

# 2023-24 ANNUAL REPORT



**COUNTY of VENTURA**  
Human Services Agency

# COUNTY OF VENTURA BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

DISTRICT 1  
Matt LaVere

DISTRICT 2  
Jeff Gorell

DISTRICT 3  
Kelly Long

DISTRICT 4  
Janice S. Parvin

DISTRICT 5  
Vianey Lopez

## COUNTY EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Dr. Sevet Johnson

## HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY DIRECTOR

Melissa Livingston

### 2023-24 REVENUE

**\$296.8 million**

FEDERAL & STATE FUNDS

**\$45.0 million**

COUNTY FUNDS

**\$341.8 million**

TOTAL

### 2023-24 EXPENDITURES

**\$168.6 million**

STAFF SALARIES & BENEFITS

**\$134.6 million**

DIRECT CLIENT ASSISTANCE

**\$38.6 million**

SERVICES & SUPPLIES

**\$341.8 million**

TOTAL

# TABLE OF CONTENTS



## Director's Message

4

## 2023-24 Highlights

6

## Value: Respect for Community Voice

8

## Value: Collaborative & Integrated Services

10

## Value: Employee Engagement

12

## Value: Equitable Services, Policies & Practices

14

## Value: Healing-Centered Best Practice

16

## Value: Continuous Learning & Improvement

18

# DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

**A**s I prepare to retire as director of the Human Services Agency (HSA) in April 2025, I recall my first day in 1980 as a student worker navigating a large and complex organization, at the time called the Public Social Services Agency. My first impressions of the agency were impactful. Observing the workforce's commitment to serving our most vulnerable and disadvantaged communities instilled in me the importance of public service. As I reflect upon my nearly 45 years of service, the most memorable moments are those working alongside the workforce, county partners, community-based organizations, and providers to make a collective impact on the well-being of Ventura County residents.

Although a large organization, we can't do this important work alone. It takes true partnerships and a value system grounded in collaboration and integrated services; respect for community voice; employee engagement; equitable services, policies and practices; healing-centered best practice; and continuous learning and improvement. I have always felt strongly that we have to be the best we can be as individual contributors and team/organizational contributors so that our residents receive the most exemplary services. They deserve the best service that is accessible, equitable and addresses the diverse and unique needs of each and every child, youth, adult, senior and family.

Over my past five years as director, HSA has embarked upon a significant cultural change effort given the lessons learned from the pandemic that most specifically highlighted challenges and inequities born by disadvantaged communities, and how our systems, policies and practices contributed to these challenges. Together, we have become more inclusive as an agency,







listening to the voice of our community and workforce, and cultivating systems, supports and pathways that enable our staff to deliver the highest quality services. We've made significant strides in building a collaborative, human-centered and equitable environment, and I'm proud of the work we've done together. Whether we were responding to a world-changing pandemic or building a Child, Youth and Family Wellness System, our efforts have always been guided by a commitment to meeting the complex needs of our diverse community.

Throughout my career, I have stayed true to the mission, benefiting from the many relationships and partnerships forged. The many lessons learned along the way have enriched my life in ways I never imagined. Although there are so many defining moments in my career that have been transformational, the most recent is the commitment to HSA's Emerging Leaders Program, more fondly referred to as ELP, where employees across the agency look at a variety of topics from a values-based lens. Leadership happens daily at all levels of the agency, and encouraging that leadership to step up, share their voice, share their ideas, and put their ideas into practice opens the door to limitless opportunities and possibilities. As I step into retirement, I do so with confidence, knowing that there are emerging leaders at all levels of the agency who are ready to step up in new and innovative ways to carry our mission forward.

This final annual report as director highlights the many ways HSA has fulfilled its mission and values over the past year. It's a testament to the dedication and passion of every member of our team. I'm deeply grateful for the opportunity to have served in this capacity, and I'm excited to see the continued progress that will unfold in the years to come.

Thank you for your unwavering commitment to our clients, our community and to each other. Together, we'll continue to make a lasting impact and create opportunities for a better future for all residents of Ventura County.

