



**path
ways
home**

Toolkit

Welcome

If you're here, you're probably looking for ways to assist someone experiencing or on the verge of experiencing homelessness, or you're hoping to get involved in some way to help end the crisis of homelessness in your community. We're grateful to partner with you on your journey and intend for this toolkit to be a helpful starting point in your advocacy work. Inside you'll find a variety of resources, as well as an updated directory of organizations dedicated to the mission of finding quality, affordable housing for everyone.

While we want this to be a useful primer, it definitely should not replace seeking assistance from trained professionals, which is why we've included ways to connect with the many local organizations active in the community. If you're new to this work, we strongly encourage you to reach out and take advantage of the wealth of knowledge and experience which exists with the case managers, advocates and volunteers highlighted in this toolkit. Whatever situation you might currently be grappling with, you can be sure they've accompanied countless others along similar paths and are eager to share the map they used.

One thing to note before we dive in: while this work is often incredibly urgent (people need housing now), it's crucial to remain patient with both the process and the people you're working with. It's rare your advocacy work will yield overnight results, so it's best to remind yourself this is a marathon, not a sprint; start with an expectation it will take anywhere from a couple of months to a year to get someone in long-term, stable housing — and know that anything quicker is a big win!

Finally, most of the resources we've included are specific to Santa Cruz County, however all of the advocacy topics and techniques apply to anyone looking to help ensure everyone has access to safe and stable housing.

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We've structured this toolkit to be used both as an educational guide and reference tool for anyone looking to advocate with and for their community. The sections are ordered in a helpful progression for someone who wants to better understand the crisis while also providing tools and resources to help you take immediate action. Depending on your circumstance, you might find yourself working your way through each section or simply using the links below to quickly locate helpful websites or numbers to call.

We begin by exploring the [reasons people become unhoused](#) and the challenges they might face on their journey to finding stable housing. We start here in order to give you a foundation of understanding and help dispel any myths or common misconceptions you might have before you begin taking action.

We then highlight the role professional [case managers](#) play in effectively advocating for their clients, as these skills are necessary for anyone looking to assist a neighbor in need. Ideally, all people seeking housing would have access to an experienced advocate to assist them on their journey back to housing. Unfortunately, this is not the case. But, by utilizing this Toolkit and the information it provides, you can become a strong partner to anyone who needs support on their journey to housing in our community.

One important concept we examine is [trauma-informed care](#). Being aware of trauma and its effects will allow you to assist community members without inadvertently retraumatizing them — and will probably help make you an all-around more empathetic person for everyone in your life! After that, we review [de-escalation techniques](#), which will give you the ability to effectively assist individuals in crisis, something you'll encounter when helping people through one of the most stressful periods in their life.

Once you have a solid understanding of the housing crisis and some of the roles and techniques involved in addressing it, we'll outline some [solutions](#). Naturally, these all start with the various housing types available to those experiencing this crisis and as such, we discuss [how to help someone navigate](#) through their options. And finally, in order to ensure your work remains healthy and sustainable, we've also included a section on self-care, which is commonly referred to as [trauma stewardship](#).



**Now that you know
where we're going,
let's jump right in!**

Contributing Factors to Homelessness

Overview

According to the [National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty](#), every year in America roughly 2.5 to 3.5 million people sleep in shelters, transitional housing, and public places not meant for human habitation. Sadly, this figure doesn't include the millions more who are temporarily residing with family or friends after losing their own homes. How did we get here?

The contributing factors to homelessness are as varied and diverse as those experiencing this crisis. However, a combination of economic hardship and a lack of affordable housing are two of the biggest barriers to remaining housed.

Poverty

In 2019, [10.5%](#) of the national population was living below the poverty line, and with housing costs typically taking up the largest portion of monthly budgets, millions of Americans are one missed paycheck or medical crisis away from homelessness. With the [national average one-bedroom rental apartment costing \\$1,017](#), someone earning the minimum wage must work 79 hours a week simply to afford housing, to say nothing of food, clothes or healthcare.

These are the statistics Jennifer was facing, a young mom with a bubbly two-year-old daughter and dreams of becoming an interior designer. Jennifer worked as a retail clerk earning just above minimum wage in Watsonville, which meant almost all of her monthly income was going towards her rent. She was able to get by with the help of her local food bank and some family support, but it seemed no matter how many extra shifts she picked up, she never had enough to cover all of her bills, and definitely didn't have anything left over to begin saving for their future. She also found the more she worked, the more she owed in child care costs, not to mention the emotional toll of being away from her daughter for most of his waking hours.

When her apartment building was sold and the new management increased her rent, she fell further behind until she began missing payments altogether. Soon enough, she lost her housing completely and began experiencing homelessness.



WHEN JENNIFER APARTMENT BUILDING WAS SOLD and the new management increased her rent, SHE FELL FURTHER BEHIND UNTIL SHE BEGAN MISSING PAYMENTS ALTOGETHER. Soon enough, SHE LOST HER HOUSING COMPLETELY AND BEGAN EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS.”

Domestic Violence

Beyond basic economics, one of the [primary causes](#) of women and children becoming unhoused is domestic violence; nearly [80% of unhoused women](#) with children are estimated to have experienced domestic violence. Survivors of domestic abuse are more likely to be isolated from family and friends, lack access to income, and face significant physical and mental health challenges. A lack of affordable healthcare and [other housing practices](#) make it even more difficult for survivors to find homes of their own.

