

# 2016–2017 ANNUAL REPORT



free from homelessness and family violence

## The Family Front Door

**F**amilies sleeping in their cars and on the streets have a new pathway back into housing. Two years ago, Building Futures helped usher in an innovative, redesigned, coordinated system that provides a one-stop experience for homeless families to access a vast range of rehousing services from multiple programs and agencies. Even families with a housing crisis but were not yet homeless received housing counseling and referrals to appropriate services. The results were immediately beneficial to families.

It gives Sabrina Thomas (Building Futures' Director of Emergency Services) and her staff, pictured right, great pride to have envisioned a faster and more effective helping system. They worked collaboratively with the City of Oakland and East Oakland Community Project to weave decades-old independent programs into a unified system prioritizing the most vulnerable families, ended the trauma of homelessness by rehousing 38 families thus far, and counseled hundreds and hundreds of families about their housing crisis. "It is our job to know by name every family that is living in a car, park, or an encampment. And we do! We can check in on you, talk about safe housing for tonight, enroll you, and link you to help," she says.

Before the Family Front Door, families might call the County's 211 helpline and from there call every shelter in the county asking for help. "If there was no shelter space—that was it. After hours of phone calls, the family would end up with a bunch of 'no's' and no solution for that night", Thomas says. "The new model begins with a conversation with the family about their housing situation and what led up to it to help them explore a



*Emergency Services Director Sabrina Thomas (center) with Oakland Family Front Door Staff: Program Manager Lakeisha Livingston, Housing Specialist Marchon Tatmon, Case Manager Doris Freeman, and Eligibility Specialist Tasha Fifer (left to right)*

whole spectrum of options and resources, not just shelter. The purpose is that every family would have a safe indoor place to stay tonight and receive some level of service."

The new system is designed to aggressively reduce homelessness: to match those with the greatest needs with intensive supports, to reduce the amount of time families remain on the streets or in shelter, and to explore every potential familial, community, or public resource that could help end a family's homelessness.

Executive Director Liz Varela adds, "With this epic housing crisis in Alameda County and in the Bay Area, BFWC was excited to try a new approach to today's crisis while we advocate voraciously for more housing and longer-term solutions. We have to solve this housing crisis together, and soon!"

*The Family Front Door Program served as a pilot, helping guide Alameda County as it retooled homeless services. It is Alameda County's one-stop service hub for families experiencing homelessness in Oakland, Berkeley, Albany, Emeryville, and Piedmont.*



### SAN PABLO FIRE FAMILIES HOUSED

Last March the City of Oakland called upon Building Futures and other service providers to house the victims of the four-alarm fire at 2551 San Pablo Avenue. The fire claimed four lives. Those displaced "were not only homeless, but had just experienced this huge trauma," Thomas says. "If the Family Front Door was not there ready to help, it would have taken much longer to house them."

"We were starting all over," explained Family Front Door client and San Pablo Avenue survivor Eliza Anderson (pictured left). Despite the devastating loss of their home and possessions, Eliza recalls it was housing specialist Marchon Tatmon's calm demeanor and adaptability that helped her and her three children through the experience. "He was always calm, every step of the way. It gave me hope."

## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Holiday greetings! I hope the report you are holding finds you in good health and spirit. At Building Futures, we believe everyone deserves a safe place to call home. It really is as simple as that.

So every day, we help our clients overcome obstacles to being permanently housed. Building Futures is a Housing First agency, so all of our programs and services— from emergency shelter to domestic violence counseling to housing—are focused on this primary aim.

When individuals and families have a place to call home, our communities are stronger, safer, and more vibrant places for all. I thank you for supporting this important work.

Some of you have been with us since 1989, when we were known as the San Leandro Women's Refuge and operated one emergency shelter. Today, we administer a \$5.5 million budget. We've built a powerful roster of services and become an Alameda County leader in serving individuals and families in crisis.

It is no simple task to achieving our aim of connecting clients to housing. The San Francisco Bay Area is now one of the world's most expensive places to live. In addition to this stark fact, our clients face homelessness, intimate partner violence, mental health challenges, and medical needs.

