

A New Lease On Life



Are you a landlord in
Contra Costa County?

Turn to **page 5** to learn how you can
provide shelter to those who need it,
and why you should.



**Find stability and
receive help with:**

Employment and job training • **page 3**

Additional resources • **page 4**

Finding a home • **page 6**

It's okay to need help. Alex Alexander makes sure that veterans and other people living on the street know SHELTER, Inc. is there whenever they are ready.

PHOTO BY GEORGE E. BAKER JR

Housing Comes First

SHELTER, Inc. helps people return to a stable life no matter their struggle

BY THEA MARIE ROOD

The cost of housing in the Bay Area seems to only go in one direction: up. And when these skyrocketing rents are combined with any other life event like the loss of a job, illness, injury, a death in the family or divorce, it can seem nearly impossible for people to get back on their feet.

That's why SHELTER, Inc. has developed a network of programs and partnerships to prevent or relieve homelessness throughout Contra Costa County, and more recently in Solano County. Its mission is not only built around helping people regain control of their lives, but the nonprofit is also able to lend assistance to those with special challenges, like those that veterans face.

"In the military, there's a motto: give a hand up, not a handout," said Alex Alexander, SHELTER, Inc. Veterans Outreach Specialist and a veteran of the U.S. Navy. "We try to pick our fallen comrades up and get them back on their feet."

Because of his own military background, Alexander has a remarkable ability to connect with the homeless vets he meets on his weekly circuit through Richmond, Walnut Creek, Antioch, Pittsburg, the Bay Point area and the rest of Contra Costa County. As he walks through the streets, he dispenses hygiene kits and other basic necessities, as well as practical advice.

"I talk to them like they're back in the military," Alexander said, adding many vets deal with addiction or post-traumatic stress — issues that can feel insurmountable. "I tell them, 'How did you make it through basic training? How did you make it through tech school? The Motto: it's a hand up not a hand out.' But we don't judge you — if you're off the path, we help get you back on the path."

SHELTER, Inc. follows a "housing first" model, which means its highest priority is getting people off the streets. The nonprofit operates two emergency shelters for those with an immediate need, and also has a wide span of services to help individuals and families secure permanent housing. To better stabilize the people it helps, SHELTER, Inc. also provides other services like helping homeless veterans who qualify for vouchers obtain them, identifying someone's benefits or assistance eligibility, providing temporary rent assistance, master-leasing properties or undergoing negotiations with landlords.

Once people are properly housed, SHELTER, Inc. makes sure they have the best chance to stay on the path upward by referring them to rehab programs for drug or alcohol addiction, offering legal assistance to fight tickets or bench warrants and — most importantly — employment assistance. But the road is not always perfectly smooth. "Sometimes there are setbacks — we are humans, not robots that you can just put a little oil in," Alexander said. "So, they reach out again and I encourage them again. The reason we lose veterans is the loss of a job means you lose your wife, you lose your home, your family falls apart and you give up. But we have programs to support veterans and their families, all homeless families, and we do care."

"But we don't judge you — if you're off the path, we help get you back on the path."

Alex Alexander
Veterans Outreach Specialist,
SHELTER, Inc.



EMERGENCY HOUSING

Mountain View Family Shelter

Located in Martinez, this shelter allows families a place to stay *together*. During that time, on-site case management is provided, which includes life skills classes on parenting, conflict resolution and money management. Counseling services, as well as housing assistance and referrals to partner agencies, are also offered. Staff members work closely with each individual, meeting them where they are and providing the tools for self-sufficiency.

SHELTER, Solano

Located in Fairfield, this shelter provides accommodations for individuals and families experiencing homelessness in Solano County. Case management support includes life skills classes, housing assistance and referrals to mental health and other community services. Learn more about SHELTER, Solano on the back page.

To best help those experiencing homelessness, there is a Coordinated Entry system that counties use to refer those in need to the most appropriate resources available:

- **Contra Costa County, please dial 2-1-1.**
- **Solano County, please call 707-652-7311 to reach Resource Connect Solano.**

Through SHELTER, Inc.'s help, Kendall Habig found an employee she couldn't do without and Steve Bowen found a great employer and easy way to improve his life.

