



Quarterly Review

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Welcome to the Roots Quarterly Review: A Message from Dr. Noha Aboelata, CEO & Co-Founder, Roots Community Health

Dear Friends,

It is with great excitement that I welcome you to the inaugural issue of the Roots Quarterly Review, a new publication created to keep you informed and engaged in the transformational work happening every day at Roots Community Health.

Since its inception in 2008, Roots has strived to meet the evolving needs of the communities we serve, offering care, healing, opportunity, and hope. As our work expands, so too does our commitment to connect more substantively with you—our friends, partners, and supporters. The Roots Quarterly Review is an additional, new way of doing just that.



Each issue of this newsletter will bring you stories, data, and highlights from the programs, services, and partnerships that define and advance our mission. You'll hear directly from the people whose lives are being changed, and from the teams doing the work on the ground. Our aim is to share not only outcomes but also the lived experiences, challenges, and triumphs that shape the path forward.

These efforts, and so many others at Roots, are powered by a commitment to racial and health equity. We are grateful for your continued support and partnership as we work to move beyond symptoms to solutions, and beyond service to systemic change.

Thank you for walking this path with us. Together, we can continue to transform lives, strengthen communities, and build a healthier, more just future for all.

With gratitude,
Noha Aboelata, MD
Founding CEO
Roots Community Health



Roots Talk: Barney Keil

Meet Barney Keil—a 69-year-old East Oakland resident whose decade-long recovery with Roots presents a powerful window into hope, health, and healing in the 40x40. Barney's story offers an intimate look at resilience, renewal,

and why expanding access to care in the 40x40 remains urgent.

Listen to Roots Talk



Unlocking Potential: The Power of the Emancipators Initiative

The Emancipators Initiative is a workforce development program designed for East Oakland residents who face systemic barriers to employment, like prior incarceration, housing instability, and lack of access to reliable transportation. The program combines job training, hands-on work

experience, and life-skills education with the kind of wraparound support that makes long-term success possible.

“It really kept me going,” one participant recalled of his time at the Clean360 soap factory.

“When our 200 hours was over, they extended my hours because [I was] here every day and ... on time.” That dedication—and the opportunity to prove it—captures what makes the Emancipators Initiative so transformative.

What is the Emancipators Initiative?

Launched in 2013, the Roots Emancipators Initiative is a workforce development program designed for East Oakland residents who face systemic barriers to employment, like prior incarceration, housing instability, and lack of access to reliable transportation. The program combines job training, hands-on work experience at one of Roots’ three workforce enterprises, and life-skills education with the kind of wraparound support that makes long-term success possible.

In short, it’s not just about finding a job. It’s about creating a foundation for lasting stability, confidence, and growth.

Building confidence and stability

For many participants, the first step was overcoming fear. One young man, who once struggled with severe social anxiety, described entering the program as nerve-wracking—until he met staff who welcomed him without judgment.

“Once I [saw] how welcoming everybody was, it really let me settle down,” he said. That encouragement carried through as he gained work experience, first in production at Clean360, then in a storefront role, and finally into permanent employment in sign making.

“When I walk around, people wonder why I’m so happy, man,” one participant told us. “[I’ve] got something to look forward to and a journey that I’m on.”

Another participant described the turning point that came when a Roots mentor encouraged him to stick with his GED exam. He passed, went on to earn his driver’s license, and later secured a steady job.

“I just carry myself with a lot more confidence and belief in myself,” he reflected, crediting the program with changes his family immediately noticed.

Hands-on training with real impact

At Clean360, participants learn not only how to make soap, but also what it means to take responsibility, work as a team, and take pride in their craft. One man who had never imagined making soap laughed as he explained how people now ask him for more after trying a bar he shared.

“I always try to let them know, this is what I make at work,” he said. “And people say, ‘Hey man, that soap you gave me was really [great]. You got any more?’”

That pride carries into consistency. “I tried to make sure I was here early ... because what they try to show you is to be at work ... be on time,” he added. “So I was the first one here ... to try to let them know, hey, I’m ready to go.”

Support that makes the difference

Participants repeatedly emphasize that the Emancipators Initiative goes beyond training. It offers the kind of support that stabilizes lives: help with housing, access to health care, transportation, and mentoring that doesn’t end when the workday does.

