Swords to Plowshares

ANNUAL REPORT

SWORDS-TO-PLOWSHARES.ORG

Keeping our mission **especially** during shelter-in-place

We are Swords to Plowshares
We're a community-based non-profit 501(c)(3) oranization that helps 3,000+ Bay Area veterans every year. We provide support in three key areas: **financial stability, health & wellness,** and **housing.**

Our Mission
War causes wounds and suffering that last beyond the battlefield. Swords to Plowshares' mission is to heal the wounds of war, to restore dignity, hope, and self-sufficiency to all veterans in need, and to prevent and end homelessness and poverty among veterans.

Our Philosophy
Our model of care is based on the philosophy that the obstacles veterans face — including homelessness, unemployment and disability — are interrelated and require an integrated network of support.

Our Vision
All veterans will have access to the care and services they need to rebuild their lives.

DEAR FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS,

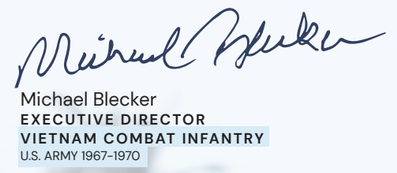
As I reflect on the events of this past year, including the COVID-19 pandemic, record unemployment, economic hardship, and social unrest, I am profoundly grateful and honored by the work of our dedicated frontline staff and the generosity of our community.

We recognized early on that the economic and health hardships of this virus would be felt most acutely by our clients. Many of the veterans we serve already face extreme barriers to their health, housing stability, and financial security. Driven by your commitment to our work, we adapted and restructured our programs to meet veterans' needs while taking every precaution to keep our staff and clients safe. In 2020, 3,171 veterans entered our doors seeking support, and housing homeless veterans quickly became our top priority.

Despite delays caused by the pandemic, we were fortunate to move ahead with two new housing developments this year. As the shelter-in-place order went into effect in March, motivated staff moved 62 veterans into the newly opened Edwin M. Lee Apartments in San Francisco's Mission Bay neighborhood. In August, we broke ground on Maceo May Apartments, which will create 104 new apartments for veteran families on Treasure Island. We are also nearing completion of a campaign close to our heart to renovate and install elevators at the Veterans Academy, vastly improving life for the 108 veterans with disabilities who reside there.

The pandemic affected nearly every aspect of the way we do business, but it did not affect our mission or purpose. We enter this new year with optimism as we continue to fight for the equitable distribution of resources and housing support for all veterans striving for a better future.

Warmly,



Michael Blecker
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
VIETNAM COMBAT INFANTRY
U.S. ARMY 1967-1970

EMERGENCY HOUSING

In 2020, Swords to Plowshares provided **34,766** nights of emergency housing for **518** unsheltered homeless veterans. Acting as a temporary bridge to permanent housing placement, emergency housing is an integral component of our efforts to prevent and end veteran homelessness. Temporary hotel stays offer veterans respite from the streets and a safe, stable opportunity to address their health and unmet needs. Through an evidence-based approach known as "Housing First," Swords to Plowshares houses veterans without preconditions; this ensures they have their most basic need met first. Once stably housed, veterans have freed capacity to work on overcoming transition barriers that contributed to their homelessness in the first place, including lack of income or mental health support.

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck the Bay Area in March 2020, Swords to Plowshares significantly scaled up its Emergency Housing program to get vulnerable veterans off the streets and into temporary shelter—the aim being to reduce their exposure to, and community spread of COVID-19. With CARES Act funding and generous foundation support, Swords has been committed to helping these veterans remain in temporary hotel stays for the duration of the shelter-in-place orders. We provided each veteran client with a phone, clothing, storage unit, and weekly groceries to support their overall well-being and food security. In 2021, we plan to move 100 veterans from emergency housing into homes of their own!

