

THE IMPACT OF Project Hope Alliance

BY JULIE LEAH

Project Hope Alliance (PHA) aims to end homelessness in our community, one child at a time. When children experience housing instability, the added stress and uncertainty makes it difficult for achievement in school and in life. However, homeless children are often hidden in plain sight. "Instead of sleeping on park benches or in tents outside, they sleep in cars, motels, garages, couch surf, and often double/triple shared spaces with other families," said Jennifer Friend, CEO of Project Hope Alliance.

PHA believes in the transformative power of education and prioritize the needs of homeless children. The organization has established formal partnerships with local schools and districts, such as Newport Mesa Unified School District. Jennifer said, "We keep kids at the center and show up every day on their school campuses."

Professional case managers support students by removing barriers caused by homelessness, providing resources like food and hygiene products, and offering academic and life goal assistance through one-on-one case management. Major milestones, such as graduation, obtaining a driver's license, college acceptance, and securing a first job, are celebrated with the students.

Before leading the organization, Jennifer Friend served as a volunteer board member and has a deeply personal connection to the cause, fueled by her own experiences with homelessness. She shared that in her childhood and teen years, her family often moved between motels or stayed with friends due to housing instability. Jennifer said, "I



Editors Note:

We are proud to highlight the mural at Project Hope Alliance's Costa Mesa office, designed by local artist Jennifer Bloomfield, and painted by a group of dedicated volunteers as part of a Love Costa Mesa Day project on May 18, 2024. We at Mesa Verde Living were honored to be part of the group who helped paint the mural. This inspiring artwork symbolizes the incredible work that this local non-profit does to provide resources for homeless children in our community.

realized the purpose of my story is to lift the invisibility of more than 23,000 students experiencing homelessness in Orange County's schools and show up

for these amazing kids so they can access and excel in their education and end the cycle of generational homelessness." A former trial lawyer, Jennifer left her law firm partnership in 2013 to serve as the CEO of PHA.

Jennifer finds daily inspiration in the children she serves. "Like Mary Poppins, I truly believe that anything can happen if you let it. Every day I see the spirit of possibility in our kids and youth. Their tenacity, grit, creativity, and courage drive me to eliminate the obstacles that homelessness brings into their lives so they can dream and bring their dreams to fruition."

Despite their serious mission, PHA maintains a light-hearted approach. Jennifer shared a memorable moment, "We raised \$11,000 for the kids in 5 minutes by stuffing marshmallows in my big mouth. I was a trial lawyer, so I've naturally got a big mouth!"

The children and youth served by Project Hope Alliance are integral to our community. Jennifer emphasized, "Our children sit next to them in the classroom at Estancia High School and Tewinkle Elementary School. They play with them on the soccer field and practice music with them in the band. They are their friends. When we see them for who they are and not their housing status, it changes the way we show up for them."

How You Can Help

To learn more about Project Hope Alliance and how you can support its mission, please contact Annie Song, Director of Development, at Annie.S@ProjectHopeAlliance.org. Upcoming projects include preparing kids for the new school year, providing basic resources like food and hygiene products, and fulfilling holiday wishes during their annual Santa's Workshop.

By coming together, we can help end the cycle of homelessness and give every child the chance to succeed.



Jennifer Friend, CEO of Project Hope Alliance



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