

BEYOND Affordability

How CHIP's Maple Park Apartments in Live Oak help seniors find their community

BY RAUL CLEMENT

Skyrocketing inflation has made it harder than ever for California residents to afford housing. This is even more true for seniors, who are more likely than younger Californians to be on a fixed income. According to the UC Berkeley Labor Center, roughly one in four senior households face a "housing cost burden," defined as spending more than 30% of their income on housing.

Fortunately for residents in seven counties in the Central Valley, an organization exists to ease their burden. Community Housing Improvement Program, known as CHIP, has been in operation since 1973 and has built more than 2,600 housing units.

One of CHIP's most recent ventures is Maple Park Apartments in Live Oak, California. An apartment for low-income families opened in 2013, and in April of 2016 a 35-unit community for seniors aged 55 and up followed. Every unit in Maple Park Senior Apartments is now full and the wait list can be years long.

The reason for that is obvious to Maple Park residents Sheila Pitts, Stephanie Smith, and Ramona Tabares.

"You won't hear anyone here say they're looking to move," Stephanie Smith says confidently.

Part of this is the affordability: Rent is determined by income. Smith, Pitts, and Tabares all pay between \$215 and \$258, an amount that would be unfathomable in standard

unsubsidized housing. Smith lived in the Bay Area for 13 years, paying over \$1600 a month for a tiny two-bedroom. Most of the units in Maple Park Apartments are one-bedroom, but they are spacious and come with a dishwasher and central air and heat. An elevator makes access easy, even on the third floor. A shared laundry facility is just across the parking lot in the family apartments. There is a reading room as well as a game room.

But more than amenities, it's the sense of community that keeps Maple Park seniors happy.

Residents engage in regular community activities, from movie night to bingo night to seminars.

"We do cake and ice cream for birthdays," Sheila Pitts says. "We don't want to miss anybody. If we know their birthday's coming, we're having cake and ice cream."

Ramona Tabares, who was homeless when she was finally admitted into Maple Park in 2019, appreciates the way residents look out for each other.

"If they know you're sick, they'll come over and bring you food. They'll ask you if you need anything. Do you need a ride? Do you need food?"

"We're like one big family here," Pitts adds. "We welcome everybody."

This sense of care extends to the CHIP employees who manage the property. An on-site manager makes sure that

"Inflation is coming. Backwards, upside down and sideways. I might gripe about the cost of gas and groceries. But as for my rent? You'd have to drag me up out of here."

Stephanie Smith
Maple Park Apartments
resident



Maple Park residents pictured top-bottom, Stephanie Smith, Sheila Pitts, and Ramona Tabares
PHOTOGRAPHY BY RAY LAAGER

everything is in working order, while a part-time services coordinator helps arrange activities.

"If something breaks, they fix it right away," Tabares says. "It's beautiful."

While the wait list is long, Pitts, Smith, and Tabares all agree that the best thing for seniors to do is to put their name on the list and call regularly to check on their application. Something will eventually open up, and when it does, you'll find yourself with at least one less worry.

"Inflation is coming," Smith says. "Backwards, upside down and sideways. I might gripe about the cost of gas and groceries. But as for my rent? You'd have to drag me up out of here."

For more information about CHIP rentals in Butte, Glenn, Tehama, Shasta, Sutter and Yuba counties, see <https://chiphousing.org/rentals>