

2015 DAC Achievement Award Nomination Form

Nominee Information

Nominee Name: Dennis Torigian

Nominee Address: [REDACTED]

Nominee Phone: [REDACTED]

Nominee Email: [REDACTED]

Nominator Information

Nominator Name: Laura Blaise

Nominator Address: [REDACTED]

Nominator Phone: [REDACTED]

Nominator Email: [REDACTED]

Nomination Category (please select one):

- Individual
- Organization
- City of Fresno Employee or Department

Nominated for:

- Improving the quality of life for individuals with disabilities
- Advocacy for issues pertaining to individuals with disabilities
- Volunteerism that has a positive impact on individuals with disabilities
- Development of new programs or services impacting individuals with disabilities
- Customer service to individuals with disabilities that is above and beyond the standard
- Innovation or Entrepreneurship by an individual with a disability or that has a positive impact on individuals with disabilities

July 28 2015

Shannon Mulhall
2600 Fresno St., Room 4011
Fresno, CA 93721

Re: Disability Advisory Commission 2015 Achievement Award

Dear Ms. Mulhall,

I am including my letter of recommendation to Nominate Dennis N Torigian for the above mentioned award.

Dennis graduated from UC Davis with a Masters degree in Ag Economics in 1967. He worked for J Paul Getty's agriculture division in Bakersfield, CA. for 20 + years. He was the President of the company now known as Paramount Farms located in Bakersfield, CA.

After his retirement he moved to Kerman where he currently farms a small vineyard at age 72. 15 years ago he founded Housing and Supportive Services of Fresno, a 501 C3 non profit.. and developed a supportive Housing Community for Adults with chronic and severe Mental Illness. He provides these services for 25 mentally ill Adults. Many of the Tenants have resided at the Apartment Complex known as Cedar Heights for over 10 years. The community provided by his efforts offers stable housing and support services to Mentally Ill adults and reduces the cost of care for these people to the County substantially. He provides a true home and stability for the Tenants.

He is extremely hands on in terms of Management, repair and providing activities for the Tenants of Cedar Heights. He takes no salary and donates every Thursday to be on site of the Apartment complex.

I believe he deserves this award because of his remarkable contribution to Fresno county providing care to those with Mental illness for over 15 years. Just last December he received the first grant in HASS history from the Fresno Regional Center on behalf of the Bennett family trust. His accomplishments and volunteerism are outstanding.

Sincerely,
Laura Blaise



July 19, 2015

Dear To Whom It May Concern:

To start off, Dennis Torigian is an amazing, talented and generous individual to many people in the Fresno community. He has brought this place called Cedar Heights and built a lasting legacy for him and about 30 residents who are psychologically disabled a place called "home". He owns this place and the residents here can stay here for as long as needed for the rest of their life.

On every other Sunday, a meal is made by a resident or two with the help of staff assisting in the cooking. He provides the meals by going to Costco and buying the ingredients for the supper that Sunday. He uses his own funding plus private donations of family and friends to purchase the food and snacks on a daily basis. Besides this, we have bingo on Mondays and Thursdays and give away six prizes on those days for the people who have bingo on their card. He supplies this from the 99 cent store such as cleaning supplies, envelopes, and other miscellaneous items.

Dennis tries and usually fixes the minor restroom plumbing, door and household repairs here at Cedar Heights. This saves money in contacting professional people to come and fix the problem. He has also remodeled one apartment in the complex for two residents whom one is handicapped and needs a cane and walker to get around every day. He has replaced the water heater that wasn't working costing a lot of money to buy and use for everyday use.

Whatever issues here at Cedar Heights wants to know about the problem and find a solution to it for all the residents that live here at the apartment complex. We have periodic meetings on Thursdays at 11am once a month discussing the issues facing the residents here. He has fixed the laundry room and has kept the prices low for the residents to use the washer and dryer. He talks to the staff and residents about trips or outings to various places in California throughout the year.

Referring back to the Sunday meals, we have special occasion holidays New Year's Day, Christmas, Thanksgiving, and the Fourth of July meal celebrations. For Thanksgiving, its traditional turkey, dressing, mashed potatoes and rolls including green salad and various other side dishes to eat. Christmas its ham, side dishes and dessert for everyone there at the apartment complex. Talking about Christmas, he gives each resident a \$50 gift card to spend, some dollar tree items for the winter and special t-shirt with the HASS logo on it each year.

