THE HOUSING FOR HOMELESS STUDENTS STORY

To understand Housing for Homeless Students, you need to know a little about the Interfaith Council of La Mesa. Since early 2011, the Interfaith Council has been meeting monthly, originally called together by then-Mayor Art Madrid. We are an open and growing collection of faith communities based in or near La Mesa, with an interest in working together to serve our community. We have no required dues or regulations or charter, just the ongoing commitments of a small but growing band of people of diverse faiths to work together to improve the lives of our neighbors.

In late 2014, one of our member congregations, First United Methodist Church of La Mesa, came to the Council with a special request. A housing ministry they had carried out for years had dwindled to the point of no longer meeting the needs of those it aimed to serve. They brought with them a school counselor who attested to the great need within our schools of families struggling with homelessness, who just needed a helping hand to get into stable housing, who could take it from there.

The Council heard this request from FUMC-La Mesa and, because of our experience with previous projects that had shown us how we are stronger together, committed to reviving this ministry. Housing for Homeless Students was born. Donations have come in from numerous congregations. Volunteers from different congregations work together to interview the families and offer them the help and hope they need to start a new chapter in their lives. We have collected chairs and sheets and lamps and plates and all manner of things from across our partner communities to help our neighbors make a home for their children.

We would love to have you join us in this journey of service and hospitality to our neighbors. Please consider prayerfully how you and your faith community might get involved!

HOUSING FOR HOMELESS STUDENTS
~ A Ministry of the Interfaith Council of La Mesa ~

“This is what community is all about”

What does it mean to be a community? What does it mean to be a community of faith communities? What does it mean to be partnered communities of faith in the midst of a housing crisis?

• If you found out a neighbor had been evicted and was living, with her two kids, in her car, what would you want to do?
• If you knew a neighbor who was trying to get her three kids to school each day, while living in a trailer with no plumbing, in someone’s backyard, what would you want to do?
• If you had a neighbor with three kids trying to find a permanent place while bouncing from motel to motel on the generosity of friends, what would you want to do?

Being community means looking out for our neighbors, especially those with the biggest challenges, and especially the children. Through Housing for Homeless Students, the faith communities of the Interfaith Council of La Mesa are making a life-changing difference for families in our community with school-age children. When children get into stable housing, their chances for success at school vastly improve.

This special fund is designed to provide grants to cover security deposits for families trying to escape homelessness. All the families are referred by school counselors, after demonstrating their capacity to pay the rent sustainably. Our grants are a “hand up”, not “hand out”. Many of us are blessed with a personal safety net, but some of our neighbors are not. When we can be that safety net for others – that is what community is all about.
Where do the funds for Housing for Homeless Students come from?
Most of the funds used to provide security deposit grants come from donations from local faith communities. Some congregations have pledged a certain amount each year. Some have held fundraisers open to the community. One congregation applied for a grant through their denomination that provided us with $2000.

Where do the funds go?
In 2016, Housing for Homeless Students assisted five families with getting into permanent, stable housing, with a total of $6,080 in grant money. As we are all aware, housing costs in San Diego County are skyrocketing and rental property is at a premium. The grants in 2016 ranged from $600 to $2000.

How are the grants awarded?
Housing for Homeless Students has an on-call Screening Committee. When our local school counselor sends us a referral, the family has already been vetted to ensure that they will be able to pay the rent going forward, if they can just get the security deposit covered. The Screening Committee gets in touch with the landlord, to make sure they are willing to work with us. Then the committee interviews the parent, to make sure they are a good fit for our program. If everything checks out, we try to get the deposit delivered as quickly as possible so the family doesn’t lose their place.

How are the funds managed?
Because the Interfaith Council itself is not incorporated, all the funds for Housing for Homeless Students are held and managed through one of our partner congregations, Crosspointe Life Church, through their separately organized community assistance organization, La Mesa City Hope. La Mesa City Hope is a 501c3 non-profit organization, so all donations are fully tax-deductible, as provided by law. Checks are signed by two members of the Interfaith Council from two faith communities.

HOW CAN WE HELP?

FUNDRAISING
The biggest need this ministry has is a continual influx of funds. We depend on our partner faith communities to make these grants possible. Please consider having your congregation or faith community discuss committing to regular support of Housing for Homeless Students. This could be an annual donation, a monthly special collection from members, a regular fund-raising event, or whatever works best in your context. Checks should be made out to La Mesa City Hope, with “Housing for Homeless Students” in the memo line, and sent to Crosspointe Life Church, Attn: Dani Womack, 8809 La Mesa Blvd., La Mesa, CA 91942.

SCREENING COMMITTEE
We would love to have someone from your faith community be part of our on-call screening community. We try to have each family meet with at least three folks for a conversation about their application. Email access is required, as that is how we share the applications and schedule the interviews. We would love to have volunteers who are fluent in Spanish. The Screening Committee volunteers also try to follow up with our families in the weeks and months after they receive their grant. We schedule Screening Committee trainings on an as-needed basis. Please email Rebecca Littlejohn at pastorbecky@yahoo.com to with questions or to express interest in volunteering.

DONATIONS OF HOUSEHOLD GOODS
Many of our families are moving into an apartment with very little furniture, bedding or kitchenware. We would love to have a contact within your faith community who could share our families’ “wish lists” with your members and help us collect the items they most need to make their new home livable. Email Rebecca Littlejohn at pastorbecky@yahoo.com to sign up for this contact list.