“Sometimes you need great things to turn your life around a little bit,” one participant explained. “And Roots has always been there when I needed help. They never said no.”

A pathway to the future

For many, the Emancipators Initiative has been life-changing. One man who had once been living out of his truck described how his Emancipators job helped him afford a new, reliable vehicle, restoring both his mobility and his sense of dignity.

Another participant, reflecting on his unexpected path into sign making, said, “What I didn’t expect was just how much I would love it—and the friendships I’ve been able to make here as well.”

“I feel stronger out there,” another graduate explained. “It put me in a sharper position. I feel more solid because I have someone behind me, representing me.”

That sense of strength and belonging is the Emancipators Initiative’s true measure of success. More than simply a way back into the workforce, it is a way **forward**, offering participants the confidence to build new futures and the stability to sustain them.



Carlos P. Community Spotlight:

Carlos grew up in East Oakland with dreams of owning his own business.



After losing his father—his partner in that dream—Carlos felt adrift. Then he found the Emancipators Initiative.

Through the Initiative, Carlos learned practical skills, like electrical and handyman trades and financial literacy skills. While in the program, he also received wraparound support from Roots: health care, housing assistance, transportation assistance. Perhaps most importantly, Carlos gained the confidence to pursue his long-term goals and to help others along the way.

“My whole perspective now is if you can help somebody ... you should do that,” Carlos says. “That’s all the world needs, just the helping hand.”

Today, Carlos walks with his head high, proud of his achievements and excited for the future. He sees the Emancipators Initiative as more than a job program. It’s a fresh start and launching pad.

“Everybody, my family includ[ed], is very happy and proud that I found a positive outlet in the community,” he says. “I can walk around with my head up high because I have all the information I can need to succeed in life right now.”

Stability Starts Here: Workforce Emergency Housing Initiative

The Workforce Emergency Housing Initiative offered a pathway from homelessness to housing and economic stability for residents who were ready, willing, and able to work. It proved what is possible when housing and workforce support are delivered in tandem, with each element reinforcing the other. Through the integration of safe housing, workforce development, and wraparound health care, the initiative achieved extraordinary outcomes, including 100% housing placement and 95% employment in 2024, and has emerged as a blueprint for tackling homelessness countywide.

Launched in 2017, the City of Oakland’s community cabins model was created to move residents quickly from encampments, which pose serious health and safety risks, into safer, managed environments where they could access services and begin building toward permanent housing and stability.

5,490 people experiencing homelessness in Oakland

9% increase from 2022,
while Alameda County as a whole
decreased 3% since 2022

Oaklandside

Since 2020, Roots Community Health has partnered with the City of Oakland to operate and manage a community cabins site, providing a safe, stable, environment for community members experiencing homelessness, where participants could rest, stabilize, and heal. In the initiative's first two years, Roots provided healthcare, counseling, and other wraparound support for a diverse group of participants at various stages of ability and readiness to pursue self-sufficiency. During that period, **46% of residents secured housing** and **30% gained employment**. Among employed residents, the impact was even more pronounced with **65% obtaining housing**. These outcomes reflect Roots' Whole Health Model, which recognizes that stability in housing, health, and employment are deeply interconnected.

The City of Oakland defines a "positive exit" from transitional housing not only as permanent housing, but also as transitional housing or reunification with family or friends.

Based on learnings from the 2-year pilot in 2022, Roots proposed an intentional focus on participants who are ready, willing, and able to work. Residents were not required to enter already employed – they only needed to express the desire to work and engage in job training and career readiness. This Workforce Emergency Housing Initiative was unique within Oakland's system as the only program designed for residents who determined that their path to permanent housing and self-sufficiency was through work.

The continuum of care was further expanded through Roots partnership with the City of Oakland on the Oakland Pathway Rehousing Initiative (OPRI). OPRI supports residents exiting the Workforce Emergency Housing Initiative with move-in assistance, rent subsidies, and ongoing care management, ensuring residents not only obtain but sustain housing. The impact was

immediate and significant. In 2022, 45% of residents secured housing. As OPRI and workforce supports aligned, outcomes continued to rise: 59% secured housing in 2023, and **by 2024, 100% of residents exited to permanent housing.**

Employment followed the same upward surge. In 2022, 53% of residents were employed, increasing to 67% in 2023, and **95% in 2024.** Housing and employment reinforced one another. These results show the power of a model that combines transitional housing, workforce readiness, and wraparound supportive services into a single, integrated ecosystem. Participants not only gain stable housing but also build financial independence and restore confidence in their futures.