To sum it all up, Dennis provides food, drinks, household repairs and cares deeply for his residents at 3708 N. Cedar Ave. Whatever needs to be done, Dennis hears and listens to the residents living here at Cedar Heights. He understands their needs and concerns because he has a son named Brian who lives on the premises.

He wants to continue to serve the residents here and once he retires to give the duties to someone who will carry on his legacy of serving, helping and assisting future residents with their needs to be met once living here at Cedar Heights. Without Dennis, the residents wouldn't have a safe, secure community to live and have independent living on their own with affordable housing for them. So, Dennis is a vital and important person in the lives of everyone living here and we appreciate his assistance.

I have known Dennis Torigian since we were freshmen at Reedley High School in 1957. Dennis has accomplished tremendous achievements in his professional career before returning to his San Joaquin Valley roots in the early 90's.

I first became reacquainted with Dennis when he was working to establish mental health treatment and housing in Fresno. He developed Cedar Heights during this time. Cedar Heights is a very unique housing and treatment program in Fresno. Cedar Heights provides the much needed structure yet allows for independence and personal growth for individuals with chronic mental health issues. The facility provides this ideal balance infused with caring and accountability.

Dennis developed this very special place inspired by painfully observing the struggles his own son experienced dealing with his mental illness. I also have a sister who has been diagnosed with schizophrenia since her initial breakdown at age 17. I am a clinical social worker and worked over ten years for Fresno County Mental Health. I have also worked as head administrator at psychiatric hospitals in both Southern and Northern California. I mention my background only to add credence to my observations and opinion regarding the quality and care provided at Cedar Heights. My sister, Lorna has resided at Cedar Heights for over 15 years.

Dennis has fiercely fought for funding and licensing for Cedar Heights throughout the history of this program. The challenges of maintaining the quality of this program during times of diminishing dollars for mental health have been very difficult for Dennis as he has had to reduce staff and I have personally seen him fixing faucets and providing other maintenance tasks.

He is the heart and soul of this program. His commitment and dedication is unparalleled. My family and I could not be any happier and pleased to have our sister, Lorna, living and thriving at Cedar Heights.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Harvey Hanemoto', written in a cursive style.

Harvey Hanemoto

July 26, 2015

We believe Dennis Torigian should receive the 2015 Disability Achievement Award. We believe this because Dennis has identified the problem of inadequate housing situations for the mentally ill and has done something about it. He had seen the problem first hand from his own family situation. As a result he founded and developed Housing and Supportive Services known more commonly as Cedar Heights.

Dennis had to learn everything. There were many obstacles and others would have given up. But his persevering spirit and tenacity to stay focused has made his dream a reality. He has provided a safe haven and given hope and honor to the individuals who are living Cedar Heights. He has given of his own monies and time to develop the program. He has provided outings and holiday meals for those living there. He has encouraged the client to be accountable in taking perscribed medications, in keeping apartments clean and orderly, by providing a network of checks. We have seen the results of his labor not only in our daughter's life, but in the lives of others as well. For this we are most grateful!

Because of his vision, his persistence in pursuing this vision in spite of great obstacles, his desire to honor those with mental illness by providing a safe haven, we believe that Dennis Torigian should receive the 2015 Disability Achievement Award.

Joan L. Acomb
Dwight E. Acomb

Alan's Story

A foundation of support socially, mentally, and emotionally

My name is Mamoru A. Hara, but people call me Alan. I was born in Okinawa, Japan and lived there until I was 16. That was the year my mother committed suicide. My dad packed up and moved my brother, sister, and me to Hawaii where I finished my senior year in Oahu and went on to Hawaii State University. I transferred to Long Beach State and graduated with a bachelor's degree in business with an option in human resources.

After graduation, I landed a job at the community hospital in Long Beach. I spent about 14 years there, but when the hospital began downsizing, my workload increased. I was doing multiple jobs, and I got burned out. I decided to give my 30-day notice.

I wanted to move to a place that was less crowded and had a more affordable cost of living. I closed my eyes and pointed on the map; my finger landed on Fresno. Within two months, I moved to Fresno and found not one but two jobs. One of my jobs was working in food service for Community Hospital.

