



Contra Costa Council on Homelessness

Homelessness Awareness Month 2023 Recognitions for “Resilience in the Face of Homelessness”

Resilience” is defined as the capacity to withstand or to recover from difficulties or adversity. The "Resilience In The Face of Homelessness" category is designed to recognize individuals who have demonstrated resilience in the face of homelessness.

Nominated people must have a lived experience of homelessness in Contra Costa County and/or have experienced homelessness and currently live and/or work in Contra Costa County.

Nominees

- Amanda Jenkins
- Brendi Velasquez
- Cristina Garrotto
- James Cherry
- Jessica Taran-Mott
- Jo Bruno
- Lance McPhee
- LeeAnn Matthews
- Loren Dalbert
- Markus Newsome
- Mimi Randolph-Wells
- O'Neill Fernandez
- Onterrio Brown
- Sylvester Carter
- Thea Mount
- Wayne Earl

The following pages contain descriptions of each nominee as provided by the person (s) who nominated them.

Amanda Jenkins

Nominated by: Nicole Moses, Bussiness Partner, friend of 30yrs, family

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)

Nominee's personal accomplishments that reflect resilience and courage.

Amanda has been thru so much during her time with homelessness yet she still has found the strength to overcome her issues and return to housing and at the same time of being homeless started the Castro encampment and continues to assist the city of Richmond in housing the other 100 people from the same encampment and be an advocate for those who have no voice and help restore trust back in them with the city to make there jobs easier in getting people housed. She has made sure to never forget where she came from but to use her experience as a stepping stone to a better life. Since being housed she has taken many trainings in homeless outreach and next month will start back to school to earn her AA in sociology so she can continue doing this work for years to come. She has had a lot of loss in her life since being homeless yet rather then let it get her down she says it has done the opposite it has made her strive for better fueling her fire to be an advocate for those still struggling with homelessness.

She is now convinced she is doing God's work on God's time of passage. She never wants to forget where she has been n life or she feels she will forget where she's going.

Brendi Velasquez

Nominated by: Leng Power, City of Concord Staff supporting the Homeless Strategic Plan project.

Supervisory District: I don't know

Nominee's personal accomplishments that reflect resilience and courage.

Brendi was appointed by the City of Concord City Council to serve on the Homeless Strategic Plan Working Group representing the Lived Experience seat. Brendi has contributed a depth of knowledge from her experience to the broader understanding and awareness of the Working Group. Brendi leads with passion and empathy which empowers others with lived experience to share their stories as well.

Brendi Velasquez has strived against the face of homelessness in numerous ways both in the work of guiding the Homeless Strategic Planning process for the City of Concord and also in her personal endeavors as she has shared her educational progress and volunteer work with various community based organizations working to form connections with those experiencing homelessness. Brendi is also a role model for her young daughter as she attends the monthly nightly meetings alongside Brendi.

Cristina Garrotto

Nominated by: Beth Limberg, colleague

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)

Nominee's personal accomplishments that reflect resilience and courage.

When Cristina became homeless, she believed that she was "above" the rest because she chose to be homeless in order to leave a bad relationship. She had a bachelors degree, a family who would help her, and a sense of personal power. She was independent and expected to be in and out of homelessness according to her own plan. When Cristina realized that she would be homeless longer than planned, she sought services only to find that services were not as accessible as she expected. Over time, Cristina found herself doing things that shifted her sense of herself. As things got worse, Cristina says that she recognized the need for change. The "gift of desperation" helped her to recognize that anyone could get trapped into bad spaces and that she needed to get out and become someone who could help those who were trapped. She did. She now is housed, re-engaged with her family, and employed as a case manager serving in the H3 systems of care.

