OCCHC/SteppingUP celebrated its 38th year committed to housing Orange County’s homeless in 2015. Under the guidance of our amazing Board of Directors, we continue to work “to transition extremely low-income families towards greater self-sufficiency by assisting them with HOUSING and EDUCATION”. We are deeply appreciative to our Board Chair, Yesenia Ochoa, who led our success over the years and will pass the gavel to Father Edward Poettgen in 2016. We also would like to thank our generous supporters for championing our cause in providing a better future for at-risk youth and families throughout Orange County over the past year.

In 2015, OCCHC/SteppingUP continued to own and manage 226 apartments housing families comprising of 1,073 individuals (605 adults and 468 children) who were once part of Orange County’s homeless population and are now provided with the program services crucial to breaking the cycle of poverty. We continued our efforts with new ETHIC where 84 additional affordable housing units will be built adjacent to The Great Park in Irvine in 2016, rehabilitated our 9-unit building in Huntington Beach dedicated to housing single parents pursuing a higher education, collaborated with Veterans First and Volunteers of America to house and assist veteran families dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and created affordable housing opportunities for Orange County’s developmentally disabled population with the provision of 12 affordable units for Community Housing Resources, Inc.

Since SteppingUP's inception in 2003, Family Mentoring has assisted 57 families in becoming first time homeowners and has grown to serving 1,600 individuals annually. The College Awareness Program, also known as CAP, has maintained its commitment to reducing the high school dropout rate in Orange County and encouraging higher education for at-risk youth since 2006. The program has served 1,339, 6-12th grade students of extremely low-income families with 185 students graduating high school on time and continuing onto college. CAP has grown to serve 450 annually, provided 320 students with SAT/ACT Testing Services and will celebrate its 10th anniversary in 2016.

Affordable Housing

In 2015, OCCHC transitioned 117 individuals of 30 families from homelessness to housing including a family of 6, headed by a single father whose wife lost her battle to cancer, and a veteran with a family of 8 who lost his job shortly after returning home. Both families suffered from the instability of housing from living in a motel or from living in their car. Like many of our families, they came to our apartments from substandard housing, which left the family with a need for substantial rehabilitation - socially, financially and educationally. Over the past year, efforts on housing Orange County’s homeless families and providing them with Family Mentoring led to the service of approximately 1,600 at-risk individuals with one-on-one assistance, referrals, budgeting, credit counseling, financial literacy and also included:

- transitioning 117 individuals of 30 families from motels, shelters and substandard living to our affordable housing building upon the continuum of care for at-risk families
- 66 families receiving one-on-one mentoring in financial literacy, budgeting and credit counseling needed to provide a stable environment for their children during times of economic hardship where 6% of our families showed an increase in their income, 5% opened a new checking/savings account, 10% improved their credit scores and 30% individuals improved their budgeting and banking skills.
- 49 workshops were provided to over 500 adults educating on topics such as financial aid, suicide/teen dating, financial literacy, ESL, cancer awareness, health, drug and gang prevention, the 4 systems of higher education, sex education and prepare for college.
- providing its 2nd annual Holiday Cheer event to over 100 guests and received 351 toys from the OC Toy Collaborative delivering them to families just in time for the holidays.

In addition, 18 families obtained self-sufficiency and transitioned to market rate housing with 15 families completing homeownership seminars and 2 families becoming a first-time homeowner.

“I was about to be homeless with myself, my husband and my children. I had called everywhere possible to see who could help me. I was so scared and had 72 hours to find a home but no one could help me. Not only were we blessed with a beautiful two-bedroom condo but the team at OCCHC/SteppingUP showed us how to budget our income and helped our children prepare for college.”

- Katherine D.
OCCHC/SteppingUP’s College Awareness Program (CAP) expanded to serving 450 students as a result of our generous donors. We are pleased to share that each of our 22 seniors graduated high school on time with 100% of them stepping up to college in the Fall of 2015. Of the 22 students, 15 are currently attending a 4-year university with the remaining 7 at a 2-year college. CAP provided weekly academic advising to 450 students with 40 events through the help of over 25 CAP Alumni and 12 college interns from local colleges that included:

- 7 CAP meetings at each of our 3 sites in Huntington Beach, Buena Park and Garden Grove focusing on topics including race relations, financial literacy, conflict & resolution & healthy living, financial aid/scholarships and more.
- two 6-week Summer Academies series focused on STEM and Leadership to motivate and expose students to pursue and education and/or career with STEM and inspire students to become active leaders and make a positive impact within their communities, and 3 community events at its very own Oak View neighborhood for a community cleanup and volunteering at the El Modena Senior Center.
- Literacy Campaign on Revolutionary Readers brought together 45 students who discussed literature on a weekly basis engaging in group discussions, activities and projects to improve reading comprehension, critical thinking, and vocabulary while gaining the skills necessary for success at a college.
- 4 college campus tours to UCLA, Chapman University, Soka and UCI in addition to 6 educational excursions including a Global Compassion Summit, Critical Conversations at Soka University, Fishing Trip, Raza Youth Conference and the Museum of Tolerance.
- CAP’s annual Career Day exposed students to professionals where academic advisors prepare students in creating resumes, reviewing interview tips, professional attire and mock interview sessions.
- CAP students, advisors, alumni and parents organized OC Giving Day raising over $10,000 in support of our future.
- SteppingUP’s Scholar Savings Program was created in 2010 with a Sunwest Bank donation and continues to encourage students to save for their college education where SteppingUP will match for every dollar saved up to $500.00 each year. We now have 83 active students that have contributed $73,616 towards their future. Thirty-five of those students are currently in college with the remaining 48 saving for their future education.

CAP now celebrates 185 graduates who continued onto higher education after completing high school. Of those, 7% of our CAP Alumni have completed their post-secondary education, 49% are currently attending a 4-year university with 43% attending a community college and the remaining 1% in trade school or members of the Military.

SteppingUP’s Testing Services component exceeded its goal of serving 250 by serving just over 320 students through 10 cohorts of students while collaborating with additional nonprofits such as AISS, El Viento, and Girls, Inc., Upward Bound at CSULB, Educational Talent Search at CSUF, Boys & Girls Club-Santa Ana, Think Together at Santa Ana High School and Think Together at Century High School. Results showed an average increase for students of 137 points on the SAT, with the highest increase at 500 points, the highest score achieved at 2170. The highest merit based scholarship was received by Mathew whose motivation and resiliency was rewarded with a sizable increase in his SAT super-score, making him eligible for the lucrative scholarships. We are happy to announce that Mathew was awarded a $60,000 scholarship over 4 years from Chapman University, where he is currently a freshman.

"I have been a part of CAP for more than a third of my life and I am forever grateful to them. They are a second family to me. It didn't matter if I needed guidance in academics or life in general; they were always there for me. I wouldn't have found a college that best suits me, yet alone, attend one if it wasn't for this amazing program."

- Sandra, CAP Alumni, 3rd year student California Polytechnic State University, Mechanical Engineering