

S.H. Cowell Foundation

## *Building Strong Families by Supporting a Community's Long-term Commitment to Change*

TAHOE TRUCKEE REGION, CALIFORNIA



MANY OF THE COMMUNITIES ALONG THE NORTH SHORE OF LAKE TAHOE struggle with high rates of poverty, a lack of affordable housing and alarming school dropout rates, especially for children who speak English as a second language.

In 1999, the S.H. Cowell Foundation was exploring areas in northern California where it could make grants to improve the lives of children—including support for family resource centers, affordable housing, schools, youth development programs and other critical community services. One of the Foundation's program officers toured the North Shore to explore the potential for making grants in the area.

During this tour, Kings Beach, a small town in Placer County, caught the program officer's attention. The majority of Kings Beach residents were Latino immigrants who came to the area to work for Tahoe's booming tourism industry. More than 17 percent of the families in the town, and one out of five children under age 18, were living in poverty. However, despite these issues, the leaders in Kings Beach had a vision for their community. They were ready to work together to find ways to improve the quality of life for the families who lived there. It was a perfect fit for the Foundation's evolving place-based approach.

In January 2000, the Foundation provided a start-up grant to help Kings Beach create a family resource center to provide a variety of services to local families, including adult education classes in ESL and computer skills, employment resources and health and nutrition courses.

The Foundation built upon that original grant by continuing to fund the development of the family resource center, providing a capital grant to build a new clubhouse for the Boys and Girls Club of North Lake Tahoe next to Kings Beach Elementary School and supporting the development of affordable housing for the community. The Foundation also funded a full-time bilingual family liaison, a reading specialist and other systems of support to help Spanish-speaking students successfully transition from the local elementary school to the middle/high school in affluent Tahoe City.



“We are proud of the role we have played as a catalyst for community change in the Tahoe Truckee region and that we’ve helped lay the groundwork for local leaders to sustain this progress into the future.”

—LISE MAISANO,

VICE PRESIDENT GRANTS PROGRAM,  
S. H. COWELL FOUNDATION

By 2007, the Foundation had provided more than \$2.5 million in grants to Kings Beach and those investments were having a significant impact. Over 500 families were using the services available through the family resource center to improve their health, economic stability and family self-sufficiency. The new Boys and Girls Club was being used by over 200 kids each day. Middle school students had improved test scores by nearly 30 percent and the development over 500 new units of affordable housing was underway in the area.

At the same time, community leaders made a compelling case to the Foundation that regional solutions were needed to tackle many of the community’s problems. As a result, the Foundation expanded its support to encompass the entire Tahoe Truckee area. By mid-2010, they had made another \$1.9 million in grants across the region, supporting projects such as ARC, a new youth literacy and environmental education program and innovative programs to help close the achievement gap for Spanish-speaking children throughout the Tahoe Truckee school district. The Foundation also made grants to expand the reach of the Family Resource Center of Truckee, including training six promotoras, or peer mentors, who would travel to Truckee’s poorest neighborhoods to provide information about health, life skills and family services.



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As these programs moved forward, the Foundation knew that the area would need to find other sustainable sources of funding and leadership to continue to change outcomes for low-income families. With this goal, the Foundation helped the Truckee Tahoe Community Foundation increase its endowment so that it could increase its grantmaking in the area and become a hub for collaboration and service integration among organizations that serve local families. The Foundation also helped launch a local Leadership Program which works with emerging local leaders to build leadership skills and learn about the challenges and opportunities facing the region.

The Foundation’s consistent commitment to this region combined with the willingness of local organizations and residents to engage and collaborate on solutions is having a major impact on the children and families who live there.

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**S.H. COWELL FOUNDATION:** *The S.H. Cowell Foundation works to improve the quality of life of children living in poverty in Northern and Central California by providing grants to strengthen families and communities. The Foundation was established in 1956 through a \$12.5 million bequest from S.H. Cowell. Since then, Cowell has made more than \$248 million in grants.*

**NORTHERN CALIFORNIA GRANTMAKERS** (NCG) is a regional association of foundations, corporate contributions programs and other public and private grantmakers. Started in 1965 and incorporated in 1981, NCG has grown to support the activity of 170 member grantmakers active in the Bay Area, with combined grantmaking of more than \$3 billion annually. NCG enhances the effectiveness of philanthropy by supporting regional grantmakers’ efforts to learn, promote the field and connect to peers and resources. For more information visit: [www.ncg.org](http://www.ncg.org).