

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING CHANGES LIVES



Find out how Brilliant Corners accelerates access to housing for those who need it most.



CREATING SOLUTIONS FOR THOSE IN NEED

BY GAIL ALLYN SHORT



Brilliant Corners' L.A. housing acquisitions staff
PHOTO BY SOPHIA LI

Brilliant Corners connects vulnerable people with a permanent place to call home

The skyrocketing home prices and rents in California have created a true housing crisis. The broad spectrum of vulnerable, low-income individuals and families are disproportionately affected: They are priced out of their communities, cycled through bureaucratic systems, shunted into institutions or abandoned to the streets.

In a recent count, over 134,000 Californians were experiencing homelessness, representing a staggering 25 percent of the homeless population of the entire country.

Brilliant Corners, a nonprofit supportive housing agency with offices in Los Angeles and San Francisco, is working to change that. They partner with government, health care and other institutions to find, develop and manage properties, while providing financial and social supports to people who need them.

In a recent report, the RAND Corporation concluded that “Brilliant Corners is a system-changing innovation. It’s more cost-effective to fund them and their partners than continue to have people in emergency rooms, jails and the shelter system.”

“Our teams share a can-do mindset and the belief that individuals and society benefit when people live in their own homes,” said Brilliant Corners’ CEO William Pickel. “We’re most known for our innovation where we’ve partnered with multiple public systems, philanthropic organizations, managed health programs and a variety of public agencies to design and implement local rent subsidy and supportive housing programs.”

One such partnership has been with the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services Housing for Health Program that aims to secure housing through its Flexible Housing Subsidy Pool.

Former Housing for Health Director Marc Trotz credits Brilliant Corners for recruiting landlords and securing housing for patients, as well as providing rent subsidy disbursements and move-in assistance. He said Brilliant Corners has helped house more than 4,000 people.

“Having them find market rate apartments for many people who had lived in institutional care for years and years was really an eye-opener,” said Trotz. “They demonstrated their creativity and willingness to seek alternative solutions, which many people had not been able to do before.”

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2017 RAND Corporation Report

A FOCUS ON DISABILITIES

Brilliant Corners was founded in 2004 with a particular emphasis on serving those with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The organization’s scope has since expanded dramatically to include all vulnerable populations, but the commitment to serve this population has remained.

“The majority of people living with intellectual or developmental disabilities are on fixed, very limited incomes,” said Brilliant Corners’ CEO William Pickel. “They’re severely rent-burdened or forced to live in the family home far into their adult and even senior years.”

In fact, a 2017 U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development pilot study found people with mental illness, intellectual or other developmental disabilities face significant housing discrimination in the rental market.

To that end, Brilliant Corners has spent the last 10 years helping to close four state-run institutional facilities (in Sonoma, Santa Clara, Pomona and Costa Mesa) and developing 200 community-based homes for the more than 1,000 patients who’d been housed there.

“These are the most medically fragile or have the most challenging behavior, so we created highly specialized ‘forever homes,’ spread up and down the state, from San Diego to Redding,” said Sami Abdelatif, Brilliant Corners’ Director of Housing Development. “Some of these people were there [in state facilities] for decades — they came in at age 7 or 8 and are in their 50s and 60s now — and have never had their own bedrooms in their entire lives. This is a life-changing experience.”

A BRILLIANT PARTNERSHIP

BY RODNEY OROSCO



From left, Karen Ceaser, a participant in the Los Angeles County Housing for Health program, and Whitney Lawrence, Director of Policy and Planning for that program, say Housing First policies lead to better outcomes for individuals.

PHOTO BY BRIAN AVERILL

Brilliant Corners is helping Los Angeles County move people off the streets and into stable housing

Improving outcomes for individuals experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles County is not a question of will. It is a battle of numbers. With 52,765 people living unsheltered on any given night — the most of any city or county anywhere in the U.S. — the task could seem insurmountable.

“There was just never going to be enough beds or enough money in the old system of combating homelessness,” said Whitney Lawrence, the Director of Policy and Planning for the county’s Housing for Health program.

Recognizing the limits of both affordable housing development and federal Section 8 rental subsidies, Housing for Health launched a “flexible” source of rental subsidy funding that paired housing with intensive case management services for clients.

They turned to Brilliant Corners to make it a reality. By working in partnership with 62 nonprofit case management partners, more than 550 nonprofit and for-profit housing developers, nine funding sources and dozens of other government, philanthropic and health system partners, Brilliant Corners has been able to provide large scale solutions for Los Angeles County. The county has gone from 171 individuals housed in 2014 to 5,610 individuals in 2018 — and the success keeps growing.

