



**Community Advisory Board (CAB) Spotlight Series**  
***Documenting the Impact of Genesis LA's Investments***

In 2010, Genesis LA provided predevelopment financing in the amount of \$450,000 to support the Star Apartments project located on Skid Row and Developed by Skid Row Housing Trust. In this Spotlight Series interview, CAB Member Helen Leung interviews Leepi Shimkhada, M.P.P., Program Manager for LA County Department of Health Services, Housing for Health Division

**Helen:** Tell me about yourself.

**Leepi:** I'm a Program Manager for Housing for Health, a relatively new program started 3 years ago. We provide housing most frequently for homeless patients. Our goal is to reduce ER costs. We have a staff of 14 and 8 Americorps members. We have grown to 25, from a staff of 3.

**Helen:** Where do you work currently?

**Leepi:** A year ago, our offices moved to Sixth and Maple and we are co-located with the Star Apartments. We are located in the commercial space downstairs and are dubbed the Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) "lab" where our administration and policy work happens. Next door to us is the LA County Clinic, a 5-room clinic with a staff of 7-10 employees. It is the first clinic to have opened in Skid Row in over 20 years!

We serve residents of the Star Apartments, and our doctors can see them at their place of residence, if preferred.

**Helen:** Have you seen any changes to the surrounding community since this project was built? If yes, what kind of change (positive, negative, about the same)?

**Leepi:** I've seen an increase in the homeless population. With us being at the heart of it, we finally have a presence. We are starting a day-to-day outreach program to inform the homeless population about our mental health, substance abuse, and related services.

**Helen:** Do you find it easier for families to access goods and services now that the project is there?

**Leepi:** Yes, there are people outside our door every day. The clinics do take walk-in appointments, and we help people in need that can't access urgent care services.

**Helen:** Have you also seen an increase in the use of public transportation?

**Leepi:** There are several major bus lines near the Star Apartments that are used all the time. People are also using Access Services, an ADA-mandated paratransit

transportation program of LA County's. Medical vans are also used.

**Helen:** Have you also seen an increase in youth being served?

**Leepi:** Not really, our primary clients are between 40-50 yrs. We have noticed that more and more mothers are in need of our services.

**Helen:** Have people in the community been able to secure jobs at the project site?

**Leepi:** We just hired 8 people from AmeriCorps – many are from Skid Row. They started last week. They will be doing street-based outreach.

**Helen:** Do you have any recommendations to Genesis LA and other organizations doing work in Los Angeles?

**Leepi:** The Star Apartments is one of the best projects I've ever seen. The second floor collaboration is amazing. The designers did a really thoughtful job of designing the floor, which encourages people to meet and collaborate. In the future, we will need more conference spaces for meeting and for administrative and therapeutic sessions.

We need to do more projects like this. We are in a crisis. We need more developers to take on projects that will house and serve Skid Row residents. The Star Apartments is a model, and we need to go outside Skid Row to serve the homeless, in places like the San Gabriel and Antelope Valleys.

**Helen: Any great stories you can share?**

For Program for Housing, we get a lot of referrals, and we have frequent users of ER, so we do application workshops here. We partner with Skid Row Housing Trust to meet people where they are. One guy came to our workshop. He would show up wasted. Not the nicest guy in the world. But, he kept up with the process. He was eventually, one of the first people to move into Star Apartments.

One day, his case manager visited his unit and saw that he was not doing well. He received a home visit and went to detox for 2 weeks. He was even featured in the PBS News Hour story on the Star Apartments. He is doing volunteer work now with an AmeriCorps member and has been living at the Star Apartments for nearly 3 years! He has reconnected with his daughter and his granddaughter! This was all made possible by the availability of affordable housing, services and people who care.