For example, some landlords are reluctant to rent to women who have survived abuse. One shocking [study](#) from a fair housing group found close to 30% of landlords either flatly refused to rent to a domestic violence victim or failed to follow up as promised when contacted by an investigator posing as a housing coordinator for a domestic violence survivor assistance program. Moreover, these harmful practices affect not only the women but also the children who have experienced violence in the home, further undermining their chances of living a healthy, successful life.



Human Trafficking

Human trafficking is another contributing factor to the homelessness crisis in our country; tragically [85% of confirmed sex trafficking victims are U.S. citizens](#), most of whom are children. While many Americans might think trafficking is relegated to foreign countries, homeless children remain the most susceptible to traffickers, often promised food or other resources before being sold and entering a cycle of abuse which results in continued homelessness.

While data in this area by its nature is hard to collect, conservative [estimates](#) from the research available suggest that nearly 800,000 of the children or young adults experiencing homelessness each year may be victims of sex or labor trafficking in America, with LGBTQ youth, children in the foster system, and girls among the most vulnerable groups to be trafficked.

Natural Disasters

Natural disasters such as wildfires in California, tornados and flooding in the Midwest, and hurricanes on the East Coast are becoming both more severe and more common due to climate change, resulting in an increasing number of families being displaced each year, some of whom struggle to regain their footing after a catastrophic event.

[Hurricane Harvey](#), which devastated Houston in 2017 and was described by the National Hurricane Center as “the most significant tropical cyclone rainfall event in US history,” destroyed nearly 2,000 Section 8 and public housing units across the state leaving thousands displaced. According to the Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County, by the following year the number of unhoused families [had increased by 13%](#), 18% of whom said Harvey was directly to blame.

In addition to storms and natural disasters, the Covid-19 pandemic revealed just how fragile we all are to circumstances outside our control, and dealt yet another blow to those living on the margins.

Mental and Behavioral Health Issues

People suffering from behavioral health issues also find themselves unhoused at alarmingly high rates. In one [estimate](#), roughly 50% of unhoused Americans are living with a mental illness, while 25% had experienced a serious mental illness at one point. Affective disorders such as depression and bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, anxiety disorders and substance abuse disorders are among the [most common](#) types of mental illness in those experiencing homelessness.

These illnesses and their effects are often exacerbated by the traumatic experience of being homeless, further stigmatizing individuals and making access to care that much more difficult.

This describes [Hilda's](#) experience; diagnosed with bipolar and obsessive-compulsive personality disorders, she's been evicted from six shelters in the last couple of years due to a lack of medication and issues arising from her illnesses, which have also prevented her from holding steady employment.

Each time this happens, she finds herself in a cruel Catch-22: without a place to stay, her mental health treatment takes a back seat to her basic survival needs of finding food and shelter each day. However, the longer her illnesses go untreated, the harder it is for her to access another housing program and the longer she remains unhoused, the more she goes without the care she needs. Unfortunately, this spiral is far too common among people who are unhoused suffering from mental illnesses and is exceedingly hard to successfully exit without comprehensive support.



Barriers to Becoming Housed

Being unhoused is physically and emotionally draining, every single day. The unrelenting terror of living outside compounded by the time and effort required to complete simple, life-sustaining tasks like finding food or going to the bathroom consumes most of the day and almost all of one's mental capacity. When you're on the street, you most likely don't have any way to keep food cold or fresh, which means you're constantly on the search for your next meal. You also most likely don't have a secure place to store your belongings, which means you have to remain vigilant at all times and still will most likely be robbed, assaulted, or both.

Trying to navigate through a confusing and sprawling bureaucracy is challenging for most people; for someone who is simultaneously dealing with basic survival needs, it can be especially daunting. Transportation often adds another hurdle; a broken or non-existent car leaves many people dependent on public transportation, which can be both time-consuming and unreliable in many American cities.

Searching for employment requires much of what is missing when you're living unhoused; access to showers and laundry services, a secure place to leave your things when interviewing, reliable transportation and a physical address.

And anyone who's been out of work knows the longer you haven't been employed, the harder it can be to find the next job. When compounded by any preexisting behavioral or physical health challenges and trauma endured from being unhoused, this cycle can quickly feel insurmountable.

As you can see, the effects of being unhoused aren't contained to just housing, however stable housing is required to begin addressing every other challenge. (This is why "Housing First," which is prioritizing housing over everything else, has become a national best practice in ending homelessness.)

Case Management 101

What is Case Management?

People unfamiliar with this work might think of case managers simply as problem-solvers, helping someone in crisis by quickly and efficiently providing resources and answers. **However, the role is most effective when clients are centered in the work and actively driving their own outcomes**, with a skilled Case Manager expertly facilitating the organization of resources and assisting in the process.

Case managers wear a lot of different (mostly figurative) hats, as they are often the point person in reviewing applications and records, admitting clients into programs, delivering orientations and collaborating with their clients to plan, assess, and evaluate all available options and pathways to stable, long-term housing. The goal of case managers in all this work is to empower people by drawing on their strengths and capabilities while ensuring they have timely access to the resources they need to achieve housing stability.

