Please join our Board, staff and special guest Kristen Lee, Manager, Housing & Community Services Division for the City of Berkeley. They will speak about BFHP’s integral role in the City’s plan to address and resolve the homeless crisis, creating a path toward permanent housing and supportive services for the City’s 1000 homeless individuals.

Together, BFHP’s Board, staff, and Ms. Lee will answer questions and engage in open dialogue with our guests.

Thursday, May 25, 2017
St. Clement’s Episcopal Church
2837 Claremont Blvd.
Berkeley, CA 94705
8:00 a.m. to 9:30 a.m.

SAVE THE DATE – MAJOR DONOR BREAKFAST

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BERKELEY FOOD & HOUSING PROJECT

A client’s journey through The Hub

A year ago on Jan. 5, 2016, Berkeley Food & Housing Project, in partnership with the City of Berkeley and in response to a sweeping change in national homeless policy, launched a new model to provide services to the men and women and children of our community who are experiencing homelessness.

This new model centralized access to city-funded homeless services and prioritized the most vulnerable homeless individuals and families and those most in need of intense services to successfully resolve their homelessness. Prior to this, people were forced to go to numerous agencies and there wasn’t a way to ensure that they received all the services for which they were eligible. Now those experiencing homelessness can come to The Hub at 1901 Fairview St. near Adeline Street and receive access to the help they need. This new coordinated and centralized system allows the city to collect data about the needs and demographics of the people experiencing homelessness in Berkeley. It also prevents the duplication of services.

As we end year one of the new model for homeless services is working

BY TERRIE LIGHT, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, BFHP

THIS ARTICLE APPEARED AS AN OP-ED IN BERKELEYSIDE ON JANUARY 5, 2017

A YEAR IN, THE HUB’S NEW MODEL FOR PROVIDING HOMELESS SERVICES IS WORKING

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services delivery in Berkeley, I would like to reflect on our successes, challenges faced, and lessons learned.

We all know there is a critical shortage of affordable housing in the Bay Area. Finding housing for people with no recent tenancy is a challenge. Finding that housing and having it affordable is an even bigger challenge. And sometimes, when we do find housing, it may not be in Berkeley, disappointing those who want to remain here. Not everybody can get exactly what he or she wants.

Running a new pilot program invariably means that we don’t get everything right from the beginning. Over this past year, as this new system of service delivery developed, we learned a lot about what was working and what wasn’t working so well. As frequently as twice a month, we analyzed and evaluated our data in order to allow us to pivot quickly, to adjust procedures, and to redeploy human resources.

The new services system requires a tremendous amount of interagency coordination. Through a series of monthly collaboration meetings, Berkeley homeless service agencies have worked alongside of us, to develop this new system together. This has required an “all in” approach. We are grateful to our collaborative partners, especially our shelter providers YESAH! (Youth Engagement, Advocacy and Housing) and BOSS (Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency) for the ongoing feedback and willingness to find solutions.

One of the lessons we learned early on was that we needed to deploy our intake staff outdoors. As our outreach team, deployed in January 2016, began to meet people in Berkeley’s five main encampments, we realized that doing the actual intakes in encampments is an essential and effective means to begin relationships with many of those living outdoors. So starting in March 2016, our intake workers and case managers joined our outreach team, bringing services outdoors. The Housing First model is focused on helping people move into housing as quickly as possible and removing whatever barriers to tenancy might exist. And if someone doesn’t want to live in a shelter or decide to leave a shelter, we continue to work with them and continue to assist with their transition into housing. Services are no longer predicated on having to live in a shelter first as they used to be.

We have also been heartened to learn that it is still possible, in this hyper-inflated market, for landlords who are willing to take a risk and potentially lose some profit in order to give someone a chance to reintegrate into the community. Just two weeks ago, we helped move a 66-year-old gentleman with co-occurring disorders, HIV, and a 10+ year history of homelessness, into brand new affordable senior housing. He was so happy to be in his own place for the holidays.

I am so proud of the Berkeley community of providers who have all been working under difficult circumstances. I look forward to this time next year, when hopefully, I can report that we have housed most of the 83 people who are currently in “housing search” and that we have brought another 80 high-priority individuals into the housing search process. We remain committed to serving, learning, improving, and housing people.

*Sam* near the dugout hole where he lived for almost three decades.

You may remember “Sam” who we spoke about last year. He is celebrating his first indoors in 29 years — and his subsequent placement into permanent housing. We first encountered Sam, a single man in his mid-60s, in October 2015. He lived in a shelter he had dug out for himself on a hillside near the Albany Racetrack — for decades. (See photo above, as featured in our FY 2015-16 Annual Report.) Sam says he chose a place far away from the mainstream homeless encampments and chose not to interact with others in order to preserve himself, his safety, and his sanity. While living in his dugout hole outdoors, Sam’s beloved cat Tyker died. The loss of his only companion plunged him into such deep despair that he welcomed death and hoped it would come for him soon.

But as it turned out, it was life instead that came to him in the form of Berkeley Food & Housing Project who reached out and was able to connect with him at that perilous crossroad of life and death.

We provided intensive services and support: helping Sam to apply for EBT (‘food stamps’) and Medi-Cal, accompanying him to patient appointments with LifeLong Medical, and helping him to secure an ID card — his only form of identification at the time was a Naturalization card issued in 1957 when he was adopted as a toddler from Europe. “Thanks to you, I actually legally exist again,” says Sam. By February 2016, we had secured him a room in a shared house in Oakland. When asked if he would do anything special for his first indoor holiday, Sam replied, “I’ll be celebrating the fact that I’m still alive. I came out the other end.” BFHP Case Manager Robbi Montoya, commemorated the occasion by preparing a full Christmas dinner for Sam and his housemates.

Sam’s housing situation, however, remained precarious. Our program could only offer 3-12 months of assistance to the homeless, and another 90 are in a “housing search”.

**UPDATE:** A new report generated April 20, 2017 indicates ongoing success. Since The Hub’s launch, we have assessed and prioritized 302 individuals as highly vulnerable and most in need. Of those 302, 58 have already moved into housing and another 90 are in a “housing search”.

*“Sam” with his tireless and enthusiastic case worker, Robbi Montoya.*