

Bakersfield College Housing Project: An Engine for Economic Mobility

Prepared by: Bakersfield College and the Housing Authority of Kern | January 26, 2020

Bakersfield College and the Housing Authority of Kern are partnering on a \$8M housing project for homeless students as they enroll and complete a transfer degree towards baccalaureate attainment.

Our community needs housing: While homelessness among youth ages 18-24 is a national issue, it is particularly acute in Kern County. Last year, Kern County experienced a 43% increase in youth ages 18-24 who are homeless. Many currently are students of BC and even more are prospective students that are in need of housing like this to realize the next step. Through this project, Bakersfield College will fill a glaring need in the community.

The Housing Authority has the charge of providing affordable housing to all eligible residents of Kern County; yet, the waitlist stands at over 24,000. In order to address the specific needs of student populations, a creative approach is not only necessary, it is imperative.

Our students need housing: While California's Community College tuition costs are relatively low at \$46/unit, recent research indicates hidden costs of attendance significantly increase the total cost students bear while pursuing educational credentials. Non-tuition costs like transportation, food, and housing prove to be a significant barrier to certificate and degree completion.

The California Community College System distributed a survey through The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice.¹ In the March 2019 study, The Hope Center uncovered an unacceptable reality: **60% of community college students had housing insecurity in the previous year, and 19% were homeless.** What's more: First Generation college student status is strongly correlated with housing insecurity. Eighty percent of BC's students are First Generation students.

The Project: Bakersfield College and the Housing Authority of the County of Kern, along with private and public partners, are proposing to build 43 units of affordable housing for homeless students on a college-owned, vacant property just across the street. The proposed affordable housing development will be located on a 0.69 acre vacant lot directly across the street from the BC campus. It will potentially include 38 studio units and 5 two-bedroom shared housing units, serving 48 homeless students along with an onsite manager unit. In addition, the development will feature learning spaces room as well as spaces for other onsite services provided by BC.

Live, Learn, and Find Employment: To augment the strategy, Bakersfield College will create a Learning Community environment through which students live and learn in community, skilling up and gaining the knowledge they need for success in the workforce. Programming will include educational counseling, academic support, student employment, internship placement, and job placement support. Participating residents will transfer in two years or find full time employment and self-sufficiency. Bakersfield College will partner with: (1) the Bakersfield Homeless Shelter to provide wrap-around case management services, (2) CityServe to provide mentors, and (3) Employers to provide internships.

Financing: BC and the Housing authority are seeking funding to complete the \$8 million

¹ Goldrick-Rab, S., Baker-Smith, C., Coca, V, and Looker, E., (2019) *California Community Colleges #RealCollege Survey*, The Hope Center.

development. Since this project will be on land owned by the college, all plans and prevailing wage scales dictated by the California Education Code will apply and is increasing the costs over typical Housing Authority projects. This project requires innovative funding approaches to ensure we are meeting the needs of the student population regardless of the restrictions identified in traditional funding models like federal tax credits. This is a plan that not just houses some of our areas homeless, but rather addresses the challenges of homelessness and gives them the tools to be successful without ongoing assistance.

Bakersfield College and the Housing Authority request: One-time funding for the \$8 million project

This project has the potential to be replicated, improving the lives of thousands of students across the nation. This unprecedented project is more than a housing project alone; it is an engine for economic and social mobility.

At this time, endorsements include:

Louis Gill: Executive Director of the Homeless Shelter

Vince Fong: Assemblymember, California's 34th Assembly District

Robin Robinson: Pastor of Canyon Hills Church and Executive Director of CityServe

Carlos Baldovinos, Executive Director of the Mission at Kern County

Jim Wheeler, Executive Director of Flood Bakersfield Ministries