PHOTO: (Anda Chu/Bay Area News Group)

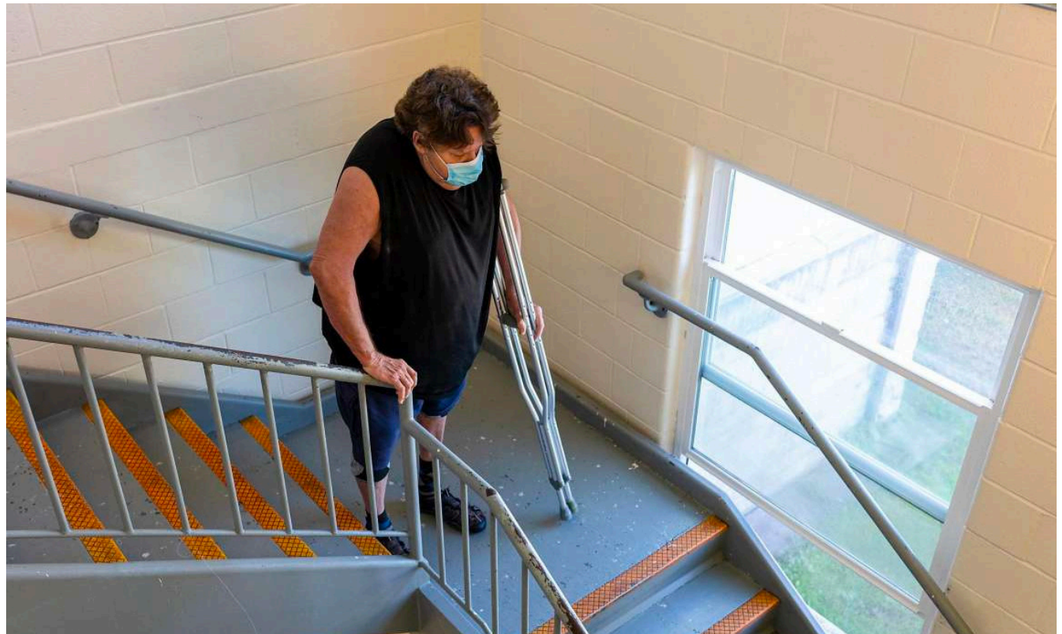
ELEVATORS AT THE VETERANS ACADEMY

Swords to Plowshares opened its first permanent supportive housing program, the Veterans Academy, in 2000 in Presidio National Park. For the past 20 years, the site has housed and supported the most vulnerable veterans in San Francisco with a 95% or greater housing retention rate.

In late 2018, Swords to Plowshares began rehabbing the housing site, which had been repurposed from two U.S. Army barracks built in 1980. Now home to 108 veterans with disabilities, the buildings needed significant work to support aging residents. The remaining element of this renovation is the installation of two elevators—one in each three-story building. Most residents plan to age in place at the Veterans Academy with their peers, but stairs provide the only access to and from units on the upper floors. We moved residents with the greatest mobility challenges to units on the first floor, however many older veterans with chronic and degenerative health conditions still reside on the upper floors; and the number of veterans with impaired mobility will continue to increase. Without a safe, easy means to travel and engage with the community, these veterans remain isolated in their rooms, greatly impacting their mental health.

Swords to Plowshares seeks $2.5 million in capital funds to complete this much-needed project by the summer of 2021. We will be re-dedicating the Veterans Academy in honor of our late board member and dedicated veteran advocate, Jon W. Paulson, to the Jon W. Paulson Veterans Community. We need more partners to join us to complete this critical project as these veterans deserve to safely and comfortably age in place in their homes.

Constanza Hevia H. / Special to The Chronicle



"BAD PAPER" AND THEIR IMPACT ON A VETERAN'S LIFE

It's a population that tends to be much more impoverished and much more vulnerable than those with an honorable discharge.

MO SIEDOR
Legal Director at Swords to Plowshares

Not everyone who wore the United States military uniform qualifies to receive the care and benefits promised to them when they enlisted. In fact, over half a million veterans with an Other-than-Honorable, Bad Conduct, or Dishonorable discharge status (otherwise known as "bad paper") are barred from healthcare and economic assistance from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The rules that dictate discharge determination are often vague and flawed by inconsistent interpretation and discrimination; consequently, many veterans are unjustly denied VA care and benefits. For example, more than 100,000 veterans have been discharged with bad paper because of their LGBTQ identity.

In addition, Black airmen and soldiers are **71%** and **61%** more likely, respectively, to face **court-martial** and **non-judicial punishment** than their white comrades.

