Berkeley Food & Housing Project is excited to announce the expansion of its Roads Home Program in Alameda County. This program will serve approximately 600 homeless veterans over the next two years, throughout Alameda County. The program expansion is made possible by $6M in additional funding from the office of Veterans’ Affairs’ Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program and built around a new rental subsidy initiative called ‘shallow subsidy.’

“By removing income restrictions once a household is enrolled, this subsidy proves to be different from other interventions,” stated Roads Home Senior Program Manager, Angela Upshaw. “I believe we will see an improvement in housing stability by encouraging households to increase their income rather than penalizing them (households) through income ineligibility.”

Despite the overall success of the SSVF rapid rehousing interventions, many cities in California and across the country are facing challenges with long-term housing stability. These challenges are due in part to the high cost and low-vacancy rates of the rental market, which has yielded an insufficient stock of affordable housing units. In response, the SSVF shallow subsidy is designed to enable service providers in high rent burdened communities to augment available housing options for homeless veterans. By providing additional rental assistance for a more extended period of time (two years before recertification), the expectation is this sustained support would increase long-term housing stability.

This program will be housed at a new office location in Oakland, and led by Roads Home Alameda Program Manager, Kyle Dunson. Kyle has been with BFHP since 2014, and was most recently leading our Roads Home team in Solano and Contra Costa counties.

Roads Home is a program of Berkeley Food & Housing Project that provides an array of services to veterans and their families experiencing housing insecurity. Roads Home delivers services across the counties of Alameda, Contra Costa, Solano, San Joaquin, Sacramento, and Amador, and has been recognized by the VA for offering a highly effective regional approach to ending veteran homelessness.
HELPING HOMELESS VETERANS FIND EMPLOYMENT

For this story, we want to highlight a specific arm of our Roads Home program, the Homeless Veteran Reintegration Program (HVRP).

Roads Home HVRP is active in the counties of Solano and Contra Costa, and is specifically focused on helping veterans find employment. The goal of this program, made possible by grant funds from the Department of Labor, is to make sure that veterans are receiving a stable income at the same time that they are receiving housing services.

Some of the most common challenges faced by our clients are physical or mental disabilities, gaps in employment, and lack of education or skills. Many clients are coming from living on the streets and have been unemployed and unhoused for a significant period of time. Clients like Gerald.

Gerald had been living under a bridge for two years when he heard about the Roads Home program from one of our partner agencies in Fairfield. It took a while to earn Gerald’s trust so for the first three months, HVRP staff met with him every three days to make sure he was receiving and responding to all the wraparound services that he needed.

Most of our clients have a history of work that involves hard manual labor, but due to disability or aging, they can no longer perform such physically taxing work. We work with the client to prepare them for jobs that they are able to do. Some of the best fields for the veterans we work with are: security guard, delivery driver, and dispatcher.

Between both the housing and employment departments of Roads Home, we were able to provide Gerald with everything from clothing to job training to housing assistance. He was able to secure a housing voucher from the HUD-VA supportive housing program, and a job at the San Francisco Airport. The last time Gerald came in to our office he was wearing a big smile “I’m truly a changed man from the experience of working with the HVRP program.”

Another client, Joseph, first came to us because he was on the verge of becoming homeless. He had been unsuccessfully searching for a job and was struggling to support himself and his family of six. “I needed a lifeline and I sought out housing services.” Our housing services department referred him to HVRP.

Run by Employment Services Supervisor, Rhoda McKenzie and her dedicated team, HVRP uses what they call a “red carpet approach” when clients come into the office for services. The veterans are always met with kindness and respect as they are welcomed into the program. When a client first comes to us, we sit down with them one-on-one to create a plan to get them to where they want to go. Some of the things that we can do to help prepare veterans for employment include: specific skills training such as computer proficiency, helping them get their GED, and signing them up for certification or licensing.

For Joseph, we were able to help him complete training and certification to become a security guard. “I enjoyed the training I received to obtain my BSIS card which included the regular guard card class and taking my baton permit class.”

HVRP will work with clients for a full year to help them find a job and then once they are employed we will be there to check in with them on a monthly basis for an additional year to make sure they are able to retain their employment.

As part of this program, we also organize job fairs where we bring together veterans and prospective employers in the area. What makes this different to other job fairs is that each of the represented employers are already willing to hire formerly homeless veterans. Many are even specifically looking for employees with a military background.

Joseph got a job at National Pro Security and is now overseeing twelve posts. “I enjoy using my experience and skills from the military to work with all types of individuals and being able to interact with them on a daily basis.”

We believe patience, persistence, and partnership are the keys to helping veterans overcome the initial barriers of homelessness and unemployment. With this program we are able to work with each client individually to help them address their specific challenges and rejoin society.

In Joseph’s words, “I am no longer in a housing crisis and I am able to support my family with my job. Roads Home has definitely brought me to where I am today.”
Calleene Egan joined the agency in January 2019 as Director of Programs and has already played a pivotal role in bringing BFHP’s programs and services into alignment with the changing needs of a burgeoning – and intraregional – homeless population. She succeeds Terrie Light, BFHP’s former Executive Director, who retired after 21 years with the agency.

“The Board of BFHP is excited for its future under Calleene’s leadership” said Board Chair, Kajsa Minor. “We have been incredibly impressed by her passion and dedication to serving the homeless. Her energy and tenacity will no doubt make a significant impact, which our community needs now more than ever. Calleene will also be instrumental in achieving BFHP’s goal of building the Hope Center, which will break ground next year. BFHP is fortunate to have Calleene at its helm.”

Prior to joining BFHP, Calleene was Regional Director for Social Enterprise with Caminar Inc. She holds a BA from California State University, Chico, and a MA in Social Entrepreneurship from Pepperdine University. Calleene brings many years of experience in developing strategic partnerships as well as managing complex contracts for services with local, regional, and national providers.

“I am honored to lead Berkeley Food and Housing Project into the next era” says Egan. “I am inspired daily by our dedicated staff’s commitment to our clients and I look forward to the work we will continue to do together to find innovative solutions to ease and end the crisis of homelessness in our communities.”

Join Us For an Open House!

You are invited to join us for your chance to meet Calleene and the rest of the Executive Management Team, and see our new Roads Home office in Oakland.

Thursday, November 7, 2019
4:30 – 6:00 pm

11881 Skyline Blvd, Suite G | Oakland, CA 94619

Please RSVP to info@bfhp.org or (510) 601-2616

A LITTLE HELP FROM OUR FRIENDS

We want to give a big thank you to our friends at the Aquatic Residences in Berkeley. They are hosting a fundraiser for BFHP during the month of October. We’re always so grateful for strong engagement from the local communities we are part of. It’s only together that we can make a difference!

If you want to get involved you can find the fundraiser page at: crowdrise.com/aquatic-cares
Our shelters, drop-in center, and permanent supportive housing facilities are in serious need of some basic necessities:

- New bath towels and wash cloths
- Shampoo (full or travel size)
- New twin-size sheet sets
- Laundry Soap

If you are able to donate any of the above, please contact us at info@bfhp.org or (510) 601-2616