



Abundant Grace COASTSIDE WORKER

Abundant Grace Coastsider Worker (AGCW) envisions a day when all of our neighbors experiencing homelessness are housed, employed, fed high-quality food and in good health as they pursue their own meaningful life as a valuable member of the local community. Our mission is to transform the lives of Coastsiders experiencing homelessness through meaningful employment, skills training, community-building, food justice and other supports, enacted through three program branches: Full Circle Food Justice, Coastsider Clean Team, and services at the Workforce Development Center.



AGCW provides work and growth opportunities to anyone in our community who is unsheltered or under-sheltered and provides low-income residents with free, nutritious food from Potrero Nuevo Farm, where we lease farmland. Our programs transform lives through consistency, relationship-building, and skills-building. We provide fair stipends to participants, and they learn the soft and hard skills to become ready for more regular employment, whether on a farm or in a different industry.

The produce we grow and distribute builds community connection, deepens relationships between housed and unhoused neighbors who are struggling, and improves health outcomes.

We are proud of our accomplishments, especially as our program offerings expand and deepen in scope and purpose. In 2022, we cleared 139,743 lbs of trash from beaches, trails and waterways in Half Moon Bay and grew 20,000 lbs of food for 1,600 low-income people - participants, low-income individuals, and families with children. Last year, we paid out \$164,774 in stipends for 126 unique program participants. Of our participants in 2022: 14 were housed, 16 were employed, and 5 entered recovery.

Goals and Approach

Our five outcome goals for participants are housing, employment, health and wellness, food security and sobriety. We believe the experience of responsibility, teamwork, the self-awareness of being a valuable part of a larger community, and the pride that comes from work with dignity are key steps toward making better decisions toward self-care and life transformation.



Our philosophical approach is called “accompaniment;” setting the stage for transformation by working side-by-side and encouraging participants to determine how

they want to change their own lives. Together, staff and participants work in the fields at the farm, collect trash from coastal trails and local beaches and neighborhoods with the Coastside Clean Team, and build community at the Workforce Development Center (WDC).

Each person has unique needs that we aim to serve, and we offer support instead of dictating a pre-set course of action for every person to follow. This way, we acknowledge the humanity of each of our participants and create common ground with each other and to help them take positive steps forward in goals such as seeking housing or a permanent job, signing up for anger management counseling (which we fund), checking into substance abuse rehab (we transport and visit them throughout treatment), and more. We believe that this “client-centered” work we practice at AGCW helps to re-weave the web of community ties that many homeless individuals have lost or severed through their experiences of homelessness.

Programs

Full Circle Food Justice

Full Circle Food Justice (FCFJ) hires participants twice weekly to grow fresh, organic produce at the farm as part of our job-readiness training. AGCW Farm Program participants plant, tend, and harvest 20,000 lbs of fresh produce annually, which is given away for free to low-income families at our WDC & through other food distribution sites on the Coast. FCFJ includes regular farm days that any participant can show up for, and we ensure that each participant has a successful day by assigning them tasks that they can complete. As they attend more sessions, we build on the skills participants have learned and give them more complex jobs with more responsibility, eventually asking them to teach other participants. This strategy builds self-confidence and empowers participants to engage in their work, to feel connected, and ideally is a springboard for employment outside of AGCW.



In addition to regular farm days, FCFJ includes two higher-level programs: the **Farm Apprenticeship** and the **Conservation Crew**. Participants must apply to be a part of both programs, and successful completion is rewarded with a bonus and a certificate. The Apprenticeship gives the farmers a chance to mentor participants in specific farm skills and focus on inner work like meditation and personal accountability, whereas the Conservation Crew focuses on teaching environmental stewardship and completing hands-on projects.

Farm Apprenticeship

We offer 5 rounds of the Apprenticeship each year, and each round consists of 6 weekly sessions. Each participant selects a project to complete on the farm, studying subjects like irrigation, greenhouse management, herbs and flowers, pest control, and more. In addition to completing their individual project, apprentices participate in training



sessions led by expert guest speakers in topics like mindfulness, accountability, and personal responsibility. Finally, each participant works on a series of goal-setting sessions called “Future Authoring;” this is an incredibly powerful part of the apprenticeship, as many of our participants have never been asked or challenged to set goals for their own lives. We have seen some amazing goals come to fruition in this dynamic program. This year we are expanding on two new focus areas of the Apprenticeship: nutrition and “value added products”.

Conservation Crew

The Conservation Crew was developed to create a work program to engage people experiencing homelessness in meaningful work that focuses on environmental stewardship. Potrero Nuevo Farm is a 300-acre farm and wilderness property that provides the perfect “outdoor classroom” where we teach environmental studies, with the goal of fostering personal reflection on one’s own impact on the planet.