I then went to work for a messenger service company, and then another courier service for around 10 years. One day, on the job, I got into a solo auto accident. I made a mistake. I rolled my vehicle while drinking on the job. I walked away with a small injury behind my left ear, but my car was totaled. The CHP officer at the scene asked me to take a Breathalyzer test. It registered at .04, well under the legal limit. However, I was fired the next day. The company mailed me my last check. The insurance company sent me a settlement check soon after. It didn't take long for me to burn through the funds.

My life changed drastically over the next month. My drinking increased to two cases of Bud Light accompanied by two packs of cigarettes a day. I drained my checking and savings accounts, and relied on my credit to live, which ballooned to \$30,000 of debt.

On one a brisk holiday in November 2001, when all the stores were closed, I was stuck with my own thoughts. I wasn't able to get beer or cigarettes. Sober for once, I realized I was headed nowhere. I was in a deep hole, sinking in quicksand. I knew something had to give, but I didn't know where to get help.

The next morning, I got up and took the bus downtown to the only place I knew where to go for assistance, the police department. I walked in and said, "I need help." If I hadn't reached out on that day, I'm sure I would be on the streets or dead by now. The officer on duty called an ambulance, and the ambulance took me to be evaluated. I was put on a 24-hour hold then moved to a short-term facility for 19 days. I was transferred to a long-term facility in Vallejo, starting out in the lock down unit for two months, then moving to the open unit for another two months.

When it was time for my release, the director of psychiatry asked how much money I had. I had nothing. I couldn't go back to where I was living. I was gravely disabled with bipolar disorder and alcoholism. So, I was put on a conservatorship. In hindsight, that was the turning point of my life. It gave me a second chance. I had truly hit bottom. The conservator helped me get my finances in order, file for SDI, SSI, and SSDI, and move into a transition facility. I was there for 28 days before moving into a board and care for two months. Finally, I moved into Housing and Supportive Services of Fresno.

In 2005, I gave notice to leave HASS. I was getting married. The marriage was short lived. After separating from my wife and getting divorced, we went through bankruptcy and spousal support issues. In June 2006, I found myself at the Greyhound station in downtown Fresno and asked a taxi driver to take me to HASS. It happened to be the day of their eighth anniversary party. I moved back in, and HASS has been my home ever since.

Living with bipolar disorder isn't as bad as you might think. I experience more depression than mania. I take antidepressants and go to group therapy. Each day, I learn more about myself and about my disorder. I try to be more aware of my moods and triggers. Now, I can change my moods from dark to light. At first it was difficult to do. It takes practice. I wasn't born with it; it's an acquired skill.

HASS provides a foundation of support — socially, mentally, and emotionally. It provides a foundation and a place to call home. Plus it's truly independent living. You learn to live on your own. As you live independently, you grow as a person and individual. You mature. You learn to control your mental illness and don't let your mental illness control you.

I recently was diagnosed with bladder cancer. It's nice to have the support of the HASS community around me. With the cancer treatment working, I have a positive outlook on the future.

Brian's Story

Without HASS, I would be out on the streets

I've been through something that is beyond my comprehension. I feel physically disabled all time. When I look in the mirror, a picture tells a story. Is this, "mirror, mirror on the wall?"

It's very difficult to live with mental illness. I take it as it comes. It's not easy. Because of people's perceptions, every person has a diabolical instinct and stereotype of those with mental illness.

My mental illness has never been pinpointed. The doctors say it's several things. It's a pathological problem. I don't really know what my diagnosis is right now. They aren't forward with me because they don't want to hurt me.

Living at Housing and Supportive Services is very nice. The freedom is nice. There is a sense that you're not incarcerated or being subjected to what the doctors feel. Without HASS, I would be out on the streets.

My favorite thing about living here is watching the other residents and taking part in what they're doing. I also like watching TV and listening to the radio. My favorite TV show used to be Seinfeld, but now it's Two and a Half Men. I like to listen to KMJ, country music, and soft rock.

Living here at HASS is convenient. There are services and aid to help. People are willing to do things for you, things that you would normally take care of as a 45-year old, but that I'm not able to do on my own.

Brian was the inspiration for the creation of HASS and has lived here since the complex opened in 1998. Read more about Brian's journey from his father and HASS founder Dennis Torigian on the About Us page.

