



SPRING 2020

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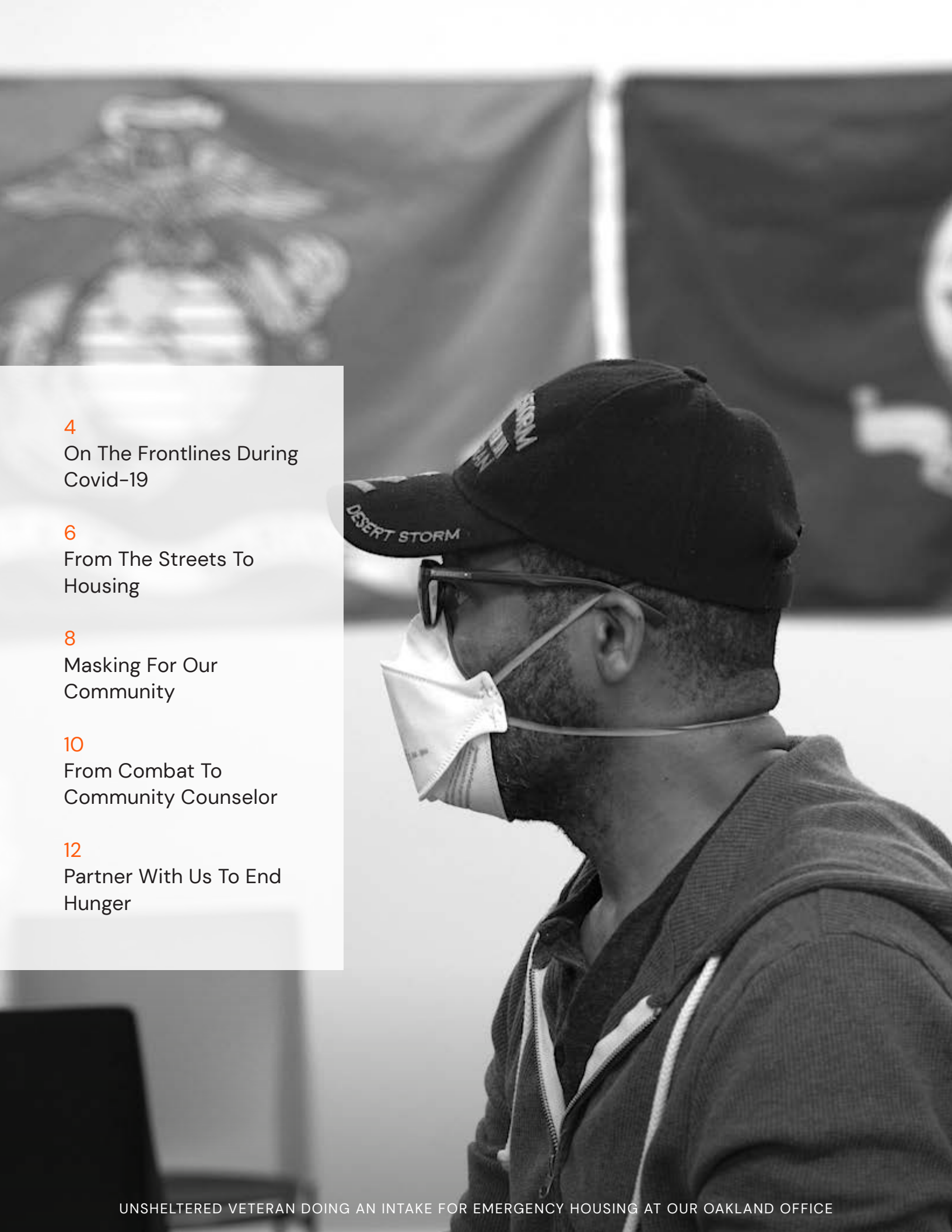
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Dear Community Of Supporters,

I hope this letter finds you safe and healthy, and with peace of mind that your loved ones are as well. None of us could have imagined that we would experience a pandemic in our lifetimes, and yet here we are trying to make sense of it all.

