Shelter Tech

Technology built for, and by, the homeless

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Shelter Tech

Chapter I:
OVERVIEW

Annual Report 2018

1. About us

ShelterTech was **founded in 2016** by **Darcel Jackson** after he was injured at work and experienced life on the streets. He felt that a few simple technology tools could have eased his path out of homelessness, and he founded ShelterTech to help bridge this digital divide.

ShelterTech is an **all-volunteer organization** that builds **technology tools for underserved communities** with the insight and participation of individuals with lived experience of homelessness.

ShelterTech performs its work **in partnership** with the Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development (which provides funding for some of its work), the San Francisco Bar Association's Justice & Diversity Center's Homeless Advocacy Project (HAP), other community organizations, such as St. Anthony's, and - of course - the community itself.

2. Overview of Projects

ShelterTech currently has three main initiatives:

Creating a resource directory with up-to-date information about homelessness services

Through AskDarcel, case managers, city employees and people experiencing homelessness can find hundreds of resources regarding homelessness, housing, health, jobs and education. The data in AskDarcel is updated several times a month at "datathons" by volunteers working in conjunctions with paid community representatives, who are individuals with lived experience of homelessness

Providing free WIFI to shelters and Single Room Occupancy (SRO) facilities

Through ShelterConnect, ShelterTech seeks to bridge one of the most invisible but pernicious aspect of the digital divide: wifi. ShelterConnect installs free wifi in shelters, SROs and drop-in centers to allow people experiencing homelessness to use the internet to search for jobs, access educational programing, communicate with doctors, keep in touch with friends and family, and relax at the end of a long and stressful day

Envisioning a new tool to support individuals who are transitionally homeless

Casey seeks to make information about homelessness available and accessible to people who need it, when they need it, by leveraging the data already collected in AskDarcel. The primary goal of Casey is to help individuals access data about their various needs at different points in their journey

3. Achievements in 2018

Our four primary goals for 2018 were to:

1. Develop AskDarcel into a **usable and viable product** available to case managers and people experiencing homelessness

2. Host **24 datathons** and vet data from 100 organizations

3. Wire **4 shelters**, SROs or drop-in centers with wifi

4. Host **4 events** to bring together people experiencing homelessness and members of the tech community

Here're some of ShelterTech's most notable achievements for the year:

1. Issued **7 updates** for AskDarcel

2. Worked to ensure **228 resources** were vetted through datathons and certified by HAP

3. Hosted **26 datathons**

4. Wired **7 shelters** with free wifi

5. Performed **50+ informational interviews** for user research for Casey

6. Held **6 social and educational events**

4. Organization

Partnerships

ShelterTech works in partnership with several community organizations, including:

- The San Francisco Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development (which provides funding for some of our work)
- San Francisco Bar Association's Justice & Diversity Center's Homeless Advocacy Project (HAP)
- Community organizations (e.g., St. Anthony's, Larkin Street Youth Services)

Volunteers

In 2018, we grew our team of volunteers by 200%:

- **January:** a core group of 20 volunteers, including about 10 members of the development team, responsible for building and maintaining the AskDarcel database