The Workforce Emergency Housing Initiative proved that homelessness cannot be solved with shelter alone. Stability comes when people have a safe place to live, income they can rely on, and the support needed to rebuild their lives and thrive. When housing, workforce development, and whole-person care are integrated, unhoused individuals do more than exit homelessness, they succeed. Families reunite, incomes rise and people move into homes they can sustain.

The Workforce Emergency Housing Initiative shows what is possible when communities believe in people's potential and give them the support to reach it. With continued investment and partnership, this model can be expanded and replicated to reduce homelessness countywide and build a healthier, more resilient Alameda County.

Training Tomorrow's Changemakers: Roots & Samuel Merritt University Launch a New Healthcare Internship Program

Roots Community Health and Samuel Merritt University teamed up with local partners this summer to launch a hands-on healthcare internship for Oakland youth, building skills, confidence, and the next generation of health equity leaders.



This summer, Roots Community Health welcomed a new cohort of interns through a powerful partnership with Samuel Merritt University (SMU), East Oakland Youth Development Center (EOYDC), and Umoja Health. The internship, coordinated by SMU's Center for Community Engagement (CCE), placed local high school and early-college students directly in the heart of community health efforts, working side-by-side with trusted care teams at Roots.

This partnership marks a meaningful addition to Roots' workforce development portfolio. While Roots has long employed and supported community health workers, the internship program is a testament to its commitment to cultivating the next generation of health equity leaders from within the community. Through mentorship, exposure, and hands-on experiences, this initiative is preparing young people to become not only healthcare professionals, but also advocates for justice and wellness in their neighborhoods.

We caught up with **Emily Prieto-Tseregounis, Ph.D.**, Vice President of External Affairs and Chief of Staff to the President at SMU, to hear more about the vision behind the program and what made this summer so impactful:

Why is this internship program important to you and to SMU?

This program sits right at the intersection of SMU's mission and my values: growing a diverse, community-rooted health workforce and giving students real responsibilities that improve care today, not just after they graduate. Led by SMU's Center for Community Engagement, this program opens doors for local young people, builds confidence and skills, and shows our students, many of whom are first-gen, that they belong in healthcare and that their lived

experience is an asset, not a barrier.

What stood out about partnering with Roots, EOYDC, and Umoja Health?

It's the trust. Roots has deep, sustained relationships with Oakland families; EOYDC and Umoja bring youth development, mentoring, and culturally grounded outreach. Together, they created a learning environment where interns weren't just "shadowing," they were contributing as part of a trusted care team. That authenticity is hard to replicate, and it's exactly why the learning sticks.

What kind of impact do you see this program having—for students and the broader community?

Early signs are encouraging: interns built frontline skills (communication, reliability, teamwork), learned how a clinic actually runs, and saw their work reduce friction for patients. For the community, it expands capacity where it's needed most and strengthens a local talent pipeline that's more culturally responsive and more likely to stay and serve in Oakland. Longer-term, this is how you change representation in the workforce and, ultimately, outcomes.

How does this internship align with SMU's broader work to improve access to culturally competent care?

SMU is investing in culturally responsive care, affordable pathways into health professions, and community-engaged learning. This internship is a practical extension of that strategy: it pairs students with community health workers and clinicians in settings where cultural humility, language access, and trust are non-negotiables, and it does so in partnership with organizations that reflect the communities we serve.

What do you hope these young people take away from the experience?

Three things:

- 1.) A sense of belonging in healthcare – "people like me do this work"
- 2.) Tangible skills – professional communication, confidentiality, reliability, and basic patient-navigation know-how
- 3.) A north star – seeing that health equity isn't abstract; its daily systems work powered by small, consistent acts of care

One intern summed it up beautifully:

"In this internship with Roots and Umoja, I learned a lot about community health and developed important hard and soft skills that I will be able to carry with me in my future career. Through the various activities, like practicing CPR, taking blood pressure, and suturing, I realized the importance of the work that goes on in helping the community. It takes a village to form a healthy society and there is a lot of work that goes on behind the scenes that isn't usually talked

about. This internship helped me realize what I want to do, which is something I was looking for when I applied.”