Kelly's Story

A little different is okay

I was born in Fresno and raised in Fresno and Madera. I am the youngest of four kids: Sherri, Darren, Leslie, and me. My dad is a school psychologist, and growing up, my mom worked as an office manager for a doctor's office.

I always knew I was a little different. I was born with a cognitive learning disability, diagnosed with hyperactivity, and suffered from seizures from ages 9–12 years old. While riding my bike one day, I experienced a seizure and hit my head on the concrete. The resulting concussion destroyed the vision in my left eye. Increasing to my social isolation, I was required to wear a back brace for three years in high school. I learned not to trust other people; I only trust my family.

Despite my differences, I finished high school and went on to earn a bachelors degree in liberal studies from Fresno State. I wanted to be a teacher. However, going through the interview process for the teaching credential, it felt like they were calling me a freak. It was so upsetting. Realizing that I wasn't going to be able to obtain a teaching credential, I applied to be a Certified Nursing Assistant, but again wasn't accepted into the program.

After finishing my degree, I was at a loss. I had been used to taking classes, going to school, and doing homework. I didn't know how to fill my time anymore. I tried to find a job and moved to Fresno. Without being able to drive and not having any specific skills, I had limited prospects. I struggled with a sense of constructive purpose.

Isolation and lack of social skills fueled my depression. I've had depression and anxiety all my life and started taking meds when I was in college. After struggling to live on my own, I agreed to voluntary hospitalization at Cedar Vista for two and a half weeks.

Living with mental illness is difficult. It's like you are at war with yourself sometimes. Often, I can't sleep or concentrate. There are things that I want to change but it doesn't seem possible. I try to focus on the blessings — on the small stuff and live day by day.

My sister Leslie, who was two years older than me, liked cinnamon bears and hearts. In high school, she was kidnapped which most likely lead to some of her difficulties later in life. At age 35, she passed away of an overdose, leaving three children behind. My nephew was just a baby. Soon after, I moved into HASS. It was a rough transition. I missed my sister. I still get blue when her birthday comes around.

The day before my birthday a few years later, my sister Sherri, who was eight years older than me, passed away unexpectedly at the age of 49 from a heart attack during a seizure. I went through a really bad period after she died. I was sleeping too much and

making bad choices. It was hard for me to correct myself. The staff at HASS helped me through it. They monitored my mistakes and progress, and they put me back on the right path. I now manage my own symptoms. I talk to my mom everyday and see my parents once a month.

HASS is a community of people who are facing the similar challenges. Being a little different here is not different at all. Everyone understands. If I go through a bad spot, there is someone here to talk to. The planned activities provide an excuse to get out and do something. Stay active. I especially like Bingo and am looking forward to going to Disneyland.

Mary's Story

I have too much to lose to ever go back

As a young adult living in Fresno, I worked as a data processor for Aetna. Soon, I fell in love as young people do. I got married and moved to Reno where I landed a job as a loan officer at a credit union. The marriage didn't last long, and soon I found myself back in Merced. Within three days, I found a job as a loan processor at a savings and loan. I worked there for about a year before it closed. I then moved on to work for a commercial real estate appraiser, typing up commercial appraisal reports at 90 words per minute.

I met a man whose brother lived right next door to me. One thing led to another and I had a son, Jeremy. He is 27 years old now. When I told my employer I was pregnant, I was fired. This was at a time prior to job protection for pregnant mothers. I ended up on welfare for the duration of my pregnancy. After my son was born, I was really depressed. Sure, I had had periods of depression when I was a teenager but nothing serious. The post-partum depression didn't get any better and didn't go away. I finally went to County Health, and they put me on meds.

One day when my son was about ten, he came home from school, and I didn't recognize him. It frightened me. I had a psychotic break once before when Jeremy was eight, but the episodes had become steadily worse. I was hallucinating that there were dead bodies lined up all along the walls and ceiling. Whenever I would go to sleep, I imagined a zombie sticking needles in my back. I could feel it. It was horrible, like being in hell. One night I thought demons were coming up through the floor to drag me to hell. My heart was racing. It was like it was really happening. I was terrified. I couldn't walk down the street because I was afraid that people would stick me with hypodermic needles. This lasted eight months — while I was still caring for my son. There was nobody in my family to take care of Jeremy. One day, I called a friend that worked at Catholic Charities. She referred me to a doctor and contacted Child Protective Services.

