



Contra Costa Council on Homelessness

## Homelessness Awareness Month 2021 Awards for Innovation

*The Innovation Award is to recognize individuals and/or organizations that have enriched the lives of people facing homelessness in Contra Costa County using an innovative initiative/project/program. The innovative initiative/ project/program must be new to Contra Costa County within the past two years. The initiative/project/program may have been successful elsewhere and has been modified to work in Contra Costa County, or an original program that is successful in assisting those facing homelessness. The Nominee must be an individual or organization helping Contra Costa County residents and the initiative/project/program must be new to Contra Costa County within the past two years.*

### **Awardees**

1. Continued Success Program, Winter Nights Family Shelter, Inc.  
(District: Entire County)
2. Holistic Intervention Partnership (HIP) Program (District: Entire County)
3. Homeless Action Coalition (District 5)
4. S.H.A.R.E. Community (District 5)
5. SoS Richmond! Streets Team (District 1)

*The following pages contain descriptions of awardees provided by the person (s) who nominated them.*

# Continued Success Program, Winter Nights Family Shelter, Inc.

**Contact:** Bill Shaw

**Nominated by:** Jo Kerner

**Supervisory District:** They serve the entire county.

**Description of the innovative initiative/project/program:** Winter Nights has operated a family shelter in Contra Costa County since 2004. Now in our 18th season, over 380 families with minor children have been served and the program has expanded to include a Safe Parking program for families and individuals living in their cars. In early 2020 we planned a pilot program to stay in touch with families from prior years, after they were housed. We called it Continued Success and originally budgeted \$450 for simple outreach.

The Covid-19 pandemic changed all of this. Keeping former clients housed became a major priority. At Winter Nights, our clients and alumni live near or below the poverty line and these folks have been hit hard. They are often one paycheck away from returning to homelessness, pandemic or not. We expanded our effort from simple follow-up to a formal program to contact alumni, assess their vulnerabilities, provide referrals, and if needed provide financial support for rent, car repair, or other expenses that threatened their ability to stay in their home. This program seeks to prevent that from happening. Since July 1, 2020, we have contacted 40 alumni families and have helped 9 of them with specific needs (23%).

**Description of how the innovative initiative/project/program impacts the lives of people experiencing homelessness:** We have spent \$5450 in direct payments for rent, keeping two families from losing their apartments, and \$400 in Target and Gasoline gift cards to others. \$5850 in total. We have also helped families receive needed furnishings for their apartments, clothing for newborns and

growing children, and access to food and baby supplies through agencies we work with.

Here is the story of one family, as told in our Good News letter:

*September 2020 While reaching out to stay in touch, a wife and mother of two told program manager, Teri Lundvall, that when she didn't feel well, she went to get tested for Covid-19. (False alarm- it was negative. Yay!) While she waited for results, her employer took her off the work schedule completely, and did not reinstate her. At the same time, her husband's work hours, at the same firm, were reduced to one day a week. What a terrible situation for a family of four.*

We are glad to report that both parents have since found new jobs and are fully employed. But, while she was sheltered, waiting for her test results, and he was working one day a week and then both were looking for new jobs, the rent was due, and then overdue. Their landlord served them the California "3-day Notice to Pay Rent or Quit", the first step in the eviction process.

Well, that is what Continued Success is for: to help keep alumni families housed, rather than repeat the cycle of homelessness. After verifying the eviction notice, our Continued Success team went to work, and so did they. Mom and Dad contacted all the resources we suggested but were repeatedly told that the agency was out of funding. So, Winter Nights' Continued Success offered to pay their back rent, and the current month's rent too, giving them breathing room they needed. They are so very, very grateful. When Mom came to pick up the rent check, with one of her sons, there were tears all around.

**Description of what makes initiative/project/program innovative:** Prior to the American Rescue Plan in 2020 and the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP), a small non-profit like Winter Nights was able to assess the vulnerability of it's former clients and offer assistance just by starting with a small fund for follow-up support. The regular email outreach is designed to acknowledge the difficulties of staying housed these days and provide a source for guidance that is known and trusted by those who receive the monthly outreach emails. The name of the program, Continued Success, honors the achievements of formerly homeless families.

A note from a Continued Success father of four, after a visit from Winter Nights staff.