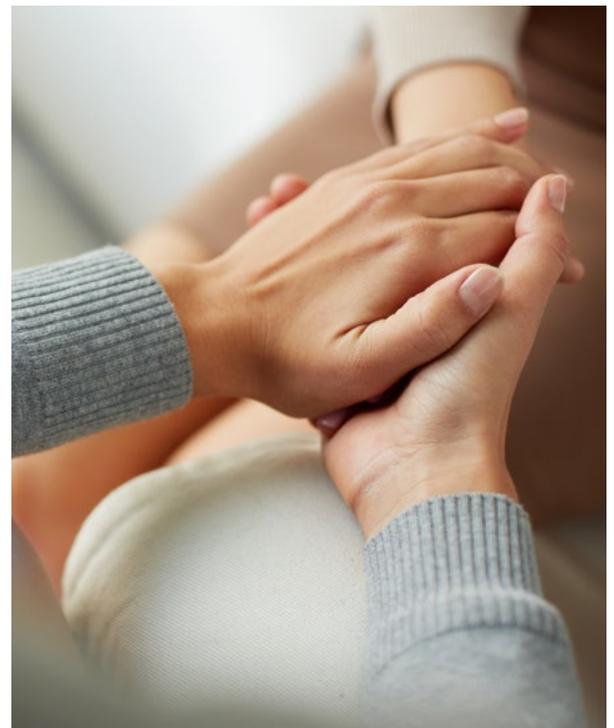
Case Management Skills You Can Use

When working with someone experiencing homelessness, **the most important thing to remember is your role is not to perform actions for people but instead to be there *with* them as they navigate their way back to stability.** As such, routinely checking in for consent and never doing things without explicit permission is critical. Sometimes just your physical presence is the most helpful thing you can provide; accompanying people to doctor appointments or housing visits can positively affect their outcomes in myriad ways, as these situations are typically the most fraught with mistrust and misunderstandings.

Asking open-ended, thoughtful questions is a great way to help empower someone to recognize their agency and set their own course. As some of your conversations will be touching on sensitive topics and personal information, being clear at the outset with your intentions and ensuring consent along the way will help you continue to build a solid relationship.

As you build this relationship, **it's also necessary to set boundaries early and often**, recognizing if this is your first time helping someone in crisis, you might not know exactly where your boundaries are before they're crossed. Also, as you read about earlier, being unhoused is traumatic and people experiencing it might have additional conditions which make it difficult to recognize social cues.

Give the person you're working with and yourself some grace in this process, and know it's okay to occasionally need space and time away before coming back to an issue. Experienced caseworkers routinely say things like, "I don't want to be talked to like this, I will come back later when you're ready to have this conversation." Getting comfortable with this kind of direct communication is going to help your work to be both effective and sustainable for you.



When you're first assessing someone's situation, **asking the following key questions will give you a better idea of how to prioritize their next steps.** After ensuring their physical safety, the questions address three important areas: income, work and health.

Where are you staying now? Are you safe where you're staying?
Let's talk about how to get you back to being housed. Do you have income?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How much income? • Can you afford between \$1500-\$1800 a month in rent? (This is the average cost of a studio apartment in Santa Cruz)
Are you able to work?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you have an idea where you want to work? • Do you want support building a resume? • Do you want support job hunting?
Are you unable to work and eligible for disability benefits?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you have access to a doctor who can document your situation? (If not, connecting them with an organization like HPHP is crucial)

Once you have the answers to these questions, it's much easier to see where to begin taking action. For a more in-depth set of questions, you can use [this resource](#) to help start formulating a plan. Know that if the person you're assisting is able to have this conversation and start developing a plan, they're already well along the path to becoming rehoused, and you can determine where you can provide additional support and maintain regular check-ins on progress.

Regardless of what the initial case may be, it's essential to understand there most likely will be setbacks and roadblocks along the way; maintaining a positive and flexible attitude will allow both you and the person you're helping remain resilient during what are sure to be incredibly stressful times.

Needless to say, this work requires awareness of both emotional triggers for others and oneself, as well as understanding the principles of trauma-informed care and de-escalation techniques, which we'll review a bit later in the toolkit. And once again, the quicker you can connect with a trained professional, especially if someone's situation is complex, the better. Of course, continuing to provide additional support will only enhance their outcome, but do not feel like you have to do it alone.

Housing Navigation

When helping someone who is experiencing homelessness navigate a housing search, keep in mind your role; you are empowering them to find their own housing, assisting and supporting where asked. The following are the stages of the process and how to best help alleviate the challenges which might arise when working with someone who is unhoused.

A quick note before we dig in: it may be tempting to begin looking for housing right away, however if you don't have all the pieces in place, you may be setting someone up for disappointment. Finding a dream spot and then watching it slip away can be emotionally wrenching, especially when you're unhoused. Making sure someone has their entire application package ready, and their finances in order, before seeing any actual units will help set them up for success and ensure everything goes as smooth as possible once they've found a place they'd like to apply for.

The Budget

The first step in helping someone find housing is determining what their budget looks like. The worksheet below is a great tool to use for this.

The Budget		
Category	Expenses	Amount
Food	Groceries (not including food stamps)	
	Eating Out	
Health & Grooming	Medical/Dental/Prescriptions	
	Laundry	
	Grooming (hair, nails, etc)	
	Toiletries/Diapers	
Car & Transit	Public Transportation	
	Car Payment/Insurance, Gas & Maintenance	
Personal	Clothing	
	Cleaning Supplies	
	Cigarettes	
	Entertainment	
Miscellaneous	Child Care/Education	
	Child Support	
	Storage and/or Debt	
	Other	
	Cell Phone	

Total Savings (To Date) \$

Income	Income Source	Amount
	SSI	
	SSDI	
	CalWORKs	
	Employment/Unemployment	
	Secondary Employment	
	Child Support	
	Other:	

*Food Stamps? If Yes, how much a month? \$

Total Gross Income	
Total Monthly Expenses	
Balance: Income - Expenses =	

Documentation and Paperwork

Once you've figured out what price range is available, it's best to gather all the documentation and paperwork in advance, so they're ready to submit an application when the time comes.