I hope you enjoy this annual report, and feel pride in the many successes you have helped to make possible. I am grateful to you for your partnership and your support. Most of all, I am grateful for your compassion for your neighbors in need.

Sincerely,



Liz Varela



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## BACK TO SCHOOL—IN STYLE

**W**e were humbled by the outpouring of school supplies and backpacks that flowed into collection bins and our San Leandro office.

With the help of countless community members who care, 165 children began the new school year with fully-stocked backpacks. In addition, our friends at My New Red Shoes made sure that each and every child—at our shelters, safe house, housing site,

and our housing assistance and domestic violence outreach programs—received a brand new pair of shoes and a gift card to Old Navy. Thank you, one and all!



*Emergency shelter case managers Norma Aleman and Kimber Murillo collect school supplies for San Leandro and Midway Shelter students*

## OUR MISSION

*To build communities with underserved women and children where they are safely and supportively housed, free from homelessness and family violence.*

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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## SEEKING BOARD MEMBERS

Building Futures seeks volunteers to serve on our board of directors and help lead and advance our mission, core values and sustainability.

Ideal candidates have prior board experience, background in nonprofit finance a plus.

If interested, please contact Liz Varela at [lvarela@bfwc.org](mailto:lvarela@bfwc.org).



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# BY THE NUMBERS

Every person we serve has a story of courage and hardship. We're proud to share the data behind the individuals and families Building Futures served with your help during 2016–17.



## 24-HOUR TOLL-FREE CRISIS LINE

6,662

**calls for assistance** on our crisis line, including shelter, housing and domestic violence.

## HOMELESS SERVICES



**nights of shelter** for **148 homeless women and children** provided at Midway and San Leandro shelters.

## HOUSING AND HOUSING ASSISTANCE



**households** living in permanent supportive housing at Bessie Coleman Court were provided with case management services, community activities and other support services.

336

**homeless adults and children** were quickly re-housed as part of our housing programs.

70 rainy or very cold nights

136

**San Leandro-based guests** stayed at the San Leandro Winter Warming Shelter

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICES



**women and children** were sheltered at Sister Me Home safe house, receiving support services designed to keep them safe while rebuilding their lives.

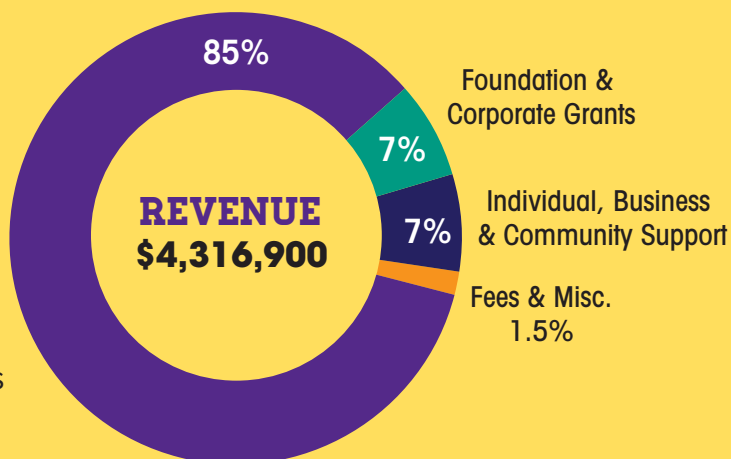
268

**individuals** received education, counseling, intervention, and safety planning through community groups or individual services.