CPS came out and took custody of my son. I started praying feverishly that he would have the best foster parents possible. My prayers were answered. He was placed with a lovely family and spent the next eight years with them. In fact, the foster parents were recognized statewide for providing exceptional care.

After my son was taken away, I was hospitalized. The doctors put me on medication, and I started getting better. I moved into a board and care home. Soon, however, their license was revoked, and the facility turned into room and board. For about eight years, I bounced from one room and board to the next as they would open and close.

At one room and board everyone in the house — including the manager — was smoking crack cocaine. One night, my neighbor talked me into trying it. I was immediately hooked and remained addicted for the next five years.

In order to move into HASS, I had to quit. I did. Then for some reason one day, I had to smoke crack. I immediately told a staff member at HASS what I had done. HASS has a zero tolerance policy. I was afraid I was going to have to move out. Instead, the staff member got me into a rehab program. The program has been helpful. I still think about trying crack again, but I have too much to lose to ever go back. I have a good relationship with my son, I have a good church, and I'm stable on my medications.

HASS has completely changed my life for the better. When I was in the room and board homes, I wasn't stable at all. And of course, there were the drugs. I now live in one spot. I'm stable. I take my meds regularly — religiously. It's the same as having diabetes and having to take insulin every day. I know this.

The HASS community is like a big family. The people are friendly and nice. We do things together — craft classes and cooking classes. We play bingo a couple of times a week. And Dennis Torigian takes us on trips. It's just wonderful. It's a wonderful place to live. Later this month we are going to crochet headbands.

Rebecca's Story

Riding the roller coaster

I received my undergraduate degree from Northwestern University where I studied to be a secondary education language teacher in French and Spanish. I went on to obtain my masters degree in Linguistics. Having a specialty in teaching English as a second language, I was thrilled to begin my career at Madera High School teaching math for second language learners.

During my two years of teaching, I found myself super depressed and even suicidal. I thought there was something wrong with my brain, and I just couldn't think. I would try to plan for my classes and would totally blank. I felt like I had to die. Simple as that. Thankfully, I started seeing a therapist and eventually was hospitalized for depression. However, I didn't want to take any medication.

Once I started feeling better and was released from the hospital, I started wearing makeup and spending money — lots of money — on clothes and supplies and games for my students. It was too much. Again, I sought help. I went to see a doctor whom I had never seen before. One look at me and he said, "I think you have bipolar disorder." I was devastated.

My supervisor at work recommended that I take a "mental health" day off. I did. I drove to Los Angeles and didn't come back. I was manic. I moved in with someone I didn't even know. I bounced around a bit finding myself in places and not knowing how I got there, living with someone in an abandoned house, and staying in a homeless shelter.

Having mental illness feels like riding a roller coaster. The low part of the roller coaster is complete nothingness. Life is too hard. Simply taking a shower is impossible. I totally shut down both physically and mentally.

Then, the mania starts. At first, it's good; I'm really happy. I feel as if I can do anything. Nothing is too difficult. I have all types of goals and excitement about life and am super outgoing. Then, it spirals out of control. The crazy thoughts begin. Thoughts pass through my brain at lightning speed. I become totally unfocused. Often in that state, I thought I was Jesus or Mary or that other people were Jesus.

One day, I ended up accidentally cutting my chin and went to the hospital. There, I befriended a man who had just been in a motorcycle accident. We became involved, and soon after, I had a little girl, Sarah.

Sarah changed my life. My family wanted me to put her up for adoption; I didn't. My baby girl had cerebral palsy. She provided the motivation for me to work hard to stabilize. I cared for her, took her to her therapies, and helped her to grow and develop.

When she was about three years old, I felt the mania coming on again. I immediately called my sister, and she took care of my daughter for me. Again, I was hospitalized. The day I got out of the hospital I went to a halfway house. I immediately called my mom and asked to see my baby girl. She said calmly, "You can see her tomorrow." That night, however, my precious Sarah passed away.

It spun me into another manic episode, and again I was hospitalized. This time, when I was released, my wonderful case manager at Fresno County Mental Health recommended Housing and Supportive Services of Fresno. I moved into HASS in 1999. It changed my life.