When on the streets, Cristina met so many people who appeared complacent with their circumstances. It was devastating to her; these 'new friends' didn't seem to know that services were available to help. Even so, these people shared their stories with Cristina and helped her in ways she didn't even know she needed help. For this, she is forever grateful. One of the places that had tremendous impact on Cristina was Trinity Center. No matter what she did or "put them through," they were always welcoming. Without the staff support system, Cristina says she would have lost herself. They reached out to her. They sat with her through crisis. They helped Cristina know who she wanted to be when she became housed again. While at Trinity, Cristina met Alisha Jackson, a housing navigator for Hope Solutions, who set her on the right path for housing. Now, and in every job she has had since becoming housed again, Cristina uses her new resources to help those she encountered when homeless. She's gone back to those she knew to give them resources and hope.

James Cherry

Nominated by: Diana Baires, Colleague

Supervisory District: They serve the entire county

Nominee's personal accomplishments that reflect resilience and courage.

Veteran James Cherry has overcome monumental challenges in his personal and professional life. He started as a HUD-VASH participant and now goes above and beyond to serve Veterans as a peer support. James is the definition of resilience- he embodies all that a positive attitude and endurance mean.

James is an outstanding person, friend, and colleague. He is the type of person this field needs- someone who brings joy and passion into everything they do. His laugh is infectious and he makes friends wherever he goes because of his kind spirit and positive nature.

Jessi Taran

Nominated by: Adeline Leal,

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)

Nominee's personal accomplishments that reflect resilience and courage.

Her name is Jessi Taran, and she is a 53-year old woman who lives in a bus in Richmond with her partner and 2 dogs. She was living in Rydin Road and operated a food donation kiosk there until it was dismantled in September last year. She was part of the Richmond delegation that attended the Community First! Village symposium in Austin TX at the end of April to learn how to replicate this revolutionary model of tiny homes and RVs in our area. She interacted with the formerly homeless residents there so the group could have a better idea of their perspective of Community First! She is a vital member of the Community First! Greater Richmond, whose "purpose is to inspire broad support for a Community First! Village model that will provide permanent housing, care services, and peer support for the chronically homeless." Jessi is also in constant contact with her fellow former residents of Rydin Road and helps them in any way she can. She participates in the Richmond Homeless Task Force meetings and advocates for herself and these residents. She recently alerted the task force that one of the residents has gone missing, and Richmond is following up. She is a member of Faith in Action, and in a recent video her voice narrates the entire video. She has attended events and conferences in LA this year.

Within the last year she has attended several church services letting the pastors know who she is, and she still has access to food for food distribution as she continues to distribute food to the homeless residents in the area. Jessi is one of the most resilient people I know. She is exceptional in her abilities, her intuition, her persistence, her passion, and her empathy!

Jessica Taran-Mott

Nominated by: Tanya Jacobs, Community Organizer

Supervisory District: District 4 (Clayton, Concord, Pleasant Hill, part of Walnut Creek, and the unincorporated Contra Costa Centre)

Nominee's personal accomplishments that reflect resilience and courage.

Jessi has spent countless hours serving the unhoused communities, advocating for new beginnings, healthier quality of life, and ways to integrate one another together as one community. Jessica identifies ways to change the way of life for everyone and to make sure the voices are heard from her associates within the community. Jesse has paved the way for members of the unhoused community by ensure they have equal rights and access to everyday living.

Jesse is awesome and always speaking out loud about the community needs but also has made the initiative to be inclusive in the process. Jesse has traveled with our organization to Texas to speak and advocate for the unhoused community to returning to California to help organizers and community members be apart of solid solutions to ending homelessness.

Jo Bruno

Nominated by: April Loveland, work acquaintance

Supervisory District: District 3 (Bethel Island, Blackhawk, Byron, Diablo, Discovery Bay and Knightsen, as well as the cities of Antioch, Brentwood, and Oakley)

Nominee's personal accomplishments that reflect resilience and courage.

Jo Bruno has utilized her experience to serve as an advocate for the unhoused population in Contra Costa County. She went from living in her car on the streets of Antioch to graduating the SPIRIT program as Class Valedictorian. Jo works closely with H3 to provide a Peer voice for the homeless population. She is currently developing a plan to implement WRAP (Wellness Recovery Action Plan) for individuals utilizing the Homeless Continuum of Care.