Swords to Plowshares was not prepared for something of this nature and scope. However, we have been working tirelessly to provide the critical services that our veteran clients rely on while protecting staff and thereby our community at large.

I've been with Swords to Plowshares since 1976 – spanning more than four decades – and we have been faced with many challenges including losing our only funding source, a return to war, the recession, and many veteran lives lost. However, learning how to care for both staff and veterans during this COVID-19 health crisis has been my greatest challenge. We have never abandoned our mission throughout this crisis, but it isn't without its burdens on frontline staff.

We learn more every day and take action to adapt quickly to the changing landscape of the overall public health crisis, to address the issues staff are facing, and to deliver the support and services our veteran clients need to get through this difficult time. I have never

been more proud of the hardworking, dedicated people who work at Swords to Plowshares. My team of 200 staff has shown resolve and commitment, and it doesn't go unnoticed by our veterans – particularly the 500 veterans who live in our supportive housing.

We are all faced with unknowns from the fallout of this pandemic. And as we look further into 2020, even in 2021, the picture is unclear. At Swords to Plowshares, we know that we will face even more challenges, including loss of funding and greater strains on our budget in order to provide increased services, sanitation, food, and compensate staff on the front lines.

Now more than ever, we need the support of our community. We need our partners, our donors, our friends to donate as generously as possible. We will weather this storm, but we need partners like you to make it through.

Thank you for your solidarity.

Michael Blecker
Executive Director
Swords to Plowshares
U.S. Army 1967-70

On The Frontlines During Covid-19

Still working to house veterans

Swords to Plowshares has been on the frontlines working with homeless, at-risk, and other vulnerable veterans for over 45 years. Our work to end poverty and homelessness has not stopped because of COVID-19 and we continue to provide critical services that our veterans have relied on over the years. None of which are probably more critical during this crisis than moving veterans off the streets and into housing so they can safely shelter in place.

As of mid-April, nearly 20% of all COVID-related hospitalizations in San Francisco were from individuals who were homeless. Our dedicated outreach specialists have adopted safety and physical distancing guidelines recommended by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and have continued to connect with unsheltered veterans through

community-based referrals. Despite the daunting logistics and challenges, our team has secured emergency housing for dozens of veterans since shelter in place started in mid-March.

One veteran had been released from a local jail as part of the process to reduce the inmate to mitigate the risk of COVID-19. This veteran had been released at the beginning of shelter in place into an unsheltered environment with no supports. He tried emailing and calling community organizations in the East Bay but could not connect nor heard any reply. Desperate, the veteran contacted a physician from the jail who in turn reached out to one of our outreach specialists, Dennis Johnson.



OUTREACH SPECIALIST, DENNIS JOHNSON TALKING TO A HOMELESS VETERAN

Dennis, a U.S. Army veteran, quickly reached out to the veteran to set up a time and date to connect him to our services. The veteran could not believe his persistent efforts of reaching out had finally paid off. He found a lifeline in Dennis, in what he said was his most dire moment. Thankfully, he moved into emergency housing in a rapid fashion and continues to utilize our services to get his life back on track.

“Working with veterans is very near and dear to my heart,” said Dennis Johnson. “I always try my best to connect our veterans to what they need, and COVID-19 makes no difference. We just continue to adapt to these challenges to do what’s best for our vets.”

From The Streets To Housing

Helping veterans stay safe & shelter in place

As we continue to respond to the challenges of COVID-19, it is critically important to keep the momentum of getting veterans housed. For veterans who remain unsheltered, many are among the most vulnerable to serious health complications from disease. The majority are seniors (55%), disabled (56%), extremely low-income (72%), and aged beyond their years, often due to service-related injuries and time on the streets.

Our mission to end veteran homelessness is more urgent than ever to both our community and the veterans we serve. We have continued to move these veterans off the streets and into housing in a rapid and safe fashion.

Construction was completed on our latest supportive housing program, The Edwin M. Lee Apartments on February. Before and after the shelter in place order, dedicated staff were working to move 62 formerly homeless veterans and 56 low-income families into the new building. These veterans and families now have a home to safely shelter in place during COVID-19 and well beyond.