The documents generally needed to rent an apartment or house are:

 **A photo identification (this can be a driver's license, state ID or passport)**

 **Proof of income (including check stubs, bank statements or tax returns)**

 **Housing history**

 **Credit check**

Documents in general are extremely hard to keep safe and organized when unhoused. If you can locate or provide a secure storage space (either physically or by helping to scan and place all the files somewhere easily accessed in the cloud) this will be a tremendous help.

Offering support to work through housing applications in advance of landlord meetings is a great way to help someone in the midst of homelessness. Remember to leave ample time to gather relevant supporting documents.

Cover Letter

Writing a cover letter is useful to both introduce someone and their story to a prospective landlord and proactively explain any gaps or areas of concern in their application. If writing is a challenge, you can offer to help either edit a draft or compose it collaboratively. The letter should highlight the progress they've made, their commitment to becoming and staying housed and the systems of support they've utilized in their journey.

[This questionnaire](#) is a great resource to help begin brainstorming this letter.

Letters of Support

Letters from past landlords and employers are often helpful in an application package. Also, if someone is currently in a support program, additional letters from program staff or clinicians can speak to their efforts and commitment to their wellbeing while providing a more holistic view of their situation. Also including your own letter here would be great, detailing your history together and how much this housing opportunity would impact their outcome.

Credit and Criminal History Issues

Many people (both housed and unhoused) might not know what's on their credit report, and we often tend to think it's much worse than it is. Helping someone obtain their report (using a free resource like [Annual Credit Report](#)) and reviewing all their information allows them to address any errors or explain any inconsistencies with additional documentation. As landlords focus on unpaid utilities or evictions, encouraging clients to set up a payment plan for any outstanding debts in these areas would be extremely beneficial.

The same process should be completed for criminal history. If this applies, encourage the person you're helping to obtain their police records so they can ensure accuracy, and if they're currently on probation or parole, asking their attending officers for letters of support is also useful.

Income Requirements

Generally, larger management companies and landlords have an income requirement for all tenants (usually 2-3x the monthly rent). If this threshold can't be met, you can focus your search on smaller, independent landlords who will probably have less stringent requirements and who are open to reviewing a prospective tenant's entire application package.

However, keep in mind if someone has been approved for Section 8 vouchers, their income only needs to be 2-3x their portion of the rent, as the vouchers will cover the rest. (Even if their income is \$0, their vouchers can be used for the entirety of the rent.) In this case, they meet the requirements and are able to apply for these units.

The Search

Once all their documents are in place, the apartment search can begin. Using online directories like Craigslist, Zillow, Apartments.com, and Facebook Marketplace are great places to start, in addition to scanning neighborhoods in-person to spot any "For Rent" signs posted by smaller landlords or individual owners. If someone is using housing vouchers, searching for landlords who accept Section 8 can be done online at [AffordableHousing.com](#).

In order to see units that fit the search parameters, the next step is scheduling a tour with a property manager, leasing agent or landlord. It can be helpful to help prepare some relevant questions to ask and things to look for on these visits, such as clarifying who is responsible for which utilities, understanding any pet or other restrictions and locating any shared amenities (like laundry) on the property.

Again, if requested, your presence on these tours would be useful; being there to help make sure all the important details are captured as well as demonstrating your support to a prospective landlord or property manager can help alleviate any concerns they might have about renting their unit to someone who is currently homeless.

The Lease and Security Deposit

After an application has been submitted and accepted, you'll want to review the lease in detail together, making sure it's clear when and how to pay the monthly rent, utilities and any other rules and regulations (like pets, housemates, visitors, etc.) that may be outlined.

Just before lease signing, there is typically a walk-thru with either the landlord or property manager, during which a move-in checklist is completed, detailing the state of the apartment upon delivery. Encourage the person you're helping to take pictures and compile notes to document any pre-existing damage and ensure they understand the security deposit is conditional on the physical state of the apartment at the end of the lease.

Support After Housing is Found

While getting housed is a major first step towards stability, if someone has lived without a home for a long period of time, there is going to be a transition period where they will need assistance adjusting to living in a home again. It might take time to acclimate to the idea that the unit is their own, and things like finding furniture or keeping track of when bills are due can feel overwhelming.

Often the best way to support someone after they find housing is to check-in regularly, offering to join them on any errands and generally just being available to help establish routines which may be new.

Helping Families Displaced Due to Wildfires (or Other Natural Disasters)

If you're assisting people whose houses have been destroyed due to a natural disaster, while the fundamental process remains the same, there might be additional funds or resources available from state or federal relief programs.



CALLING 2-1-1 OR SEARCHING
[FEMA'S WEBSITE](#) WILL HELP
DETERMINE HOW TO ACCESS
ANY ADDITIONAL PROGRAMS.

Solutions to Homelessness

People experience homelessness through a variety of lived circumstances and while there is no “one size fits all” approach to solving the larger crisis of homelessness in the United States, there is a widely shared consensus that housing is the ultimate solution to homelessness. After all, when someone is housed, they are no longer homeless! There are a few different types of housing to be aware of. Shelter and supportive services also have their place, but we’ll get to that later on.