Jo Bruno is the founder of Delta Peers and a writer that has produced many different pieces under the title "A Cup of Jo Bruno."

Lance McPhee

Nominated by: Shawwna Costanzo, friend

Supervisory District: District 4 (Clayton, Concord, Pleasant Hill, part of Walnut Creek, and the unincorporated Contra Costa Centre)

Nominee's personal accomplishments that reflect resilience and courage.

Continually ministered to people on the street, bringing many to AA meetings. Recovered from knee replacement surgery while living in his automobile. Helps others while experiencing his own mental and physical conditions.

Lance makes me smile. Points out ways to stay humble. Shows love to fellow humans whatever their path in life.

LeeAnn Matthews

Nominated by: Ady Olvera, friend

Supervisory District: District 4 (Clayton, Concord, Pleasant Hill, part of Walnut Creek, and the unincorporated Contra Costa Centre)

Nominee's personal accomplishments that reflect resilience and courage.

LA.M is an amazing community leaders facing hardships as an unhoused person; accepting help to her whenever offered; and volunteering in social justice causes that could impact improving the lives of unhoused residents in Concord.

LA.M is very generous with her time, helping other unhoused individuals struggling more than her, offering rides, food, and other types of support. She is most impressive when telling her story, and how she has overcome certain obstacles and supporting other communities leaders seeking change.



LeeAnn Mathews

Nominated by: Kelly McKinley, Friend

Supervisory District: District 4 (Clayton, Concord, Pleasant Hill, part of Walnut Creek, and the unincorporated Contra Costa Centre)

Nominee's personal accomplishments that reflect resilience and courage.

The system has failed her and she is still trying to better her life

Loren Dalbert

Nominated by: James Becker, Employer

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)

Nominee's personal accomplishments that reflect resilience and courage.

Loren Dalbert was a homeless veteran, suffering from PTSD and other challenges. He joined the RCF staff team as a Lived Experience Consultant, despite doing everything he could during the interview process to not get hired. But he is an incredibly brilliant person, and has stepped into larger leadership roles at RCF Connects. He is now the Manager of our Mobility LABs initiative in Antioch, helping community resident leaders build solutions to end poverty. He was also elected by his peers to serve on RCF's Executive Staff Team, helping RCF ensure that it centers resident voices in all of its work. Loren is now mentoring his son who has secured a job with Hope Solutions, advocating for affordable housing in the community. Most recently, Loren represented RCF at the Leshner Center News Makers event, and is working with former Stockton Mayor, Michael Tubbs, on a guaranteed income program for the community he serves.

Loren has also been able to use his technology skills to help local residents build a business to provide key technology services.

Markus Newsome

Nominated by: Heather Spellman, Writer/videographer

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)

Nominee's personal accomplishments that reflect resilience and courage.

Marcus, a 32-year-old African American male had a checked youth and was in and out of trouble with the law. His family and friends were frustrated at his choices in life and in associates, and would no longer help. He became homeless, lived on couches and in his car in Contra Costa County for several years. He finally decided he needed a change, first trying one non-profit as a cook, and then SHELTER, Inc. where the case manager, eligibility specialists and housing navigators helped him to enter truck operator school, obtain his commercial license, start working and obtain housing. He is elated he is back in control of his life and thanks the people responsible.

Marcus had drug use issues in his past but is now clean.

Mimi Randolph-Wells

Nominated by: Wayne Earl, co-worker

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)

Nominee's personal accomplishments that reflect resilience and courage.

Mimi Randolph-Wells' life story is a testament to the power of resilience, compassion, and the transformative impact of community support. Once facing the harsh realities of homelessness while caring for her young daughter in the confines of a car in Richmond, Mimi's journey turned pivotal when a compassionate police officer knocked on her window. That simple act of kindness led her to the Bay Area Rescue Mission, where her life would be forever changed.