PHOTO BY GEORGE E. BAKER JR

Anchored and Employed

A steady job is the first step to maintaining a stable household

BY THEA MARIE ROOD

Losing a job is devastating on its own, but in areas like the Bay Area, where living expenses are high even for the employed, losing a job can quickly lead to other losses: First the car, then someone's home, or even a spouse or custody.

SHELTER, Inc. helps veterans and non-veterans avoid this domino effect by matching employers with people who need a job. The result can be life-changing, and is a vital solution to reducing their struggle with housing.

Steve Bowen, a U.S. Army veteran, was paying his bills by doing odd jobs and living in a tiny room in Antioch when he found SHELTER, Inc. At the same time, Kendall Habig, the manager at Riverview Lodge, was desperate for a dishwasher. With SHELTER, Inc.'s help, Bowen polished up his work skills and the two were placed together.

"He is a godsend," said Habig. "He is a whirlwind, does whatever he is asked, is an absolute dream. If he ever tried to quit, I would beg him to stay — I couldn't do it without him."

In fact, Habig, whose husband is also a veteran, believes military training makes for excellent employees.

"They have discipline and respect, which is sorely lacking these days," she said. "So, hire them. Give them a chance and get them off the streets. They're not asking for a handout — they will do whatever you need them to do."

SHELTER, Inc.'s job placement services are two-fold. One is to connect employers to potential employees and help them "see something besides barriers," said Trudie Giordano, Program Director for SHELTER, Inc. The second is to polish up an applicant's "soft skills" and resumes so they are more employable.

"For example, veterans have good military skills and just need to translate those to civilian life," she said.

SHELTER, Inc. can also help break down barriers for people who are struggling with addiction or other health and life

"He is a whirlwind ... I couldn't do it without him."

Kendall Habig
Restaurant manager

issues that can make finding a job on one's own very difficult.

"We often work with people recovering from addictions who are working to get their kids back, some of whom may be self-harming or suicidal," Giordano said. "And by providing a stable home and employment, we see these burdens resolve."

This kind of stability also makes a big impact on children in a household. Giordano said she's seen cases where children were engaging in self-harm or lashing out because of the constant upheaval their families were going through.

"Once their lives stabilized, all that stopped and they just blossomed — it made a huge difference," said Giordano. "We're not just making an employer happy, we've helped someone get a job and that helps the children, the parents, anyone who depends on that person."



JOB OPPORTUNITIES

SHELTER, Inc. helps veterans and non-veterans find an essential piece of stability: a good job. Here are some ways SHELTER, Inc. can help people find jobs and start on the road to a better future.

Job and Home Placement

Sometimes, two problems can be solved at once if people are placed into jobs that also come with on-site housing. These opportunities can be found in employment at a storage facility, as an apartment property manager, or as a long-distance driver.

Employment Assistance

Open to homeless families and individuals in Contra Costa County and Solano County, who are enrolled in our programs or staying at our shelters. Offers them one-on-one career development and readiness. Also provides assistance with job placement and job retention services, transportation, uniforms, short-term training and certification for those enrolled in their programs.

After he lost his business, Nicholas Baxley was able to get back on his feet and rekindle his relationship with his son thanks to help from Lakisha Langston at SHELTER, Inc.

PHOTO BY GEORGE E. BAKER JR.



HELP FOR VETERANS

Homeless Veteran Reintegration Program (HVRP)

One of the most important steps in maintaining permanent housing is employment. SHELTER, Inc. can help veterans get back into the workforce.

Eligibility requirements:

- Veterans who have served at least one day of active duty
- No dishonorable discharge status
- Located in Alameda, Contra Costa and Solano counties

Services and referrals include:

- Job-readiness skills
- Job training
- Transportation
- Professional attire

For more information, call 925-957-7573.

Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF)

This Veterans Affairs-funded program provides support for low-income homeless veteran families as well as those who are at risk of losing their housing.

Eligibility requirements:

- No dishonorable discharge status (DD-214 or other documentation required)
- Income below 50 percent of the area median income level
- We can only provide SSVF services for Contra Costa County, presently

Services include:

- Limited payments to landlords, utility companies and childcare providers
- Assistance obtaining benefits from the VA or other government agencies, if applicable

For more information, call 925-957-7592

For more information on either program, visit shelterinc.org.