“Thanks to our partnership with Brilliant Corners, we are almost doubling the number of people we are housing every year,” Lawrence said.

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Whitney Lawrence
Director of Policy and Planning, Los Angeles County Housing for Health Division

Karen Ceaser, 64, is one of them.

In 2013, Ceaser lost her job unexpectedly and was forced to live in her car. A former social worker who used to volunteer feeding the homeless, she said it was difficult to be the one reaching out for help.

She found it when a partner agency referred her to Brilliant Corners. Within a month, she moved into a unit in Harbor City. Ceaser pays 30 percent of her rent — Brilliant Corners pays the rest.

“Without them there would be no way,” she said. “This is a relief. The lack of stress keeps me healthy.”

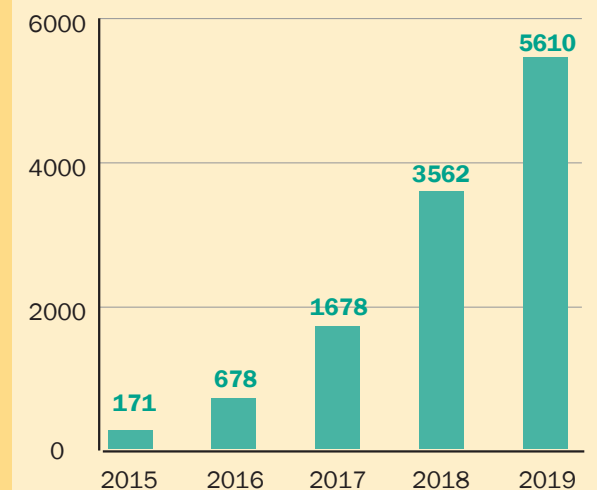
Individuals experiencing homelessness tend to have multiple physical and mental health challenges, which places a higher demand on the health system. Housing for Health supports a “Housing First” approach because research has shown it is easier to administer health services to individuals once they are in stable housing.

“We used to have such a high number of homeless cycling in and out of the hospital,” said Lawrence. “Now they can get services and stabilize their health.”

Having a flexible source of funding also means that Housing for Health could better serve specific populations that are experiencing or at risk of homelessness, including the medically fragile, parolees transitioning out of the criminal justice system, women and veterans. Leveraging its network of partners, Brilliant Corners is able to customize solutions for the needs of each population.

A SUCCESS STORY

People Housed



200

average number
people housed
per month

HOW BRILLIANT CORNERS MAKES HOUSING FIRST A REALITY

Brilliant Corners works alongside public agencies, property owners and case management agencies to create more supportive housing options for vulnerable populations

Public Agencies and Managed-Care Organizations

(The fiscal and administrative leaders)

What they do:

- Provide contract administration and quality assurance
- Fund program resources
- Manage relationships with Brilliant Corners and Case Management providers

Brilliant Corners

(Landlord engagement and tenancy support specialists)



What they do:

- Identify and secure housing units
- Coordinate lease signing, security deposit, unit readiness and move-in
- Administer rent payments
- Provide ongoing tenant and landlord supports
 - Coordinate with public agencies and case management providers
 - Prevent evictions and support relocations as needed

Wraparound Services



Case Managers

(The experts in providing intensive health services)

What they do:

- Client outreach
- Ongoing case management and benefits assistance
- Link to health, mental health and substance abuse services
- Assist with life skills, employment and education
- Report to County Health Departments

Property Owners

(The private market and nonprofit landlords)

What they do:

- Provide safe, affordable housing
- Maximize number of units available for Brilliant Corners

6 REASONS WHY BRILLIANT CORNERS WORKS



PHOTO BY ANDRE NIESING

Every community wants housing for its most vulnerable residents. Danielle Wildkress, Chief Program Officer of Los Angeles at Brilliant Corners, explains how Brilliant Corners can help public agencies achieve that goal.

1 Improves outcomes for individuals

Supportive housing is the cornerstone of health, well-being and independence for vulnerable individuals and families. Providing housing and dignity for these individuals has a whole host of ripple effects, including improved physical and mental health.

2 Promotes the Housing First approach

Guided by the Housing First principle, working with Brilliant Corners allows public agencies to move people into housing regardless of substance abuse or involvement in the criminal justice system, which can disqualify individuals from participating in other housing programs.

“Too many of those experiencing homelessness can’t stay healthy because of the chaos of living on the streets,” said Wildkress. “By putting them in housing, we now can give them the stability and the services they need to thrive.”

