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Spring Edition  
March 2024

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## Board Profile: *Chair of the Board, Gloria Wallace*

We asked Gloria Wallace, our current Chair of the Board to share her story. Although she prefers to work in the shadows, we felt it was important to share her profile as it adds context to why she works tirelessly for EHP and is a representation of EHP leadership's guiding principles.

In her words:

It was 2000 when a previous board member recommended my business, Wallace Bookkeeping, for the in-house accountant position. I held this position for 20 years at EHP. It was a privilege to work under Nevada Butler, Executive Director at that time, and side by side with Maleah Choi for 7 years. The following 14 years, I worked directly with Lesia Preston, Executive Director as the in-house accountant and administrator. EHP and I were the perfect marriage. My love has always been helping small businesses succeed. EHP fits my family history. My dad immigrated from Mexico in 1929 right before the beginning of the Great Depression. My mother was born & raised in San Francisco. Neither of my parents received more than a 6th grade & 8th grade education respectively. To their daughters, they passed on their two greatest wisdoms. Number one, get an education and never stop learning. Number two, work hard and always work with integrity. Because of them I graduated from San Francisco State University College with a degree in accounting.

During my childhood, my parents created and owned several businesses in San Francisco's Mission District. Eventually, I started my own business. Being a business owner was natural for me. It gave me the unique perspective needed to support small business owners. It was exciting to be a part of each of my clients' companies and a critical part of their success. EHP had a different model than my for-profit clients as it was a social service nonprofit. I loved EHP's mission. With my mother's childhood, raised during the Great Depression Era, and my dad's childhood, raised during the Mexican Revolution 1910 along with his young adulthood during the Great Depression Era, they both lived through many years of strife. There were no social services in Mexico and very little during the depression years for individuals & families. EHP has given me the opportunity to help others. Over the many years of volunteering at EHP, I've been able

to extend a helping hand to others living in strife. It's my way of honoring my parents.

In 1977 my husband, John and I moved from San Francisco to Menlo Park. We have three children. They all graduated from Menlo Atherton High School and went on to earn their secondary college degree. They have blessed me with 6 grandchildren. They all are my heart.

In 2019, after 20 years, I retired from EHP and 1.5 years later, I submitted my application to join the board, becoming a member in 2021. While working for EHP, I learned how EHP works. Many times, I would speak to Lesia and point out a system didn't make sense. She would explain why the system is done in that fashion. I was always wrong. There is always a reason why there are certain unique systems to help their clients. Working at EHP has helped me become a better Board member.

The work has been rewarding and I am humbled and honored to have been a part of EHP's growth and development through the last two decades. What I have received in return has been life changing, and invaluable.



Lesia Preston, EHP's Executive Director, is incredibly grateful for Gloria's dedication to the organization. "Under Gloria's leadership, board processes have become more efficient. ByLaws were updated and made current, and a new Board Policy and Procedures was implemented. This has allowed the organization to focus on critical tasks and expansion of essential programs including completion of EHP's Organizational Strategic Plan, and the launch of the long-awaited Family Sustainability Fund, a program designed to help families achieve financial stability. The goal of the program is to give individuals and families the tools they need to be able to get them on stable footing. Another new EHP program will be launched in March 2024, the Life Skills program. The first leg of the program is a Sewing class led on a volunteer basis by a graduate of the San Francisco Fashion & Design Institute who will begin helping clients with basic sewing skills. Our expectation is to expand the Life Skills program to include nutrition, cooking, the basics of how to grow a victory garden and more. I appreciate Gloria's commitment to families in need in the local community."



## Voices of Change: *LaKesha Roberts, Associate Director* (as profiled by CZI)

LaKesha Roberts was recently tagged by Chan Zuckerberg Initiative as a Change-Maker for her work and impact on our community.

### **LaKesha Roberts: Assisting Neighbors in Need with Compassion**

LaKesha Roberts is the associate director of the Ecumenical Hunger Program (EHP). She began working at the organization as a volunteer and is passionate about serving her community and dedicated employees. For Roberts, working at EHP is more than a job. Its mission is to provide compassionate, dignified and practical assistance to families and individuals experiencing economic and personal hardship. The East Palo Alto, California, organization offers several programs, including emergency food assistance, resources for children, and advocacy. Ecumenical Hunger Program is one of CZI's Community Fund partners.

### **How It Started**

My interest in helping others started with my grandmother, Nevada Butler, former director of the Ecumenical Hunger Program and current outreach staff member. This was her life. Everything about her was EHP. Growing up, I was able to see the work she did and the impact it had. When I used to go to the grocery store with her, everybody wanted to stop and thank her for all that she's done. It always warmed my heart. I could say it's hereditary, as my mother and current EHP executive director, Lesia Preston, shared the same compassion and service for the community that was passed down to me.

I've volunteered in the program since my high school days at Eastside College Preparatory School in East Palo Alto, California. To be able to give my time and impact somebody's life is something that has always moved me. Even in school, I was always willing to help or take time for others.