As we’ve discussed, there are many issues that can lead to someone becoming unhoused, so why not address those issues first before finding housing? Why not make housing dependent on sobriety or employment or ongoing treatment for mental health issues? The simple answer is by including preconditions on housing, the continued trauma and upheaval associated with being unhoused makes it that much more difficult to begin tackling these barriers and ultimately leaves those most in need of support and care the farthest away from receiving it.

Providing housing first, without preconditions, gives people a stable and secure environment in which to receive additional support and resources. It’s important to note Housing First is not housing only, and the [research](#) continues to suggest this is one of the most effective (not to mention cost-effective) ways to permanently end the homeless crisis.

Rapid Re-Housing

[Rapid re-housing](#) is just as it sounds; assisting those experiencing homelessness to find housing as quickly as possible, understanding the less time an individual or family spends unhoused, the easier it is to connect them with programs that will ultimately ensure positive outcomes. If someone is enrolled in a rapid re-housing program, they usually have access to some form of financial assistance: move-in assistance, security deposit, and/or short-term rental assistance.

Once housed, residents are in a much better position to address any barriers previously preventing them from finding housing, and services can then be provided to assist in maintaining permanent housing.

Permanent Supportive Housing

Permanent supportive housing, or PSH, combines affordable housing with support services to people who need support — without a time limit — in order to maintain their housing. Participants in PSH often struggle with physical disabilities or issues of behavioral health that affect their ability to live independently. PSH often includes access to on-site services, and investment in PSH has been shown to help reduce the number of those chronically experiencing homelessness by [20% since 2007](#) while also lowering public costs.

Permanent Independent Housing

Permanent independent housing is rented or owned without supportive services attached. Of course, residents are always encouraged to access any and all resources they need in order to be successful, but these services are typically accessed outside the home.

Obtaining permanent independent housing begins with a search of available units, which can be found in a variety of ways. Along with the more “typical” approaches to the housing search, it is important to search for housing in more “non-typical” ways such as word of mouth, flyers around the community, yard signs, and social media channels. [The Department of Housing and Urban Development](#) offers a range of housing assistance programs and is a great resource when reviewing which rights and protections are guaranteed to residents in each state.

The process for finding permanent independent housing was outlined earlier in our section on housing navigation.



If you are in Santa Cruz County and are threatened, please call 9-1-1. If you are threatened by domestic violence, you can call the Monarch hotline at 1-888-900-4232, or if you are not in imminent danger but need immediate mental health crisis support, please call the Santa Cruz County Mental Health Crisis Line at 1-800-952-2335, which is open 24 hours a day.

Shelter

The first thing to know about shelter is that it's not the end goal. Shelter is temporary, not permanent. When someone enters a shelter program or finds shelter on a friend's couch, they still need to find permanent housing to end their experience of homelessness.

That having been said, shelter can be instrumental in someone's journey to housing. When sheltered, a person doesn't have to think about where they'll sleep every day, and they usually have a place to store their belongings. Shelter can be incredibly stabilizing for someone who has been unsheltered and can help someone make big strides toward resolving their homelessness.

When beginning your search for shelter, it is important to consider the limited capacity of shelter beds available in Santa Cruz County. So, while getting on the waiting lists (which we will discuss in the coming paragraphs) is important, you must also consider less formal shelter options such as staying with a friend or family member, finding a homeshare, or acquiring a safe place to park your car.

For some, an obstacle to housing options is strained relationships with family and friends. These conflicts go beyond simply putting the person in touch with their family and counseling, conflict mediation, and other reconciliation support may be helpful.

How to Get Shelter in Santa Cruz

Santa Cruz has an extensive network of providers, and if you're not sure where to start or what options are available, a good place to begin is by calling 2-1-1, where a free and confidential referral service can connect you with various programs including housing, food, and child care, among others.

To learn if you are eligible for shelter or other housing programs in Santa Cruz County, call Housing Matters, at 831-485-6020 to make an appointment for an intake assessment. You may also visit us at 115 Coral Street in Santa Cruz.

Santa Cruz County has a system called Smart Path, which allows people to complete a needs assessment at any one of the [many access points](#) throughout the county. Once a person has completed the Smart Path assessment, they'll enter the "community queue," where they'll be matched with services and resources that meet their needs as soon as possible.

This system is designed to provide a single access point for all services in the county, so people in need don't need to visit each agency separately.



Additional resources in Santa Cruz include:

- [Pajaro Valley Shelter](#), who help women, children and families.
- [Pajaro Rescue Mission](#), a faith-based shelter for homeless adult men.
- [Siena House](#), a residential shelter program for pregnant and postpartum women in crisis.
- [Faith Community Shelter](#), a rotating shelter run by local churches and faith-based organizations.

If you're outside of Santa Cruz County and are in need of housing resources, nearby shelters can be found online at sites like the [National Coalition for the Homeless](#), [Housing and Urban Development Resource Locator](#), [Homeless Shelter Directory](#) or [Shelter List](#). In many communities, a [2-1-1](#) phone number is also available to connect residents with resources in their area. Calling or visiting the local county Department of Human or Social Services, nearby churches, libraries or food pantries may also reveal other shelter options.

Different shelters have various guidelines and procedures, and it's important to know what times they open, if and when meals are served and if there are any additional support programs available to residents. Make sure you have all the information before entering a shelter program.

