Berkeley Food & Housing Project is honored to announce the expansion of our homeless veteran services program, known as Roads Home, into Sacramento and Amador Counties. This expansion will create a contiguous service area for homeless veterans from Berkeley to within 30 miles of the Nevada border. “We welcome the additional services and collaborative spirit that BFHP brings to the Sacramento area,” says Tracy Pullar, Homeless Program Manager, VA Northern California Health Care System.

Urged by our VA Liaison, BFHP joined the national effort to end veteran homelessness in 2010 by becoming the first homeless services agency in Berkeley to formally serve homeless veterans. Very aware that we were starting a veteran’s program at the epicenter of the anti-war movement, we wanted to create a space where homeless veterans (many from the Vietnam era) would feel safe and welcomed. We soon began admitting veterans into the new transitional housing program at our men’s shelter on Center Street. This program supports veterans with intensive case management services focused on providing employment and life skills training, as well as medical and behavioral health care services, while they work towards attaining permanent housing.

In 2014, we expanded our veteran’s services with the addition of our Roads Home Program, serving veterans in Alameda, Contra Costa, and Solano Counties.

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after a successful application for a one million dollar grant from the VA for Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF). This program includes rapid re-housing, homelessness prevention, wraparound case management services, and temporary rent assistance. This grant also allowed us to expand our services to include female vets and veteran families.

Our efforts to help chronically homeless veterans find employment in Solano and Contra Costa counties began with a small pilot employment program. Due to the success of this program we applied for and received grant funding from the U.S. Department of Labor to expand our individualized employment assistance and wraparound services to homeless and chronically homeless veterans in both Contra Costa and Solano Counties. The success of this program has far exceeded the national average for programs of this kind.

We have found that this regional approach is by far the most advantageous method of providing service to this population. Not being bound by city or county lines allows our vets program to be responsive and flexible in the way we work with clients. “If a person in our program in Vallejo wants to move across the water to Crockett, they don’t have to get transferred to a different provider, we can move with them,” says BFHP Executive Director, Terrie Light, “part of that is inherently built into our grant about being able to go across the county lines, we don’t have to say no, we can usually say yes.” This approach is also what allows us to collaborate most effectively with the VA, which is why we have become one of their most trusted allies in the fight to end veteran homelessness. “Berkeley Food & Housing Project is a strong partner in our efforts to end homelessness among Veterans and we look forward to continued work with them,” says Pullar.

This regional approach combined with the increasingly challenging housing market in the Bay Area, has lead us to begin housing clients farther afield. “When the opportunity to grow our service area into Sacramento came along, it felt like a natural extension and expansion,” says Light, “because we had already housed multiple clients in Sacramento County and were used to collaborating with service providers in that area.”

As we begin this new phase of our veteran services program, we are looking forward to working more closely with other service providers in Sacramento as well as continuing our collaboration with the VA.

We are happy to welcome Francesca Biffi to our team as Director of Clinical and Residential Services.

For the past 15 years, Francesca has helped the most vulnerable individuals access the basic needs of food, shelter, and medical care.

Originally from Rome, Italy, Francesca came to the U.S. to pursue a master’s degree in Social Work. “It gives me joy to help others, to get them out of poverty and rebuild their lives. Just picking them up when they are at the bottom of society and they’ve lost their hope.”

California became her second home, when she started her career as a psychiatric Social Worker at Patton State Hospital in San Bernardino County, a maximum security facility for Mentally Disordered Offenders found not guilty by reason of insanity. She then moved to Northern California and worked at San Quentin as a Clinical Social Worker helping inmates cope with mental illness and the daily stressors of prison life. Her work path brought her to State parole in Oakland where she helped parolees rebuild their lives in the community. Part of her job as a clinical social worker was to provide services to sex offenders including relapse prevention groups and mental health diagnosis and treatment.

Before joining Berkeley Food & Housing Project, she was the site supervisor for the Veterans Administration’s HUD-VA Supportive Housing Program in Martinez. Her team was part of the larger initiative of the VA in partnership with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to help homeless veterans receive wraparound services and find permanent housing. It was while working at the VA that she first met our veteran’s team lead by Natalie Siva. “I knew how wonderful this agency was because I met the veteran services providers, and I worked really closely with them in Martinez. I worked with Natalie Siva and her team in Contra Costa and Solano County for a little over a year, and I hadn’t seen the dedication and enthusiasm of this team anywhere else I had worked.” Francesca had been thinking about a change from government work, so when this position became available, she knew it would be a great fit. “I am really happy to be a part of the organization that I had worked with so much before.”

When not at work, Francesca loves reading and cooking fresh, homemade Italian food for her family and friends.
In 2012 Interfaith Chaplain M.A. Sempari began working with the men in our veteran’s transitional housing program. Her work focused on helping these homeless veterans heal from the moral injury they sustained as a result of combat experience. This powerful work inspired us to create a unique service model which soon became our Peer Outreach Internship Program.

This 6-month internship is designed from a twofold perspective. It allows homeless veterans the chance to give back to their peers while learning valuable life and job skills, and also provides them spiritual support during their own journey towards reintegration and personal acceptance.

In 2015 we began intensive outreach efforts into encampments and abandoned buildings. The interns accompany our Chaplain in an effort to reach chronically homeless veterans who were not connected to VA services. We found that many of these veterans were deliberately avoiding services because experiences they had in combat had left them feeling unworthy of help. Not only were these veterans in need of mental and physical care, but also deeply in need of spiritual care. Our engagement strategy is centered on building personal relationships and trust.

To date, all interns have graduated the program with permanent housing and employment. One of the graduates now works full time for BFHP. This unique model was recently recognized on the national level at the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans in Washington DC.

BREAKING GROUND 2019

• Developed in partnership with BRIDGE Housing
• Designed by Leddy Maytum Stacy Architects
• Located near transit in downtown Berkeley
• 53 units of extremely low-income housing for formerly homeless
• 89 units of low-income rental units: studio, one and two bedrooms
• Emergency short-term housing for homeless adult males
• Commercial kitchen and dining facility

For more information contact Jim Huntley, Director of Advancement: 510-318-6632, jhuntley@bfhp.org

ROADS HOME EXPANDS INTO SACRAMENTO AND AMADOR COUNTIES
Your contributions are vital as the agency continues to grow in breadth and scope.