she needed more space to accommodate her medical equipment, she and Thalía were able to move to another apartment at Oroysom Village.

"It was a blessing that I got this place," says Delfina, who has been able to focus on her family and community since moving. Thalía is now enjoying school and excelling. Delfina values education very highly and says that the nearby school district is a "huge part of why I wanted to move." Despite the physical challenges she faces every day, Delfina continues to help other people, and she's passed this spirit on to her daughters. She organized a talent show recently and hopes to get involved with other community activities.

As soon as possible, Delfina plans to return to volunteering: "I'm going to be a sort of an activist for people like me." She says without the aid of her family, faith community, and caring neighbors at Oroysom Village, she would not be where she is today: in a place that "exudes a real sense of home and community, a place of beauty."



*"It was a blessing that I got this place," says Delfina, who has been able to focus on her family and community since moving.*



*"Every day I used to walk [into] this place and thank God."*

## Donna Murray Casa Verde Apartments, San Leandro – Family Housing by Mercy Housing California

Donna Murray helped cut the ribbon at Casa Verde's opening ceremonies in 2008 and she's lived there ever since. Donna enjoys helping her daughter, who lives nearby, by providing daily care for her two grandsons, seven-year-old twins Eric and Freddy.

Donna says that affordable housing has given her a home that she's proud to have her grandchildren visit: "I was so happy to have my own place." Donna says. "Every day I used to walk [into] this place and thank God." After surviving a stroke in 2001, Donna was unable to work and consequently lost her apartment in 2003. She spent five long years mending her health and struggling with housing. She was homeless for a short while and then moved into a shared house for two years: "I worked all my life and never thought I'd end up like that." After obtaining

permanent disability status in 2005, Donna needed affordable housing with additional support.

Now that she's settled at Casa Verde, her own struggles have made her generous with her time. She enjoys volunteering at nearby Davis Street Family Resource Center. "It makes me feels good to give back."

Life at Casa Verde is peaceful but engaging, with management arranging various activities. Donna loves the cooking classes, computer lab and Friday gatherings for coffee and movies. "Most neighbors are all very cordial and polite," says Donna, which makes life at Casa Verde very pleasant. Best of all, "I get to spend more time with my grandbabies... That's basically my life." What a good life, indeed.

## Maresha Gray Los Medanos Village, Pittsburg – Family Housing by Resources for Community Development

As a single mom, Maresha Gray needed a home that was affordable and a landlord who cared about providing quality housing for herself and her three teenage daughters Kiana, Briana and Camillia. She noticed the advertisement for Los Medanos in the local rental listing book, and says that "My daughter encouraged me to come check it out." She was hesitant to move so far from their familiar community in Fremont, but she found the management to be "very particular about the property" and life at Los Medanos Village "fairly quiet," a benefit Maresha appreciates.

Maresha has become very involved in the community since she moved to Los Medanos in 2010. She works as a substitute instructional aide at her children's school district, which she enjoys: "I like being at their schools." She has also started a Youth Fit Club for younger residents. Eleven young people meet twice a month to take walks to the nearby park and

talk about good nutrition and the importance of eating healthy foods. "[I] taught them how to make sandwich wraps... [and share] healthy recipes and good nutrition – alternatives to junk food."

Maresha is dedicated to sharing her passion for a better life with her own children and those she teaches every day. Her new living situation helps encourage this way of life: there are two grocery stores, a post office and banking institutions within walking distance of Los Medanos Village. Now, Maresha attests, "I [am] able to have a savings account. I have that extra money to fulfill my dreams and goals." Indeed, Maresha plans to return to school, perhaps at nearby Los Medanos College. In the meantime, she is planning to start a non-profit organization aimed at helping low-income families.



*"I [am] able to have a savings account. I have that extra money to fulfill my dreams and goals."*



## Ziqiang and Runsheng He Valdez Plaza, Oakland – Senior Housing by Satellite Housing, Inc.

Ziqiang He and his wife Runsheng have enjoyed life at Valdez Plaza senior apartments for the last six years. They have been married for 10 years and are blessed with children from their previous marriages: Runsheng has two adult children and Ziqiang has five. Before settling in Oakland, both were visiting professors from Nankai University of Tianjin, China – Runsheng taught biology at the University of San Francisco and Ziqiang was a geography professor at Western Michigan University.

While both octogenarians are retired, the Hes have remained actively involved in community life at Valdez Plaza. Runsheng attends classes in computer skills, conversational English, and Tai Chi in the community room. Ziqiang joined the Christian Terrace Chorus at another affordable senior development across the street. Both are active in EBHO's resident organizing program.

The Hes feel that their lives are enhanced through activities which show management's attention to quality of life. "They give us so many activities so we can live more happily and more healthily," says Ziqiang. The Hes also appreciate the location "because it's not so far away from markets, Chinatown, [and] public transportation, which is very important for seniors."

Mr. He summed it up in a recent poem he wrote (in Chinese) called: "Beautiful Oakland, Joyful Valdez."

*"You have open friendly arms and win many residents who readily admire. All of this to let seniors to live more healthily and happily... We met old friends and knew new friends here... Here is not the end of your life... let us start again. Enjoy beautiful Oakland, beautiful Valdez."*

## Nancy Delaney Sojourner Truth Manor, Oakland – Senior Housing by Christian Church Homes

After facing many challenges, Nancy Delaney has found peace at Sojourner Truth senior apartments. Though she has lived in the Bay Area for much of her adult life, Nancy's story begins in San Diego, where she overcame a tough childhood. When Nancy was just 12, she and her siblings became wards of the court following her parents' divorce and the family's eviction. As a youth, Nancy lived in four different foster homes; she has since dedicated her life to helping other former foster children – who often experience housing instability – cope with their life experiences.

As an adult, Nancy returned to the Bay Area and struggled with her own cycle of homelessness and sense of belonging for many years. Still, she faced her challenges head on. She earned her B.A. from Cal State East Bay in Human Development in 2004,

despite having been diagnosed with breast cancer. She continued her battle against the disease and was cancer-free until her second diagnosis in 2009. That same year, after living in a shared house in Berkeley for 17 years, her landlord decided to reclaim the house and Nancy had to move.

Fortunately, non-profit senior housing provided Nancy with options. She applied to a few developments and received approval to move into Sojourner Truth in October 2009. While Nancy is still fighting breast cancer, living at Sojourner Truth has allowed her the space to reflect on her foster care experience and to convalesce. She finds comfort in the other residents, who have diverse life experiences and "treat each other courteously." She calls the management staff "superlative people" who "honor everybody who comes [to live] there." Now, Nancy is looking to her future and planning to get a master's degree in holistic psychology. It's just the next step in what she describes as "an amazing journey."



*"It's been an amazing journey of discovery... a spiritual journey."*

EBHO thanks Michele T. Morris for her work with these residents.