With heartfelt gratitude,

Melissa Livingston  
Director, County of Ventura Human Services Agency

# 2023-24 HIGHLIGHTS

**HELPED**  
**237,754**

clients receive health coverage benefits through Medi-Cal

**HELPED**  
**78,199**

individuals supplement their diets with CalFresh benefits



**HELPED**  
**9,651**

individuals receive In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS)



**HELPED**  
**7,966**

families meet basic needs through California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs)

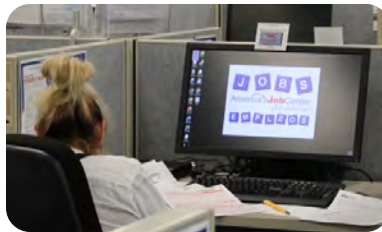
**RESPONDED TO**  
**6,661**

allegations of adult abuse

**PROVIDED SERVICES TO**

**6,225**

job seekers and other visitors at America's Job Center of California



**PROVIDED**  
**3,603**

services to employers in manufacturing, healthcare, agriculture, construction and more

**INVESTIGATED**  
**2,790**

reports of suspected child abuse or neglect

**FACILITATED**  
**60**  
adoptions

**HELPED**  
**340**

individuals gain permanent housing through Homeless Services



**HELPED**  
**142**

families reunify/ remain together



**FILED**  
**6,676**

compensation and pension claims on behalf of veterans and their families





In 2021, we embarked on a transformative journey to redefine our mission, vision and values in response to evolving challenges. Recognizing the importance of adapting our approach to better serve our county's diverse population, we engaged in foundational planning to create a more collaborative, human-centric and effective framework for our agency.

Through a series of surveys, discussions and strategy sessions, we gathered over 1,000 ideas from clients, team members, community partners and stakeholders. This extensive input guided the creation of a refreshed framework for HSA, focused on collaboration, human-centric service delivery, and a commitment to equity and effectiveness.

Today, we are fully engaged in implementing these values across all levels of our agency. This report highlights the many ways in which we are living out our mission and values, demonstrating our ongoing dedication to transforming our services in meaningful ways that positively impact the lives of those we serve.



## Our Mission

Working together in every community to offer support, hope and opportunity for improved well-being

## Our Vision

Empowered and thriving communities where all have opportunities for better futures

## Our Values

- Respect for Community Voice
- Collaborative & Integrated Services
- Employee Engagement
- Equitable Services, Policies & Practices
- Healing-Centered Best Practice
- Continuous Learning & Improvement

# VALUE: RESPECT FOR COMMUNITY VOICE

*We are dedicated to delivering services that respect and include the unique voices within our community.*

**T**his year, we have taken significant steps to ensure that our services are reflective of the needs and experiences of the community we serve.

One way we ensure that community members served by HSA are heard and included in decision-making is through formal advisory committees. Both the **IHSS Public Authority Advisory Committee** and the **VCAAA Advisory Council** play vital roles in representing and advocating for some of the most vulnerable members of our community. These committees are essential in ensuring that the voices of older adults, people with disabilities, and caregivers are heard and that their needs are met through effective, inclusive service delivery.

## **IHSS Public Authority Advisory Committee**

The IHSS Public Authority Advisory Committee has been instrumental in advocating for the needs of IHSS clients and providers. The primary responsibility of the committee is to provide client input and recommendations regarding policy development and funding decisions for the IHSS program. This year, the committee focused on program improvements and initiatives, and navigating the ever-evolving state legal and policy changes impacting IHSS. By fostering a more inclusive environment and encouraging diverse voices, the committee works to ensure that all stakeholders are actively involved in the decision-making process.

## **Ventura County Area Agency on Aging (VCAAA) Advisory Council**

The VCAAA Advisory Council remains a strong advocate for older adults, people with disabilities, and caregivers. By participating in strategic planning and community engagement, council committees contribute to several key initiatives, including optimal aging, transportation, workforce, housing, and senior nutrition and health.



The council also played a pivotal role in identifying gaps in services for older adults and advocating for additional resources to address these needs. Through collaboration with local organizations and service providers, the council has helped ensure that older adults in Ventura County have access to the support they need to age with dignity and independence.





## Building a Child, Youth and Family Wellness System

We're focused on creating services that are collaborative, culturally responsive, and accessible to all. This year, our efforts have centered on actionable steps that bring this vision closer to reality.

### CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION

Partnerships with schools, healthcare providers, and local organizations have been critical in developing a more integrated support system for children and families. By working together, we are able to provide comprehensive services that address both immediate needs and long-term wellness.



### PARENT PARTNER VOICE

Central to our approach has been the inclusion of parent partners—individuals who have navigated the system themselves and now use their experiences to guide and support other families. This year, parent partners have played a pivotal role in shaping our services, advocating for families, and ensuring that their voices are heard at every level of decision-making. Their contributions have been instrumental in making our programs more responsive and effective.

