

Orange County's Bringing Families Home Program

In the spring of 2025, Change Well Project hosted regional convenings with California counties and tribal communities across Southern California, exploring the ways CDSS-funded rehousing programs are supporting individuals and families experiencing homelessness. Through individual interviews, program leaders and partners shared reflections and insights on what it takes to deepen program outcomes despite funding challenges, high housing costs, and a lack of affordable housing.



Across Orange County, the high cost of living and a lack of affordable housing leave low- and middle-income individuals and families vulnerable to housing insecurity and homelessness. That vulnerability increases exponentially for families in crisis, including those involved with child welfare. Orange County's Social Services Agency launched its Bringing Families Home (BFH) program to address that need, providing a wide range of support services with the goal of reuniting families and preventing unnecessary foster care placements.

Today, through strong partnerships and a commitment to providing holistic care, Orange County's BFH team is delivering integrated resources designed to keep families in safe, stable homes—and children where they belong.

Orange County's Bringing Families Home program nurtures both internal and external partnerships that deepen its impact.

The families served through BFH face a wide range of complex needs, from case management and housing navigation to financial assistance, mental health supports, legal services, and well beyond. Delivering those services demands more capacity than one organization or agency can provide, as well as the flexibility to adapt to evolving needs and timelines. That's why the BFH team prioritizes strong partnerships, both between the County's staff and with external partners.

Inside the agency, BFH administrators work as a team with the finance department to provide program participants with financial resources and extensions when they need them. To deliver the most powerful case management and service delivery possible, the County's team

partnered with Mercy House, which brings deep experience in offering homeless services. Mercy House operates a complete system of care—outreach, emergency shelters, transitional facilities, and permanent residences. Through their BFH partnership, the County and Mercy House together served nearly 250 families in Fiscal Year 2023-2024 alone, including 488 children. During that time, over 98 percent of families in BFH exited into either permanent or temporary housing. Contributing to this success is a very low recidivism rate.

The BFH team is actively working to build deeper connections to other CDSS-funded programs also serving Orange County to provide community members with the highest-impact services while increasing efficiencies in the County’s comprehensive work to prevent and address homelessness.

Orange County’s Bringing Families Home program is engaging and building trust with landlords to increase the number of available units to individuals and families in need.

Effective landlord engagement has been essential to BFH’s impact in Orange County, where a lack of rental control and a limited inventory of affordable housing units present critical barriers to low- and even middle-income renters.

“Building trust with landlords and leasing agents, and advocating for them to consider working with programs like ours is critical because it creates future opportunities for families we serve to move into affordable units,” said Amanda Carney, who helps to lead the County’s BFH program. “Mercy House has done a fabulous job with outreach to the leasing community, including listening to the concerns landlords have and offering incentives that encourage their participation and trust.”



Orange County’s Bringing Families Home Program celebrates successes as participating families find new ways to grow and thrive.

The team at Orange County’s Social Services Agency is committed to celebrating the successes of families who are reunified through support from programs like Bringing Families Home. At this year’s Celebrating Families event, 14 families, including seven who received BFH services, were honored for overcoming extraordinary barriers like drug use and mental health issues. Committed social workers nominated each family and celebrated alongside them during the gathering.

This event provided parents an opportunity to share how the support they received through programs like BFH allowed them to address trauma in their own histories—a critical step to healing their relationships with their children. Their reflections included statements like:

“My life is different. I have peace now.”

“You pushed me. Supported me. Made me believe in myself.”

“I’m enrolled in classes to become a counselor to help others like me.”

While each was unique, their stories demonstrated what is possible when a struggling parent or caregiver receives the support they need to stay on course toward family reunification and long-term wellbeing.

More Stories of Success from Orange County’s Bringing Families Home Program

Alex: After five years of homelessness, Alex was determined to rebuild his life and regain custody of his daughter. Struggling with substance abuse and limited to a bike for transportation, he faced overwhelming obstacles. His turning point came when he connected with the Bringing Families Home program and Mercy House.

With their support, Alex secured housing, received help with rent and furnishings, and ultimately gained full custody of his daughter. Today, he works two jobs, owns two cars, and provides a stable home for his family. His story is a powerful testament to how targeted support and resilience can transform lives.

Sarah: When Sarah, a single mother and full-time worker, experienced domestic violence and lost financial support from her partner, she suddenly faced the threat of homelessness. With graduation on the horizon and her family’s stability at risk, she turned to the Bringing Families Home program for help.

Through Bringing Families Home, Mercy House stepped in with crucial support, covering arrears and providing rental assistance to keep Sarah and her children housed. Thanks to her resilience and that timely intervention, Sarah graduated, earned a major promotion, and now provides a stable, secure home for her family. Her story is a testament to how targeted support can prevent homelessness and empower long-term success.

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Jason: After losing his job, serving time in prison, and battling addiction, Jason found himself homeless and determined to rebuild his life. When he entered the Bringing Families Home program, he was living in a sober home and working toward stable housing so he could reunite with his daughter.

With support from Mercy House, including rental and furniture assistance, household supplies, and ongoing case management, Jason secured permanent housing in Hawthorne, California. He is now working two jobs, reunited with his daughter, and has built financial stability with savings for the future. His story is a powerful example of how second chances and strong support can lead to lasting change.

**Names have been changed for confidentiality*



Orange County Board of Supervisors Chair Doug Chaffee, Fourth District, center, sponsored the June 2025 Celebrating Families event that recognized parents who put in the work to reunify with their children. Senior Social Worker Katherin Macdonald, left, nominated Maria Raiza, right, as one of the 14 families to be honored.