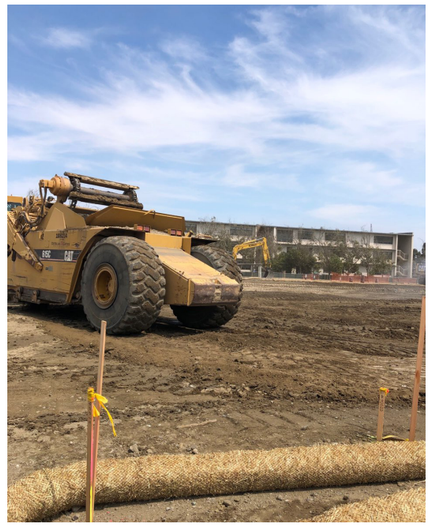
In the summer of 2020, Swords to Plowshares participated in a forum hosted by the Veterans Healthcare Policy Institute to discuss how military discharge status can punish veterans by denying them critical services and benefits. In addition, our Legal Director, Mo Siedor, published an insightful article on Medium.com, VA Seeks to Deny Care to Veterans at Significant Risk of Suicide, advocating on behalf of veterans who are excluded from VA care due to minor infractions in their military records. She also testified before the House Veterans Affairs Committee to strongly urge U.S. policymakers to reconsider the existing regulations for veterans' benefits eligibility since denying access to these benefits results in higher rates of homelessness, substance abuse, and incarceration for vulnerable veterans. Swords to Plowshares stands with veterans and asks the VA to create a more just, inclusive system that supports all veterans who served our nation.

MACEO MAY GROUNDBREAKING

On September 18, 2020, we announced the groundbreaking of the Maceo May Apartments, which will provide 100% affordable housing for 104 formerly homeless veterans on Treasure Island when completed in 2022. This complex is the third housing project co-developed by Swords to Plowshares and Chinatown Community Development Center (CCDC). Previously, we worked with CCDC to develop Veterans Commons and the Edwin M. Lee Apartments, which created over 250 apartment units reserved for veterans, making a huge impact in the city's homeless veteran population.

In addition to providing housing and on-site supportive services for future residents, this project also helps veterans with job training and placement. Veterans participating in a free construction job training program through One Treasure Island are being hired to build Maceo May Apartments.

The new apartment complex is aptly named in recognition of the dedication and advocacy of Maceo May, a Vietnam War veteran who worked at Swords to Plowshares for 12 years and subsequently served on our Board of Directors for 14 years until his passing in 2014. We hope to restore hope, dignity, and self-sufficiency for Bay Area veterans with these new homes and job opportunities.



SOCIAL NETWORKS FOR GOOD

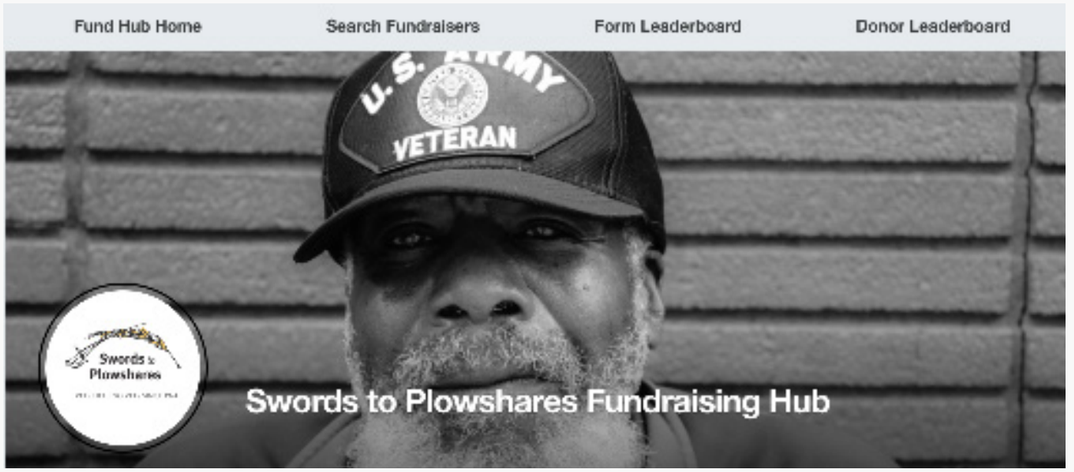
In 2020, when all of us relied on our networks to stay virtually connected, a couple of our supporters used their online presence for good and inspired others into action to support local veterans.

