

**Introducing Kiyomi Yamamoto,
Silicon Valley Community Foundation's new Director of Housing**

Christine Thorsteinson, SVCF Director of [Early Childhood Development](#) and [Build Up San Mateo County](#) Planning Committee and Advisory Board Member, recently had the opportunity to sit down with Kiyomi and learn more about her work and the passion she brings to housing justice.

1. Tell us about yourself and how you came to work on the issue of housing in Silicon Valley?

I am a fourth-generation Bay Area resident, and along with my husband, am raising two daughters: (4 years and 4 months old). My family began its 120-year history in this region, as sharecroppers and farmers in the "Valley of the Heart's Delight." They experienced overt discrimination, were exploited to work the land and yet prohibited from owning it. During WWII, the federal government forced 100,000 people of Japanese ancestry, including my grandparents and their children who were all U.S. citizens, into internment camps. This intentional mass displacement dispossessed them of not just their homes and property, but of their sense of security and identity. The effects of this injustice affected subsequent generations and catalyzed my pursuit of racial and social justice in our community.

I am currently focused on affordable housing issues because of the wide-ranging impact that a home, or lack of one, has on the quality of our lives. Where we live directly reflects and affects our physical and mental health outcomes, and educational and economic opportunities. When we take positions on housing, we are inherently making statements about who we believe belongs, who is valued, and who gets to succeed. It is unconscionable to accept unstable and uninhabitable living conditions as viable options for our neighbors, especially when we can all play a part in taking care of each other.

2. What brings you joy in your work?

The best part of my job is meeting and working with my neighbors and community-based organizations who are transforming institutional systems to serve the people. Their power and generosity are buoys during challenging times, and I am grateful for these teachers, mentors, and friends.

3. How do you fill your cup?

I am fortunate to live very close to natural open space where I escape to the trails. I am also within walking distance to the library where, despite my best intentions, I check out more books than I can realistically consume. I am also trying to prioritize sleep as a health requirement, rather than an afterthought.

Additionally, I also love interacting with our community partners and am reenergized by learning about their grassroots movements that are advancing the racial and social justice. These heroes remind me that while the work is constant and challenging, it is important to celebrate our successes and community fellowship.

4. What keeps you up at night?

My kids - literally and figuratively. Like many parents of young children, COVID-19 is still a real and constant threat to our families. I am grateful that my older daughter started her vaccine series and am eagerly waiting for when my younger child can begin hers.

For many of our neighbors, COVID-19 exacerbated longstanding struggles to access essential services like housing and healthcare. Lower-income families of color continue to disproportionately bear the brunt of the impact, highlighting the disparities in our economic and justice systems. If anything, COVID-19 has taught us how intricately connected we are, and that we are all at risk when we fail to take care of one another. My hope is that we take advantage of these lessons learned, help our communities heal, and move forward with greater solidarity.

5. Housing affordability and equitable access for all is a significant challenge for Silicon Valley. How is Silicon Valley Community Foundation (SVCF) planning to address these challenges and what is SVCF's vision for the future?

This is a critical moment for housing justice – an urgency to fulfill the human right to housing. SVCF believes that every person deserves a home that they can afford with access to quality resources and a pathway to share in the prosperity of Silicon Valley. SVCF is dedicated to ensuring that all neighbors in Silicon Valley have opportunities to live in a safe and stable home, with equitable access to quality resources. By supporting community-led coalitions, multisector partnerships, and advocacy efforts, we will help dismantle exclusionary land-use policies that segregate our communities and perpetuate the racial disparities reflected in the wealth and homeownership gaps. In partnership with others, we can help catalyze affordable housing production in high opportunity areas, permanently preserve them, and protect lower-income tenants' rights to stable and safe homes.

6. Why is it important for childcare and housing advocates to work together/join forces?

Audre Lorde famously stated that “there is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives.” Housing and children’s issues are complementary components to building a future where all have equitable opportunities to succeed. Too often, advocates find themselves competing against each other, whether for funds, attention, or as legislative priorities. This “Hunger Games” approach is how we fail to make progress, and the reason that multi sector collaboration is a pillar of our housing strategy, to spur mutually beneficial support regionally and across sectors, creating a cooperative rather than a competitive atmosphere. At SVCF, we believe that a smart affordable housing program is one that is oriented around the whole person - their families, environments, and futures.



Kiyomi Yamamoto, Director of Housing
Silicon Valley Community Foundation