

## **AHO COVID-19 Homeless Youth Housing Fund Matching Challenge Campaign**

### **PROJECT**

Ambassadors of Hope and Opportunity's (AHO), a 17 year old Marin County nonprofit organization's *new* program, the **\$60,000 COVID-19 Homeless Youth Housing Fund**, was created to respond to our youth, who are students at College of Marin (COM), in the Economic Opportunity Services Program (EOPS). Due to the pandemic, these students are at a high risk of losing their housing and dropping out of college when the County's rent moratorium ends on September 30, 2021. This fund will provide vetted EOPS students with rental and utility assistance, so they can remain in their rentals and continue their educations.

The fund's goal of \$60,000, will be achieved first through the recruitment of three (3) \$10,000 Sponsors to provide the \$30,000 base for a AHO's Matching Challenge Campaign which will then be rolled-out to the general Marin community to be matched. This Challenge Campaign will in-turn raise the additional \$30,000 to achieve the \$60,000 funding goal for the project. We are seeking the three (3) sponsors of this project.

### **GENERAL & PARTICULAR NEED**

Due to the pandemic, COM-EOPS students are at a high risk of losing their housing and dropping out of college. This fund will provide them with **rental and utility assistance**, so they can remain in their rentals and continue their educations.

To be eligible, AHO youth in COM-EOPS program can only have a maximum yearly income of \$16,500, take 12 units each semester, and remain in good standing, with at least a 2.0 GPA. As single, self-supporting individuals they are either at, or below, the 80% median income set by the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (FDHUD).

These students are either not eligible for Federal or County funding for rental and utility assistance, or, fall through the cracks because of limited available funding. Others miss out due to some other bureaucratic oversight, and therefore are unable to receive the Federal Emergency Rental Assistance from the County.

Funds allocated will be go specifically to vetted COM-EOPS students referred by Becky Reetz, MA Director of the COM-EOPS program. These students will be eligible to receive up to \$2,000 in rental and utility support paid directly to the landlord or utility company.

The following two (2) AHO youth, who are COM-EOPS students, demonstrate the specific benefit that will be achieved with this Fund.

#### **Elisa**

"I am an AHO youth and student at College of Marin in the EOPS program working on my Associate Degree. I came from Guatemala and have no family or support here in Marin. I was struggling to stay in school because I needed an eye-exam, glasses and dental work to be able to study and sleep without pain. AHO helped me with those things so I could stay in school. With COVID, I am now going to lose my housing because I am not able to get help from the County with my past rent I owe. I am working two jobs and taking 12 units at COM. I want to keep going to school, but I need help to continue. I am worried what will happen to me."

## Ash

“I almost lost my life on the Golden Gate Bridge. When I was in the hospital AHO really listened and connected me with other youth like me who struggled with the never-ending feeling of pain and hopelessness which led to my suicide attempt. I am now a student in COM’s EOPS program with a focus on computer science. With the support of AHO I am in the process of reprogramming my thinking from the abuse I’ve experienced throughout my life. With COVID my fear and anxiety has escalated. Although I am working and taking 12 units at COM, I’m afraid I will lose my housing and not be able to continue my education and spiral back into anxiety and hopeless again.”

## BACKGROUND

During the COVID pandemic, little attention has been paid to college students without homes or unstable housing. Homelessness is not unique to K-12 schools. This issue affects 1 in 5 community college students, 1 in 10 California State University students, and 1 in 20 UC students. <sup>1</sup>

Sadika Sulaiman Hara, MA, Director of Student Activities and Advocacy (SAA) at COM, has reported that “While there is an assumption that college students in this county are not homeless, we are seeing students at College of Marin every semester who are telling us otherwise. Since the onset of the pandemic, rental and utility assistance has been a main concern and stress, and a HUGE need, for an identified 29 EOPS students at COM. Yet we know there are many others that are unreported.”

As the Founder and Executive Director of AHO, I’ve heard directly from many youth who are struggling now more than ever. I was homeless for years myself and remember the daily panic and deep fear I felt as I worried about having a place to sleep at night while trying to go to school. The lowest income vulnerable students at College of Marin have lost their jobs and healthcare, and are now at-risk of losing their housing too. With COVID-19, panic and fear are multiplied, and students without rental and utility assistance are at a high risk of having to drop out of college.

Being on the frontline working with these youth, I know of not a single young person in our program who has received a stimulus check. For AHO’s youth and young adults, the pandemic continues to prey on their pre-existing conditions of trauma, victimization and pervasive insecurity as new COVID variants continue to appear and potential surges emerge. Long-after the COVID-19 lockdown has been lifted and schools and businesses begin to open-up the trauma caused by the pandemic will persist in the lives of our most vulnerable young people struggling to get an education and become contributing adults.



---

<sup>1</sup> *Joseph Bishop is the director of the Center for the Transformation of Schools, UCLA, [jbishop@gseis.ucla.edu](mailto:jbishop@gseis.ucla.edu).*

*Xilonin Cruz-Gonzalez is president of the California School Boards Association, [xcruz-gonzalez@csba.org](mailto:xcruz-gonzalez@csba.org). Distributed by CalMatters.org.*