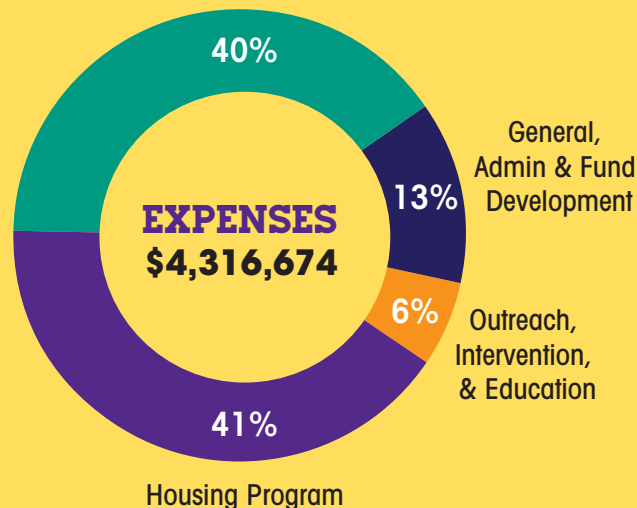
Building Futures provided leadership to Domestic Violence Task Forces in Alameda and San Leandro, supporting Domestic Violence Awareness Month in October and Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month in February.



Government Grants and Contracts



Shelters





# Midway Art Nights

All year, volunteer Mridula Singh has shared her passion for art by presenting Art Nights at Midway Shelter. For each session, Mridula designs a new project, creates example pieces, and provides supplies for teen and adult residents to participate. Her guidance encourages residents to be creative and comfortable with expressing themselves.



*Midway resident displays her butterfly creations*

The first Art Night, residents created portraits using pastels on construction paper canvases. For inspiration, Mridula introduced the residents to the works and technique of Amedeo Modigliani—one of her favorite artists. With Mridula's guidance and encouragement, any initial hesitance melted away. The ladies sketched and blended. Chatting and sharing, as they created colorful images of themselves.

Modigliani said of art “With one eye you are looking at the outside world, while with the other you are looking within yourself.”

For the women living at Midway Shelter, life has come to a turning point. One recent Art Night, clients focused on painting butterflies—a symbol for the potential of transformation and rebirth. And perhaps for these women, the butterfly serves as a symbol of the opportunity Midway provides for a fresh start. At the end of the evening, the table was covered with vibrant, beautifully detailed butterflies.

Mridula brings joy to the shelter with each visit. She also volunteers with Midway's Dinner Donation Program, providing monthly meals for the shelter's 25 residents with her church St. Joseph's. Thank you, Mridula!



*Volunteer art instructor Mridula shares a laugh and portrait technique ideas with a Midway client*



“In January, my 20 year-old daughter and I were at our very end of trying to hold on. Several other shelters told us it would be best to separate—the last thing we wanted to do. Then there was Building Futures. At the shelter, everyone welcomed us. My daughter even graduated from college while we were there. Every staff member puts everything into their jobs. We were encouraged to work hard and not give up. In July, we were connected with housing. Building Futures is forever etched in our hearts!”

## PROVIDING NOURISHMENT, INSPIRING HOPE

The Dalai Lama said, “The act of bringing food is one of the basic roots of all relationships.” Generous community members at Bethel Community Presbyterian Church exemplify the idea, providing dinner for the thirty women and children at the San Leandro Shelter twice every month.

Donald Ogrodnik (2nd from right), joined the dinner volunteer group after a work injury almost nine years ago. Donald provides a salad, picks up other “courses” from group members, and brings the complete meal to the shelter.



*Bethel Community “Second Tuesday” Dinner Donors, (left to right) Suzanne Yee, Charlene Kehret, Donald Ogrodnik, and Marilyn Hicks*

Charlene Kehret (2nd from left), a dinner program volunteer for nearly two decades, recalls, “There have been a lot of people in the church who have done it over the years. It’s a nice community event. We are contributing something and we get to socialize along the way.”

Over 150 women and children call the San Leandro Shelter home each year. For them, dinner donations from community volunteers are more than a nutritious meal. Each meal gives comfort and the knowledge that their neighbors care.

Volunteers purchase, prepare, and deliver a wholesome, well-balanced meal once each month. Some, like the group at Bethel Community Presbyterian Church have been helping since Building Futures’ founding almost three

decades ago!

For available dinner donation slots for the San Leandro or Midway Shelters or to learn more about the Dinner Donation Program, contact Lorie at 510-924-3092 or [lcurtis@bffc.org](mailto:lcurtis@bffc.org).