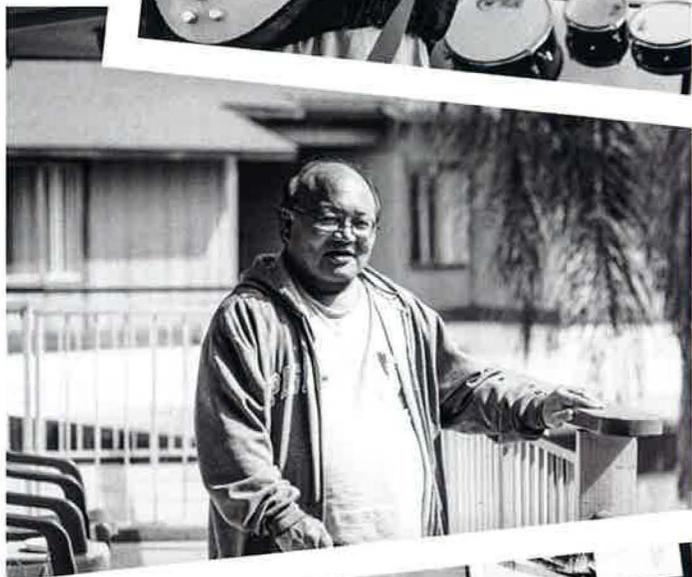
Living at HASS has given me much needed stability. It has helped me stay mentally well, medicine compliant, and out of the hospital. If HASS didn't exist, I'm sure I would still cycle through dangerous periods of mania and depression a few times a year.

I'm relieved to say that haven't been hospitalized for eleven years and counting. I work at HASS on weekends, and I volunteer at Fresno Rescue Mission mentoring women to help prepare for the GED. Seven years ago, I met Daniel, another HASS resident. We've been married for four years and have two adorable cats, Misty Blue and Penny. HASS has provided the foundation for me to have a job, volunteer, and build a life with my husband.

There's no place like home.

Housing and Supportive Services
of Fresno creates a sense of
place for people with serious
and chronic mental disabilities.

We create a home environment
for residents to live an independent,
productive, and quality life.



**Housing and
Supportive Services**
of Fresno

Providing stability for those who need it most.

Housing and Supportive Services of Fresno (HASS) promotes wellness and functionality among our residents—adults with serious mental illnesses who are low income, homeless, or at risk of homelessness.

All residents live independently, taking their prescribed medication and preparing their own food. Living arrangements are as home-like and family-oriented as possible.

Residents are clustered in an apartment setting with studio, one-bedroom and two-bedroom configurations. Two residents share two-bedroom apartments. Support is provided in the form of broad-range living skills training, medication compliance, and crisis intervention.

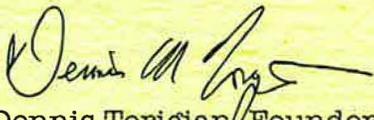
Do you know what it's like to live with mental illness? I had no clue. I had never been exposed to mental illness until my only child, Brian, within three years, went from being captain of the freshmen football team to being committed to a mental health facility. One day, his mom called me and said, "I can't deal with him any more." He was digging a big hole in the backyard for his own grave. I immediately took over care of our son. Soon after he cut off the tail of a cat with pruning shears. I knew he needed more help than I could provide at that time and had him committed.

Over the next 10 years, Brian had sixty different placements within the county mental healthcare system. Six-zero. There had to be a better solution.

So, for Brian and others like him, along with a handful of friends and associates, we embarked on a six-year journey to create a supportive independent living facility for people with serious and chronic mental disabilities that opened in 1998. By providing independent living and supportive services in a community atmosphere, our facility creates a secure sense of place.

Creating a home and a community for these individuals allows them to have a quality life off the streets. It reduces their use of public services and improves overall safety in our community. Our hope is that someday everyone with serious and chronic mental disabilities can live a quality, independent life.

Please donate to HASS today.