Participants benefit from expert guest speakers and hands-on work projects in the areas of conservation, native plant and wildlife management, and climate change. Concepts and skills taught include general land stewardship, human impact on the environment, carbon sequestration, riparian zone awareness, marine plastic pollution prevention, habitat restoration and “leave-no-trace” policies. The Conservation Crew has successfully planted hundreds of native plants and removed non-native species; we continue to work on creek and pond restoration, erosion control, and preserving wildlife habitat.

The population we work with is living directly on the land, and there is potential for a very large environmental impact, particularly because homeless encampments are often adjacent to or directly in riparian zones. The negative impact on rivers and riparian areas is visible to anyone who has seen these encampments, as is the positive change brought on by Conservation Crew members.



As participants develop a deeper environmentally-minded ethos, we encourage them to apply this knowledge back in town. The culminating project of the Conservation Crew is identifying and remediating a section of the creek in town that has been polluted by encampments. There have been some incredibly powerful moments of our participants identifying areas they once impacted in a negative way and completely transforming it by removing significant amounts of trash and returning it to its natural state.

Workforce Development Center (WDC)

Our WDC is the hub of all our services, and of homelessness services in the area, so we intentionally craft a space that is inviting, inclusive and supportive. It offers a wide range of resources including access to the kitchen, showers, laundry, food, clothing room, laptops and WiFi access, limited storage and mail service, resume building, job searches, housing application assistance, community programming, and



social events. We also provide space for case management services and for medical services through a partnership with the Street Medical Team. We offer personal care items, bicycle repair, and more.

The WDC houses our administrative offices and is the meeting point for all of our employment programs. It is also the site of our twice-weekly farmstand produce distribution, where we give away fresh, organic produce from our farm program partnership with Potrero Nuevo Farm. Many of the recipients of the fresh produce are farmworker and service worker families. We

distribute 20,000 lbs. of produce annually.

Additionally, at the WDC we host participants for shared meals, movie nights and pizza parties. We also host memorials when we lose members of our community, as well as celebrations such as when a participant finds permanent housing or marks significant sobriety milestones.

Coastside Clean Team

The Coastside Clean Team (CCT) provides paid opportunities for participants to engage in meaningful work for a three-hour session, 4 days per week as well as for additional special encampment cleanup work days when necessary. The CCT provides an easy re-entry to regular work and community connection. CCT crews pick up litter and debris from beaches, neighborhoods, parks, and coastal trails.



Results

Abundant Grace Coastside Worker is in a unique position to affect real change in the homeless community as a result of the deep connections and ties we have within the Coastside homeless community. Not only does the organization have a direct relationship with people in the encampments; we also have a strong record of transformative programming and a positive reputation in our local community.

This year as of August 31, CCT and Conservation Crews have cleared 101,000 lbs of trash from beaches, trails and waterways in Half Moon Bay and grown and

distributed 7,650 lbs of food to 177 low-income community members. So far, we paid \$84,150 in stipends for meaningful work done by 83 unique individuals doing 5,049 hours of work. Of these participants, 15 have been helped into transitional housing and we helped 12 more to maintain their transitional placement, helped 8 into permanent housing, 6 have found employment, and 4 have entered a recovery program and continue to maintain their recovery.

Participants in all of our work programs receive a stipend - \$50 for three hours of work growing food for their neighbors or caring for their environment. For the more advanced Farm Apprenticeship and Conservation Crew programs, for which we require more of a commitment, a bonus and certificate are given at program completion.

Beyond compensation, participants report calm, focus, peace, and other positive feelings while working with us. For some participants, a work commitment where they must show up on time, dress appropriately, be sober and ready to work is a big accomplishment in itself. Our staff work alongside participants in the fields and at beach and neighborhood cleanups, which builds trust and embodies our model of accompaniment at its best. Further, participants are often willing to open up to program staff about their circumstances. People are reinvigorated through meaningful and dignified work and this experience often gives them the chance to feel what growth is possible.

The true transformative power of our work is best seen through stories of positive movement in the lives of our participants. For Helen (name changed), a powerful moment in the Conservation Crew was a personal paradigm shift during her group's culminating project. After 8 years of homelessness and with our support, she had qualified and moved into new housing. She was now ready to let go of her old camp and focus on maintaining her new housing. Bravely, she offered her old encampment as the focus of her group's clean-up site. Together, we sorted and removed 5,400 pounds of trash from her camp. The effect on the woods and the riparian zone was immense. The incredible result of both her personal progress and the impact of our programming reinforces the importance of one's impact on the natural environment. By providing an opportunity for meaningful work, we connect participants to their environment, their community's well being, and their contributions to both.

