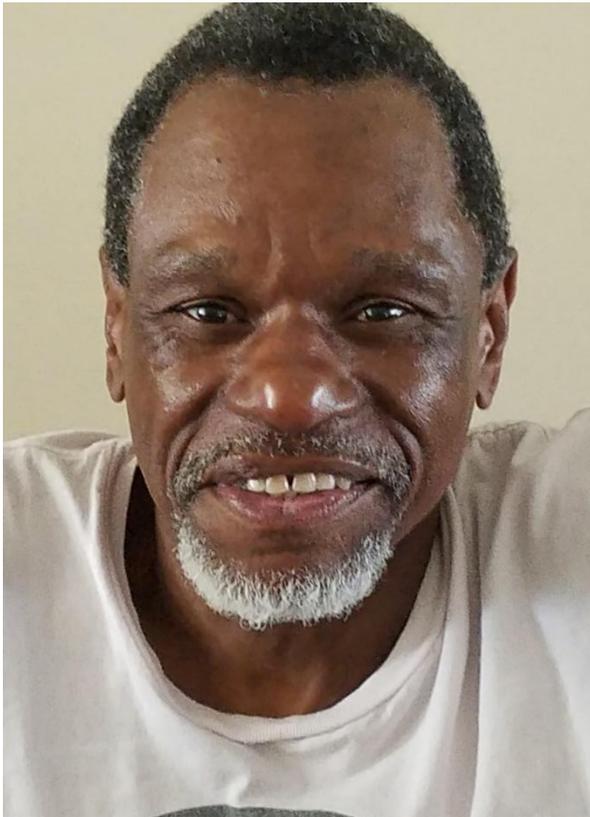


“I am, because of who we all are.”



The eldest of six children in a family headed by a career Army man, surrounded by positive male role models, and encouraged to secure an education, Alberto B. graduated with a major in political science from UC Berkeley, married his high school sweetheart, and joined the Army. Alberto learned to drive tanks and was stationed in Hawaii. Then, without knowing why, everything he worked for, everything he believed in, and everything he wanted crumbled at his feet, leading him to living on the streets in Los Angeles for the better part of 20 years.

It is not uncommon for symptoms of schizophrenia to appear in the mid-to-late 20s, which is what Alberto experienced. He was discharged from the Army after serving almost three years. He and his wife divorced and she took their two children to Maryland and he headed to California to reconnect

with  
his

*Alberto B., a happy and housed Veteran.*

mother and siblings. His Army

training qualified him to drive for Loomis Armored and then for a delivery service. He was seriously injured in a work-related accident. Not long after, he received his mental health diagnosis. The family with whom he had reconnected moved away. He ended up staying on the streets, using drugs and alcohol to numb his pain. Sometimes he would sleep in a tent. Sometimes, he would use part of his disability payment to buy 29 days of the month in an SRO motel downtown. He stayed at shelters. He wanted to get some kind of help. In order to qualify for housing, Alberto was told he needed an ID; to obtain an ID, he needed a birth certificate. He didn't have one and didn't know how to get it - he was born on a military base in Panama.

Since meeting his Service Coordinator, Lauren Ecker, 14 months ago, Alberto's life has dramatically changed. She called the Embassy. She called Washington, D.C. She took him to the VA and Alberto received an ID from there. He received his Veteran housing voucher and has lived in his own apartment for 13 months. He is stable on his medication, and he has gone from intensive supervision to meeting with Lauren once a month.

Alberto is also a great advocate for individuals he knows on the streets. He has referred three other Veterans experiencing chronic homelessness who are currently housed and participating in Step Up's HUD-VASH Program. Alberto wants people to know his life is better, that working with Lauren has made all the difference in his ability to navigate a very complicated system,

and he recommends that anyone who needs housing and qualifies to give Section 8 housing a try. He regularly visits Skid Row to tell other Veterans that life can be different for them if they want it to be. He knows.

“I understand why people end up on the streets even after they find a place to stay,” said Alberto. “They get lonely being in a room or an apartment without conversation.” It is this sense of community and social connection that is referred to as *Ubuntu*, loosely translated from Zulu to mean, “I am, because of who we all are.”



*Alberto B. and Service Coordinator Lauren Ecker, proud of their teamwork.*