### COMMUNITY PATHWAYS: EVERY RIGHT DOOR/NO WRONG DOOR

A cornerstone of our wellness system is the “Every Right Door/No Wrong Door” initiative, which shifts the focus from crisis-driven responses to proactive, community-based support. By leveraging trusted community sites as access points, families can receive the help they need in environments that are familiar and welcoming. This approach ensures that no matter where a family seeks help, they are connected to the right resources.

Through these initiatives, we are building a wellness system that not only meets the needs of our community but is also shaped by the community itself.

# VALUE: COLLABORATIVE & INTEGRATED SERVICES

*We believe in the power of collaboration and integration to meet the complex needs of those we serve.*

**T**his year, we worked closely with our partners and within our teams to ensure that HSA services are coordinated, accessible and client-centered.

## Client Navigation Program

Building on the [Resource Navigator Program](#) launched in 2022, HSA's Client Navigation Program is at the forefront of the agency's efforts to provide comprehensive and coordinated support to individuals and families. After extensive training, resource specialists guide clients through the complexities of accessing services, addressing barriers, and achieving stability.



## Pilots in Community Services and Children & Family Services

In 2024, the Community Access & Engagement (CAE) department's client navigation team launched two significant pilot programs in collaboration with the Community Services (CSD) and Children & Family Services (CFS) departments. These pilots were designed to address the needs of high-risk clients by providing tailored support and ensuring these clients have access to the services they require and are too often unable to obtain.

- **CSD PILOT:** Launched in May 2024, this pilot focuses on serving high-needs clients at two key sites: the Telephone Road building in Ventura and America's Job Center of California in Oxnard. Resource specialists provide assistance with housing, food insecurity, and other urgent needs. Early successes have highlighted the critical importance of connecting clients to stabilizing resources within HSA, partner agencies and community-based organizations.
- **CFS PILOT:** Launched in June 2024, this pilot serves clients in the [Neighbors Together](#) and Family Preservation programs. Resource specialists work closely with families to provide support tailored to their specific situations, helping ensure stability and prevent crises.



## New Office at The Palms-Oxnard

In July 2024, HSA opened a new facility at The Palms in Oxnard, now home to the [Veteran Services Office](#), [Farmworker Resource Program](#), and [RAIN Bridge Housing Program](#). More than 40% of HSA clients reside in Oxnard, and this new location will help us expand in-person services and meet clients where they are. Increasing community access points in Oxnard is part of HSA's broader strategy, following the repurposing of the former Vanguard facility.

As HSA continues to grow into this new office space, we will offer a range of services to individuals, children and families that promote well-being, provide access to basic supports, and facilitate linkage to career services. We also plan to pursue partnerships with organizations in the immediate area that offer healthcare, immigration, social security, employment and other support services. The Palms represents a critical investment in the community, providing essential services that empower individuals to thrive and achieve stability.



## Evolution of RAIN Transitional Living Center

2024 marked a significant shift for the RAIN Transitional Living Center (TLC). After many years of providing critical support to individuals and families experiencing homelessness, RAIN TLC transitioned from a congregate housing model to a Bridge Housing program that serves families in scattered-site motel room and master-lease apartment settings throughout Ventura County. This change was driven by a commitment to better serve the community by providing more flexible, responsive housing solutions that meet the diverse needs of vulnerable populations. The new Bridge Housing model offers increased privacy as well as continued support, ensuring that families receive the help they need to transition to permanent housing.

While the program is based at The Palms-Oxnard office, RAIN team members continue to be field-based, meeting at locations most convenient for clients.



# VALUE: EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

*Our workforce is our most valued asset, and we are committed to creating an environment where all employees feel valued, heard and supported.*

**T**his year, we invested in the growth and development of our staff, ensuring they have the tools and opportunities to reach their full potential.

## Emerging Leaders Program Cohort 2

HSA's Emerging Leaders Program (ELP) is an eight-month voluntary training initiative designed to prepare employees for future leadership roles while also bolstering their ability to lead within their current roles. Open to all staff, the program combines mentorship, values-based training, and hands-on project work. On May 15, participants in Cohort 2 celebrated their graduation after presenting their research and recommendations on advancing HSA's strategic initiatives. This program not only enhances participants' leadership capabilities but also contributes valuable insights to the agency's ongoing efforts. By engaging voices at all levels of the organization and making changes based on this feedback, we open our minds to new ways and approaches to how work is performed and how we can better service the community.







## Inclusive Leadership Behaviors and Employee Surveys

At HSA, we emphasize the importance of inclusive leadership behaviors, which include empowerment, conflict competence, respect, fairness, approachability, discretion and judiciousness. These behaviors are integral to fostering an inclusive environment where all voices are valued, and team members feel safe to share their ideas and concerns.



