



California Community Colleges

SYSTEM WEBINAR SUMMARY:

SHARING THE CCC STORY (January 2022)

The primary item on the agenda was an innovative effort at Imperial Valley College (IVC) to provide housing for former foster youth, homeless students, and those at risk of homelessness, an effort featured in a [recent episode](#) of PBS KVIE's series on community colleges for its Inside California Education segment.

What is the Lotus Living Community?

- The community is a collection of approximately 26 [“tiny homes”](#) located about 5 miles from IVC's campus. Each unit is 170 square feet, and includes a kitchenette, bathroom, closet, washer/dryer unit, bed, and desk.
- Students pay \$200 per month, with a goal of allowing students to work only part-time and focus on their studies. They are required to perform 10 hours per month of community service maintenance work on the premises as part of their rental agreement.

How Did IVC Develop and Implement the Program?

- Lotus Living Community resulted from a partnership among IVC, the Imperial Valley College Foundation (IVCF), and the City of El Centro. It was initiated by Dr. Martha Garcia, former president of IVC, who approached local government officials and representatives of various local nonprofit organizations about ways to support students experiencing housing insecurity.
- After considering several options (e.g., renovating a hotel), the partner agencies chose the tiny home approach as the most cost effective, allowing them to create structures that can last for 60 years with affordable maintenance costs.
- The project was built on a one-acre city-owned parcel of land, which was leased for 55 years to IVCF. The city's emergency declaration due to the pandemic facilitated an expedited procurement process, and several other entities expedited their processes to ensure timely completion (e.g., utility providers). IVC and IVCF will be responsible for operations, maintenance and repair for the length of the lease, and have worked with California Joint Powers Insurance Authority to properly insure the project and its operation.
- The \$3 million cost for construction was covered by a \$2.6 million grant from the state's [Homekey Program](#) and \$458,000 of [Homeless Emergency Aid Program](#) funds awarded by Imperial County. [Enterprise Community](#) granted over \$500,000 to cover two years of operational costs.

How is the Program Supporting Student Success?

- The community includes Resident Assistants, who are on call to support students and make referrals to tutoring and other needed services. Each student meets one-on-one with the housing director monthly to help IVC identify additional needs.
- Staff make intentional efforts to have students engage with each other to develop a network of support, including hosting recreational activities at least monthly.
- Placement of the community was intentional, using a parcel of land conveniently located near major retail stores and other services. The city added a bus stop directly in front of the community to facilitate students' transportation.
- According to IVC President Lennor Johnson, housing stability has had an impact on the success of student residents. Their persistence rate is about 90%, exceeding the 70-75% rate for the college overall. Residents' GPAs were generally in the 1.5 – 2.0 range at the time they moved in, but the average is now 2.5 and some residents are approaching graduation.

What Advice Is Offered for Other Colleges?

- Work with your Board of Trustees and partner with local government and community organizations to make it a collective effort of the community to support students. Take the time to get solid partnerships in place.
- Design the project with student input by using questions on your application, student surveys, and focus groups to identify the resources students need to be successful.
- Avoid any effort to create a revenue-generating project; rather, keep the focus on meeting students' basic needs.
- Understand the challenges students are facing to shift from homelessness or housing insecurity to focusing on their education, and provide services that give them the confidence to go beyond the daily struggle to meet basic needs. As one student put it, "Don't just stick us in a house and expect us to be successful."

What State/System Resources are Available?

- The Board of Governors' Affordable Student Housing Taskforce is developing a comprehensive student housing framework and will present recommendations by November 2022 to maximize the state's [Student Housing Grants](#) (SB 169, 2021).
- Applications for the first round of funding were due in fall 2021, but there will be two more rounds in 2022 and 2023. The Department of Finance will review applications and make recommendations for funding during the budget cycle.