*“Hi Bill, Teri and Kathleen,*

*Thank you so, so, so much for loving on us. I got so emotional, at work, when my wife sent me the pic of y’all at our place Hugs and kisses to you guys. You took us in when family kicked us out. Till this day they haven’t visited us, yet y’all have come to see us. My heart overflows with thanksgiving to God for you all. God bless each of you!!!”*

# Holistic Intervention Partnership program (HIP)

**Contact:** Bertha Lopez, Hume Center

**Nominated by:** Chris Celio, PsyD

**Supervisory District:** They serve the entire county.

**Description of the innovative initiative/project/program:** The Holistic Intervention Partnership program (HIP) is a collaboration between Contra Costa County Health, Housing, and Homeless Services (H3) and the Contra Costa County Public Defender's Office. H3 and the Public Defender's Office have brought together an impactful team of agencies in this project, including The Hume Center, Bay Area Legal Aid, Contra Costa County Office of Re-entry and Justice, Cal State University Long Beach, Rubicon, and Uptrust.

The HIP program serves Contra Costa County, justice-impacted residents and their families with housing support services and resources in Contra Costa County. The aim of the project is to help these residents successfully resolve their justice-related issues while attaining or maintaining housing for them and their household. The project includes legal advocacy, housing support, rapid resolution, community linkage, mediation, employment support and training, and appointment and court date reminders and linkage. Amazingly, the partners were able to put the distractions of the early pandemic aside and start up the project collaboratively. The project started July 1, 2020 for its first year and has been renewed for a second year!

This project is a vast one, with different goals and activities for each of the partners. I am nominating the entire HIP project and all of the partners. In this application though, I can only speak to Hume's impact and I hope that other partners, if this project is considered, can add in their impact statements. For Hume Center, we were contracted to work with 65 clients a year. So far, we have worked with 80 clients to assist with their housing. Our work with each client has

varied, but we are most excited about having helped one-third of those households achieve permanent housing!

**Description of how the innovative initiative/project/program impacts the lives of people experiencing homelessness:** This project has had a vast impact and has had four main stakeholder groups: justice involved individuals, their families, the justice system, and the Continuum of Care.

Justice-Involved Individuals: When you're facing the weight of the justice system, it can be an overwhelming and heavy lift to get through it. Small issues can easily snowball into large and dreadful issues for many reasons, including: not knowing how to navigate the justice system; missing court dates due to lack of housing, transportation, reminders, etc; not having the resources to assemble an advocacy and support team; not having stable housing from which to be able to prepare, attend, and resolve legal issues; not being able to afford missing work to attend to the preparation or court dates successfully; not knowing what resources are available to help you or how to access them; and having co-occurring stressors, employment, mental health, substance use, housing, or other difficulties that make it impossible to complete your court or other legal requirements successfully so that you can move beyond this justice issue. It can feel like the legal system is not just a snowball that builds slowly over time, but that it is already a boulder perched on a cliff that is ready to fall down toward you at the slightest touch. This population is the main stakeholder of this project.

The second stakeholder group of this project is the family and other household members of the justice-involved person. They are often negatively impacted greatly by their loved one's participation in the justice system. With HIP's support to resolve the justice system issue and to equip the household with appropriate and sustainable housing and employment, the whole household benefits! Not only is the household's entry into homeless prevented, but the stigma of being justice-involved is resolved and the dignity of appropriate housing and employment can lead to great improvements in their mental health and functioning.

The third stakeholder group of this project is the justice system itself. Persons who do not resolve legal matters are kept within the legal system, with additional

court appointments, public defender assignments, and other resources while they remain in the justice system. Efficiently resolving their legal issue through a concerted effort to help through the arduous process results in benefits for the entire legal system. As this project helps its clients resolve their issues, the limited resources of the justice system are freed up to assist others to achieve swift and supported resolutions of their case.

And lastly, the limited resources of the entire Continuum of Care benefit from a successful project such as this one. With these individuals connected to a full suite of resources and supported to resolve their legal, housing, and employment issues, that leaves other resources available to support the others who are experiencing housing disruption, eviction, or homelessness.

**Description of what makes initiative/project/program innovative:** What makes this project unique and impactful is the collaboration between all of the partners and the easy and seamless manner in which clients gain access to the full suite of services and agencies. People and their families who are justice-involved are, in general, multi-stressed. The justice system can be arduous to navigate, especially when many other life stressors are being experienced concurrently and the person and their family are trying to maintain their income and household at the same time.