3 Accelerates housing move-in

Affordable housing developments often take three to six years, and people wait equally long for federal Section

8 vouchers. By contrast, people move into units secured by Brilliant Corners in as little as a few weeks. Brilliant Corners develops a broad inventory of housing options, including single-family homes, apartment units, blocks of units and entire buildings. Having more units reduces the amount of time individuals are on a waitlist. This benefits individuals who are at risk of homelessness and may have limited time to find new housing due to eviction or raised rent.

4 Leverages core competencies

When health departments work with Brilliant Corners, each partner is allowed to do what it does best. “We are the housing people and they are the health people,” Wildkress said.

Health departments no longer need to spend time and money becoming experts on complicated real estate dealings. Health departments can focus on what they do best — providing services that help individuals find stability. Similarly, case management partners can focus on the higher-level needs of their clients, knowing one of the most basic human needs — housing — is met.

5 Reduces unnecessary health spending

Housing can reduce inappropriate use of expensive health care resources. Many individuals experiencing homelessness have complex physical and mental health conditions like heart disease, cancer, bipolar disorder and PTSD. These conditions are exacerbated by life on the streets.

This often leads to long hospitalizations and repeated trips to the ER, where care is more costly. Supportive housing can end this cycle by getting the individual off the street and administering health services in less costly settings.

6 Saves taxpayer money

Investing in housing actually saves cities and counties money. For instance, Los Angeles County’s Housing for Health program spent \$23,000 less per participant when they were housed compared to the year prior, when they lived on the streets. This saved the county \$20 million in the program’s first year, according to a RAND Corporation report.

“Supportive housing is one of the best investments municipalities can make,” Wildkress said. “They are investing in healthy communities.”

A GOOD DEAL

BY GAIL ALLYN SHORT



Real estate investor Ian Hollinger says working with Brilliant Corners makes good business sense. The nonprofit offers landlord incentives, helps arrange for rental subsidies, covers rent for units while they are vacant, and provides Housing Coordinators to smooth out any issues between tenants and property owners.
PHOTO BY BRIAN AVERILL

Working with Brilliant Corners is a boon for both the tenant and the property owner

Los Angeles real estate investor Ian Hollinger owns several multi-family apartments in the city. And for more than a year, he has rented some of his units to clients of Brilliant Corners.

Brilliant Corners, a nonprofit supportive housing agency, helps underserved individuals obtain housing that they can afford. The agency's clients include patients transitioning out of institutional settings and those who are experiencing homelessness — people who often have difficulties getting property owners to rent to them because of their low income.

Besides assisting prospective tenants, Brilliant Corners' staff also assist property owners like Hollinger to ensure renting to special-needs tenants goes smoothly.

Hollinger said he has experience consulting with various housing programs like the federal Housing Choice Voucher Program or Section 8. But of all the agencies, he says, Brilliant Corners is different.

"It's one of the few programs that, I feel as a landlord, really goes out of the way to cater to your needs just as much as they do the applicant," he said.

Brilliant Corners Housing Coordinators regularly scout potential properties, which are then inspected and priced. Afterward, if the property owner agrees to the price, the two

parties enter an agreement where the property owner takes the unit off the market to hold for Brilliant Corners' clients. In turn, Brilliant Corners agrees to pay the rent for a unit until a client signs a lease agreement.

Hollinger said the arrangement prevents vacancy losses. "So, as a landlord, you're not sitting around losing money waiting for a tenant," said Hollinger.

He also likes that he only has to communicate and work with one Brilliant Corners Housing Acquisition Specialist who he can call whenever he needs information.

Additionally, Brilliant Corners gives him the opportunity to interview all of the applicants just as he would for any of his properties.

Once a tenant moves in, Brilliant Corners assigns a Housing Coordinator, who serves as a liaison between the property owner and the tenant and is prepared to deal with any issues that may arise, such as a tenant's physical or mental health issues or struggles to pay the rent.

Hollinger said working with Brilliant Corners has been "sheer bliss." "It's run in a very cost-effective manner," he said.

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Ian Hollinger
Senior Vice President BRC Properties

BRILLIANT BENEFITS

Landlords who rent units through Brilliant Corners enjoy a range of benefits that make the leasing experience easier and more profitable, according to Chris Contreras, Director of the Flexible Housing Subsidy Pool. Here are just some of the perks:

Knowledgeable, professional service — Brilliant Corners assigns property owners their own Housing Acquisition Specialist dedicated to helping them navigate the process.

Housing Retention Services — Brilliant Corners takes the worry out of leasing by assigning a Housing Coordinator to each client, who acts as a liaison between property managers and tenants to address any housing related issues that may arise.

Tenant matching is based on the landlord's requirements and the tenant needs.