Supportive Services

While finding shelter is a crucial first step, the supportive services attached to that shelter are often key to long-term success in staying rehoused. There are also many supportive services that are available to people not staying in shelters; some are robust housing programs, others are simple day services.

Beyond the program staff and case managers available to help shelter residents and other community members connect with additional resources, other services can include hot showers and restrooms, which provide a space for residents to stay hygienic and comfortable.

In addition, many shelters or day services programs offer personal storage, as it's difficult to look for employment or permanent housing when burdened with transporting all one's belongings or being concerned for their security while doing so.

Access to a mailroom can be easily overlooked but without an address, it is hard for residents to apply for jobs, receive banking services and other important documents.

Becoming a Landlord

Do you, or someone you know, have an extra room to rent out? Or maybe you know a property manager/landlord who doesn't yet accept Housing Choice vouchers (previously known as Section 8).

As you will begin to realize, finding housing in Santa Cruz County is not easy. The demand for housing is high and thus, affordable housing is hard to come by. This is why a crucial part of this work is to encourage property owners to accept tenants with [Housing Choice vouchers](#). There are many benefits for landlords accepting Housing Choice vouchers outlined by HUD [here](#).

Housing Matters offers extensive supportive services on-site including the following services provided often in partnership with other organizations:



[CalFresh](#) (formerly known as food stamps) enrollment connects individuals and families with CalFresh benefits



Housing workshops provide the tools and support needed for individuals to move toward permanent, stable housing



[Homeless Persons' Health Project](#) is a full-service primary health center run by the County of Santa Cruz



[Dientes Community Dental Care](#) provides full dental services at no cost

Trauma-Informed Care

Trauma-informed care is a way of providing services for people which assumes that everyone who comes through the door has probably experienced trauma, whether they disclose it to you or not. When you operate under this assumption, you are sensitive to act in a way that won't re-traumatize the very people you're trying to assist. This may sound like common sense ("of course I don't want to re-traumatize someone!"), but it actually requires understanding what the effects of trauma might look like and evaluating how your actions can unknowingly trigger people.

We define trauma as "an event, series of events, or set of circumstances experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting and adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional or spiritual well-being."

Being without a home certainly qualifies as a traumatic event, as it profoundly disrupts a person's core need for stability and security, and is often followed by a loss of both possessions and community.

People experiencing homelessness are living with constant feelings of terror, loneliness, despair and dread, which can result in post-traumatic stress disorder after even a short period of homelessness. Obviously, the longer the experience lasts, the more rooted this trauma becomes and the more at-risk people remain to violence and further emotional and physical harm.

Beyond the immediate effects of being unhoused, people may also be experiencing the repercussions of previously undisclosed trauma which may be further affecting their physical or emotional state. When delivering trauma-informed care, service providers are not seeking to treat the symptoms or issues related to the trauma, but rather to provide services in a way that is accessible to those who have experienced trauma without triggering and re-traumatizing individuals.

HOW IS TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE BEST ACCOMPLISHED?

THERE ARE FIVE GUIDING PRINCIPLES WIDELY USED TO MINIMIZE THE RISK OF RE-TRAUMATIZATION: **SAFETY, CHOICE, COLLABORATION, TRUSTWORTHINESS AND EMPOWERMENT.**



Safety: refers to both physical and emotional safety, and can be ensured by creating safe and welcoming spaces in shelters where clear personal boundaries are respected.



Choice: highlights the importance of making sure individuals have control over their situation. In practice, this can be accomplished by establishing clear and appropriate messaging about their rights and responsibilities while receiving support.



Collaboration: focuses on making decisions with (and not for) individuals and thus sharing power in the process.



Trustworthiness: centers on clarity of tasks and established interpersonal boundaries which are respected throughout every interaction.



Empowerment: prioritizes skill-building and bolstering, in an atmosphere cultivated to validate and affirm the individuals being served.



HELPFUL TIPS WHEN DEALING WITH SOMEONE IN A CRISIS

1. Understand that Behavior is Communication - Look for signs of anxiety in body language, tone and cadence. Understand that crisis behavior reflects a need and consider what it is the other person might want. Ask open and clarifying questions with the aim of understanding not just the “what,” but the “why” and “how.”

2. Avoid the Power Struggle - Challenging or exercising authority over someone can escalate behaviors (and in your role as an advocate you shouldn't really be trying to assert authority over people you're trying to help).

Consider options you can offer that allow flexibility to address both parties' needs and desired outcomes; saying things like “let's go sit down over there so I can hear you better” can remove the interaction from a stressful location.

3. Use Limit Setting - Behavior can't be forced, but setting limits can help us influence behaviors. Framing acceptable behaviors or outcomes can encourage someone to choose the most productive option.

4. Practice Rational Detachment - Don't take behaviors personally. Stay calm. Find a positive way to release the negative energy you absorbed during the conflict by going for a walk, a quick meditation or listening to something pleasant.

De-escalation Techniques

As we've discussed, people experiencing homelessness are often suffering from acute or complex trauma, which means emotions are heightened and biological instincts of fight, flight or freeze may be present. These states are obviously both uncomfortable for the person experiencing them and not conducive to constructive action, therefore knowing effective de-escalation techniques will help resolve any momentary tension and get things back on track.

It can be quite jarring to see someone you know suddenly under tremendous stress and witness the corresponding changes in their mood or behavior. However, if you're able to remain calm, regulate your reactions and be ready with some simple de-escalation techniques, you'll be able to help ground everyone's emotions.

