Berkeley Food & Housing Project
Spring Newsletter 2013

Appeal From the Executive Director, Terrie Light

OUR GOAL IS A MUCH NEEDED $80,000 by June 30, 2013
($17,255 raised to date; $62,745 to go)

Dear Friend of Berkeley Food and Housing Project,

Thank you for your faithful support of our work. In order to keep our doors open, we rely every year on a mix of public money and contributions from faithful friends and supporters like you.

But in this economic climate, can we sustain these vital services? Because of sequestration and ongoing budget cuts, our women’s programs remain dramatically underfunded. That is why we are devoting our private fundraising between now and the end of our fiscal year on June 30th to raise $80,000 in order to prevent painful cuts in staffing that will impact the women and children we serve. When it costs over $1,000,000 per year to maintain our Women’s Center, $80,000 represents less than 8% of our actual costs.

At the same time, our work is reaching new levels of success. Last year, we placed nearly 100 women and children into permanent housing of their own. Our women’s transitional housing program was the highest ranking program of its kind in all of Alameda County.

To give you an idea of what is at stake, in recent months we have been profiling the journey of one particular women whom I will call “Linda”. Linda does not fit the stereotype of a homeless person. Nevertheless, two years ago she hit what she described as the “perfect storm” of events that put her and her daughter on the streets. Here is what she had to say about what happened next.

“I don’t know where I would be if I hadn’t found BFHP. From the moment I arrived, there was a sense of peace, knowing that my daughter and I would be taken care of – because when you’re homeless and disconnected from your community, as a woman and as a mother, there were the most basic things I could not provide. Now I have case managers who care, access to medical care, and most importantly, time to recover as I visualize and move toward a new future for the two of us. I am extremely grateful because without BFHP, I don’t know what would have happened to us.”

I hope you will give generously and be a partner with us to reach our goal and continue our work in transforming the lives of our clients.

Also in this issue, you will read about the work we are doing to refine our key messaging and communications, focusing in on what it is we do that sets us apart from other agencies. You will also read about our Chaplain, Marianna Sempari, who is working with our homeless veterans, and Sonia Sajja, whose work focuses on improved nutrition and wellness for all our clients.

On behalf of Linda and everyone we serve, thank you for your support. With your help, I know we can reach our goal!

With gratitude,

Terrie Light
Executive Director
6 Month Health, Nutrition and Wellness Program Wraps Up

In the fall, we reported on the start of our new program in Health, Nutrition and Wellness. Thanks to a generous grant from the City of Berkeley Mental Health Division, we were able to pioneer best practices in addressing the health of our clients with mental illness. The focus is on weight, nutrition, and preventive healthcare.

Sonia Sajja, BFHP’s health care coordinator, says she provides practical tools for our clients shift from “crisis mode” to a long term vision of health and wellness. She says, “Our clients are not used to having a roof over their head, so I have had to ask, how do I talk about nutrition and exercise with someone who has been struggling to survive at the most basic level?”

A typical week for a client enrolled in the program includes a cooking class with Three Squares, a local culinary institute, as well as exercise such as water aerobics, yoga, chi gong, or walking. Nursing students from Samuel Merritt University volunteer to provide one-on-one wellness counseling and monitoring clients’ vital signs once per month.

16 clients have graduated from the Three Squares’ cooking program so far. More students will graduate at the end of April. The menus provided by Three Squares are culinary delights. They include kale salad, veggie black bean quesadillas with fresh guacamole, frittata, stir fried vegetables with brown rice, quinoa salad, fruit salad, spaghetti with turkey, and mango lassi.

Sonia’s hard work can only be compared to the hard work of the clients themselves. Our star client has lost an incredible 40 pounds as part of the program, doing water aerobics at the Y and walking regularly. Several clients have started a daily walking group. Sonia says, “our clients are always up to trying something new. When is the last time any of them have played an organized sport? Last week we played kickball.”

Special Thanks to our program supporters:

- Charis Fund
- City of Berkeley
- Samuel Merrit University School of Nursing interns
- Lifelong Medical Center
- Three Squares
- Berkeley Bowl

North County Women’s Shelter Celebrates High Environmental Greenpoint Rating

NCWS received an outstanding green environmental rating from Stopwaste.org, a project of Alameda county. NCWS was rated on energy efficiency, water conservation, indoor air quality, resource conservation, and community. Viviana Lahrs, our Facilities Manager until this month, says, “There’s a misconception that it’s expensive to be green – but we’re showing that sustainable practices can save money for non-profits.”

Client education was key to our Greenpoint rating. Viviana trained site managers, staff, and clients on recycling and composting. “This education empowers our clients in their journey toward independence.”

Meet M.A., Our Veterans’ Chaplain

Meet Marianna Sempari, our chaplain at the Berkeley Food and Housing Project. Marianna, who goes by M.A., works with our Homeless Veteran’s program. The Veteran’s Program is a result of our strong partnership with the U.S. Veteran’s Association.

