

PUGET SOUND BUSINESS JOURNAL

Treehouse taps new CEO, adjusts mission to support foster youth caught in health crisis

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Lisa Chin took over as [Treehouse's](#) CEO on March 30.

Seattle nonprofit Treehouse welcomed its new CEO [Lisa Chin](#) this week — virtually, on a flat screen.



“I feel like I'm watching like a hundred-person version of 'The Brady Bunch' stream,” said Chin, who started Monday, nearly a month into the COVID-19 pandemic in Washington.

Treehouse provides children in foster care with basic necessities and educational support. Longtime CEO [Janis Avery announced in October](#) she'd step down this spring, though the search for the organization's next leader had already been under way for months.

Chin formerly led the Boys and Girls Club of King County as its president for two years, and before that was founding executive director of the Seattle office of Year Up. At every career stop for the past 15 years, Chin said she's initiated partnerships that serve youth in foster care.

Chin's immediate goal is to get the nonprofit through the public health crisis intact, and to avoid reducing its services in the meantime. She may even increase services to meet the community's needs.

Treehouse serves more than 8,000 of the youth in Washington, and during the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been adjusting its services. The nonprofit is working on getting foster youth and their families access to technology needed for online learning and to stay connected to their specialists, coaches and advocates at Treehouse while schools are closed.

Though the nonprofit closed its free store, which provides clothing and supplies to foster youth, Chief Development Officer [Jessica Ross](#) said they've been delivering shopping bags full of those supplies to their homes.

Treehouse also transitioned its Just-in-Time Funding program to rent assistance, utility bills and other urgent funding requests. The program had previously supported participation in extracurricular activities.

“Really from the homelessness prevention perspective, it's really important that we stay connected and maintain in the immediate but certainly in the long term,” Ross said.

Ross said Chin's leadership thus far has been impressive considering how quickly circumstances have changed since she accepted the position in mid-February.

“The job she accepted is very different than the job she walked into on Monday,” Ross said.

“She really has all the tools and experience to rally and lead this organization through the crisis and beyond. Talk about adaptable — Lisa shifted on a dime and said, ‘Well, this is going to be different. Here we go,’ and jumped right in with all of us midstream.”

Treehouse's annual fundraiser luncheon had to be canceled due to virus concerns, Ross said, but the team built a [crowdfunding campaign](#) and is now thinking of other ways to engage the community. Chin said the local business community can continue to support the nonprofit financially, through volunteering and by donating items for youth and families.

“It's new for the world to be isolated in this way and to be cut off from services and central functions, but it's not new for our youth,” Chin said. “Our team is amazing.”