One of the first steps to mitigate a high-stress situation is to empathize and acknowledge any feelings of distress in a non-judgmental manner. Calmly validating emotions while employing non-threatening verbal and non-verbal cues should begin to defuse the moment, or at least ensure it won't continue to escalate.

While you can't control someone else's behavior, you can provide neutral responses while focusing energy on working together to identify a solution to their problem. Using phrases like “that must be frustrating” and “I understand why you feel that way” help communicate your empathy and willingness to assist in solving their crisis, and doing so slowly and calmly allows them to come down from a heightened emotional state and start regaining peace.

FOR MORE HELPFUL TIPS, VISIT
[THE CRISIS PREVENTION INSTITUTE.](#)

Trauma Stewardship

As you can imagine, this work requires a high level of emotional intelligence and may begin to take a toll on the caregiver's mental health over time. To avoid burnout, it's important to be mindful of one's own emotions and use strategies to maintain your own mental health, remembering the maxim "you can't pour from an empty cup."

IF YOU'RE LOOKING TO REFILL YOUR CUP, TRY SOME OF THE HEALING PRACTICES BELOW:



Get Enough Sleep

Set a routine around getting to bed and try to consistently honor it. Allowing your body time to heal overnight is key to maintaining your peace throughout stressful days.



Go Outside

If possible, be intentional about getting outdoors, even if it's just for a five to ten-minute walk (without any screens) at some point in your day.



Cultivate Relationships

Developing and maintaining friendships that are healthy and supportive can rejuvenate you and help keep you from feeling overwhelmed.



Do Something For You

Take time to engage in one thing you enjoy every day - this can be dancing, cooking, sketching, or organizing your sock drawer. Whatever it is, make sure to give yourself moments that spark joy!



Nurture Gratitude

Remind yourself of one thing in your life that is going well. Take time to reflect on all the ways in which this corner of your world is in harmony, even if it's simply, "I enjoyed a delicious smoothie at lunch." You can take this a step further by creating a gratitude journal, where you write down a couple of things each day you're grateful for. (When you're feeling particularly run down, it's helpful to flip back and see all the positive things in your life at a glance!)

Other ways to regain some mental clarity include things like meditating, journaling, staying active, and limiting access to social media or other negative inputs. One comprehensive resource for caregivers is [Laura Van Dernoot Lipsky and Connie Burk's](#) book, and additional information and ideas can be found on The Trauma Stewardship Institute's [website](#).

And remember: setting boundaries early and often in this work will help you better maintain your own mental health as you strive to assist others. We discussed this earlier, but finding where those boundaries are might be tricky at first, so it's ok to be constantly re-evaluating your comfort zones and taking space and time for yourself as needed.

Glossary

Case Management

Case managers are dedicated, hands-on coaches who help clients resolve their homelessness. Case managers partner with their clients to understand and navigate the barriers they face in getting housing. Case managers are problem solvers who know the nuances of social services and housing, and ensure clients are connected to all the services they need. They help clients find better jobs and be better tenants, and they even support landlords.

Day Services

At Housing Matters, we offer drop-in showers, restrooms, and mail services to the general public. We host a dental clinic, a medical clinic, support groups, and more on our two-acre campus. When someone drops in for a shower we have an opportunity to say hello and we're always available to have a conversation with them about their pathway to permanent housing.

Homeless

Homelessness means, at its most basic level, being without a home; however, it's a bit more nuanced than that. It's really the experience of lacking fixed, regular, and — here's the key — adequate housing. Shelter does not equal housing. People staying in shelters are still homeless. Shelters are temporary. Housing is permanent. Homelessness is as diverse as the people living in our community.

Housing First

Housing First is a national best practice for ending homelessness, prioritizing housing over everything else. People in permanent housing can more effectively attend to matters of job training, substance abuse, behavioral health, and more. Housing Matters practices Housing First; housing is a foundation from which to tackle all life's other challenges.

Housing Navigators

Housing navigators are specialists who source housing opportunities. While case managers work with clients on a holistic level, Housing Navigators specialize in the housing market. Housing navigation is the service of helping someone through the process of finding housing. It includes helping a client identify and overcome any barriers to housing they may have, and then working hand-in-hand with clients and landlords to find a permanent housing solution for the client.

Navigation Center

Navigation centers are one-stop-shops for someone experiencing homelessness. People can find shelter and access the supportive services they need to get back on their feet. Housing Matters already acts like an early-stage navigation center, with shelter and supportive services on campus.

Rapid Re-Housing

Rapid re-housing is for people who don't need long-term support to get back into permanent housing. For example, some employed individuals have limited cash resources. Sometimes, we may just need to pay their security deposit and other move-in costs while they take over paying their rent. The goals of rapid re-housing are to help people navigate permanent housing and to maintain long-term self-sufficiency.

Supportive Services

Supportive Services is a catch-all term for any service that may help an unhoused person or family with their transition from homelessness into permanent housing. This can include goal setting, counseling, contacting landlords, rental subsidies, and connecting households to other resources. Supportive services can also help people retain their housing, if needed.

Transitional Housing

Transitional housing is temporary housing for people that allows households to work on overcoming barriers they face in attaining permanent housing, such as saving money, building credit or rental history, and establishing a support network. Along with shared housing, transitional housing participants also receive support services to help them address the issues that may have led to homelessness in the first place. Transitional housing residents often pay a portion of their income toward rent.