VETERAN SWIPE HIS KEY CARD INTO HIS HOTEL ROOM



Masking For Our Community

Homemade cloth masks for outreach specialists, frontline staff, and vulnerable veterans

When the Center for Disease Control (CDC) came out with recommendations for everyone to wear masks, we had some amazing folks step up to support our staff and veterans.

Thanks to the efforts of community partners like Miracle Messages and their volunteers Madeline and Desmond, we were able to receive 150 cloth masks in a quick turnaround. Additionally, our very own Kristen Cissé, executive assistant, enlisted the help of her family and friends from the Vallejo Piecemakers, a quilting guild, to sew and donate 500 masks and has promised to keep sewing as long as there is a need.

These cloth masks were distributed to our outreach specialists who continued to move unsheltered veterans off the streets into shelter, frontline staff members at our two service centers and eight housing locations, and any veteran client or resident in need.

Thank you all for your support during the COVID-19 and helping keep our veterans and staff safe and healthy.



MIRACLE MESSAGES VOLUNTEER, DESMOND LEE

Moving forward, together.

Thank you to Craig Newmark Philanthropies, William G. Gilmore Foundation, and our other supporters for their generous donations that directly support Bay Area veterans during the COVID-19 crisis.

William & Emily Brizendine	Qatalyst Partners	Stacey Sprenkel
Copia	Barbara Saavedra	United Way Bay Area
Bill & Trudy Drypolcher	Saida + Sullivan Design Partners	Upwork Veterans Group
Fairmont Hotel San Francisco	Samuel Test	Townsend Walker
Glide	The San Francisco Foundation	West Davis & Bergard Foundation
Rick Houlberg	San Francisco/Marin Food Bank	Y & H Soda Foundation
John & Tina Keker	May & Stanley Smith Charitable Trust	Peter Van Der Naillen
LinkedIn		Varooge Yerganian
Artis Neville		



From Combat To Community Counselor

How one veteran joined the fight to end veteran homelessness

Gabriel “Gabe” Iturbe was born and raised in the San Francisco Bay Area as the son of immigrant parents from the Philippines and Peru. Life for Gabe and his family growing up was not always easy. He experienced some major traumas at a young age, including losing a close friend to suicide and nearly losing his brother to gang-related violence.

Fortunately, he found mentorship from two police officers in his hometown who encouraged him to serve his community. With their guidance, Gabe was able to cope with his traumas. Wanting a better future, he decided to join the military to start a new chapter in his life. Gabe served nearly 20 years in various roles of military law enforcement in the United

States Air Force (Active Duty 1998–2005, Reserves 2005–2010) and United States Army Reserves (2011–2017) including five deployments to the Middle East.

After his last deployment to Iraq in 2008–2009, Gabe began to experience symptoms of PTSD. He became reclusive, hyper-vigilant, and emotionally isolated. On top of that, his marriage to the mother of his four children began to dissolve. In 2012, Gabe decided to finally seek help from the VA for both his physical and mental health. Gabe wanted to be more deeply involved in the veteran community and, in his search, he discovered Swords to Plowshares. He reached out to our Employment and Training department to express his interest and willingness to help veterans. Staff thought Gabe would be a good fit for an open position in our housing program. He was offered the position and he left his job in the security industry to start work at the Veterans Academy, Swords’ longest running permanent supportive housing program.

After about nine months, a position as an outreach specialist working with homeless and at-risk veterans in the East Bay opened at Swords to Plowshares. With Gabe’s military background and experience working in our housing program, he was a natural fit to work with some of our most vulnerable veterans. Over the next couple of years, Gabe went to tent encampments, shelters, VA facilities, and

just about anywhere to help unsheltered and veterans with high acuity connect to services. Gabe’s empathy and compassion from his outreach work led him become a community counselor at our San Francisco Drop-in Center, working to serve our veterans to best of our ability even during the COVID-19 crisis. Gabe’s commitment has been unwavering. He is still providing triage, mail and medication services to our veterans.

