

Contra Costa Council on Homelessness
Homelessness Awareness Month 2024
Recognitions for “Phoenix Rising”

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

1. Amelia Juner
2. Angie Pena
3. Ashley Graham
4. Carlos Aguilar
5. Christopher Williams
6. Darren Stallcup
7. Malika Mahanna
8. Teddy Thollaug
9. Victoria Fairchild

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

Amelia Juner

Nominated by: Andrea Altman, Supporter, admirer of her abilities and friend

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

Amelia (Amy) possesses all of those character traits. In the past year plus Amy has taken steps to change her life around. Amy stepped away from her fears and anxiety, found steady employment, acquired housing, enrolled in classes, graduated from the SPIRIT program and interned for a while with CORE. Today she is in a new cute apartment with her son, participating in his life, and working daily. In between all of that she volunteers for GROW Concord in giving back to her friends still on the streets, but mostly as an inspiration to so many more that want to be like Amy.

Several people I have spoken to have known Amy for a long time. Her strength to take on her mental and physical health for the purpose of being with her son as he grew up was awesome to watch. She overcame obstacles like major depression, employer issues and stayed focused and resilient.

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

Angie Pena

Nominated by: Morgan Richie, Co-worker

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

Angie Pena's journey from living in a homeless encampment to becoming a key leader at SOS Richmond is nothing short of inspiring. Over the years, Angie has demonstrated unwavering commitment to not only rebuilding her own life but also uplifting others along the way. She has consistently shown resilience, strength, and determination, working her way up through various roles at SOS with an unmatched dedication. What sets Angie apart is her ability to lead with both empathy and effectiveness. Having experienced the struggles of homelessness firsthand, she brings a deep understanding and compassion to her work, earning the trust and respect of both her peers and those she serves. In each position she's held, Angie has been a model of consistency, showing up strong for her community day in and day out. As she took on more leadership responsibility, her impact only grew, not just because of her work ethic, but because of the care and thoughtfulness she brings to everything she does. Angie Pena is more than a leader—she is a beacon of hope and proof that, with dedication and support, it's possible to create a better future. Her contribution to SOS Richmond and to the broader community is invaluable, making her a truly deserving candidate for this nomination.

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)

Ashley Graham

Nominated by: Ashley Graham, Self

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

Ashley has engaged in treatment and reentry transition programs to live a healthier lifestyle and become self sufficient.

Ashley has suffered over 20 years of severe homelessness, drug addiction and being a victim of human trafficking. For the past two years she has worked closely with her treatment team and maintained her sobriety while pursuing a higher education at Diablo Valley College.

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)

Carlos Aguilar

Nominated by: Daniel Aderholt, I'm his CEO of American River homeless crews non profit

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

They used to be homeless and now he helps our homeless with food and supplies every week as an American River homeless crew member

Carlos helps our homeless every chance he gets in Antioch

Supervisorial District: They serve the entire county

Christopher Williams

Nominated by: Morgan Richie, Co-worker

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

Christopher Williams' story is one of transformation and perseverance. After spending years in a homeless encampment, Christopher is now paying it forward in ways that profoundly impact his community. At SOS Richmond, Christopher has earned a reputation for being unafraid of hard work. Whether it's rolling up his sleeves for the most challenging tasks or stepping in to lend a hand to someone, he's ready to do whatever it takes. But what truly makes Christopher stand out is his ability to mentor others walking the path he once walked. He leads by example, showing those around him that determination and effort make change possible. His willingness to share his journey and guide others has made him a pillar of support within SOS. Christopher doesn't just give advice—he offers understanding, hope, and practical steps toward a better future. Christopher's personal life is moving forward as well. His warm personality, combined with his strong work ethic, makes him a natural leader and a source of inspiration. Christopher Williams is a person who embodies resilience and the power of community, making him an excellent candidate for this nomination.

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)

Darren Stallcup

Nominated by: Darren Stallcup, Self

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

My house burnt down and I lost everything. I overcame homelessness, mental health and drug addiction. Now I'm sober, selling cars, have my own place and I'm married.

Darren Stallcup

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

Malika Mahanna

Nominated by: Cristina Garrotto, Colleague/ friend

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

She shows strength of character by overcoming, severe neglect, physical, and psychological abuse. She persevered while suffering with a mental illness, over overcoming Juvenile hall and chronic homelessness.

I am honored to have worked by her side, and will forever be a friend and colleague.

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

Teddy Thollaug

Nominated by: Hope Dixon, Employer

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

Teddy Thollaug is a kind and compassionate person who shows incredible strength, courage, and resilience. Over the past year, while experiencing homelessness, Teddy graduated from high school and started college. They are an active member of the Youth Action Board, where they've helped work on our Youth Housing Demonstration Grant application and the Youth Community Needs Assessment. Through this work, they've advocated for their unhoused peers and contributed to creating important resources for young people. Through self-advocacy Teddy connected to several resources on campus and now works in the Basic Needs Department, helping support the campus food pantry and assisting fellow students who are facing similar challenges. Their dedication to helping improve our systems and support our community is a regular inspiration for me.

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)

Victoria Fairchild

Nominated by: Victoria Fairchild, Self

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

This person is me. I have overcome so much. I spent 17 years in and out of prisons. After I stopped going to jail, I spent five years still in my addiction, living on the streets, pushing a shopping cart with living in homeless encampments. I had no hope. I thought I would die on the streets an ex-felon and drug addict. Today I am full of hope, with 11 years clean. I work in Contra Costa County at the Office for Peer and Family Empowerment as one of the SPIRIT Peer co-instructors teaching peers how to use their lived experience to instill Hope, Resiliency and Empowerment to others. I have turned my adversity into opportunity. I also work overtime with the A3 Miles Hall Crisis Call Center to provide support to those experiencing a crisis. My life is nowhere near what it once was. I live today helping others and breaking down stigma that keeps people from wanting to change.

This is the first time I am doing something like this for myself. I feel if I don't recognize my own courage, strength, and resiliency, how can I expect someone else too? Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Supervisory District: They serve the entire county