

Press Release

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For immediate release

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SUMMARY

Miracle Messages, an award-winning 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that helps people isolated by homelessness rebuild their social support systems, announces the launch of Miracle Friends, a first-of-its-kind virtual buddy system for individuals experiencing homelessness during COVID-19 (and beyond).

San Francisco, CA June 23, 2020 — Miracle Friends, a newly launched pilot program by Miracle Messages, matches volunteers with unhoused individuals who have been temporarily moved into hotels and other emergency housing during COVID-19 for one-to-one weekly phone calls and text messages. The goal of the program is to provide general companionship and social support for people experiencing the isolation of homelessness.

Miracle Messages is excited to announce Miracle Friends: San Francisco, the first city and county-wide pilot of Miracle Friends, in partnership with the City and County of San Francisco Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing, with additional support from Urban Alchemy, Five Keys Schools and Programs, Sequoia Living, Catholic Charities, Larkin Street Youth Services, Episcopal Community Services, Downtown Streets Team, and other local nonprofit partners.

Launched as a pilot program in late April 2020, Miracle Friends: San Francisco has thus far matched dozens of volunteers with unhoused individuals who have been moved into hotels during the pandemic. To date, more than 180 volunteers have applied for training and matching through Miracle Friends. The program is currently active at four hotel sites and one affordable housing site for senior citizens in San Francisco, as well as one hotel site in San Mateo County (via Samaritan House) and Santa Cruz County, bringing the total number of matches made through Miracle Friends thus far to over 100. A half-dozen additional cities, counties, and hotel sites in the Bay Area have expressed interest in joining the program. Additional participants will be added from current and future sites over the coming weeks.

“Our neighbors experiencing homelessness are not problems to be solved, but people to be loved,” says Kevin F. Adler, the Founder and CEO of Miracle Messages. “We are excited to partner with the City and County of San Francisco to launch Miracle Friends: San Francisco, as part of our broader commitment to end relational poverty on our streets and show up for our unhoused neighbors with the same level of compassion and respect that we would want someone to show up for our own parents, siblings, children, or even ourselves.”

“We know there is no one solution to addressing homelessness,” said San Francisco Mayor, London N. Breed. “Innovative partnerships with organizations like Miracle Messages are so important as we do everything we can to support people experiencing homelessness during this pandemic and beyond. By using technology to develop and maintain social relationships, especially during shelter in place when it’s so easy for people to become isolated, we can help those in our city who are struggling to stay connected.”

“We are pleased to join with our nonprofit partners in supporting the Miracle Friends pilot program to help mitigate the isolation that so often accompanies and compounds the experience of homelessness,” said Abigail Stewart-Kahn, Interim Director of San Francisco’s Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing. “The opportunity to access this program is being offered to guests at our shelter-in-place hotels with the intention of building capacity.”

HOW IT WORKS

For volunteers: Miracle Friends is 100% virtual. Volunteers can be based anywhere. If selected to participate (the application is [here](#)), a volunteer is matched with someone experiencing homelessness at a participating partner site, as well as a mentor from the Miracle Messages community. Through our partnership with cloud-based phone system [Dialpad](#), volunteers are assigned a new, secure, virtual phone number to make calls and text with their friend. The time commitment for volunteers is 2-3 hours/week, which includes the 1:1 calls, call logs, weekly group check-ins, and ongoing training and communication. AT&T and Verizon have each committed 100 phones for unhoused friends who would like to participate in Miracle Friends but don’t have their own devices, as well as \$10,000 each to help support the program.

For partner sites: The first step is to get in touch with the team at Miracle Friends by emailing friends@miraclemessages.org. Once a partner site is approved for the program, on-site case managers distribute copies of Miracle Friends’ [client-facing flyer](#) at the hotel, and then collect sign-ups and/or releases of information consent forms from interested participants. Once the matches have been made, volunteers complete a check-in log to share their conversation notes with mentors, and flag any potential issues for on-site staff at the partner site to follow-up. If a client wishes to participate but does not have a phone, we have a limited number of free phones and data plans available for active participants in the program via our telecom partners at AT&T and Verizon. If a client would like help reconnecting with a loved one, their friend can assist with that as well: Miracle Messages’ volunteer “digital detectives” have reunited over 350 families.

ADDITIONAL INTERVIEWEES

Angel Morales-Carrion (Coordinator of Operations, Urban Alchemy) - angelc@urban-alchemy.us

Maryann Philbrook (and her unhoused friend) - maryannphilbrook@gmail.com, 773-816-0313
Kris Foss (and possibly her unhoused friend) - kris@hillsandgrant.com, 925-876-1069

ADDITIONAL QUOTES

"AT&T is proud to support the Miracle Friends pilot program by donating devices and making a financial contribution to help people who are experiencing homelessness in San Francisco during the COVID 19 pandemic," said Cammy Blackstone, Director-External Affairs, AT&T California.

"Verizon understands the critical need for connectivity, now more than ever, and we are honored to partner with the City and County of San Francisco to support the Miracle Friends pilot program," said Rudy Reyes, West Region Vice President and Associate General Counsel for Verizon. "By donating wireless devices, data service and funds, we aim to help people experiencing homelessness stay connected to the services and support they need during this crucial time."

"Dialpad is committed to helping people maintain connections from anywhere, and we understand the importance of communication in times of need. We are proud to continue our work with Miracle Messages by offering our services to help those experiencing homelessness to stay connected during these trying times," Craig Walker, Chief Executive Officer and Co-Founder of Dialpad.

BACKGROUND

Miracle Messages (miraclemessages.org) is a San Francisco-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that helps people isolated by homelessness rebuild their social support systems. Miracle Messages' award-winning reunion service has helped more than 325 people experiencing homelessness reconnect with their loved ones, through short messages and a global network of volunteer "digital detectives." Miracle Friends builds on the volunteer base and core values of Miracle Messages' reunion service: that everyone is someone's somebody.

Miracle Messages offer a humane way to help end homelessness: reconnect families, strengthen local social support systems, shatter stigmas, and empower people everywhere to get involved. Founder and CEO Kevin F. Adler started Miracle Messages in honor of his uncle, who lived on-and-off the streets for 30 years in Santa Cruz before he died. We are on a mission to end relational poverty on the streets, and in the process, inspire people everywhere to embrace their homeless neighbors not as problems to be solved, but as people to be loved.

For a complete list of cities and counties where Miracle Friends is currently being piloted, please visit miraclefriends.org.

About the San Francisco Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing

San Francisco is a pioneer in homeless services and a leader in providing supportive housing as a permanent exit from homelessness. **The Department of Homelessness and Supportive**

Housing (HSH) strives to make homelessness rare, brief and one time and seeks to be a national leader in the movement to end homelessness through a Homeless Response System comprising a coordinated, client-focused system of services, piloting innovative models, and implementing proven solutions with measurable results. Major programs include: street outreach and service connection through the Homeless Outreach Team; a robust shelter system for single adults and families including shelters for members of the LGBTQ community and survivors of domestic violence; Navigation Centers that provide temporary shelter for individuals and couples using a low-threshold model; rapid rehousing rental subsidies for families, adults, seniors and transitional aged youth; the Homeward Bound program which has helped 10,000 individuals return to stable housing in their city of origin; and robust supportive housing programs of nearly 7,500 units which provide permanent housing and services to formerly homeless individuals and families.