

HOMEKEY 2.0 YOUTH PROJECT PROFILE

Mesa Ojai • City of Ojai, Ventura County



Project:	Mesa Ojai
Project Team:	Mesa and Ventura County
Location:	City of Ojai, Ventura County
Number of Units for Residents:	13
Number of Units Reserved for Youth:	13
Building Type:	Manufactured Housing
Occupancy Type:	Interim
Total Homekey 2.0 Award:	\$4,229,800
Opening:	December 2022

Administered by the California Department of Housing and Community Development, Homekey funds the purchase, rehabilitation, and construction of interim and permanent housing for individuals and families experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Homekey rounds two and three contain a “youth set-aside,” requiring 8% of Homekey funds to be available for projects serving homeless youth or youth at risk of homelessness.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Ventura County and its nonprofit partner Mesa have received a \$4,229,800 Homekey award during round two to develop a transitional housing and wellness center for youth on a 10-acre sustainable farm in Ojai. In addition to the existing four-bedroom residence which will house a house manager and three youth, 10 tiny homes will be built on the farm, providing housing to a total of 13 transition-age youth experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Two of the tiny homes will offer an additional bedroom and will be available to parenting youth.

In addition to housing, Mesa is establishing a wellness center with physical and mental therapeutic interventions available. Mesa is also incorporating sustainable permaculture practices into the design of the farm where youth will have the opportunity to grow and harvest their own organic food. Ongoing supportive services will be provided to each youth resident, using Mesa's holistic approach of trauma-informed programming, vocational counseling, educational support, sustainable agriculture, relationship-building, financial literacy, independent living skills, mental health and wellness, and more. The intake process will draw on the local Coordinated Entry System to identify youth.

COVID-19 had a harsh impact on Ventura County's homeless population, with the Point-In-Time count showing an increase in homelessness by approximately 25 percent following the onset of the pandemic. California State University Channel Islands saw the number of students seeking emergency basic needs resources double between March and September 2020.

Services Provided to Youth

Youth residing at Mesa Ojai will be offered a number of supportive services, including:

- Trauma-informed programming
- Vocational counselling
- Educational support
- Sustainable agriculture
- A range of therapeutic services including talk therapy, horticultural, art, and drama therapy
- Financial literacy
- Independent living skills

Founded in December of 2020, Mesa is a 501(c)3 nonprofit providing stable housing and personalized services for transition-age youth in Ventura County. Mesa's goal is to ensure every child leaving foster care or the juvenile justice system has an opportunity to succeed. Mesa aims to influence the way that services are provided to transition-age youth around the country. Mesa has partnered with the University of Notre Dame's Lab for Economic Opportunity to develop new ways to measure outcomes and will use this data to prove its impact.



Mesa's founder, Dan Parziale, recognized the historic lack of funding for addressing youth homelessness in California, and understood the value of Homekey's 8% youth set-aside: "If we are serious about ending homelessness," Parziale says, "we need to invest in preventing homelessness for those young adults who are most likely to find themselves living on the street. The youth set-aside is an important step in that direction, and we need to continue to expand this commitment."

BEHIND THE PROJECT

Ventura County provided the required matching funds, investing just over \$2 million in the project—with \$1.2 million coming from American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds and \$806,400 coming from Permanent Local Housing Allocation (PLHA) funds. As a result of the aggressive project timelines associated with Homekey, Mesa secured a \$2.6 million loan from the Ventura County Housing Trust Fund to successfully close on the project's property on time. Mesa partnered with People's Self Help Housing to aid in the application and development process.

Project partners are currently identifying funding sources to cover operating and service costs. Partners have secured \$1.4 million from their Homekey award and Ventura County to cover core operations for seven years, including food, utilities, and a house manager. The project has also raised \$250,000 from a variety of private donors and foundations including the Sparks Fund and a number of donor-advised funds through the Ventura County Community Foundation. Mesa is currently looking into local and state sources of funding to cover the remaining operating need, which may be supplemented with additional private fundraising.

The project benefitted from Ventura County's previous experience successfully applying for Homekey funding during round one. Project partners identify the tight timeline as the most significant challenge encountered in developing their Homekey project, and cite the positive, collaborative relationship between project partners as key to their success. Mesa is aiming to open by mid-December to ensure it will be eligible to receive the Homekey bonus funding offered by the California Department of Housing and Community Development, which provides an additional \$10,000 per assisted unit in operating funds to projects that achieve full occupancy within eight months of the initial award date. The two project partners intend to pursue funding through Homekey round three for an additional project serving transition-age youth.

With limited resources for transition-age youth in Ventura County, this project represents progress. Mesa hopes to expand its reach and develop additional sites reaching up to 70 total youth within the next five years.



This profile was developed by John Burton Advocates for Youth.
Thank you to Mesa and Ventura County for sharing your project with us.

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