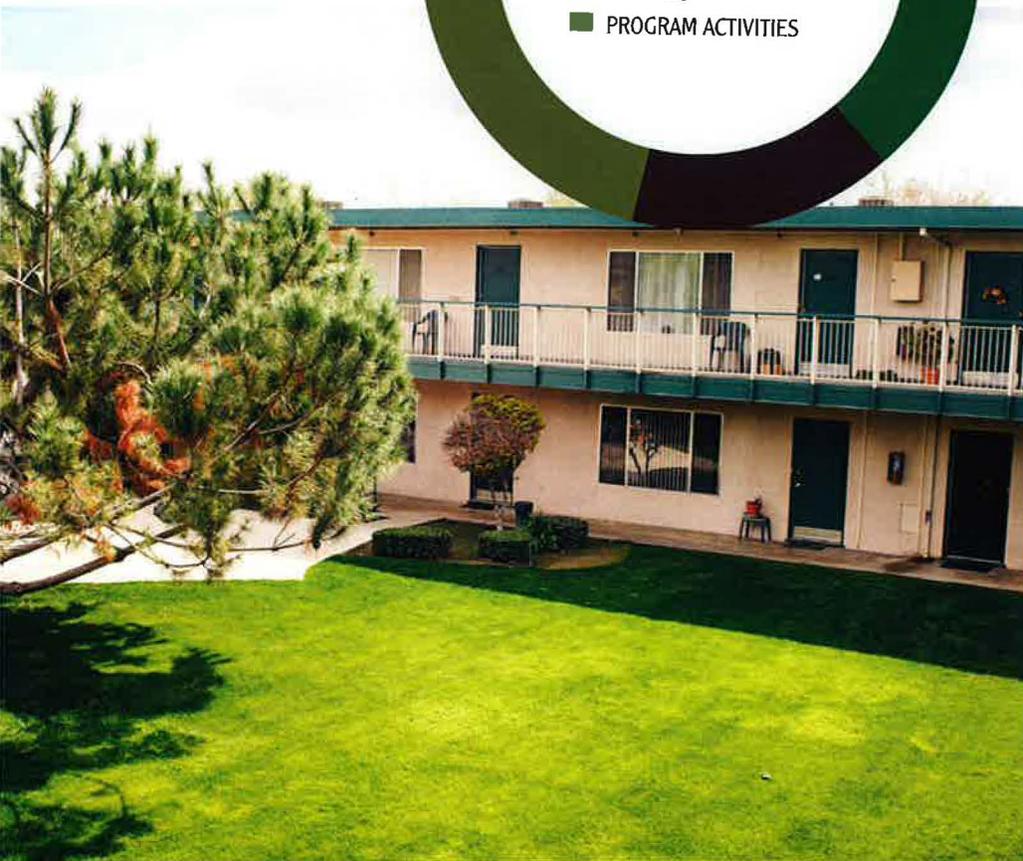
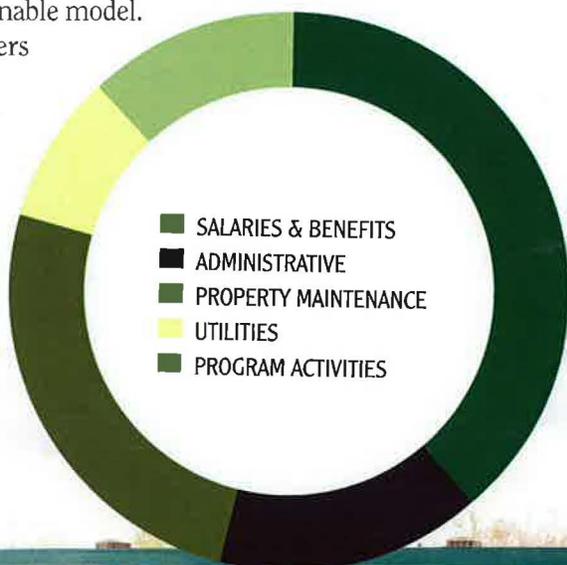

Dennis Torigian/Founder



Where our funding goes

We own our building outright and we operate on a lean budget to maximize our limited resources. Maintaining the property requires about a quarter of our current annual budget of \$186,000. Our revenue for 2014 is projected to be \$144,000, and it comes from the primarily below market rents—\$280 per month on average—that we charge residents. Rent is based on a sliding scale and includes cable TV access and some utilities. Our CEO waives his annual salary and in the past has personally financed the organization's funding gap. However, this is not a sustainable model.

We are hoping to find partners to help fund the existing supportive services and new staff positions, so that we can continue to offer and expand programming and services for residents.



Why is permanent supportive housing important?

