

# Central Valley Community Foundation

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## Visalia Residents Enjoy Green Space and Affordable Housing with Smart Growth Initiative

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The need for affordable housing in California, particularly within the Central Valley, is a matter which cannot be overstated. In Fresno alone, it's estimated that at least 35,000 additional units of affordable housing are needed for thousands of families struggling to afford rent.

This problem is not unique to just one area in the Central Valley, which is why Self-Help Enterprises has worked for over 50 years to build and sustain healthy homes and communities throughout the region. Established in 1965, Self-Help Enterprises (SHE) has become a nationally-recognized community development organization and a pioneer and leading provider of mutual self-help housing in the United States, with an eight county service area based in the Central Valley. Since its inception, Self-Help Enterprises has helped more than 6,200 families build their own homes; has provided homeownership education and first-time home-buyer assistance to over 9,900 families; has rehabilitated over 6,300 unsafe homes; has developed 1,347 units of affordable rental housing; and has provided technical assistance for reliable access to safe drinking water and sanitary sewer infrastructures to more than 160 small communities. These combined efforts have touched the lives of over 55,000 families.



Self-Help Enterprises President and CEO Tom Collishaw poses with CVCF Board Member Carol Chandler at the 2016 CVCF grant awards reception.

One such effort was the establishment and implementation of Self-Help Enterprises' Smart Growth Initiative in 2016, with support from a grant from the Central Valley Community Foundation. Self-Help Enterprises has a long history of integrating healthy, sustainable, eco-friendly "green" development practices into its work while respecting the affordability needs of participants. The work of the Smart Growth Initiative was specifically intended to improve public health and the public's access to green space through the establishment of a community garden and recreation space at the affordable rental community of Highland Gardens in Visalia.



Affordable Housing Units at Highland Gardens. (Photo Credit: Self-Help Enterprises)



The Highland Gardens Community Center (Photo Credit: Self-Help Enterprises)



Children play at the new community playground. (Photo Credit: Self-Help Enterprises)



The New Recreation space Includes a half-court basketball court.(Photo Credit: Self-Help Enterprises)



Work on the community garden begins. (Photo credits: Self-Help Enterprises)



(Photo Credit: Self-Help Enterprises)



Vegetables and trees planted at the community garden. (Photo Credit: Self-Help Enterprises)



Solar Carports located next to green space at Highland Gardens. These carports provide shaded parking for residents and generate renewable energy to lower utility costs. (Photo Credit: Self-Help Enterprises)

Through a partnership with the City of Visalia, Self-Help Enterprises built Highland Gardens, a 36-unit affordable apartment rental community in North Visalia. Highland Gardens features two- and three-bedroom apartments with green technology – however, before the Smart Growth Initiative, housing units were missing some notable features: green and recreation space. With funding secured, Self-Help Enterprises accomplished its ambitious plan to develop at least 20,000 square feet of passive recreation green space, as well as a nearly 6,600 square foot community garden in Highland Gardens. In addition, the Smart Growth Initiative established resident services focused on obesity prevention and healthy cooking, the latter of which utilize the freshly-grown vegetables of the community garden.

Highland Gardens is among 28 affordable apartment rental communities operated by Self-Help Enterprises through the Central Valley, and its first in Visalia. With monthly rents determined by family size and income, Self-Help Enterprises and the City of Visalia are providing residents an affordable housing opportunity to serve the needs of hardworking, low-income families. Self-Help Enterprises Real Estate Program Director Betsy McGovern-Garcia had this to say about the grant from CVCF to support the Smart Growth Initiative:

“The funding from CVCF allowed Self-Help Enterprises to expand access to open space, develop an on-site community garden, and integrate resident services to promote healthy living and obesity prevention. Highland Gardens is a model for sustainable development and is just one example of our efforts to provide high-quality affordable housing to low-income working families in the San Joaquin Valley.”  
the San Joaquin Valley.”