Dear Friend of Berkeley Food and Housing Project,

For many years now, we at Berkeley Food and Housing Project have envisioned a new Center for Homeless Services in downtown Berkeley. This month, the vision began to materialize when we began an exclusive negotiation with the City of Berkeley for a site in downtown Berkeley on which to build our new facility. This will be the largest project in the history of the agency and is likely to take many years to come to fruition. But now we are confident it will happen. You can read more about it in this issue of our newsletter.

Meanwhile, our work continues to expand to meet the growing need for homeless services. We have received a second year of funding from the Veterans Administration in support of our work to help end veteran’s homelessness by 2015. This has allowed us to open new offices in Richmond and Vallejo and our veteran’s services now extend into three counties.

Our men’s and women’s shelters in Berkeley continue to operate at capacity. Last year, we noticed an almost 30% increase in the number of shelter clients who are homeless for the first time.

This means the demand for our services continues to increase, and your continued support is absolutely vital. I am very grateful to all of you who stand behind our work and make it all possible through your generous donations.

Also in this issue you can read a profile of Vernette Suggs, the Manager of our Russell Street Residence. This critical program provides permanent supportive housing for 21 men and women with multiple disabilities. We are very proud of this facility and the staff who work 24 hours a day with one of the most difficult-to-serve populations.

And finally, please take a moment to learn how you can help us during the holidays, a time of special need, and how you might bring your skills to bear by volunteering with us.

With your help we transform lives, one human being at a time, and provide your neighbors and fellow citizens with a promising future.

Sincerely,

Terrie Light
Executive Director
BFHP Receives Second Year of Funding from Department of Veteran Affairs.

Through this funding from SSVF (Support Services for Veterans and Families), our ROADS Home (Regional Outreach, Advocacy, and Support) program has expanded significantly into Contra Costa and Solano County. The goal of the program is to provide veteran families with housing stability, either by finding permanent housing or helping them to maintain permanent housing. Thanks to this funding, we have been able to provide more than $419,500 in financial assistance to 140 families, 29 of which were households with minor children. In May we opened our new office in Richmond. In November, we will open a new office in Vallejo to better serve veterans in Solano County. One of the most moving stories involving a veteran is told in the voice of Manager, Natalie Siva:

Mr. Thompson called the SSVF Hotline on 7/14/14 and was enrolled into our program that week. From 2007-2011, Mr. Thompson served in the Marines as a Motor Vehicle Operator in Afghanistan and received many prestigious medals for his dedication.

After receiving an honorable discharge due to injury, Mr. Thompson returned home to his wife and three daughters in Nebraska. Transitioning back into civilian life was riddled with challenges due to PTSD, physical injuries, and an overall lack of community services. An extra financial strain was placed on the family when they found out they would be expecting a fourth child.

The family left Nebraska for California in hopes of finding help from their family but did not find the support they were expecting. This left the Thompson family homeless. When they called SSVF, they had nowhere to go and not enough money to put gas in their car to meet with their Case Manager.

Case Manager, Bridgette, went to meet with the family in Vallejo to help them build a new life. In July, the family moved into permanent housing in a nice house in Solano County that accommodates their whole family. Mr. Thompson and his wife are both in school and working with the SSVF Employment Specialist to assist in increasing their income.

This family is truly remarkable. They have been active participants in this whole process. Their little baby boy, who they call Bubba, had his first birthday in their very own home! We will continue working with this family on their housing stability as long as they need our support. This is one of many successful SSVF stories!

Sixth Annual Client Success Event

Every year we invite our clients who have been successfully housed for a year or more to return and speak about their life changing experiences. Not only is this a time for the clients, it is a time for staff to listen and be inspired by the stories of the people they see and serve each day.

Said Executive Director Terrie Light, “Some agencies celebrate their clients when they leave the program; we wait a year and celebrate them when they have been successfully housed for 12 months or more. Their stories and testimonials are powerful and moving.”