A Hand Up

How one veteran rebuilt his life with the right supports

BY ANNE STOKES

In 2013, Nicholas Baxley opened Baxley & Son General Maintenance. The business was something he hoped he could build together with his son, who was born with Down syndrome. Unfortunately, the handyman business folded within a year, which set him down a path toward bankruptcy and eventual homelessness.

"I've always been a hard worker, I've always taken care of myself and I had never been in that situation," the Navy veteran said. "I never thought I would ever be in that position, but I was."

After his housing situation fell through, he ended up staying in different Bay Area shelters for a year until he found SHELTER, Inc. in 2018. His case manager, Lakisha Langston, not only connected him with housing but also put him in touch with other resources like the Department of Veterans Affairs. SHELTER, Inc. also provided financial assistance to better help him get on his feet, like covering rent, utilities and new household items.

"They paid my deposit, which together with first and last month's rent was almost \$6,000," Baxley said. "They basically gave me a cushion to start over again with. It really changed my life."

According to Langston, Program Manager of SHELTER, Inc.'s Reentry Program, the nonprofit's ultimate goal is housing

retention. This can start with emergency housing and progress to moving participants into a permanent residence.

In most cases, ensuring residents can stay housed requires on-going support. To meet those needs, SHELTER, Inc. can offer financial support, and refers participants to government agencies and other organizations for additional assistance available through benefits, entitlements, employment assistance, mental health care and financial education.

"Housing provides a sense of stability where [participants] can start working on their credit, start working on being in a house environment, and help them work through any barriers, whether it's mental health or getting connected to mainstream benefits or employment," Langston said.

Baxley is thankful for the new foundation SHELTER, Inc. has helped him build. Today, he's living in permanent housing and is able to play an active role in his son's life.

"I'm not a wealthy man by any means, but

I have a comfortable life," Baxley said. "I'm able to support myself and I have a house that I've been in almost a year and I have a dog now. My son comes over all the time. It's nice to be able to start my life over again."

"They basically gave me a cushion to start over again with. It really changed my life."

Nicholas Baxley
U.S. Navy veteran

Azell Vickers wanted to help those in need, so she opened an extra room in her home to those who need a temporary place to stay.
PHOTO BY GEORGE E. BAKER JR

Being the Change

Landlords and property owners in Contra Costa and Solano counties can give people a second chance

BY THEA MARIE ROOD

People who end up homeless often lack social or family connections that might have otherwise served as a parachute when things went wrong. For people without these kinds of safety nets, SHELTER, Inc. provides a network of support through its partnerships with property owners across Contra Costa County and Solano County — many of whom open up their own homes to people in need.

“These people often have high barriers [to finding a home on the open market],” said Monica Shepard, Program Manager for SHELTER, Inc.

Traditional landlords — who typically require credit checks, background checks and a minimum income equal to three times the rent — would likely never accept these individuals through a formal application process. But SHELTER, Inc. works with landlords to secure housing despite these types of barriers.

In the past, SHELTER, Inc. has helped property owners safely assist other people by master-leasing their property. This means SHELTER, Inc. rents the property, then places an individual in it. Wraparound services can also begin at that point, said Shepard, ensuring people stay on a healthy path in the face of challenges like mental health issues, addiction or financial struggles.

SHELTER, Inc. can also work directly with landlords to obtain a lease in the individual’s name, so the person will have a renter history but SHELTER, Inc. can still provide case management for up to a year. During this time, the nonprofit will gradually transition all responsibility to renters.

But there are opportunities for others to help. For instance, SHELTER, Inc. has partners who rent rooms in their private homes, on either a temporary or permanent basis. For example, Azell Vickers, Founder of New Hope Transitional Housing Inc., has rented rooms to men and women newly released from jail or prison until they can obtain jobs and permanent homes.

Not only does Vickers get to help those in need, she’s found that this arrangement also helps her feel like she’s making a difference in her community.

“People love my house,” Vickers said. “We provide meals to everyone and, also, they can use the kitchen to fix food the way they want it. This population has a great need for housing because they leave jail or prison with next to nothing.”

If you have a property or an extra room available, consider partnering with SHELTER, Inc. Contact Kelly Nielsen, Director of Property Care at 925-349-0532 or Kelly.Nielsen@shelterinc.org to learn more.

“This population has a great need for housing.”

Azell Vickers
Founder, New Hope Transitional Housing Inc.