“I don’t know what I’d do if I couldn’t get my mail or medications. I’m just glad you are still open. Thank you for what you continue to do.”

– ANONYMOUS VETERAN DROP-IN CLIENT

“It’s been tough not being able to provide the same level of service or connect veterans as easily to resources,” said Gabe. “With information changing daily, it’s been difficult, but we have been doing our best to relay everything we can to our veterans and I’m so proud of our team and Swords.”

Partner With Us To End Hunger

How we are tackling food insecurity during COVID-19

When shelter in place is in effect, those already susceptible to food insecurity experience greater hardship in accessing food and essential goods. The veterans we serve, many of whom are homeless, low-income, aging, and disabled, are no exception.

By working closely with our existing partners like Centro Latino de San Francisco, Swords to Plowshares continues to provide critically needed meals, now individually packaged, for many of the veterans that call Swords to Plowshares home. We are also continuing to build new opportunities with partners like San Francisco-Marin Food Bank and One Treasure Island in order to better serve the veterans living in our Treasure Island housing site, where food insecurity has become exacerbated during shelter in place because of its remote location. Our staff now provide weekly food bank donation pick up and distribution services to every resident of our Treasure Island supportive housing.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, we used to receive food donations through various local corporate kitchens to serve hot food to the unsheltered veterans that visit our San Francisco Drop-in Center. With those services now suspended, we partner with Glide that has the capacity to serve daily meals to the homeless population in San Francisco. Glide has graciously offered lunch donations for the homeless veterans, so we can still serve 60 to 90 weekly bagged lunches to the vets who utilize our Drop-in Center for mail pick up and triage even during this pandemic.

We also have received a generous food donation from Fairmont Hotel San Francisco who gave us all of their perishable food items when the hotel kitchen had to temporarily close its doors. We are currently working with Copia, a food recovery company based in the Bay Area, to receive precooked and individually packaged meals for our veterans daily. This endeavor would become

a reality when funders and a local kitchen facility can come together to support those in need during this unprecedented crisis.

It has almost become a campaign slogan cliché, but it is true: We are all in it together. We can continue to provide services our veterans need and deserve when we work together with likeminded community partners. This crisis we face is beyond the boundaries of sectors, creed, and politics. Swords to Plowshares welcome new partnership opportunities as we do our best to keep our veterans safe and supported during this time. Help us stay on the frontlines to serve those who served.



