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Sue Reynolds Builds Housing—and Opportunity—in California

Everyday heroes who
are making a difference



Sue Reynolds' passion for social justice began with the look on one woman's face. Reynolds was a teenager volunteering to paint houses in a low-income community in Ohio. When Reynolds mentioned that she was going to college, a grandmother from the neighborhood teared up, saying she feared her own grandchildren would never get the chance.

"I got mad, and then I got inspired," Reynolds says of the moment. "I could see that the home she was living in was a big part of what was holding her back."

Reynolds is now the President and CEO of **Community HousingWorks**, a nonprofit that builds and manages affordable apartment communities across California. Founded in 1988,

CHW owns over 3,500 apartments in over 40 communities throughout the state, providing homes for working families, seniors and others who might otherwise struggle.



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“The limits to your hope that are created by not being able to put a few roots down are really severe,” says Reynolds. It’s hard for children to dream about going to college when they can’t even stay in the same school for long, she says. “We see an affordable home as the start of many good things...it’s not just the building. We build home.”



CHW builds its communities to last, with a particular focus on sustainability. In 2007, the nonprofit completed work on SOLARA, the first apartment community in California to be fully powered by solar energy. Other CHW communities use geothermal technology and solar thermal water heaters.

Green energy isn't just good for the environment; it's good for the residents too. "Sustainable alternatives are cheaper and more dependable," Reynolds says. "And when you're living on a financial edge, having your utility bill be smaller and more predictable can make all the difference in helping you stay stable."

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The innovation extends from the buildings to the programs CHW runs inside them. Reynolds is particularly proud of a program that helps boost a resident's credit score when they pay their rent on time, allowing them to build a good credit history.

CHW also runs several educational programs for children, including one that helps students reach their grade-appropriate reading levels.

"Our goal, always, is to help support the parents and the schools," she says. "We can create a culture of striving and success, where kids know somebody else who's graduated from high school, somebody else who's doing well."

One of CHW’s recent developments was built with a particular group in mind: the LGBTQ+ community. In 2008, Reynolds was part of a task force who found local LGBTQ+ seniors had lower incomes, were more isolated and were less likely to have their family in their lives. She was determined to help.

As a lesbian and as the sister of an AIDS survivor, Reynolds said the project held a lot of personal significance for her. CHW—working with The San Diego LGBTQ+ Community Center—found a building site not far from The Center and got to work. North Park Seniors was completed in 2017 and is the first LGBTQ+-affirming affordable apartment community in San Diego. The space offers 76 apartments for senior residents who are 55 years and older.



Community-centric projects like North Park Seniors are the ones that inspire Reynolds most deeply. When neighborhoods welcome affordable housing communities, she says, they help create an environment in which residents are inspired to give back.

“The residents themselves are active in making the world better,” she says. Housing is just the first step. Reynolds firmly believes that with a roof over your head, you can achieve anything.

U.S. Bank is proud to support organizations like Community HousingWorks that contribute to the growth of safe and vibrant communities.



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