LaKesha Roberts' passion for serving her community is multi-generational, as both her mother and grandmother are dedicated to the same mission.

I remember being at EHP during the holidays one year, and news reporters were interviewing a family about our Christmas program and its impact. A dad and his son were answering questions, and the little boy said he only wanted an iPod for Christmas. I overheard the interview while listening to

an iPod and packing gifts and felt terrible. Here's a kid who really wanted one, and because of the family's situation, he would never be able to afford it. So I thought, "Can I give him mine?" We ended up having iPods as Christmas gifts, so we gave him one.

I wasn't planning on coming back to EHP to work. When I went to school, I studied math and education and was set on being a teacher. But after four years of my education minor and going out to schools, I realized I didn't



want to be a teacher anymore. It wasn't because it wasn't great; I simply didn't see myself in a classroom. If you've ever been fortunate enough to experience the culture of EHP, you would understand that it's a feeling like no other.

When I finished at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania, I moved to Texas to live with my grandmother after she retired. I worked in an emergency shelter. She became sick and returned to California, so I followed. That same weekend I returned to California, it was EHP's community block party event. The receptionist had found a new job, and I offered to fill in since I was between jobs. From there, I ended up staying. I worked in several positions — part-time in the food closet, donation pickups, full-time program manager, etc. — before I arrived in my current position as associate director, which the EHP board created for me.

### **How It's Going**

I've been fortunate to be able to work with the Ecumenical Hunger Program for over a decade and counting.

I don't know when we can say we're out of the pandemic, but surviving that is probably my most significant accomplishment at EHP. Before COVID-19, we were serving 100-120 families a day. When COVID hit, we were serving 300 families. And on our highest day, we served more than 400. It got really busy here.

We shut down all of our services in the warehouse and only focused on food because that's what our families needed at the time. We had lines wrapped around the block day in and day out — in the heat. We moved everything outside to serve community members safely in the parking lot, which is how we created the drive-thru service.

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Roberts and the EHP team adapted by distributing groceries via a drive-thru.

Getting through COVID and having the staff still be here, in addition to keeping up with and managing to serve all the families that we did, is a huge accomplishment. I'm very proud of that.

Our organization works hard to be open and serve everyone. We don't turn away anyone — and we never want to. We want everyone to feel comfortable to receive services here. Even if from out of our area, we serve anyone who comes and help them connect to other resources that will be more beneficial to them.

We work closely with our families and try to engage with them as much as possible to determine their needs and ensure we meet them. EHP also partners with other agencies in our community to ensure that we are not duplicating their efforts, but to find out how we can all be a part of the solution for the families we're serving.

### **Looking to the Future**

The pandemic showed us that no matter what is thrown at us or the obstacles we face, we will figure out a way to keep pushing forward.

Right now, we're going through some serious changes, and EHP is working on providing solutions to supply our clients with the food servings and provisions they need. Roberts says that EHP doesn't turn anyone away, even if outside of the organization's service area. Instead, they connect clients with the resources they need. Since the pandemic, we have been surviving off the partnerships of the food bank and other neighboring partners for our food supply. However, due to the toll of the pandemic's aftermath, we've not been able to provide our family with the necessities they're now accustomed to. We've been purchasing food every month — thousands and thousands of dollars of food that we never had to buy before. So, that makes it all scary. Still, I have hope. We genuinely value our donors who have come to the forefront and did everything they could to ensure we were supported during that time.



Spring break is here and believe it or not, the 2024 school year is coming to an end and the 2024-2025 school year is approaching. Our children need your help with resources during the summer months and resources to build their learning foundation in the next school year! If you would like to lend a hand, a donation of gift cards will go directly to families on the Summer/B2S program list and families will be able to shop with their children for additional food expenses during the summer and Back-to-School necessities.

*The most requested gift cards are: Amazon, Walmart, Target and Costco.*

If you would like to donate items, Backpacks, school supplies and hygiene products would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you for giving our students the resources they need to enjoy a much needed break and give them a head start to a successful school year!

Donations can be dropped off at 2411 Pulgas Avenue, East Palo Alto, Mon-Thur, 9:00 am—5:00 pm

For more information, please call LaKesha at 650-323-7781 x1200 or email: [LaKesha@ehpcares.org](mailto:LaKesha@ehpcares.org)



**Food for Thought ... From July 2022—June 2023, we served (unduplicated):**

6,819 households, 17,245 individuals and 33,789 food boxes

Of this number, approximately 35% served were children and 20% senior citizens

This is an increase of almost 2,000 households and 4,000 individuals from 2022





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MARCH 2024

***Our Mission:***

to provide compassionate, dignified  
and practical assistance to families  
and individuals experiencing  
economic and personal hardship.

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**CONSULTING STAFF**

*Maleah Choi  
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Read about Ecumenical Hunger Program on [Charity Navigator](#),  
America's largest and most-utilized independent evaluator  
of charities, and add us to your charities!



EHP is a Platinum-level [GuideStar Exchange](#) participant, demon-  
strating its commitment to transparency. Write a review about us!

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