- **December:** 60 volunteers actively engaged in our work on a day-to-day basis

Shelter Tech team grew

3-fold
in 2018

Q1 '18	Q2 '18	Q3 '18	Q4 '18
20	40	50	60
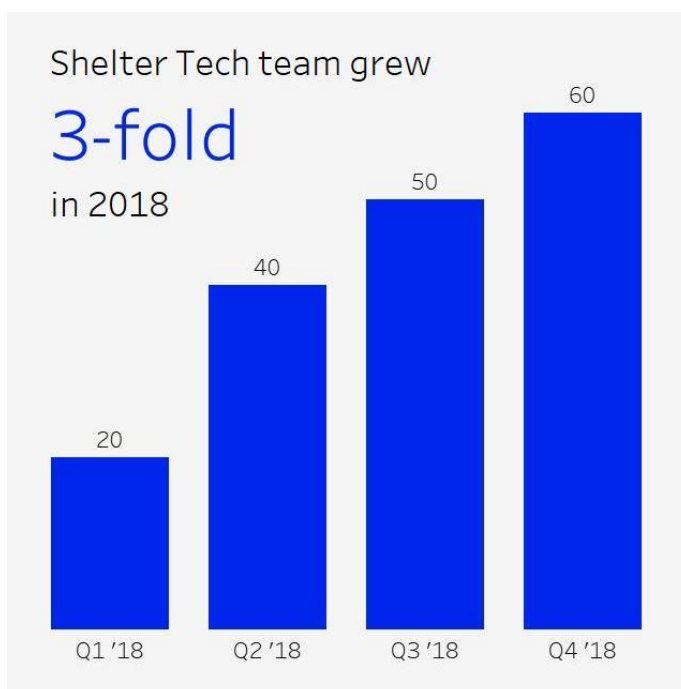
5. Goals for 2019

Looking forward, our main goals for 2019 are to:

1. Launch AskDarcel and track site usage and effectiveness

2. Create and implement a distribution strategy for AskDarcel to ensure it is accessible to case managers and people experiencing homelessness

3. Host 45 datathons (or datathons until all 800 organizations in AskDarcel are fully vetted)

4. Wire 8 shelters, SROs or drop-in centers with wifi to reach a goal of 500 individuals and track metrics and narratives in usage and impact

5. Issue 6 feature updates or redesigns for AskDarcel

6. Generate 500 hours of paid work to community representatives

7. Host 4 events that bring together people who are currently or formerly homeless and members of the tech community

8. Create a prototype of a roadmap tool designed for transitionally homeless youth

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# Chapter II:
PROJECT DETAILS

1. AskDarcel

Our primary product, AskDarcel, is a **resource guide** that provides **individuals, case managers** and **city employees** with information about resources related to homelessness.

In 2017, ShelterTech **won a contract** with the **Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development** to develop AskDarcel into a City-sponsored website and information tool that provides details on housing and homelessness resources that can benefit low-income San Franciscans.

In 2018, our tech team spent over **2,000 hours** working to develop, update and maintain AskDarcel, completing **seven updates** of the website to add **critical functionality**, improve **design** and enhance **usability**.

Aside from design and usability enhancements, the **data** in AskDarcel also **dramatically improved** in 2018. At the beginning of 2018, AskDarcel contained only 365 resources, and as of December 2018 currently includes **over 800 resources** - over 200 of which have been vetted through multiple datathons and verified by HAP.