Stepping into the Bay Area Rescue Mission was a turning point for Mimi. The mission provided her and her daughter with a safe place to live and showered them with the essentials they so desperately needed: a room, clothes, food, and supplies. However, the overwhelming outpouring of love, kindness, and empathy she encountered touched Mimi's heart. She recalls tears of gratitude as she felt embraced by the warmth of the mission's staff and volunteers.

Fast forward two decades and Mimi Randolph-Wells is now a shining example of how one person's transformation can become a beacon of hope for an entire community. From her once-fragile position as a homeless mother, Mimi has become a key leader at the Bay Area Rescue Mission. Her unwavering commitment to raising awareness and funds has led her to raise millions of dollars, enabling the mission to support mothers like herself who need a helping hand.

Mimi's influence has expanded far beyond the walls of the mission. Her story of triumph over adversity resonates with individuals across the Bay Area, inspiring them to take action and make a difference. With her newfound position, she has elevated her own life but also uplifted the lives of countless others. Her journey from homelessness to heroism is a testament to the power of community, compassion, and the human spirit's ability to overcome challenges.

Mimi Randolph-Wells is a beacon of hope, a symbol of resilience, and a true hero of our community. Her dedication to creating positive change has transformed her from a recipient of aid to a tireless advocate for those in need. Her legacy is one of strength, generosity, and the profound impact a single individual can have on the lives of many.

O'Neill Fernandez

Nominated by: Tomi Nagai-Rothe, Colleague

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)

Nominee's personal accomplishments that reflect resilience and courage.

O'Neill Fernandez was unhoused in several locations in Contra Costa County and now lives in Richmond as the Director of Programs for SOS Richmond. He went from a six figure salary to living in a tent over a matter of months due to a personal trauma. He now works for both Lifelong Medical as an encampment health ambassador - reaching out to friends and former neighbors - as well as supervising SOS's field staff (all hired from encampments). O'Neill lives with his partner and baby daughter. Clean and sober and a model for so many transitioning into housing and into a caring environment of peers helping peers.

O'Neill Fernandez is a natural leader, public speaker and deeply caring individual who works around the clock - literally. All Neighbor Care Line calls come to him personally and he is dedicated to offering resources that help others improve their health, housing and income.

O'Neill has a unique ability to connect to ANYONE. His colleagues bring neighbors who have behavioral health issues and need various kinds of assistance, and somehow O'Neill makes a strong connection with them. Those trusting relationships are the basis for supporting positive changes.

Unhoused neighbors need housing but they really need to be reconnected, and O'Neill knows and acts on that understanding.

O'Neill was born and raised in Hawaii on Oahu, and is Native Hawaiian (and Puerto Rican). The aloha spirit runs deep in him. As evidenced in the ways that people have shown up for one another following the fires on Maui, residents of Hawaii take it on themselves to support their community.

He has overcome incredible personal adversity and says, "It is the gas in my engine." O'Neill says that all of his experiences have made him who he is today.

Onterrio Brown

Nominated by: BETTY BLACKMORE-GEE, I am an advocate and outreach worker for the homeless.

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)

Nominee's personal accomplishments that reflect resilience and courage.

Onterrio Brown was invited by his friend to move to California to get a job and a fresh start and move in with him and his girlfriend and was homeless as soon as he arrived in California.

Onterrio is a 40 year old single father with a 12 year old daughter, whom he has custody of since she was 3 years old. After coming to California, his friend's girlfriend did not want any visitors living with them. His friend ended up moving out and went back to his home state. He introduced him to someone who wanted to help. They loaned him a car to sleep in.

They were told to call 211 for resources. 211 referred them to a safe parking program at a church in Antioch. They lived in the car for about a month and was able to move into a shared housing program for about a week. That program had to close that house because of lack of funding.