This project takes existing services and brings them together for easy access and a more impactful and lasting outcome. The partnership is summarized below: H3 and Hume Center work together to evaluate the housing needs and which strategies to use to help the person leave homelessness, maintain housing, or attain more healthy or sustainable housing. H3's interventions include linking them to HDAP and General Assistance, CORE Homeless Outreach, a homeless shelter, or entry into the Coordinated Entry System. When appropriate, they refer the person to Hume Center's Rapid Resolution Program to prevent homelessness. Hume provides short-term case management, advocacy, housing support services, mediation, rapid resolution, and linkages throughout the Continuum of Care. They assist individuals with Whole Person Care and wrap-around-services, including behavioral health. Bay Area Legal Aid provides legal services and advocacy outside of what is needed in their criminal case, including advocacy related to areas like child support, divorces/separations, financial issues, landlord/tenant

issues, evictions, and restraining orders. Rubicon provides employment coaching, training, and linkage to support the person sustain their gains made in the program and open more housing opportunities to them. CCC Office of Re-Entry and Justice provides the legal services that have to do with their legal case that need additional services outside of what the Public Defenders' Office provides, e.g. helping them get their driver's license back CSU Long Beach is the research partner and the glue that pieces together and facilitate interagency and stakeholder communication. Uptrust is creating an app that will link the clients of the program with their provider team and be a centralized place for court date, appointment, and documentation information and reminders. It's obvious why this program has been so impactful. With so many talented agencies all working together for these individuals and their families, successful navigation of the legal system and positive and sustainable housing outcomes are easily enabled. Compare that to the ineffective status quo, where justice-involved individuals have to find and navigate complex and unknown community resources all while going through a very stressful experience, and the positive impacts of the HIP program are no surprise at all.

Hume Center would like to appreciate H3 and the Public Defender's Office for convening this group of agencies and doing the hard work to stand up a collaborative project with so many pieces. it was a big lift but the reward for the residents of Contra Costa have been numerous! Thank you H3 for always being a great partner and driver of innovation.

# Homeless Action Coalition

**Contact:** Noralea Gipner

**Nominated by:** Deborah White

**Supervisory District:** District 5 (Hercules, Martinez, Pittsburg, portions of Pinole and Antioch, and unincorporated communities of Alhambra Valley, Bay Point, Briones, Rodeo, Pacheco, Crockett, Tormey, Port Costa, Mt. View, Vine Hill, Reliez Valley, and Clyde)

**Description of the innovative initiative/project/program:** The Homeless Action Coalition (HAC) is a new nonprofit organization led by former Martinez City Councilmember Noralea Gipner. It is a coalition of community and faith leaders who have joined together to address the needs of the unhoused residents of Martinez residents.

With more than 150 unhoused residents living in encampments, embankments and parking lots, Martinez has one of the highest per capita homelessness rates in Contra Costa County. With such great need, Martinez leaders were compelled to act.

Over the past year, community groups and the Martinez Homelessness Task Force have partnered to address urgent needs, most recently operating a weekly homeless service center at the Martinez Waterfront Park. There, the Bay Church and other faith partners offered showers, laundry service and toiletries. The Martinez Police Department and Contra Costa C.O.R.E. connected people to shelters and other public resources, while Contra Costa Health Services provided a free mobile clinic. Community volunteers offered haircuts and organized a clothing exchange program. Prior to COVID-19, 30-40 individuals participated in these services every week. Moving forward, the Homeless Action Coalition will serve as a hub for these resources, coordinating strategy and funding within Martinez and its adjacent communities.

**Description of how the innovative initiative/project/program impacts the lives of people experiencing homelessness:** The Homeless Action Coalition provides multiple needed services for unhoused individuals in Martinez, including

temporary housing, clothing, showers, restroom facilities and medical care. Their actions have assisted fully 75% of Martinez's unhoused individuals. Of particular importance, The HAC was able to move quickly to find, renovate, and move people into a safe shelter for individuals during the COVID pandemic. Individuals there were regularly tested and could quarantine safely, preventing the spread of COVID in Martinez and beyond.