To ensure that these values are embedded throughout the agency, we conducted employee surveys focused on engaging staff around these leadership behaviors, as well as on the strategic plan and collaboration both within HSA and with external partners. These surveys provided valuable feedback that is being used to guide our ongoing efforts to create a more inclusive and collaborative workplace. The insights gained from these surveys are helping us strengthen our organizational culture and improve how we work together to achieve our mission.

## Career-Centered Conversations

Recognizing team members' needs to grow and learn as they manage their career paths, HSA has implemented training that helps supervisors engage in ongoing career-centered conversations (aka stay interviews). Stay interviews provide an opportunity for team members to speak to their supervisor about their job, the organization, and their future. In addition to gaining valuable feedback—including what team members may need to further invest in the agency's mission-focused work—these conversations help supervisors identify and create career development plans that align with team members' strengths, interests and goals.

# VALUE: EQUITABLE SERVICES, POLICIES & PRACTICES

*We are committed to ensuring that our services, policies and practices are informed by a thoughtful commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion.*

**T**his year, we focused on creating equitable access and outcomes for all, both within our agency and in the community we serve.

## Community Emergency Access Assessment

Disasters impact some community members more than others. To address these differences and enhance safety, HSA launched a grant-funded initiative to identify the needs of people with disabilities and other access and functional needs during all phases of a disaster.

In the fall of 2023, a survey was distributed directly to thousands of these community members. Of the 881 people who completed the survey, 47% said they feel prepared for emergencies, and identify evacuating animals, gathering medication, and the need to coordinate location and reunification with others as the most common reasons complicating or delaying evacuation. HSA and local partners are holding various listening sessions and town hall meetings across Ventura County to ensure the data collected reflects community experiences.

A final report, expected by the end of 2024, will identify and evaluate gaps in community emergency access and facilitate future recommendations for improvement. Our goal is to ensure all community members have equitable access to emergency information, resources and services.







## VCAAA Job Fair 2024

In January 2024, the Workforce Committee of the VCAAA Advisory Council organized a pioneering job fair in conjunction with the annual Wellness Fest hosted by the Goebel Adult Community Center in Thousand Oaks. The event was specifically designed to support older adults, many of whom have faced significant challenges in the job market, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Over 400 participants, primarily in their 60s and 70s, attended the fair and connected with employers from various sectors. The job fair offered opportunities ranging from crossing guards to program aides. The event highlighted the value that older workers bring to the workforce, challenging age-related stereotypes and offering a supportive environment for those looking to re-enter the job market.



HSA is committed to partnering with the VCAAA Advisory Council and other community groups that are dedicated to ensuring that older adults have access to meaningful employment and resources they need to thrive.

# VALUE: HEALING-CENTERED BEST PRACTICE

*We are committed to providing supportive, safe and nurturing environments that meet the diverse needs of individuals and families.*

**T**his year, HSA's focus on healing-centered care has been reflected in our efforts to build trust, foster resilience, and support recovery. This commitment is seen across our programs and exemplified by the work of our social workers and the impacts made in clients' lives.

## Family Search & Engagement (FSE)

The FSE program focuses on addressing the special needs of children in foster care with little to no family connections and no designated permanent plan. The FSE program works to reconnect these children with safe, supportive families, aiding in their emotional recovery. After locating the child's relatives, the program helps rebuild relationships and explores opportunities for a permanent family placement.



## SUCCESS STORY

Nine-year-old JJ had been in the foster care system from a young age and had been in 10 different placements over the course of two years. A Forever Connections forum brought together JJ's prior social workers and case aides to collect names of his family members and previous resource parents. After making contact with JJ's biological grandfather who lived in Washington state, FSE facilitated several meetings and a week-long stay with JJ and his grandfather to build a relationship and

ensure the grandfather could provide a stable environment.

JJ is now doing extremely well emotionally and physically under the guardianship of his grandfather. He's thriving in school, following rules at home, and has connected with cousins his age. He's gone on several camping and hunting trips and is an avid BMX rider. Now having the family he's always longed for, "JJ is becoming the kid he needs to be and enjoying a childhood long overdue," says his grandfather.

## Home Visiting Program (HVP)

In partnership with the Ventura County Health Care Agency, the Home Visiting Program (HVP) pairs families with public health social workers, who provide at-home parenting guidance and coaching. Through this program, families are able to stabilize and work toward self-sufficiency.