I am an advocate and outreach worker for our program called, The NEPHEW HOMELESS PROJECT in West County. NEPHEW (New Empowering Philosophies that Heals Emotional Wounds).

Another agency referred them to me. I immediately started looking for resources for them to keep them from living outside. Onterrio was introduced to someone who had a two bedroom apartment and was looking for a roommate. Our program was able to pay Onterrio portion of the rent for 4 months. I then referred him to another agency and they were able to help pay his rent for the next 6 months.

While going through all of these challenges, Onterrio was able to find a job soliciting roofs for a roofing company knocking on doors in the cold and raining season. After a few months, he got a better and permanent and a more stable job.

I am so proud of Onterrio because of his resilience, he now have a better job, found a 2 bedroom apartment and moved in on July 1, 2023. A reliable car for work and his daughter, Terrianna stable in school.

His desire is to find a trade school to learn a professional skill to better himself.

Sylvester Carter

Nominated by: Nicole Green, Program Collaboration and support

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)

Nominee's personal accomplishments that reflect resilience and courage.

SJC is a transitional house located in East Contra Costa County and provides housing for the homeless population. Sylvester Carter owns SJC and he demonstrates resilience through self-awareness when working with the justice impacted population. The owner views challenges as learning opportunities. With his lived experience he is able to provide housing support for those in need and helping participants understanding how to take a positive perspective on situations. The owner Sylvester Carter supports the community and has compassion for others, shows commitment to supporting the homeless population that is justice impacted.

SJC works with community partners such as BACS, Shelter Inc, Hope Solutions and community programs working with the homeless population. Mr. Carter provides housing support for those in need with wrap around services. He has been a great housing resource for those facing homelessness within the county.

Thea Mount

Nominated by: Nichole Gardner, Friend

Supervisory District: District 3 (Bethel Island, Blackhawk, Byron, Diablo, Discovery Bay and Knightsen, as well as the cities of Antioch, Brentwood, and Oakley)

Nominee's personal accomplishments that reflect resilience and courage.

When I first met Thea about 7 years ago she was homeless and living on the streets of Antioch with her partner. She was battling a drug addiction and living in her car. Once our group started advocating for homeless rights and working with the homeless in the community she was the first to join us at council meeting to advocate for herself and her friends. She also organized her friends living on the streets to do encampment cleanups around the city. She was able to get herself clean a few years back while still living in her car and she got a job. She got into the delta landing program and obtained housing and has maintained housing and a job for a couple of years now. She still gives back and volunteers to serve her friends that are still living on the streets. I can not think of anyone who is more becoming of overcoming being homeless on our streets and getting their life back on track.

Wayne Earl

Nominated by: Stephanie Sewell, Work Collogue

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)

Nominee's personal accomplishments that reflect resilience and courage.

Wayne Earl is a remarkable individual who emerged from the depths of addiction and homelessness to become a beacon of hope in the San Francisco East Bay community. Wayne's journey began on the streets, where he battled the grip of drug addiction, struggling to find a way out of his despair. One day, Wayne realized he needed help to break free from his destructive cycle. That moment of clarity led him to the Bay Area Rescue Mission, a lifeline that would transform his life. Through their comprehensive program, Wayne faced challenges head-on, determined to rebuild his life from the ground up. Today, Wayne is a shining example of triumph over adversity, a source of inspiration for his unhoused neighbors. He conquered his own demons and has become an integral part of the Bay Area Rescue Mission. Wayne's dedication shines through in his leadership of crucial projects and his representation of the mission within the county. Beyond his full-time role, Wayne's impact extends even further. He selflessly runs a church serving the community in need, embodying compassion, and understanding from his own experiences. Wayne's journey reminds us that the human spirit is resilient, capable of transformation, and boundless kindness. His unwavering care for people is a testament to the lessons from his past, proving that the most beautiful expressions of humanity can arise from the darkest circumstances. Wayne would say, "All Glory goes to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."