**Description of what makes initiative/project/program innovative:** The Homeless Action Coalition is a grassroots organization that was born out of one city official's frustration with a system that made it difficult for people to work together to confront an obvious concern. Starting with faith organizations who were motivated to assist but had no venue to pool resources and then using her knowledge of the system to enlist the assistance of police and medical services to expand the work. It has grown quickly and was in a position to begin collecting donations and further expanding services immediately upon becoming a 501c (3) organization. One of the other important facets of HAC is its dedication to self-governance by the individuals served, encouraging "self confidence, sense of community, and security. "

I couldn't decide whether to nominate Noralea Gipner as an individual or Homeless Action Coalition as an organization. Both are very deserving of the award. They have done more to assist the unhoused population of Martinez in two years than has been done in a decade.

# S.H.A.R.E. Community

**Contact:** Ricka Davis-Sheard

**Nominated by:** Patrice Guillory

**Supervisory District:** District 5 (Hercules, Martinez, Pittsburg, portions of Pinole and Antioch, and unincorporated communities of Alhambra Valley, Bay Point, Briones, Rodeo, Pacheco, Crockett, Tormey, Port Costa, Mt. View, Vine Hill, Reliez Valley, and Clyde)

**Description of the innovative initiative/project/program:** As of September 29, 2021, it has been a year since S.H.A.R.E. started providing consistent mobile showers in a state of the art, constantly fully-sanitized trailer. The trailer is ADA compliant and can provide up to 25 hot showers per session. S.H.A.R.E. provides clean clothing and hygiene packages including: soap, razors, toothbrush, toothpaste, lotion, shampoo, conditioner, feminine products, hair brushes and other toiletries.

S.H.A.R.E. also connects guests to other on-site personal grooming services, gives new/gently used clothing according to the weather, provides device charging stations, and free meals. S.H.A.R.E. has provided just under 1,000 showers so far! Guests have many positive things to say about having consistent place to shower.

*"You know, ever since I've been coming to shower here, I feel like a person again. I didn't feel like that before. Thank you."*

*"When I shower here, I feel loved AND clean. I feel a part of society again -- I'm ready to take on the day!"*

**Description of how the innovative initiative/project/program impacts the lives of people experiencing homelessness:** S.H.A.R.E. understands showers and access to hygiene will not alone solve the homeless crisis. However, given a chance to restore dignity, many of the guests have managed to acquire jobs, build self-confidence, combat depression, and actively participate in quelling the spread of COVID-19. Nearly 40% of the guests report they believe access to this facility helps them stay healthy.

By leveraging support from organizations and small businesses such as White Pony Express, local Barbers and Hair Salons, HealthRIGHT 360, Golden Hill's Community Outreach Center, Shelter, Inc., Lava Maex, Contra Costa Health Services' CORE Team, and Supportive Services for Veterans, S.H.A.R.E. helps facilitate access to opportunities that come with being clean and helps guests reach optimal levels of success, individually and communally.

**Description of what makes initiative/project/program innovative:** S.H.A.R.E. is the ONLY consistent, full-service, fully ADA compliant mobile shower program in East Contra Costa County. S.H.A.R.E. envisions our work as the springboard for unhoused people to build confidence, reinforce their human worth, and secure stable housing. S.H.A.R.E. understands this cannot be achieved overnight, however, through consistency and unfettered support. We know our work changes lives and communities!

# SOS! Richmond Streets Team

**Contact:** Daniel Barth

**Nominated by:** Gayle McLaughlin

**Supervisory District:** District 1 (Richmond, San Pablo, El Cerrito, part of Pinole, and the unincorporated communities of Bayview, East Richmond Heights, El Sobrante, Kensington, Montalvin Manor, Tara Hills, North Richmond, and Rollingwood)

**Description of the innovative initiative/project/program:** Richmond has an innovative organization called SOS! Richmond. SOS stands for Safe Organized Spaces. Safe Organized Spaces Richmond has been operational as an essential resource for the city since 2019. It receives universal praise for its as it addresses essential needs among the unhoused that are otherwise unmet. SOS! Richmond is the only organization in Richmond whose mission is centered on workforce development for unhoused individuals who otherwise have the least access to mainstream opportunities. It is the SOS! Streets Team program that I am nominating for this "Innovation" award.