Permanent Supportive Housing

Permanent supportive housing, or PSH, combines affordable housing with support services to people who need support — without a time limit — in order to maintain their housing. Participants in PSH often struggle with physical disabilities or issues of behavioral health that affect their ability to live independently. PSH often includes access to on-site services.

Directory of Resources

Housing and Shelter Services

- [Faith Community Shelter](#), a rotating shelter run in part by its participants.
Ph: (831) 429-9000.
- [Housing Matters](#)
Ph: (831) 458 6020.
- [Pajaro Rescue Mission](#) a faith-based shelter for homeless adult men.
Ph: (831) 722-2074.
- [Pajaro Valley Shelter](#) helping women, children, and families end the causes and cycles of homelessness.
Ph: (831) 728-5649.
- [Siena House](#) a residential program for pregnant and postpartum women in crisis.
Ph: (831) 425-2229.

Substance Abuse Services

- [Al-Anon & Alateen](#), supports family members of people suffering from alcoholism.
Ph: (831) 462-1818.
- [DrugRehab.com](#) is an online resource dedicated to providing information and education about substances, treatment, and recovery.
- [Elevate Addiction Services](#) offers a thorough rehab program, from detox to aftercare – and even beforehand with intervention services. They have a facility in Watsonville.
Ph: (831) 440-3568.
- [Janus of Santa Cruz](#) offers a variety of programs and services.
Ph: (866) 526-8772.
- [Santa Cruz County](#) offers resources through their Health Services Agency.

Food Services

- If you are interested in receiving CalFresh benefits (formerly known as Food Stamps), visit the [County of Santa Cruz Human Services Department's](#) website to get started.
- There are several locations throughout Santa Cruz County to get a hot meal, including [Pajaro Valley Loaves and Fishes](#) in Watsonville, and [St. Francis Catholic Kitchen](#) in Santa Cruz.
Watsonville Ph: (831) 722-4144.
Santa Cruz Ph: (831) 459-6712.

- [Second Harvest Food Bank](#) is Santa Cruz County's most comprehensive resource for information and support for people in need of food. You can contact their **Community Food Hotline** at **(831) 662-0991** from 8:00am to 4:00pm, Monday through Friday.

Employment Services

- [CalFresh Employment and Training \(CFET\)](#) is a program offered by referral only to CalFresh participants. You can learn about this program at the Housing Matters campus, or through the county.
- [Goodwill Central Coast](#) offers employment services and training programs.
- [Homeless Garden Project](#) provides job training, transitional employment and support services to people who are experiencing homelessness.
Ph: (831) 295-6328.
- [Workforce Santa Cruz County](#) is a partnership of local organizations that serve both job seekers and businesses in the community.

Health Services

- [Homeless Persons' Health Project](#) is co-located with Housing Matters on our Coral Street campus. They provide comprehensive health care and housing in an effort to eliminate homelessness in our community.
Ph: (831) 454-2080.
- [Santa Cruz County](#) offers medical clinics that provide general medical care for infants, children and adults.
- [Santa Cruz Community Health Centers](#) operates two clinics, the East Cliff Family Health Center and the Women's Health Center.
Ph: (831) 427-3500.

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Mental Health Services

- If you are not in imminent danger but need immediate mental health crisis support call **Santa Cruz County Mental Health at 800-952-2335** (24 hours a day).
- [National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\) Santa Cruz County](#), offers services for people with mental health concerns as well as support groups for their loved ones.
Ph: (831) 427-8020.
- [Santa Cruz County's Behavioral Health Division](#), provides a wide range of prevention and treatment options for Santa Cruz County adults, children and their families.
Ph: (831) 454-4170.

Veteran Services

- A list of veterans service providers can be found through the [Santa Cruz County Veterans Memorial Building](#) website.
- Assisted Living Research Institute provides a comprehensive [guide to assisted living resources](#) for veterans.
- [The Santa Cruz Veterans Resource Center](#), is the local branch of the Veterans Resource Centers of America.
Ph: (831) 477-7515.
- [Santa Cruz County Veterans Services Office](#) can connect veterans, military retirees, and their families to available benefits and services.
Ph: (831) 454-7276.
- Supportive Services for Veterans and their Families (SSVF) is a housing program available through [Housing Matters](#).

Domestic Violence

- If you are in immediate danger, call 911.
- You can reach the [Monarch Services](#) 24-hour **Domestic Violence Crisis Hotline at 1-888-900-4232**. Monarch Services offers immediate crisis response to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, as well as a wide range of support services.
- [Walnut Avenue Family & Women's Center](#), provides support and services for women, children and families.
Ph: (831) 426-3062.

Multiple Services

- [Encompass Community Services](#) has several programs through their Community Recovery Services, available for individuals and families.
Ph: (831) 469-1700.
- [The Conflict Resolution Center](#), offers conflict mediation and solutions for anyone in the community.
Ph: (831) 475-6117.
- [Santa Cruz County's guide to available resources](#)
- [Senior Network Services](#), provides senior citizens and persons with disabilities assistance in coordinating and accessing a variety of resources and supportive services in the community.
Ph: (831) 462-1433.



Toolkit

The Pathways Home Toolkit was produced by Housing Matters and was funded generously by community donations.

Housing Matters partners with individuals and families to create pathways out of homelessness in Santa Cruz County. To learn more, visit housingmatterssc.org.

This toolkit is intended for community-wide distribution and organizations are welcome to reproduce and distribute as they see fit.

For print-ready files, contact Andrea Feltz, Community Engagement Manager, at afeltz@housingmatterssc.org

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