## SUCCESS STORY

An HVP client and her three children, one who was born with profound hearing loss and developmentally delayed, were living in a rented garage. The assigned public health social worker immediately conducted an assessment to identify the family's most pressing needs, securing new beds and arranging for regular deliveries of diapers and other necessities.

The HVP team also coordinated medical care for one of the children, who was unable to sit up or crawl. They connected the family with specialists who provided the necessary interventions to support the child's development. She is now able to crawl, pull herself up and stand against furniture. She can also self-feed and play with toys. Best of all, she can now clap and laugh.



## Adult Protective Services (APS)

APS helps ensure the safety and well-being of older adults and adults with disabilities. Social workers investigate allegations of abuse and neglect, assess client needs, and provide short-term case management and a connection to other services.

As the population of older people in Ventura County continues to grow, sadly, so do the allegations of elder abuse. APS social workers responded to a nearly 25% increase in abuse allegations this year compared to last year.

## SUCCESS STORY

Ms. Jones, an elderly woman living alone, faced severe challenges with hoarding, untreated mental health issues, and frequent falls that led to multiple hospitalizations. APS intervened by first conducting a comprehensive assessment to address her immediate medical needs and secure home health services. The team collaborated with mental health professionals to send hoarding specialists to create a plan to clear her home

safely. Ms. Jones' social worker worked with utility companies to restore services to her home and negotiated payment plans for overdue bills. The social worker also advocated for Ms. Jones during hospital stays, ensuring she received the appropriate care.

Eventually, Ms. Jones was assisted in her transition to a board and care home, where she now receives the necessary support in a safe environment.

# VALUE: CONTINUOUS LEARNING & IMPROVEMENT

*We believe in the importance of continually improving our services and adapting to the needs of our community.*

**T**his year, we made significant strides in enhancing programs and processes to better serve those who depend on us.

## Bridges 2 Work

In 2024, the **Workforce Development Board of Ventura County** (WDBVC) was honored with the National Association of Counties (NACo) Achievement Award for its innovative Bridges 2 Work program, which aims to reduce recidivism by providing career services to incarcerated individuals before and after release.

The program places employment specialists at the main Ventura County jail and Todd Road Jail, who offer skills assessments, resume preparation, interview training, and job placement services to inmates 20-180 days from release. After release, participants receive ongoing support at **America's Job Center of California** sites, including job training, placement and follow-up services to ensure long-term success.



Bridges 2 Work has enrolled 305 individuals to date, exceeding its original program goal of 300. By providing comprehensive support, this program is transforming lives and helping to build stronger communities.

## VC Thrive

In the fall of 2023, HSA partnered with Ventura County-based nonprofit James Storehouse to launch **VC Thrive**, a supplemental income pilot program for former foster youth. This 18-month program combines state and local funding to provide \$1,000 monthly stipends to 150 eligible individuals who have aged out of the local foster care system.

Former foster youth face significant challenges in education, employment and well-being. VC Thrive invests at a crucial time to influence positive outcomes for young adults and their communities. By providing a supplemental monthly income, the program helps participants afford basic needs, enabling them to focus on education and career opportunities, leading to self-sufficiency and a better quality of life.





Half of the \$2.7 million designated for stipends has already been distributed. Nearly 90% of VC Thrive survey respondents report spending these funds on housing, utilities, transportation, groceries, and health and child care. At the time of application, about 55% of respondents were employed, and another 16% were in school or serving as caregivers or volunteers. An in-depth analysis of participant outcomes is forthcoming from state researchers.

As one participant explains, VC Thrive means “not having to worry about when I will eat next or worry about whether I can pay my bills.”



## Medi-Cal Unwinding

The Medi-Cal “unwinding” or renewal process, which began in April 2023, presented significant challenges as HSA worked to ensure continuous coverage for all Medi-Cal beneficiaries. This 14-month unwinding period required all Medi-Cal beneficiaries to undergo a full redetermination, or recertification, of their cases.

To address this challenge, HSA enhanced its partnership with Gold Coast Health Plan to expand outreach efforts and support beneficiaries in completing their renewal paperwork. Additionally, the county engaged in focused efforts to process renewals and ensure that clients continued to receive the benefits they depend on.

To work through the unwinding process, California and HSA increased automation and efficiency using electronic verification processes, which allowed more than 60% of monthly renewals to be completed automatically. Community partnerships with organizations such as the Mixteco/Indigena Community Organizing Project (MICOP) and Interface Children & Family Services were also critical in assisting over 9,000 families with their renewals as of October 2024.



**COUNTY of VENTURA**  
Human Services Agency

[VCHSA.org](https://www.vchsa.org)

Follow us on