What’s next? How do you hope this model grows?

We’d like to make this a standing, year-round pathway with stackable experiences, from early exposure to deeper clinical internships, so students can keep building skills and credentials. We’re eager to scale with more Roots departments and additional community partners, while keeping the core Oakland-rooted model intact. Success looks like: more interns, clearer academic credit where appropriate, stronger data on retention and career placement, and graduates who choose to practice in the very neighborhoods where they trained.

Final Thoughts from Emily:

Partnering with Roots and our fellow community organizations has been a profound reminder of what’s possible when we center youth, equity, and local leadership in our work. This internship program is more than a career pipeline, it’s a pathway to healing, representation, and real community change.

Healing Begins Here: Training the Next Generation of Community Health Leaders



Roots Community Health is building the next generation of trusted health leaders through its new Community Health Worker (CHW) training program. By equipping community-rooted individuals with skills in navigation, outreach, and trauma-informed care, Roots is creating meaningful career paths while ensuring East Oakland families have the support they need to thrive.

At Roots Community Health, healing doesn’t begin in a clinic—it begins in the community. Now, that community is being trained and empowered in new ways.

Roots Health Navigators—trained Community Health Workers (CHWs)—have been a

cornerstone to the successful programs and services offered by Roots since inception. Recently, Roots has launched a new program to train community members as CHWs, building the pipeline of trusted, skilled, and culturally aligned leaders who are equipped to meet East Oakland's health challenges head-on. This initiative isn't just about filling roles; it's about training community-rooted leaders to serve where they are needed most and creating a meaningful career path for members of the community.

What is a Community Health Worker?

CHWs are individuals *from* the community who are trained to offer health education, outreach, system navigation, and support to members of the community. They are often the first and most consistent link between community members and care, particularly for those who face barriers due to poverty, language, insurance status, or trauma. Their goal is simple, to leave no need unmet for the individuals they serve.

Roots has long recognized the value of CHWs, not just as connectors but as change agents. CHWs play a pivotal role in everything from maternal health and chronic disease prevention to mental health, housing support, and reentry services. Now, through structured training and mentorship, Roots is ensuring that more community members have a path into this impactful career, ensuring that Oakland's future health workforce is representative of and responsive to the communities they serve.

A Career Path with Purpose

Roots' new CHW training program builds on this foundation by offering a **structured curriculum, mentorship from experienced CHWs, and hands-on experience** in clinical and community settings. The program prioritizes individuals with lived experience—ensuring that the care Roots provides is shaped by deep understanding and shared values.

Participants receive training in:

- Trauma-informed care
- Health systems navigation
- Motivational interviewing
- Community resource mapping
- Public speaking and professional development
- Mental health first aid

This approach advances **local workforce development**, creating meaningful, mission-aligned jobs for those who want to serve their community.

“We have crafted a very effective service model that focuses on meeting people where they are and supporting them to become their best selves. The interactive nature of CHW training classes has helped trainees feel more brave socially. Feeling comfortable talking to community members from various backgrounds.”

—**Tracy Brown**, Instructor and Curriculum Specialist, Roots Community Health

“I just want to say thank you for creating such a supportive and engaging learning environment. I’ve really enjoyed being part of this class and appreciate all the effort that goes into making it meaningful. I’m looking forward to continuing to grow, especially in areas like public speaking and professional development.”

— **Roots CHW Training Participant**

A Model for Community-Led Public Health

As health systems across California grapple with how to deliver more equitable, preventative care, Roots is already doing it. By investing in local talent, building trusted relationships, and grounding care in the lived experience of community members, Roots is offering **a powerful blueprint for others to follow.**

The CHW training program is not just a milestone, it’s another example of Roots’ Whole Health vision in action: healing that begins within, and radiates outward.

Want to Know More?

To learn more about our Community Health Worker program or connect with the team, **email Niya Paul at niya.paul@rootscommunityhealth.org.**

