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HOUSING

HEART loan program helps families buy affordable mobile homes in San Mateo County

'It's a tiny house, but in no way is it tiny to us'



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William lives with his family of four in this mobile home near Redwood City. The family received a low-interest loan from a San Mateo

County nonprofit to purchase the home. Photo by William.

After living in a cramped RV for a year with his family of four, 30-year-old William and his family became the owners of a mobile home through a nonprofit program that issues low-interest loans to qualifying San Mateo County residents.

William, who declined to give his last name for privacy reasons, is one of 18 families to receive a mobile home loan from the San Mateo County Housing Endowment and Regional Trust, a nonprofit that aims to increase the supply of affordable housing by providing financing and loans to developers and residents.

San Mateo County real estate is some of the most expensive in the country. Amid a shortage of affordable housing, mobile homes serve as one housing option for residents priced out of traditional rentals and homeownership. In 2024, the nonprofit, known as HEART, launched a pilot program that offers the loans to residents of mobile home parks in unincorporated parts of San Mateo County.

William lives with his younger sister and his parents. They recently moved into their mobile home at the Sequoia Trailer Park near Redwood City, where they had been living in an RV for the previous year. Before that, they had lived in an apartment that William's father managed until declining health from kidney disease made him too tired to work. The family's new home, William said, is an improvement over the RV because it's much warmer and has a far better bathroom.

"We feel really grateful because the insulation [and] the walls are thicker, so it's less cold in the winter compared to last year," William said. "Having a residential shower, a toilet... it feels like you're just grateful to God."

Alex Waggoner, a program manager for HEART, said the loan program was created in response to demand from residents seeking to move out of substandard, out-of-compliance housing and into safer units.

"They were cooking meals on a hot plate, where moisture built up," Waggoner said. "They had to have their clothes in specialized bags to avoid having them ruined. [There were] people sleeping [with] many, many folks in one room."

HEART observed that many residents struggled to find affordable loan options because loans for mobile homes are frequently treated as car loans, which come with significantly higher interest rates. The organization partnered with San Mateo County, which provided \$2 million in Measure K funding to launch the program. The average cost of a new mobile home is \$100,000, meaning the nonprofit could offer 20 loans to families. Through the program, households earning as little as \$40,000 can qualify for loans up to \$100,000, with interest rates between 0.25% to 1% for a 30-year term. The homes can be delivered in as little

as two months, Waggoner said.

Besides an income maximum of 80% of area median income, the only other financial qualification for the program is that the family's debt burden – from the mobile home loan, land rent, and any other obligations – could not surpass 30% of their income. While families will own the mobile home once they pay off the loan, they continue renting the space in the park where it sits.

While 18 of the 20 available loans have been issued, two loans are still available. Waggoner said interested families can find out more information about the program on HEART's [website](#). HEART is also looking to expand the program with additional funding sources in San Mateo County, other municipalities, and some foundations. And as loans are repaid, HEART plans to reissue the funds to other families, creating a revolving loan pool.

For William's family, the new home is not only much more comfortable and home-like, but also provides a respite for his dad, who is still battling kidney disease. Though the home is small, William said it offers a better environment for his dad to rest and for the family to prepare healthy meals in the kitchen. It also includes a larger bedroom that can accommodate his father's catheter.

"The space is incredible. And mentally for my dad, I know that it has helped him with his health as well," William said. "It's a tiny house, but in no way is it tiny to us. It's very spacious and very welcoming,"