Jefferson Award Winner Works With San Francisco’s Homeless To Build A Strong Community

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SAN FRANCISCO (CBS SF) — This week’s Jefferson Award winner is a local artist who has always been inspired by the possibilities in creating art. But when Kristie Fairchild brought that same vision to her work with the homeless, she helped hundreds of people realize their own possibilities.

Following Fairchild as she walks through North Beach in San Francisco, you’d think she was mayor of this neighborhood.

But to those who greet her every day, she is much more.

For the last 10 years, Fairchild has been executive director of North Beach Citizens, a nonprofit that has made a real difference helping the homeless in this community.

“People don’t remember how many people were on the streets in North Beach … having pan handlers on each corner,” Fairchild said. “And you don’t have that anymore.”

Her Columbus Avenue office is a gathering place for food, advice, and resources.

“I really serve as an advocate,” she explained. “I ensure the individuals are getting their basic needs met.”

For those without a permanent home, she keeps their legal papers, collects mail, and provides clean clothing.

Most importantly, if they want the help, she will be there.

DeForrest Wiggins was living on the streets for two years when he met Fairchild.

“I remember Kristie asking me, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ And I said, ‘I want you to help me get my life back together.’ And that’s exactly what happened,” DeForrest said.

Fairchild got him medical help for his depression, his SSRI benefits, and eventually, permanent housing in the neighborhood.

Today, he is back in touch with his family, and once again, playing the music he loves.

“I was existing before I walked into this door,” he said. “Now I am living.”
“I think that homelessness is not an intractable problem,” said Fairchild. “I think there is a solution to it. I think we can fix it. I think that a concerted effort can make change and strong community.”

North Beach Citizens was started almost 15 years ago by movie director Francis Ford Coppola, who lived in the area. And walking to work, he saw the need.

“I think his real mission was to help the homeless in his neighborhood with dignity, respect and integrity,” reflected Fairchild.

Clients like Brandan Boivin say you have to earn it and be accountable, but it’s Kristie’s belief in every individual that makes the difference.

“She believed in me before I could believe in myself, and when I stopped believing in myself,” Brandan said. “She’s an angel.”

Now after being homeless for 17 years, Brandan has an apartment. And he earns food vouchers through one of Fairchild’s programs, cleaning the very streets where he once lived.

“It brings me a lot of joy to see people flourish and shine again,” said Fairchild.

So for helping hundreds of people realize the possibilities in their own lives, this week’s Jefferson Award in the Bay Area goes to Kristie Fairchild of North Beach Citizens.

North Beach Citizens helps 500-700 people every year. If you want to learn more about Kristie’s programs, the website is www.northbeachcitizens.org.

Incidentally, its neighborhood clean-up program removed 3,000 bags of trash from North Beach parks and streets.