> **This Vietnam Veteran In-Country '70 & '71 thanks you for your service, your sacrifice in service to others. There is no greater call to duty.**
>
> *Supporter from Leigh's peer-to-peer campaign*

Leigh Ferrara, a well-known local yoga and movement instructor, hosted a virtual meditative movement class, donating 100% of the gifts made by attendees to support homeless veterans. Leigh created a peer-to-peer (P2P) fundraising page and pushed the link out to her students and friends to raise over $5,500 in small dollar donations, which were matched 1:1 by a generous donor for a total of over $10,000 within just 3 weeks!

Jesse Thorn, host of *Bullseye* on NPR, harnessed the good in his 58k Twitter followers when he asked for gifts in memory of his father, a Vietnam-era veteran, Lee Thorn. On Twitter, he shared the remarkable legacy Lee left behind in the veteran community as an activist and advocate for peace, disability rights, and anti-poverty causes. Moved by Lee's work, Jesse's Twitter followers collectively raised over $7,800 for Swords to Plowshares within days.

We now offer an easy tool for our supporters to host an online P2P fundraising event to raise awareness about and funds for Swords to Plowshares. It allows our supporters to create their own customizable campaign and seamlessly share with their networks on the social media platform of their choice and through e-mail. Please contact us at **development@stp-sf.org** to set up a P2P campaign and harness the power of your network to benefit homeless veterans in our community.



FOOD INSECURITY

In 2020, COVID-19 made it more difficult for homeless veterans to access food, due in part to the lack of community resources and services as service providers faced increased expenses and decreased funding. Even veterans housed in permanent supportive housing sites, many of whom are aging and immunocompromised, found it difficult to find adequate food due to the shutdowns and health risks posed by the virus.

Swords to Plowshares worked relentlessly to address food insecurity faced by the veterans under our care. We strengthened our partnerships with local nonprofits, including the SF/Marin Food Bank, Meals on Wheels, Food Runners, Centro Latino de SF, and Glide to deliver nutritious meals to our veteran clients. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs loosened program restrictions during the crisis, giving us new ways to engage with homeless veterans by providing longer-term emergency housing and food services. For many months of the pandemic, we purchased and delivered weekly groceries to veterans scattered in temporary hotel stays across the Bay Area. Numerous San Francisco volunteers, called TogetherSF, came to our Drop-in Center weekly to contribute to this effort.

We also received many generous donations from corporate and community partners, big and small, that provided prepackaged meals throughout the pandemic. Most notably, Frontline Foods, a local chapter of World Central Kitchen that partners with 40+ local restaurants, supplied over **$70,000** worth of prepackaged meals to veterans in our supportive housing programs from May to November. Thanks to the ingenuity and generosity of our partners and staff, we ensured the food security of the most vulnerable veterans among us during 2020.

VETERAN SPOTLIGHT

At the start of the Bay Area's **shelter-in place,** Robert Whiteaker, a 59-year-old Air Force veteran, was referred to us by the VA.

This veteran was a successful electrician, but he suffered a series of strokes that left him unemployed, homeless, and with significant limitations in communication. Due to his sudden loss of interpersonal skills and independence, he was depressed and frustrated.

Unfortunately, there are no transitional housing programs in San Francisco that are focused on rehabilitation for physical health. Providing a good option for intensive wrap-around support, he joined Swords to Plowshares' Safe Haven program—low-barrier transitional housing that offers comprehensive services intended to meet veterans where they are and be readily available when they choose to engage.

While at Safe Haven, staff helped coordinate his care with the VA and community providers so that he could receive treatment, including physical, speech, and occupational therapies. His word recall has improved significantly, and he has learned to better express himself through hand gestures and written and drawn communication. In addition, we helped him with finalizing his SSI case to finally receive full benefits. He was also allowed to bring his cat, Mr. Kitty, to live with him at Safe Haven. Regular income, steady housing and care, and the companionship of his cat all helped to decrease his stress and improve his confidence and overall health and well-being.

Finally on November 2020, he moved into one of Swords to Plowshares' permanent supportive housing sites, the Veterans Commons! With the support of housing stability, he will continue to receive the wraparound care he needs so he can achieve better health and greater independence.