

PropelNext In Action

Bill Wilson Center

Bill Wilson Center in Santa Clara County, California connects youth and their families to education, employment, housing, and positive relationships. Specifically targeting youth and young adults up to age 25 and their families, the organization's goal is to ensure every youth has access to the range of services needed to grow to be healthy and self-sufficient adults. "We're working to prevent poverty in the next generation by connecting youth to needed support and services – housing, education, and employment services," said CEO Sparky Harlan.

"We have a pretty big vision," Harlan said. "We're working on trying to end youth and family homelessness."

As the only homeless youth service provider in Santa Clara County, Bill Wilson Center's range of nearly 40 services includes transitional housing, rapid re-housing, emergency housing, and permanent supported housing. The organization also offers counseling, foster

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propelnext

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care, LGBTQ-specific services, medical and mental health services, street outreach, a drop-in center, and a 24/7 crisis hotline.

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Through PropelNext, Bill Wilson Center is rethinking the organization and articulation of its different types of housing programs to ensure a system of consistent implementation and quality control. According to Harlan, Bill Wilson Center is consolidating its housing descriptions to clarify it provides a variety of transitional housing services to different populations in need.

Specifically, Bill Wilson Center is working with PropelNext on their rapid re-housing program, a type of transitional housing that aims first to house youth and then provide supports to transition to self-sufficiency. This is important not only for quality control and standardizing services in the present but

also for charting a path for the future of the organization. “What PropelNext is doing is helping us pick one model and really break the model down so, no matter what staff person we might hire, we’re training them on the same program or base of services for each young person,” explained Harlan.

As an organization that started with a \$300K budget that has grown to \$25M, Bill Wilson Center has evolved over time, and not necessarily with a clear theory of change guiding the evolution. For Harlan, who’s been with Bill Wilson Center for 36 years, PropelNext is in part a strategic planning process and professional development opportunity for her staff to understand the building blocks for a successful future.

“As I look at retirement in a few years, what is it that Bill Wilson Center really needs to take us to the next 36 years?” she said. I’m using PropelNext to develop my staff, asking them how they would build a brand-new program from scratch and make these decisions after I leave.”

PropelNext is a program of the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation that helps promising nonprofits convert their passion for serving disadvantaged youth into data-driven insights and practices that increase their impact on young people’s lives. This is a look into Bill Wilson Center, a PropelNext grantee in their Northern California 2021 cohort, and the organization’s experience thus far in the program. The Sobrato Family Foundation is the co-investor for Bill Wilson Center.