THOSE IN NEED CONTRA COSTA COUNTY



485
families



496
veterans



532
transitional age youth



5285
single adults
increasing in need



659
seniors
increasing in need



3971
adults with disabilities
increasing in need

Source: Homeless Management Information System, 2018 data

Before SHELTER, Inc. the only home David Walker had was the companionship of his dog, Pinky. Now, both of them have a roof over their heads.

PHOTO BY GEORGE E. BAKER JR

A Brighter Future

How a Bay Area man went from a dark period into a new life

BY THEA MARIE ROOD



It's tempting to see someone living on the street and think, "That could never be me." But life takes many unpredictable turns, and homelessness can happen to anyone.

Someone who can attest to that is David Walker, a 56-year-old combat veteran who served in Kuwait during Desert Storm and in the U.S. Navy Medical Corps.

"If you would have told me 20 years ago that I would be homeless, alone and on the streets of Pleasant Hill and Walnut Creek, I would have laughed until tears came out of my eyes and brushed you off as a lunatic," Walker said.

But he did live on the streets, and for more than three years. Walker said only his dog, Pinky, a wire coat rat terrier and Chihuahua mix, kept him going.

"Never in my darkest nightmares would I have foreseen the darkness that fell upon me," he said. "I did not know how to be homeless. And the learning curve is unmerciful."

Walker comes from a U.S. Army family — his father was a Non-Commissioned Officer — and he was born at an army hospital in Seoul, Korea. He excelled in school, and attended Boston University, St. Mary's College and Purdue University Concord School of Law. He holds a bachelor's degree in law studies, a master's degree in leadership and a juris doctor law degree.

But post-traumatic stress disorder and head and spine trauma — all service-related — eventually derailed him.

"There were moments of incredible kindness on the streets, as well as the violence of having to fight off a group of strung-out methamphetamine addicts to keep from losing all that was keeping me dry from the rain and warm during the freezing cold of night," he recalled. "Pinky would stay awake at night watching over me. I would let her sleep during the day, watching over her."

After connecting with SHELTER, Inc., Case Manager Sean Chu helped him fill out the necessary paperwork and Walker found housing placement. Now, he lives in Tabora Gardens Senior Apartments in Antioch, a brand-new LEED-Certified building. He has access to assistance with food, transportation, bills and other legal and financial issues right on site. He even performs volunteer work himself, helping other veterans.

"Pinky and I love the Tabora community,"

Walker said. "Here, I know dozens of my neighbors on property that is beautiful with gardens and landscaping. Adjacent to the property are three large parks well-suited for barbecues, baseball games, bird-watching, peace and solitude — and dog-walking, of course."

"I did not know how to be homeless. And the learning curve is unmerciful."

David Walker
U.S. Navy veteran



PERMANENT HOUSING

SHELTER, Inc. can provide permanent housing assistance for veterans and non-veterans through a program called Rapid Re-Housing. Here's how it works:

- SHELTER, Inc. owns or master-leases over 200 units throughout Contra Costa County, renting to low-income, vulnerable or homeless residents. Residents are further supported by permanent housing subsidies and wraparound services.
- SHELTER, Inc. works with landlords so people can obtain their own leases who otherwise have too many barriers to get housing. Housing Resource Specialists are always on the lookout for rent at, or below, Fair Market Rate (FMR). SHELTER, Inc. can offer short-term support for those who qualify, which may include security deposits or rental assistance.
- SHELTER, Inc. partners with community organizations, such as food banks, employment resources and domestic violence or mental health agencies to address other needs.

Need Help?

A Q&A with Program Director Trudie Giordano on how SHELTER, Inc. can help you get back on your feet



“People can find themselves in a situation for any number of reasons and the spiral down can be quick and harsh. Everyone is human and worthy of respect and care.”

Trudie Giordano
Program Director,
SHELTER, Inc.

BY ANNE STOKES

How can SHELTER, Inc. help those who are struggling?

