Building a Brighter Future: Raquel’s Story

As a single mother with a young daughter, Raquel was already struggling to make ends meet despite holding down a full time job. With the end of her lease approaching, Raquel learned that her rent would be increasing again. She worried that the rent increase would push her closer to eviction and homelessness.

Fortunately, Raquel received a call from West Valley Community Services that would be life-changing. After being on the Below Market Rate (BMR) housing program wait list for 5 years, Raquel learned that a two bedroom unit has become available and she was next on the wait list. Unfortunately, Raquel had no savings and could not afford both the last month’s rent on her current apartment and the move in deposit required for the BMR unit. With no family to turn to for support and the inability to qualify for loans due to poor credit, Raquel sought emergency rental assistance from WVCS.

WVCS was able to provide the assistance Raquel needed to move into the BMR unit. Raquel’s case manager recommended she participate in food pantry services and the financial empowerment program. Working with her volunteer financial coach, Raquel was able to develop the skills that enabled her to better manage her money, pay her bills on time, start a savings plan, pay off all of her debt, and increase her credit score by 94 points. Additionally, Raquel gained reliable transportation after being approved for an auto loan through Ways to Work.

Working with WVCS and her case manager, Raquel and her daughter now have stable, affordable housing, and have gained the tools, knowledge and resources to establish a strong foundation that will help ensure long term self-sufficiency.

WVCS: By the Numbers

Because of you, WVCS was able to offer the following services in the community during the current fiscal year:

- **445,065 pounds of food** was distributed to hungry people through the food pantry
- **$121,416 of emergency financial assistance** was distributed to clients to assist with housing or prevent utility shut-off
- **468 individuals gave 15,024 volunteer hours** to support WVCS clients and programs
- **232 new households** participated in case management

Thank you for making this important work possible!
Donor Spotlight: Chris & Bob Cloke

Chris and Bob Cloke are long-time supporters of WVCS. Bob has been volunteering in the computer lab for twelve years, and Chris began volunteering in our free tax preparation program this year. We sat down with them to learn more about why they support WVCS.

How did you first get involved with WVCS?
Bob: When I retired I had in mind that I want to help seniors with computers or something like that. So I began volunteering at WVCS assisting clients with the computer.

Why did you decide to donate to WVCS?
Chris: Because that is the way we are. That is what we believe in. We support a few organizations, mostly through our church, and giving back to the community is important to our family.

What interests you most about the work WVCS is doing?
Bob: WVCS fills a need I don’t see being filled anywhere else. These are folks who really need our help and we’re here to do that for them.

Do you have any dreams or hopes for the future of WVCS?
Chris: I want to continue to help people who are looking for ways to make a positive change.
Bob: I think the kinds of programs that serve the educational needs of the clients and help them become more self-sufficient are really good.
Chris: And then they can turn around and help someone else.
Bob: This work is very rewarding, and you won’t know how rewarding it is until you actually do it.

Thank you for all you do to help our clients and our community. You make a real difference!

Financial Empowerment Program

In addition to addressing basic and immediate human needs, WVCS works closely with clients to develop new skills that will support long-term stability. Many of our clients lack basic financial literacy skills. In fact, 90% of the debt our clients face is due to poor judgement, lack of understanding of contracts and cancelation policies, unnecessary fees and penalties, and debt spirals caused by payday lending. As a result, clients face even deeper debt, bad credit scores, evictions, utility shut off, and even homelessness.

The financial empowerment program helps clients develop financial management skills that support behavior change and lower the need for emergency financial intervention in the future. Clients are paired with a volunteer coach that helps them develop new skills and set goals such as paying bills on time, opening a bank account, and improving their credit score. This program is a complement to services such as case management and the food pantry, and provides our clients with resources that can help them transition from dependence to self sufficiency.

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JOIN OUR BOARD: We are seeking additional members for our Board who can join us to help fight hunger and homelessness in the West Valley. For more information, contact Josh Selo at josh@wvcommunityservices.org.

Like us...review us...interact with us...WVCS is online!
Volunteer Profile: Allan

Allan has volunteered with WVCS for two years and has dedicated over 85 volunteer hours to West Valley Community Services.

**Volunteer Role:** Grocery Pick-Up at Target

**Why I volunteer:** "West Valley Community Services has a great reputation for helping people in need in our area by providing food and family support services. Well run non-profits give opportunities to people to participate in a greater good. WVCS is just such an organization and I feel privileged to be a part of the team."

**Impact on WVCS:** "I am a gleaner, and although it is a small contribution to the whole organization, I see that I am a link between corporations that donate goods and WVCS."

Partner Profile: Sprouts Farmers Market

Last fiscal year, WVCS distributed over 770,000 pounds of food, much of which was donated by local grocery stores as part of a grocery rescue program coordinated by Second Harvest Food Bank.

The Sprouts Farmers Market located on Prospect Road in the Westgate West shopping center and the Sprouts in Cupertino on Stevens Creek Boulevard have been key partners in helping to combat hunger in the West Valley region. Volunteers from WVCS pick up donations 5 days a week, and so far Sprouts has donated 74,822 pounds of food during the current fiscal year. Donations include deli food, baked goods, dairy items, and produce. Sprouts Farmers Market has a strong commitment to community service from the corporate level, and these stores embrace that goal in every way possible. Partners such as Sprouts are vital to our food pantry operations, as 75% of our pantry stock comes through donations.

*Thank you to Sprouts Farmers Market for helping to feed hungry people in our community!*

Shop to Support WVCS

West Valley Community Service is now part of the eScrip Program, a simple way to support our community while you shop. Shop online, buy groceries, or dine out and you can make a difference and support WVCS programs and services.

For more information, visit www.escrip.com.

Program Update: Transitional Housing for the Homeless

Since 2004, WVCS has been operating a transitional housing program for homeless men, women, and children. Recent studies by HUD have shown that a housing first model that moves homeless individuals into permanent supportive housing is a better approach to ending homelessness. With that in mind, WVCS will be converting our four transitional housing units to below market rate housing, adding four new units to the inventory of below market rate units in the City of Cupertino. Additionally, we will be expanding our services to homeless individuals and families through our new Haven to Home Rapid Rehousing Program funded by HUD, and a new homeless prevention initiative made possible through a grant from Supervisor Joe Simitian and the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors.

For more information about the below market rate housing in Cupertino, visit www.cupertino.org.
New Faces at West Valley Community Services

Josh Selo is the new Executive Director of West Valley Community Services. Josh has more than fifteen years of experience in the nonprofit sector, and has worked as the Associate Executive Director at the Palo Alto Family YMCA, the Chief Operating Officer of the JCC in Rockland County and the Senior Director of Family & Community Programs at the JCC in Manhattan. Josh has an MBA in Finance from Washington State University and a Masters Degree in Education from the William Davidson Graduate School of Education. A native of Southern California, Josh lived in New York City for more than ten years, and relocated to Silicon Valley with his family in 2013.

Kohinoor Chakravarty has more than 15 years of nonprofit experience, and brings a wealth of knowledge to her role as the new Director of Development and Communications at WVCS. Kohinoor completed her MSW in Social Work shortly after completing an M.A. and Ph.D. in Psychology. Having lived through a major industrial disaster in India, Kohinoor has personally seen the care and compassion needed to support individuals through challenging circumstances. Most recently she served as the Development Director at There With Care supporting families and children with long-term health issues and prior to that she was Development Director at Foundation For Excellence, a nonprofit focused on higher education for underprivileged children.

Donate online @ svgives.razoo.com/us/story/West-Valley-Community-Services

Please support us on Thursday, May 3rd

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