M.A. was called to ministry later in life, and is now seeking an ecumenical Masters of Divinity at the Pacific School of Religion (PSR). Her decision to work at BFHP was grounded in her desire to “go to the people” rather than work in a traditional congregational setting.

M.A. worked hard to gain acceptance and trust among the veterans, and she is now known for her close bond with the tight-knit group of men. As she describes it, the story of her first meeting with the veterans is both funny and poignant:

“When I walked in and said, “I’m the new chaplain, chaos broke out – there was a sudden cleaning frenzy – I didn’t realize that a chaplain is an officer in the military. The frenzy continued until finally I said, ‘At ease, gentlemen.’”

Much of her work with the veterans has centered on the mens’ experience of religion in the military. M.A. emphasizes that her role is not to tell men what to believe, or what is right and wrong, but simply to listen. She says, “Many of these men have not had a chance to tell their stories. Some of them have had to kill people. They’ve lost their wives. There is a moral injury that we don’t talk about.... We are learning the role of holding a safe space, of being a container, to trust, and to speak.”

M.A. recommends this book on the topic of moral injury and veterans:

Soul Repair: Recovering from Moral Injury after War, by Rita Nakashima Brock and Gabriella Lettini. (Beacon Press, 2012)
Last year we were awarded a grant from the Taproot Foundation of pro-bono services worth $65,000 to examine our “key messages” and our “brand strategy.” Said Executive Director Terrie Light, “we knew that in recent years our model of delivering services has become very sophisticated, but our ability to explain in simple language what we do and how we do it was lagging behind.”

Headed by Project Director Karl Auker, the team of seven began their work in September by conducting confidential interviews with donors, community leaders, and members of the business community to assess the ways in which BFHP is perceived and valued. Said BFHP Board Chair Larry Rosenthal, “this team has been responsible for a profound change in the way we characterize and communicate our work to the public.”

Some of the deliverables from the project that were presented to the BFHP Board on January 16th included new key messages that focus on the things that make BFHP unique, as well as strategies for incorporating the new language into all our communications. This will result in a redesigned website, a new brochure, as well a way to focus and refine our use of social media. Stay tuned!

So, if you are asked what BFHP accomplishes, here is what you can say:

**What do you say when asked what BFHP does?**
"Berkeley Food and Housing Project provides homeless and struggling members of our community with a comprehensive range of practical services, without judgment or restrictions. Our unique approach includes partnering with our clients to help them develop skills to move forward in their lives."

**What is unique about our approach?**
- We develop a partnership with every client to access the help they need and develop the skills necessary to achieve long-lasting results, independence, and habits of success.
- Our professional, dedicated and compassionate team works alongside each individual to identify their specific needs and tailor a program of services, tools and opportunities to underpin real and effective changes.

**What are some of our comprehensive practical services?**
- BFHP is the only agency in Alameda County to provide both food AND housing support services.
- Great results in transitioning homeless people into permanent housing, while also providing emergency food and shelter to those who would otherwise be forced to sleep on the streets.
- Recognized in the county as a model for permanent supportive housing facility for mentally ill men & women.
- Comprehensive program of shelter and services for homeless veterans in collaboration with the Veterans Association
- Professional case management services to assist with housing, health, and social support.
- The longest running food program in the area, serving more than 100,000 nutritious free meals per year.

**What does it mean to operate without judgment or restrictions?**
- Nobody is turned away or overlooked, and no one falls through the cracks.
- BFHP works with people on low incomes, those who are homeless, have disabilities or require mental health support, men, women and children, as well as veterans.

**What are the skills we teach to move forward?**
- BFHP works with homeless and struggling members of our community to help transform lives.
- We provide educational opportunities and services to break the cycle of homelessness.
- Our programs provide clients with access to a social and professional support network to enable a long-term move to permanent housing and self-sufficiency. This includes credit and benefits counseling, access to services, job training, employment counseling, support for health and wellness, and other life skills.
Urgent Donations Needed

In-kind donations matter as much to our day-to-day operations as financial contributions. These donations go directly to our clients. Right now, we have an urgent need for:

- Toiletries, including feminine hygiene products, deodorant, and travel-size shampoos
- New plus-size mens’ clothes
- Twin-size blankets
- Chef coats for our meal services (5 XXL and 10 XL)
- Aprons
- 1 or more commercial laundry carts

Feeling Inspired and Looking for More Ways to Help Your Community? Volunteer!

**Volunteer as a Group**
- Purchase, prepare and serve a meal
- Do a special project like painting or gardening

**Volunteer as an Individual**
- Serve a meal at our Multi-Service Center
- Provide administrative support
- Offer your professional services or creative talents to our clients

To volunteer contact our Coordinator at 510-809-8506 or email volunteers@bfhp.org