

Alice's story: Getting out of hoarding conditions and back with family

Alice was a longtime Costa Mesa resident who lived in uninhabitable conditions until the City and the Network for Homeless Solutions worked together to change her life for the good.

Today, Alice is living in an assisted living facility in San Diego close to her family and children but her journey and eventual success didn't come easy.

Alice lived in a home on the Westside, but years of hoarding turned the residence into an unsafe and crowded place. Indeed, after she took a fall and placed a call for service, firefighters could barely clear a path of travel to help her.

Fire crews explained to Alice, who was a senior, that she needed to address the unsafe living conditions. But they also took it a step further and contacted one of her sons to let him know what was going on. The family told fire crews they had been urging Alice to leave her home and move to more suitable living conditions for several years. They welcomed any help that Costa Mesa Fire & Rescue could offer to convince their mother that it was time to leave her longtime home.

Fire & Rescue leaders didn't stop there. They filed an Adult Protective Services report and contacted Senior Code Enforcement Officer Mike Brumbaugh, who specializes in these types of cases.

Brumbaugh recognized that Alice was at risk of losing her home and becoming homeless, so he enlisted help from the City's Network for Homeless Solutions and its multiple partners and he laid out a strategic plan to alleviate the hoarding

conditions. All the while, Brumbaugh kept in close contact with Alice's three sons.

The family immediately re-launched a conversation with their mover about moving nearer to them in the San Diego area and even made plans to visit with her the next week to accompany her to a medical appointment and assess her living conditions.

Brumbaugh sought the help of Community Outreach Worker John Begin, who is also an employee of Trellis, a faith-based organization that is part of the Network for Homeless Solutions.

Begin, who has an extensive pastoral counseling background, worked with both Alice and her family. As a result of these new trusting relationships, arrangements were made with Alice and her family to hire a tree trimmer to remove excess foliage around her home, which was attracting rodents.

The work had to be approved by Alice, who now felt she had community partners she could rely on and that she was included in a "team approach" to resolve her unsafe living conditions.

Despite cooperating with both her family and the City, Alice was still confused. She called Brumbaugh repeatedly and asked why all the improvements needed to be made.

Alice was concerned about the cost of rent for a place in San Diego. Brumbaugh continually reassured her that cleaning up the property would be a long project, but it was urgent to get her into a safer, healthier environment and avoid having the property turned over to a receiver.

Brumbaugh worked with Alice and her family to set a schedule for completion of the clean up and improvements and Begin continually assured her to keep moving forward with both the property improvements and preparation for a move to San Diego. They both told Alice that her family cared deeply for her and wanted to help better her life. Alice agreed.

So late last year, she moved out of her longtime Costa Mesa home and into an assisted living apartment in San Diego.

The family is working on repairing both the exterior and interior of the Costa Mesa home and is grateful to all responsible for making Alice aware of her health and safety concerns and the importance of moving her to a new healthier and safer environment.

Thanks to Code Enforcement Officer Mike Brumbaugh, Costa Mesa Fire & Rescue, Outreach Worker John Begin and the Network for Homeless Solutions for helping get a life back on the right path.

For more, please visit our website at www.costamesaca.gov/homelessness.