

Contra Costa Council on Homelessness

Homelessness Awareness Month 2025 Recognitions for “Phoenix Rising”

This category recognizes **individuals with a lived experience of homelessness** who have demonstrated outstanding courage, strength and/or resilience through the Phoenix Rising category. The Phoenix is a bird that rises up again and again from the ashes. It embodies courage and resilience through its journey or flight.

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

Nominees

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|-----------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Anastasia Lockwood | 9. Michael Callanan |
| 2. Ashley Ontiveros | 10. Moises Riley |
| 3. Brittany Ferguson | 11. Nicole Rogers |
| 4. Brittany Grenier | 12. Rebecca Sanders |
| 5. Christina Smith | 13. Robin Butler |
| 6. David Nolan | 14. Tami Townsend |
| 7. Donnie Diego | 15. Tammy Stoichich |
| 8. Donnie Diego | 16. Tanya Ruscigno |

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

Anastasia Lockwood

Nominated by: Caroline Miller, YAB

Please describe how the nominee has demonstrated courage, strength and/or resilience:

Over the past year, Anastasia has grown into a vital member of the Youth Action Board (YAB). Drawing from their lived experience, they have consistently shown up in the community to advocate for young people and work toward improving the homeless response system—even while still navigating it themselves. Anastasia’s commitment and resilience are evident in the many ways they’ve contributed: participating in the HAM panel, serving on RFP panels and participating in interviews, engaging in trainings, leading outreach efforts, and lending their voice to strategic planning.

Anastasia’s steady presence, thoughtful contributions, and deep compassion for others have left a lasting impact on their peers and the broader community. They embody the spirit of rising above challenges while lifting others alongside them.

Supervisory District: They serve the entire county

Ashley Ontiveros

Nominated by: La Tanya Johnson, Former case manager

Please describe how the nominee has demonstrated courage, strength and/or resilience:

This client was homeless, lost her children to CFS, and separated from all she has knows. During my time with her she graduated from SPIRIT program and Restore. Gained custody of her children moved and maintained permanent housing and received employment as a parent partner

Brittany Ferguson

Nominated by: Tanya Ruscigno, Co-worker

Please describe how the nominee has demonstrated courage, strength and/or resilience:

Brittany has been very helpful to CORE mobile outreach and she always advocates for the clients. Brittany has lived experience and uses her past struggles to persevere through helping her community.

Brittany from H3 has taught myself so many things and she is always responsive. She truly has a passion for this line of work and she helps build people up.

Brittany Grenier

Nominated by: Michele Eklund, Friend/coworker

Please describe how the nominee has demonstrated courage, strength and/or resilience:

She shows up everyday with a positive attitude, she inspires her clients, she doesn't judge people. She helps everyone no matter what.

She's a beautiful soul

Christina Smith

Nominated by: Bill Jones, I supervise her Program Director, and I was her mentor when she completed her SPIRIT program internship.

Please describe how the nominee has demonstrated courage, strength and/or resilience:

Christina's story is one of courage, resilience, and strength. She has faced challenges that might have kept others from moving forward, yet she has transformed her lived experiences—emerging as a true survivor—into a powerful source of wisdom and compassion. Today, Christina not only guides her own path with clarity and purpose but also uplifts, supports, and inspires the vulnerable clients she serves in the APS Home Safe program at Hope Solutions. From the beginning, Christina stood out as someone who leads with heart. She understands, on a deeply personal level, just how overwhelming life's hardships can be, and she brings that lived understanding into every interaction. Her clients trust her because she truly gets it. In her presence, they feel seen, respected, and empowered. Partners and colleagues alike recognize her authenticity and empathy, which have built bridges of trust and strengthened our entire program. Christina's leadership is compassionate, but it is also grounded in accountability. She creates spaces where teamwork thrives, where every voice matters, and where people feel both supported and challenged to grow. She demonstrates that empathy and excellence are not opposites—they go hand in hand. Through her example, Christina shows that resilience is not simply about surviving hardship, but about transforming those hardships into a driving force for change, growth, and impact. Her journey, and the way



she channels it into her work, embodies the very essence of this award. Christina is a courageous leader, a compassionate provider, and an inspiration to everyone around her. We are honored to nominate her and to celebrate the remarkable impact she continues to make in the lives of her clients, colleagues, and community.