- Keeps mentally ill individuals out of more intensive services
- Reduces cost of care and public services
- Increases the quality of life for the residents
- Houses an individual who would otherwise be homeless
- Increases public safety

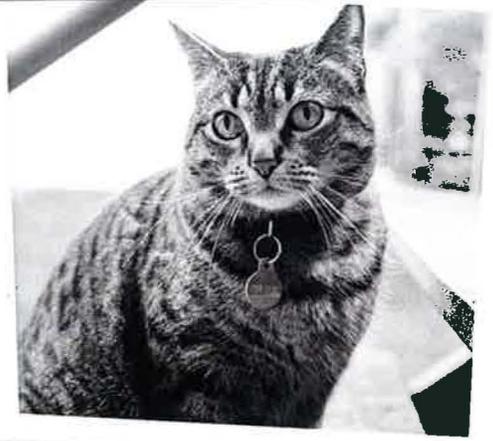
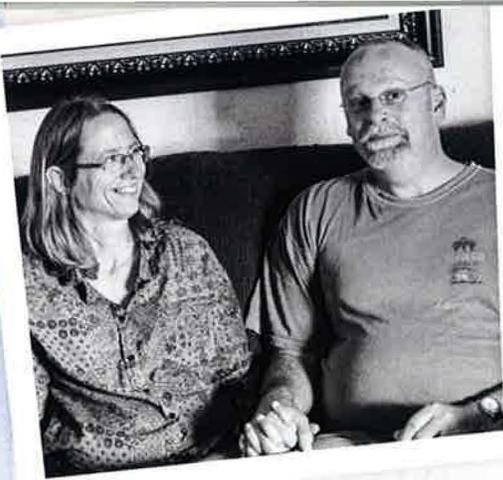
Staff Support

Fostering independence is the cornerstone of our community. We provide gentle care, unobtrusive support, and ongoing education. A staff member is always on location to be there when the residents need help. Daily assistance from staff focuses on supporting and promoting independence and personal growth:

- Promote and encourage participation on the Tenant Council, contact “person” involvement, and self-help groups.
- Be responsive to direction from Tenant Council, contact “person” and self-help groups.
- Learn and provide individual supportive needs for each resident in a friendly and respectful manner.
- Provide all manner of daily living skills training such as:
 - Instruction and medication compliance
 - Daily apartment living skills
 - Social skills counseling
 - Community interaction skills
 - Personal health care
 - Nutrition counseling
- Money management counseling and assistance with financial benefit documents
- Medication and appointment reminders and prompting when necessary
- Hygiene skills training
- Assistance with public transportation
- Counsel roommates to promote compatibility and assistance to one another
- Assist with accessing all community services
- Ensure a safe living environment
- Staff uses outside training sources for group daily living skills training and workshops.



Housing and Supportive Services
of Fresno



REBECCA'S STORY:

Riding the roller coaster

I received my undergraduate and masters degrees from Northwestern University. I began my career at Madera High School teaching math for second language learners.

My supervisor, noticing that I was having some issues, recommended that I take a "mental health day." I did. I drove to L.A. and didn't come back. I was manic. I found myself in places—not knowing how I got there, living with someone in an abandoned house, and staying in a homeless shelter.

I met a man and had a little girl, Sarah. She was diagnosed with cerebral palsy. Having a child helped me find the stability I needed. I cared for her, took her to her therapies, and helped her to grow and develop. When she was about three years old, I felt the mania coming on again. My family took care of my daughter as I was hospitalized. The day I got out, I called my mom asking to see my daughter. Mom said, "You can see her tomorrow." That night my baby girl passed away.

Having mental illness feels like riding a roller coaster. The low part is complete nothingness. Then, the mania starts. At first, it's good. Then, it spirals out of control. I was hospitalized after my daughter died, and when I was released, I was referred to Housing and Supportive Services of Fresno. I moved into HASS in 1999. It changed my life. I haven't been hospitalized for eleven years.

Seven years ago, I met Daniel, a fellow HASS resident. We've been married for four years and have two adorable cats, Misty Blue and Penny. HASS has provided the foundation for me to have a job, volunteer, and build a life with my husband.



For more stories from HASS residents, please visit hassfresno.org.



Dennis Torigian
Chief Executive Officer
dennis@hassfresno.org

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