OSCAR GONZALEZ EXECUTIVE CHEF AT THE FAIRMONT HOTEL SAN FRANCISCO



OUTREACH SPECIALIST CHRISTOPHER HERNANDEZ



COMMUNITY ORGANIZER, BILAL MUSTAFA



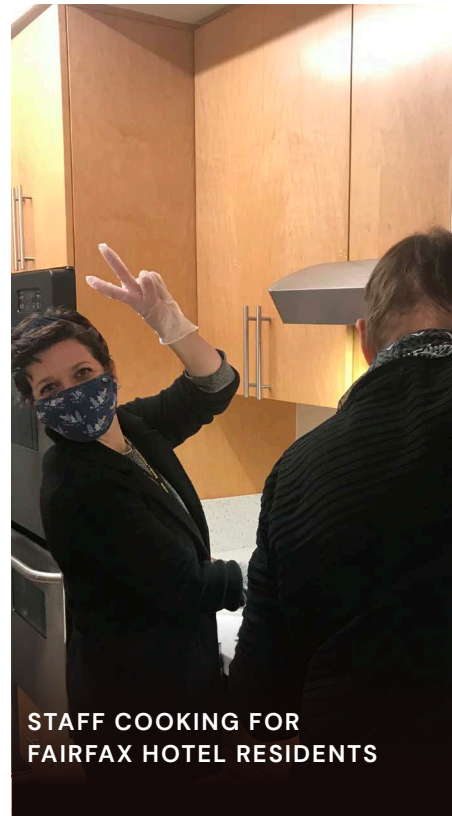
VETERAN RESIDENTS AT TREASURE ISLAND



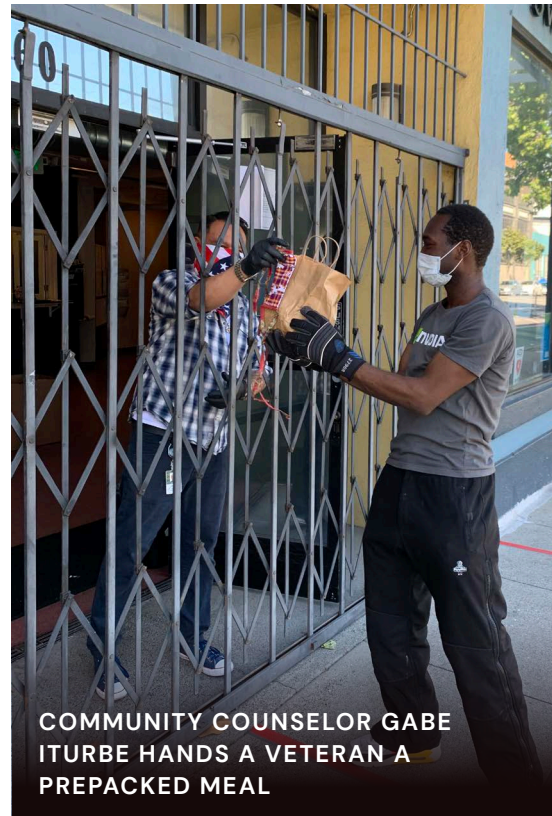
RESIDENT WITH GROCERIES



EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING PROGRAM COORDINATOR LOUISE DIAMOND



STAFF COOKING FOR FAIRFAX HOTEL RESIDENTS



COMMUNITY COUNSELOR GABE ITURBE HANDS A VETERAN A PREPACKED MEAL



EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING PROGRAM MANAGER (EAST BAY), ALEX BUE WORKING WITH A VETERAN



SF SERVICE CENTER STAFF BAGGING GROCERIES



TREASURE ISLAND STAFF DELIVERING GROCERIES TO OUR RESIDENTS

Ways To Give During The Covid-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented challenges and an enormous financial burden on our work in the community. We are grateful to the generous donors and advocates that continue to support us in this time of need. Here are a few ways to maximize and leverage your donation.

DONATE A ONE-TIME EMERGENCY GIFT

Your one-time, unrestricted donation helps us to quickly respond to changing needs and support our essential staff on the ground.

Tip: The CARES Act provides special incentives for individuals to donate generously. Check with your financial advisor to discuss your best giving options.

Tip: You can pledge your gift today through a monthly subscription that fits into your budget. Visit our website for more information.

BECOME AN ADVOCATE

During this period of social distancing, we rely more than ever on our networks to stay virtually connected. Use your voice and online presence for good by inspiring others into action with an online fundraiser.

Tip: Do you have a birthday this month? Facebook will automatically prompt you to create a birthday fundraiser for the nonprofit of your choice. Find us on social and promote your own fundraiser online on our behalf.

Tip: Not on social media? Subscribe to our monthly e-newsletter and share it with your contacts. Help spread the word about the work we are doing for veterans in the community.

LEVERAGE CORPORATE GIVING PROGRAMS

Many companies have expanded their already generous corporate matching programs in response to COVID-19. Find out how to make your donation go further through a workplace giving match, pre-tax payroll deduction, or corporate social responsibility initiative.

TIP: Use your purchasing power for good. At no extra cost to you, Amazon Smile Foundation will donate 0.5% of the purchase price of your items.

Visit www.smile.amazon.com and select Swords to Plowshares as your nonprofit of choice.

Reach out anytime for support at supportvets@stp-sf.org or **415.252.4788**.

STAY CONNECTED

OUR OFFICES

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VETS HELPING VETS SINCE 1974

See you in 2021!

Due to COVID-19, we have to cancel our annual Summer Concert this year.

*Please consider donating to Swords to Plowshares in lieu of ticket purchase or event sponsorship.

www.swords-to-plowshares.org/covid19