The right to review rental applications

Automatic security deposit payments

Long-term case management for tenants — Third-party agencies help tenants maintain stability and access health care and other wraparound services to boost housing success.

Property management assistance — The Brilliant Corners Housing Coordinators help property managers and tenants to address matters such as noise complaints, property damage mitigation and delinquent rent payments.

MORE CHOICE FOR HOUSING

BY GAIL ALLYN SHORT



Following a break-in at her home, Delia Feraro wanted to move to a different community, but she had limited options due to her income and the competitive housing market in San Francisco. Brilliant Corners worked with Feraro to get housing in a new neighborhood.

PHOTO BY GEORGE E. BAKER

A Bay Area woman moves into new neighborhood quickly with assistance from Brilliant Corners

Delia Feraro, 42, of San Francisco said that she had wanted to find a new place to live for a long time. When the apartment she shared with her 21-year-old daughter and 4-year-old grandson was broken into, the need to move became more urgent.

“My daughter was crying, and I was scared,” she said. “I couldn’t really sleep in my house that day.”

The family didn’t feel safe in their apartment, but they had limited housing options due to Feraro’s income and the competitive rental market in San Francisco. Feraro, who has a developmental disability, was referred to Brilliant Corners, a nonprofit supportive housing agency that assists people with barriers to housing.

Feraro enrolled in The Avenue, a Brilliant Corners program that locates housing specifically for people with intellectual disabilities. Her program case manager, Housing Coordinator Laura Tongchiaxyooj, listened as she talked about wanting to find a new home for her family.

Unfortunately, San Francisco’s housing market is highly competitive, so Tongchiaxyooj helped Feraro sort through her options.

“I worked with Delia and her social worker to develop a housing plan based on Delia’s income and preferences,” Tongchiaxyooj said. By January 2018, Tongchiaxyooj said she managed to get Feraro on two different waiting lists for the newly constructed units at the Alice Griffith public housing development at Candlestick Point.

A few months later, the San Francisco Housing Authority selected Feraro for placement on its waiting list. But by then, Feraro felt discouraged.

Public housing placements can take two to three years and often much longer, Tongchiaxyooj said. To encourage Feraro, she invited her to tour the Alice Griffith apartments.

“I was really excited and happy,” said Feraro, recalling the units’ modern design. “I said, ‘Oh, I want to live here.’ They looked really, really nice.”

So Tongchiaxyooj and the social worker drafted a letter asking the Housing Authority to consider Feraro’s circumstances and expedite placement. She also made repeated calls to the Housing Authority and helped Feraro collect all the documents needed for a rental application.

About a month later, Tongchiaxyooj said the Housing Authority interviewed Feraro and approved her application for a two-bedroom apartment at Alice Griffith.

Tongchiaxyooj obtained rental assistance for Feraro from the local YMCA, which paid the security deposit and first month’s rent.

In April 2018, the family moved into their new apartment. They pay 30 percent of their income in rent, and the federal voucher covers the remaining balance.

Because of her experience, Feraro said she would recommend Brilliant Corners to a friend.

“Laura helped me a lot looking for a place. I was excited that she helped me out. It was so hard being on the waiting list,” she said. “I’m very happy. It’s really a dream come true that I have this place.”

“It’s really a dream come true that I have this place.”

Delia Feraro
Public housing resident

LACK OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING CONTRIBUTES TO HOMELESSNESS

- **Eighty percent** of low-income households in California have unaffordable housing costs that exceed 30 percent of household income. Fifty-five percent of these households spend more than half of their income on housing.
- The USC Lusk Center for Real Estate predicts that by 2019 in Los Angeles County alone, average monthly rents will **increase by \$136** (over 2017 levels).
- Between 2016 and 2017, California reported the nation’s largest increase in homelessness with **16,136 more people** experiencing homelessness.
- In Los Angeles County, which has more unsheltered homeless individuals than any other city or county, **52,765 people** are homeless on an average night.



SOURCES: California Budget and Policy Center reports. National Alliance to End Homelessness, California Budget and Policy Center.

BRILLIANT SOLUTIONS

COVER AND ABOVER PHOTO BY ANDRE NIESING

As more people are affected by California's housing crisis, Brilliant Corners is leading the way in securing supportive housing for people who need it. By building partnerships with landlords and housing developers to help localities achieve their housing goals, Brilliant Corners is creating solutions that help everyone involved.

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Donate:

Visit brilliantcorners.org/about-us/donate to help us provide support for people in need.



Work with Us!

Are you a landlord, housing developer or public official seeking more information, or do you need housing? Learn more about how Brilliant Corners can help your community at

www.brilliantcorners.org