Supervisory District: They serve the entire county

David Nolan

Nominated by: Morgan Richie,

Please describe how the nominee has demonstrated courage, strength and/or resilience:

David Nolan's journey exemplifies the courage and resilience at the heart of the Phoenix Rising Award. Once a participant in SOS Richmond's Job Readiness Program, David has risen from the challenges of homelessness to step into a role of leadership — inspiring others through both his hard work and his integrity. From the beginning, David's team recognized him as a natural leader. His honesty, work ethic, and reliability quickly set him apart, and his peers came to trust him as someone who would always show up and follow through. David does not shy away from difficult tasks or hard truths — instead, he leans in with determination and clarity. What makes David's leadership unique is the care he shows for others. His coworker Shyloh describes how David consistently looks out for his teammates, whether by making sure a bike wasn't stolen, motivating his crew to clean up entire blocks of trash, or encouraging them to keep pushing forward. David's trustworthiness and compassion have a direct impact not only on his coworkers, but on the community streets where his team works every day. David's story is one of transformation and service. By moving from participant to leader, he has become a living example of what is possible when resilience meets opportunity. His presence encourages others to believe in themselves, to imagine a future beyond survival, and to take pride in contributing to their community. In David, we see the embodiment of the Phoenix: rising again and again, carrying



courage, strength, and care into every new chapter. SOS Richmond is proud to nominate him for the Phoenix Rising Award.

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)

Donnie Diego

Nominated by: Rich Town, friend

Please describe how the nominee has demonstrated courage, strength and/or resilience:

Donnie is more than a leader — he is a voice, an advocate, and a guiding light for those experiencing homelessness in Contra Costa County. Having walked through homelessness himself, Donnie carries a deep understanding of the challenges faced by our most vulnerable neighbors. Today, he turns that lived experience into action, compassion, and change. As Chairman of the Consumer Advisory Board for Healthcare for the Homeless, Donnie has ensured that the perspectives of people with lived experience are not just heard, but centered in countywide decision-making. Under his leadership, the board has strengthened collaboration between providers and the community, making healthcare and housing programs more responsive, humane, and effective.

Beyond policy, Donnie's daily work embodies hope in action. As a Registered Substance Abuse Counselor, Peer Support Specialist, and Discovery House Alumni Association Board Member, he meets people where they are, walking beside them through recovery, mental health challenges, and the difficult path out of homelessness. His trainings in WRAP, CBT, DBT, and crisis intervention equip him with the tools to help individuals heal, while his heart ensures they feel seen, valued, and never alone. Donnie's impact can be measured not just in programs improved or meetings led, but in lives changed — in the resident who found courage to begin recovery, in the shelter guest who learned new



life skills, in the countless people who now have a voice at the table because he insisted they belong there.

Quietly but powerfully, Donnie has helped turn hardship into hope, and struggle into strength. He is a true unspoken hero whose dedication continues to transform the homelessness community of Contra Costa County.

Supervisory District: They serve the entire county

Donnie Diego

Nominated by: Kevin Johnson, Friend

Please describe how the nominee has demonstrated courage, strength and/or resilience:

I am thrilled to nominate Donnie Diego for the Phoenix Rising Award, which honors individuals with lived experience of homelessness who exemplify extraordinary courage, strength, and resilience.

Despite his struggles with homelessness, Donnie has not only thrived but has become a beacon of hope and leadership. He is Chairman of the Healthcare for the Homeless Consumer Advisory Board and has driven significant improvements in healthcare access for the homeless community. His dedication to service also shined through his role as Vice President of the Resident Council at Brookside, where he championed his peers and fostered positive change. For two years Donnie volunteered his time and services at the Brookside Shelter where he managed inventory and donations as well as helped shelter staff with daily operations.

Throughout his journey, Donnie continues to thrive amidst the challenges of homelessness. He's trained and certified a Peer Support Specialist by three esteemed agencies: Contra Costa College, CalMHSA the California Mental Health Services Authority, and Medi-Cal. He has also completed courses in interpersonal development and financial management with Pacific Clinics, which led him to co-facilitate the day habilitation program at the shelter. Additionally, he graduated from the Re-Entry Success Center's Alpha Program and received the Harriet Tubman Award from the Remedy Support Group, along with a



certificate of recognition from the State Legislature through Assembly member Buffy Wicks and participated in the Contra Costa County Early Engagement Group on substance disorders.

Donnie's journey from homelessness to a pillar of strength and resilience is a testament to his unwavering courage. His dedication to empowering others and continuous pursuit of personal and professional growth make him an ideal candidate for this award. He is an inspiration to us all.

Supervisory District: I don't know

Michael Callanan

Nominated by: Tanya Ruscigno, Coworker

Please describe how the nominee has demonstrated courage, strength and/or resilience:

Mike started CORE mobile outreach and has stayed all these years because he has a passion for this work.

Mike is my new supervisor and he is calm, understanding, and always in a good mood. He listens to everyone and always is responsive.

