



Empowering People with Employment and Workforce Development | May 2022

The month of May is of special import to the international and American labor movements. The root of May 1st as International Workers Day goes back to the American Federation of Labor and its drive to establish the 8-hour workday in the 1880s.

ECS recognizes both the role of work and the dignity and centrality of working people. ECS frontline workers are represented at the collective bargaining table by OPEIU, Local 29 (union positions presently account for 40% of our 420-strong team), and we are proud of all that our staff has accomplished throughout the pandemic in service of San Franciscans who experience homelessness and extreme poverty. We learned from the release of new point-in-time count data from San Francisco's Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing that over the last two years, unsheltered homelessness has dropped by 15% in San Francisco, and chronic homelessness is down 11%. This progress would not have been possible without the steadfast work of ECS frontline workers and their peers from our sister organizations.

During the course of the pandemic, ECS managed 8 shelter-in-place hotels and served 1,399 guests in addition to our existing permanent and interim housing portfolio. At the same time, we added 451 units of new permanent supportive housing capacity. Last year alone, ECS served 1 million meals to neighbors experiencing food insecurity.

Just as ECS is committed to providing high quality services to our neighbors, we are also determined to create opportunities to return to the workforce for those who wish to pursue employment.

A core part of ECS' vision to stabilize the lives of our most vulnerable neighbors is investing in programs that create opportunities for individuals to train for and obtain work as part of their journey toward economic stabilization and personal growth. We know that education, training, and work are often linked to one's sense of social worth, economic and emotional health, and self-esteem. ECS is committed to the dignity of each individual, and we know that the road to recovery from chronic homelessness and extreme poverty for each person is unique.

Our Workforce Development and Social Enterprise team has done an extraordinary job of innovating and developing employment and training initiatives that are relevant to participants, practical for the job market, and uphold the core ECS value of service and giving back to the community.

Perhaps the most recognizable of these initiatives is the CHEFS program, which provides cutting-edge culinary industry training that enables participants to gain the skills they need for employment in commercial kitchens. But CHEFS does not only provide training, equipment, and placement assistance. ECS has a large commercial kitchen operation that prepares daily meals for a range of ECS participants, including the Canon Kip Senior Center and elderly, disabled, and veteran residents of several ECS housing establishments. Many CHEFS graduates are employed in this operation, helping to give back to the community. Larry Gorbet, our mission speaker at the recently concluded CHEFS Gala, is one chef who has chosen to work at our ECS commercial kitchen operations, and we are grateful.

Thanks to the commitment of the philanthropic community who gave generously to our Capital Campaign in 2019 and 2020, ECS raised \$2.5 million for the state-of-art, 6000-square foot CHEFS Kitchen and training space at 1064 Mission. We are pleased to report that the brand new CHEFS Kitchen is on track to open this fall.

As ECS expands our social enterprise and workforce development footprint, I wish to highlight several other initiatives as well. In 2021, we launched the Social Services Sector Employment Training program, which teaches individuals with lived experience of homelessness essential social services skills and, at the same time, leverages their lived expertise to enhance the quality of training and services. SSSET trainees have an opportunity to, following their training, work as case managers or in other roles within ECS or with a peer organization. ECS endeavors to be intentional in our training as well as in hiring practices to include individuals with lived expertise.

Another program assisting individuals with marketing themselves for work is the ECS Next Step Center. The Next Step Center, commonly referred to as the Job Center, assists participants with educational needs, resume-writing, interview skills, and more. The Next Step Center is also hosting a job-shadow opportunity in which individuals in the program are paired with ECS staff for the purpose of observing a workday, asking questions, and gaining insight.

At every step, ECS seeks to provide individuals who participate in our workforce programs with the tools, guidance, and assistance for a path to stability and success. From leadership to trainers and employment success coaches, the department's high-integrity, highly motivated staff make this possible.

Workforce development is important to creating long-term stable outcomes for those exiting homelessness, and we are honored to have an impact on those who seek this path. We are deeply thankful for the support of the broader community in this work, which enables us to further our mission and administer services and programs that empower people to live with dignity and independence.

We dedicate this month of global appreciation for work to all those who work tirelessly to improve the lives of our vulnerable neighbors as well as to those who have or are making the transition from homelessness or extreme poverty to employment. Thank you for your inspiration.

In solidarity,

Beth Stokes