



CASA Los Angeles Site Visit Report Los Angeles, CA February 15, 2022

Program Visited

- Butterfly's Haven Openhouse in partnership with CASA LA

Focusing Philanthropy Staff

- Teresa Burton
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CASA LA Staff & Participants

- Charity Chandler-Cole, CEO
- Marie Carpenter, Director of Institutional Giving

Executive Summary

On February 15, 2022, Focusing Philanthropy staff members visited Butterfly's Haven at the invitation of CASA LA. The two nonprofits partnered to establish a long-term, affordable housing facility offering in-house services for 20 former foster youth and their young children. The goal of the program is to end the cycles of child removals and dependency for young parents who were foster youth and are potentially at-risk of losing their children to foster care. FP staff members attended the ribbon-cutting and tour of the new facility. We briefly met and spoke to CASA LA CEO, Charity Chandler-Cole, and Butterfly's Haven founder, Brittany Walker, who both made remarks and hosted a tour. The location, near USC, is the first of its kind. More facilities are in the planning stages to serve additional parenting former foster youth.

Background

- Butterfly's Haven opened in February to house 20 homeless, former foster women (ages 18 to 25) and their children
- The community is a partnership with CASA LA and the mothers will be able to live together with their children and receive supportive services
- There are over 20,000 women experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles County, many of whom are mothers

Butterfly's Haven

Brittany Walker founded the nonprofit Butterfly's Haven with the aim of addressing housing inequity for single mothers in L.A., especially people of color, former foster youth, and justice-involved parents. The organization offers shared housing, supportive services and 24-hour child care to provide residents with a robust support network to realize their goals of independence and success. The mission is to ensure

that all women have the mental and physical security to thrive in a setting that doesn't feel like a foster placement or a group home.

Currently, Butterfly's Haven can house up to 20 women and their children at a time. Rent is \$1,200 per month, which includes utilities, food, and other necessities. Most of the women are either working or in school and many are receiving state support which helps cover rent. The landlord, is also eligible for government subsidies for affordable housing.

Along with the 20 bedrooms and 20 private bathrooms that will house young women, pregnant women and children for four months to three years, the residence includes amenities such as communal kitchens on each floor, laundry, Wi-Fi, and security systems as well as in-house services and programs like life coaching, child care, and mental health counseling. As part of the program, CASA LA will pair each resident with a court-appointed special advocate. CASAs will work with the mothers, the court system, and partner organizations to leverage services, internship and employment opportunities, and provide mentorship as the women become independent. CASA LA has also equipped a room, called Charity's Closet, with free clothing the women can select for use at school and work, and for their children. According to Brittany, six women and their children now live in the home. Walker is accepting applications to fill open rooms and to welcome other young mothers. The goal is to create a supportive community who will become like a family that encourages each other as they grow.

Leadership

In her speech, Brittany Walker, founder of Butterfly's Haven, described her experience living in a shelter in East Los Angeles at age 16 where she interacted with many young girls and boys from different group homes. Hearing their stories of abuse and deprivation inspired her to change things. After many years, her dream of providing a new model of support and community building that's sustainable and scalable is within reach. Walker's brother Prophet Walker a real estate developer and CEO of Treehouse is part owner of the building. In his remarks, he expressed hope that the home will be a transformative step for the mothers and their children, "The freedom to change your life is something that isn't always easy to come by for single mothers, especially those in the foster care system, who are struggling to find a home and a future for themselves and their children."

As a young woman, Charity Chandler-Cole, CEO of CASA LA, was raised in a poor environment and spent time in juvenile hall before entering the foster care system. She recounted that while she was incarcerated and criminalized for a minor offence, no one throughout her experience in the juvenile justice or foster care system questioned why she felt compelled to steal for survival. "When I came out, I wasn't given the adequate resources to address the things I needed to thrive in this world or what I wanted to do in life," she explained. "I was told what to do and how to do it, and I was so limited. They had already defined who I was supposed to be in this world, and I hated it because I had big dreams for my life. I had big visions and I didn't know how to get there, but no one tried to support me in that journey. With this transition housing, we wanted to eliminate all of that and say, 'You can be whatever you want to be. Let us know and we'll connect you to the resources, opportunities and our personal networks to help you build out that dream.'"

As the CEO of CASA/LA, Chandler-Cole works to support and advocate for children and families who have been impacted by LA county's overburdened child welfare and juvenile justice systems. These



families often come from underserved communities suffering from racial disparities and structural inequality that have led to poverty, abuse and societal neglect. Walker and Chandler-Cole formed a partnership after meeting through a mutual connection with Treehouse CEO, Prophet Walker, a personal friend of Chandler-Cole and brother to Brittany Walker.

During her time with CASA/LA, Chandler-Cole explained that most of the mothers she worked with have been told that they would never amount to anything, that they're worthless. She believes that because of the overwhelming negativity they've faced, many mothers have begun to feel limited in what they can achieve or even the support that they can receive from the institutions and organizations around them. "Hopefully through this program we're able to create a space where they're affirmed as mothers, they're affirmed as women and they're affirmed as sisters," Chandler-Cole said. "They have so much to offer, but we have to believe it. We have to believe in them, and they have to believe in themselves."

Key Observations

A variety of housing options are needed to address the many forms of homelessness experienced by families in Los Angeles. CASA LA's partnership with Butterfly's Haven is a brilliant way serve former foster youth in two ways: 1) they are helping former foster youth who are at high risk of becoming homeless, and 2) they are helping them avoid repeating the trauma of losing their children to the foster care system. Through collaboration with local leaders, CASA has found a way to serve this population rather than providing the transitional housing themselves, which would be a large burden on fundraising, budgets, and operational capacity.

FP staff were impressed and inspired by the facility - from the plentiful natural light and cheerful colors to the private bathrooms and separate beds for mothers and children. By offering a place to live as well as a support network, Butterfly's Haven and CASA/LA are giving mothers the stability and opportunity to pursue their goals, for themselves and their families. Focusing Philanthropy staff are proud to support CASA LA and look forward to their continued growth and collaborations.



CASA LA CEO, Charity Chandler Cole & Founder of Butterfly's Haven, Brittany Walker



CASA LA Staff and others