Moises Riley

Nominated by: Moises Amaya, Son

Please describe how the nominee has demonstrated courage, strength and/or resilience:

Apesar de las dificultades que pase y lo duro que fue vivir en la calle me dio el corage y la motivacion de luchar por seguir adelante sino tambien la experiencia y las historias de cada persona que sufre en las calles por falta de un hogar y las causas que por las que estas personas son olvidadas y rechazadas pero mas grande fue mi motivacion al escuchar a cada una de esas personas que me abrieron su corazon para poder darme razones y dificultades pero mas hermoso fue que todas esas personas tenemos suenos metas que por las dificultades de la vida aveces nos toca sufrir estos problemas pero hoy es mas grande la motivacion para que podamos ayudar ala comunidad a cambiar el rumbo de nuestros futuros y que el gobierno brinde y se enfoque en planes de ayuda para los mas necesitados que no pueden alzar su voz

igualdad y inclusion ala comunidades mas vulnerables

Nicole Rogers

Nominated by: Roberto Roman, Co-worker/friend

Please describe how the nominee has demonstrated courage, strength and/or resilience:

Nicole Rogers, a recent addition to the team at the Office for Peer and Family Empowerment (OPFE), knows that stories have beginnings and endings. It has taken some reflection for her to consider how her story began. “I feel like my story begins in a place of strength,” she says, “even though it didn't seem like that in the beginning.” The start of an 18-year process of overcoming mental health and substance use challenges also seemed like a very dark place to Nicole. “But in that dark place,” she says, “there was a glint of light that showed through.” In pursuing that light, she also experienced periods of homelessness and battled suicidal thoughts. The point where change seemed within grasp for Nicole was when she became pregnant. “I knew I had to save myself to save my unborn child,” she says. A devastating reality faced Nicole when, during her pregnancy, her baby’s father died from fentanyl overdose. “It really opened up my eyes, knowing that, as it was with him, it could have been with me, too.” Nicole found a refuge in Restore, a faith-based recovery program that supports women who have graduated from inpatient treatment and have open cases with Children and Family Services. Nicole eventually became a manager, group facilitator, and admin worker there. At Restore, Nicole also learned about the SPIRIT program when, during a presentation by the peer co-instructors, she received encouragement to not only apply for SPIRIT but also look into the Clean Slate program to expunge her record



and improve her employment opportunities. She was hesitant at first. “I was so stuck on my past that I didn’t see my future,” she says. “Even though I had shown signs of rehabilitation, I thought that there was no hope for me.” Yet, hope prevailed! Nicole enrolled in SPIRIT and graduated in 2024. Now, she is the newest SPIRIT Peer Vocational Specialist at OPFE. Her journey has changed her outlook. “There’s always time to rebuild your life, if that’s what you want. Bad moments and bad times don’t have to equal bad life.”

I can personally vouch for Nicole's integrity, perseverance, and dedication to helping others. She has become an instrumental part of the Office for Peer and Family Empowerment team over the last year. Her journey through adversity into victory inspires m

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

Rebecca Sanders

Nominated by: Tanya Ruscigno, Supervisor

Please describe how the nominee has demonstrated courage, strength and/or resilience:

Rebecca is an amazing supervisor and she's always available to help whenever assistance is needed. She also goes out in the field and assists coworkers with helping clients.

Rebecca is also always available to talk if a co worker is feeling overwhelmed or down, or needs a listening ear. She is truly an amazing supervisor.

Robin Butler

Nominated by: Roxanne M. Perry-White, Care Coordinator at Delta Landing Homeless Shelter

Please describe how the nominee has demonstrated courage, strength and/or resilience:

Robin had been homeless for a number of years. She placed herself on numerous housing authority waitlists; and monitored them closely. She performed all tasks required to be part of the BACS Community Services Organization in a timely fashion.

The client never gave up on her search for a forever home. She moved into her home in May 2025.

Tami Townsend

Nominated by: Tanya Ruscigno, Coworker

Please describe how the nominee has demonstrated courage, strength and/or resilience:

Tami demonstrates strength, courage, and resilience every single day. She goes, goes, goes for all clients and her community. She cares about all of the unhoused and goes the extra mile.

Tami is a team player and always gives a helping hand.

Tammy Stoicich

Nominated by: Tanya Ruscigno, Coworker

Please describe how the nominee has demonstrated courage, strength and/or resilience:

Tammy is a part of the CCH: H3 data team and she assists with a huge part of CCC reports and trains all of CORE mobile outreach. She is very patient with everyone and very professional.

Tammy has lived experience and she is a kind and loving woman. She has a heart for the unhoused.

Tanya Ruscigno

Nominated by: Brittany Ferguson, Colleague

Please describe how the nominee has demonstrated courage, strength and/or resilience:

Tanya Ruscigno each day demonstrates resilience, she is the true example of a phoenix rising. When she gets knocked down, she gets back up 10x harder. Tanya has lived experience homeless, and in recovery. I admire her strength and passion for helping and serving our community.