The Streets Team is a unique model that builds and maintains relationships with encampment residents through rooting their work in cultural competencies that can only be provided by peers who have trusted relationships with unsheltered populations. In other words, unhoused people trust other unhoused people, SOS trains and hires Streets Team members from among the unhoused and provides them with responsibilities to do outreach, engagement and stewardship to address street and encampment hotspots and needed services, as well as to help resolve neighborhood complaints. Among their many activities, they remove tons of trash and illegal dumping throughout Richmond on a weekly basis. What started as a staff of 4 diverse Streets Team members in December of 2019 has grown to a staff of 23 as of July of 2021. With new funding provided by the City of Richmond through one of our Reimagining Public Safety initiatives, the SOS! Streets Team will be able to expand to at least 60 and potentially to 100 members very soon (all to be hired from among the unhoused community in Richmond).

SOS! Richmond's Street Team provides hands-on help day in and day out to members of our unhoused community. They improve encampment and

neighborhood living conditions through direct service, engagement, advocacy, and collaborations. The impact of their efforts are enormous and they are setting Richmond on course to be an example of a city that cares about its unhoused, steering them into opportunities to lead better and more productive lives and eventually into stable housing.

**Description of how the innovative initiative/project/program impacts the lives of people experiencing homelessness:** Our challenges in the midst of this extreme housing crisis era are enormous. It is essential that we address the very real problems that people are facing at the root causes. That means we need to address the needs of unhoused residents and not just push them around from one site to another with no real support as to helping people get a leg up in their lives. Helping people lead dignified lives, as they cope in such difficult situations, takes a certain type of attitude and support. It takes compassion, understanding, patience and a willingness to provide whatever support is needed. Only with such attitudes and real support can a course be carved out toward better quality of life that leads to stable, sustainable and permanent housing. The Streets Team program provides such support.

The difference in people's lives that the SOS! Streets Team had made is enormous - helping support both unhoused residents and neighbors throughout the city that are impacted. Unsheltered people are employed on the Streets Teams to respond to neighborhood problems such as illegal dumping. Streets Team staff serve as land stewards and role models, and engage in continuous community engagement with encampment residents. This work benefits both the community and the workers.

Here is a quote from one of the Streets Team members;

*"I help run the showers, and work on the streets team on Friday. This is my first actual job with a regular paycheck. I like the people I work with, and it's great having a job. I make \$15.50 an hour. "* - Sasha Allen, encampment resident and SOS employee

SOS operates a mobile shower trailer, staffed by unsheltered people, which brings hygiene and other necessities to people at various locations across West County on a rotating basis.

Below is a quote from another SOS Streets Team member:

*"I love helping people get showers. Some people told me they haven't had a shower in 8 months. One man told me he wasn't sure he could walk as far as the shower trailer, so I pushed him there in his wheelchair."* - Buddy Bennett, encampment resident and SOS employee

SOS! Richmond also provides and maintains low-cost portable hand-washing stations at encampment locations, filling an immediate and high priority request from residents. SOS partners with public and private entities to provide portable toilets, trash removal, and other essential sanitation services.

Below is a quote from an encampment resident who receives benefit from having such water, sanitation and hygiene available for her and her husband, both seniors struggling with homelessness.

*"We sleep in our truck in the front seat. We're both on social security. We don't make enough money to consider buying or renting anything. We just want someplace where we can cook, have running water and use the restroom."* - Amilee Smith, encampment resident

### **Description of what makes initiative/project/program innovative:**

Daniel Barth is the Director of SOS! Richmond. He has 35 years of experience working with homeless populations. He directs the development and operation of the Streets Team for daytime encampment and neighborhood engagement and provision of basic amenities, and for nighttime neighborhood responses related to public safety and quality of life issues. Thanks to Daniel's leadership and that of others associated with SOS! Richmond, unhoused people are employed in the Streets Team with zero incomes, with the majority of the staff reporting that this is the first job they have held in decades, sometimes the first in their lives. We

are so lucky to have this exciting model of transforming people's lives alive and well in Richmond!

To learn more, see this link:

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1D6sllrYkMt9EJ\\_qiiV3OlrIJugP4NhxBHEWtrmQP88U/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1D6sllrYkMt9EJ_qiiV3OlrIJugP4NhxBHEWtrmQP88U/edit?usp=sharing)