SHELTER, Inc. runs a number of programs to help low-income families and individuals transition into — as well as **stay** in — housing. The nonprofit can directly connect people with resources including:

- Affordable permanent housing options include 200 units located throughout Contra Costa County owned or master leased by SHELTER, Inc.
- Help navigating government assistance and benefit programs
- Financial assistance with rent, deposits, utilities and childcare
- Job placement assistance and transportation assistance

SHELTER, Inc. also collaborates with other community organizations to connect participants with supportive services that will help them remain successfully housed, such as:

- Vocational training
- Financial education
- Referrals for mental health care services, addiction recovery services and more
- Family reunification

What other organizations and agencies does SHELTER, Inc. work with?

SHELTER, Inc. collaborates with many other service providers to get people the support they need, including:

- The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)
- U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD)
- U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)
- The Employment Development Department (EDD)
- Contra Costa Health, Housing & Homeless Services (H3)

- Contra Costa County and Solano County Workforce Development Boards
- SparkPoint centers
- Contra Costa Behavioral Health Services
- Opportunity Junction
- Bay Area Legal Aid

What impact can housing have on an entire community?

Communities across the country are discovering that law enforcement efforts, emergency room visits and incarceration, are far more expensive than homelessness prevention services, both financially and in terms of human suffering.

Affordable housing options provide stable living conditions upon which people can rebuild their lives through reentry into the workforce and reunification with family.

Where should people start?

- For homelessness prevention services in Contra Costa County, call **925-338-1038**.
- In Solano County, call **707-652-7311**.
- For veterans services, call **925-957-7573**.
- Call **2-1-1** to reach a referral specialists at the Contra Costa Crisis Center and ask for homeless services (outside the county, call **800-830-5380**).



For more information, go
online to shelterinc.org.



THE FUTURE OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING

SHELTER, Inc. is always looking for innovative ways to connect people with housing. For instance, the nonprofit collaborated with Satellite Affordable Housing Associates (SAHA) to open **Tabora Gardens Senior Apartments** in Antioch, which was completed in 2018. This location provides **85 affordable housing units** and support services to some of the community's most vulnerable residents.

“A home is the foundation for all of us to live a life of our choosing, and our organizations share the belief that everyone deserves a home,” said Cristi Ritschel, Director of Resident Services at SAHA. “SHELTER, Inc.’s mission is about helping people find homes and ending homelessness. SAHA builds and operates homes, so that pairing works really well.”

Within its first year, **all** of the residents — 40 percent of who are veterans — were able to maintain their housing, an amazing feat, particularly for those who have experienced chronic homelessness in the past.

For more information on other SAHA communities, call **510-647-0700** or visit sahahomes.org

Inspiring People, Changing Lives, Ending Homelessness

SHELTER, Inc. is expanding its services in Solano County:



SHELTER Solano, Inc.

Launched in 2019, this year-round, 24-hour comprehensive site provides emergency shelter and supportive services to homeless adults and children. On-site intensive services include case management, housing-search assistance, life-skills workshops, health classes, employment programs and other resources aimed at helping clients transition to permanent housing.

Rapid-Rehousing Program

Available to county residents, this program assists those who can feasibly afford a place now or in the near future but are unable to afford move-in costs on their own.

Homeless Veteran Reintegration Program (HVRP)

Empowers veteran participants who are experiencing homelessness with training and employment services.

Partnerships

Together with the cities of Solano County, SHELTER, Inc. attends monthly meetings called Homelessness Roundtables, where service providers, law enforcement, volunteers and others gather to share solutions and identify gaps in services that need to be addressed. In partnership with the Workforce Development Boards of both Solano County and Contra Costa County, SHELTER, Inc. supports the regional plans and offers assistance in developing local talent for local employer needs.

Why Is The Bay Area Turning To SHELTER Inc?



"I have worked with SHELTER, Inc. several times with tenants needing help with deposits. Without the help of SHELTER Inc. several tenants would not be able to afford to rent properties.

SHELTER, Inc. is very easy to work with and provides the funds promptly.

I have also worked with them on the HUD-VASH program. If it were not for SHELTER, Inc., there would be many families homeless, I feel. I would encourage everyone to work with SHELTER, Inc."

Don Seitz
Realtor, East County Brokers



"Many of our citizens are struggling with the rising costs of rent in our community. **SHELTER, Inc. is a great resource to help** with rental assistance and finding permanent solutions for those going through their greatest struggles."

Sean Wright
Mayor, The City of Antioch



Visit shelterinc.org/support for more information.



To apply for programs, find out about qualifications or get more information, just call 925-335-0698.