This year, in a quiet church sanctuary, Treesa, David, and Diedre, all former clients who are now permanently housed, stood in front of an audience and confidently told their stories. Treesa explained, “Just three months ago, I found housing. With a smile on my face, I can say that I feel better. I have a lot of confidence that I am going to make it”.

This is the kind of hope that inspires current clients to keep pushing forward and reminds all of us at BFHP of why we do what we do. It is to transform lives, one human being at a time.

Be a Part of BFHP at the Holidays

The holidays are a very important time at BFHP and they provide wonderful opportunities to volunteer. You can help serve a meal on Thanksgiving day (Nov. 28th); or at our Christmas Community Meal (Dec. 19th); or any day from Monday through Friday at 2362 Bancroft Way. You can also volunteer as a group to purchase food, prepare and serve a meal at our Men’s Emergency Shelter in downtown Berkeley.

For more information on volunteer opportunities, contact Tyler Maldonado at tmaldonado@bfhp.org or 510.809.8506.

While financial contributions are the most important way you can support BFHP, in-kind donations are also very important to us. These donations go directly to our clients. During the winter, we are always in need of knit caps, men’s and women’s (new) socks, and mittens or warm gloves. Please check our website for other items that we need on a seasonal basis.
Introducing Vernette Suggs, Program Manager and Facility Administrator of Russell Street Residence

Vernette Suggs initially became involved with Berkeley Food & Housing Project through consulting work that she did for the agency. After spending time with the organization and learning about BFHP’s core values, she was hired as the Program Manager and Facility Administrator of our Russell Street Residence in December of 2013. Russell Street Residence is a licensed board and care facility for previously homeless clients that have multiple disabilities and are in need of residential care. These clients receive support in medication management as well as outside sources of psychiatric and medical services.

Vernette has been working with clients like the ones at Russell Street, providing care and supervision, for twenty years. She finds motivation through stories from her past. She particularly remembers one client who was told by family members and other case managers that there was nothing more that could be done for them. After Vernette patiently worked with the client, they were eventually able to move out of a residential care facility and into their own apartment. Things other people thought the client would never do, like managing money and medication, finally became a tangible reality.

Vernette says, “I love to see clients do better and I want to help them with their goals. Even if it is something small”. Recently raised garden beds have been assembled and planted at Russell Street. This gardening project is something that Vernette and the clients are invested in. Although it seems small, this is something that represents Vernette’s greatest hope: that one day the clients may grow and learn to experience life independently.
BFHP is Seeking Volunteers With Special Skills

If you are interested in volunteering with BFHP and can make a commitment of at least six months, we have many needs for skilled and compassionate individuals. This is a wonderful way to meet our staff and clients, and experience what we do on a daily basis. Please e-mail mwood@bfhp.org for more information.

Men’s Housing Program 1931 Center Street, Berkeley
- Answering the shelter hot line M-F 11:30-2:30
- Have dinner with clients, be a compassionate presence, play board games and converse, M-F 5pm-8pm
- Legal assistance – come 1-2 evenings /month to meet with clients

North County Women’s Center 2140 Dwight Way, Berkeley
- Answering the front door during the day - M-F anytime b/t 9-5
- Have dinner with clients, be a presence and listen, and engage M-F 5pm-8pm
- Weekly children’s activity group in the evenings – any day

Russell Street Residence 1741 Russell Street, Berkeley
- Weekly art group - time flexible
- Accompany staff when taking clients on outings - time flexible
- Sewing, crochet, needlepoint groups - time flexible

Multi-Service Center 2362 Bancroft Way, Berkeley
- During hospitality hours , talk with clients, lead activities such as board games, cards, art projects M-F 10-12
- Computer literacy tutors and workshop facilitators (specifically related to employment program: navigating internet, typing, navigating computer software, expanding skills - excel, word, etc.)
- Mock interviewers – meet with clients working on employment search, do mock interviews, provide feedback
- Resource assistant (researching resources, calling to ensure information is up-to-date, displaying resources in MSC space, etc.)