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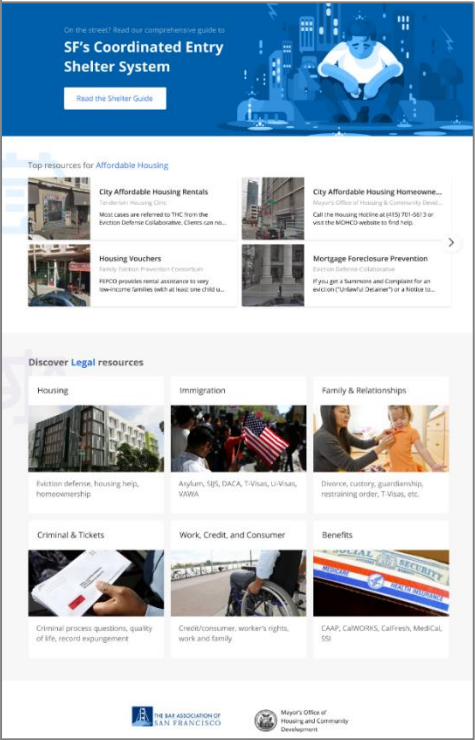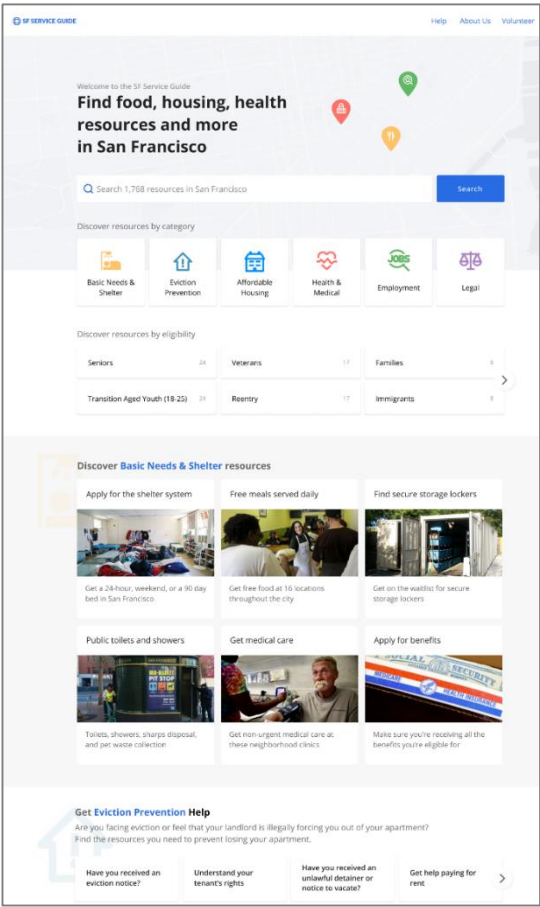
AskDarcel today…

…vs. AskDarcel in early 2018
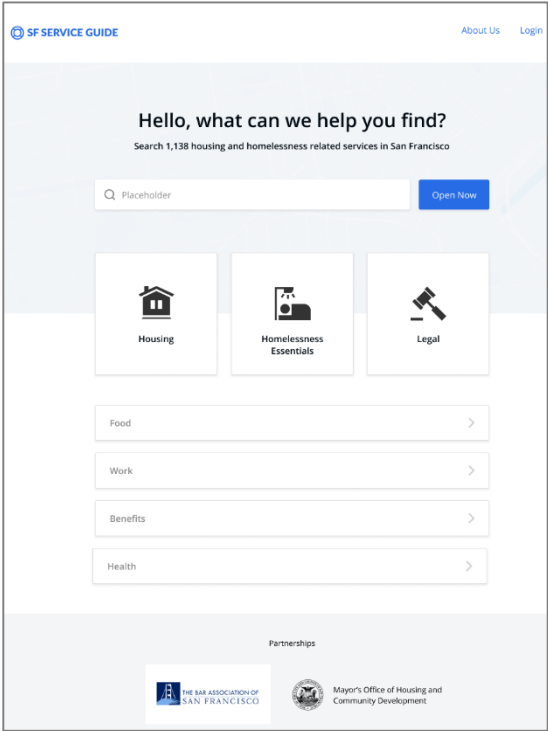
2. Datathons

One of the main difficulties with **resource directories** is **keeping them up-to-date**, as organizations' services, contact information, eligibility criteria and hours change frequently. It can often be a huge **operational burden** to ensure the accuracy of the resources as a result of **this frequent turnover** - so much so that other organizations employ full-time staff to keep information in a resource database accurate.

In order to work around this issue, ShelterTech takes a unique and groundbreaking approach, organizing **public events and workshops**, called **"datathons"** where volunteers work side-by-side with individuals who are currently or previously homeless - or community representatives - to verify and vet the services in our system. These community representatives are paid a stipend to compensate them for their time.

Datathon statistics

9.9   Attending volunteers per datathon

2.9   Organizations vetted per volunteer

ShelterTech held an average of **2-4 datathons per month** in 2018, engaging approximately **8-10 volunteers** at each event.

These datathons led to real **tangible impacts** in AskDarcel, keeping **data up-to-date and accurate**. In our most active month, May 2018, our volunteers and community representatives vetted data from over 150 organizations and their work resulted in over 1500 edits to the database.
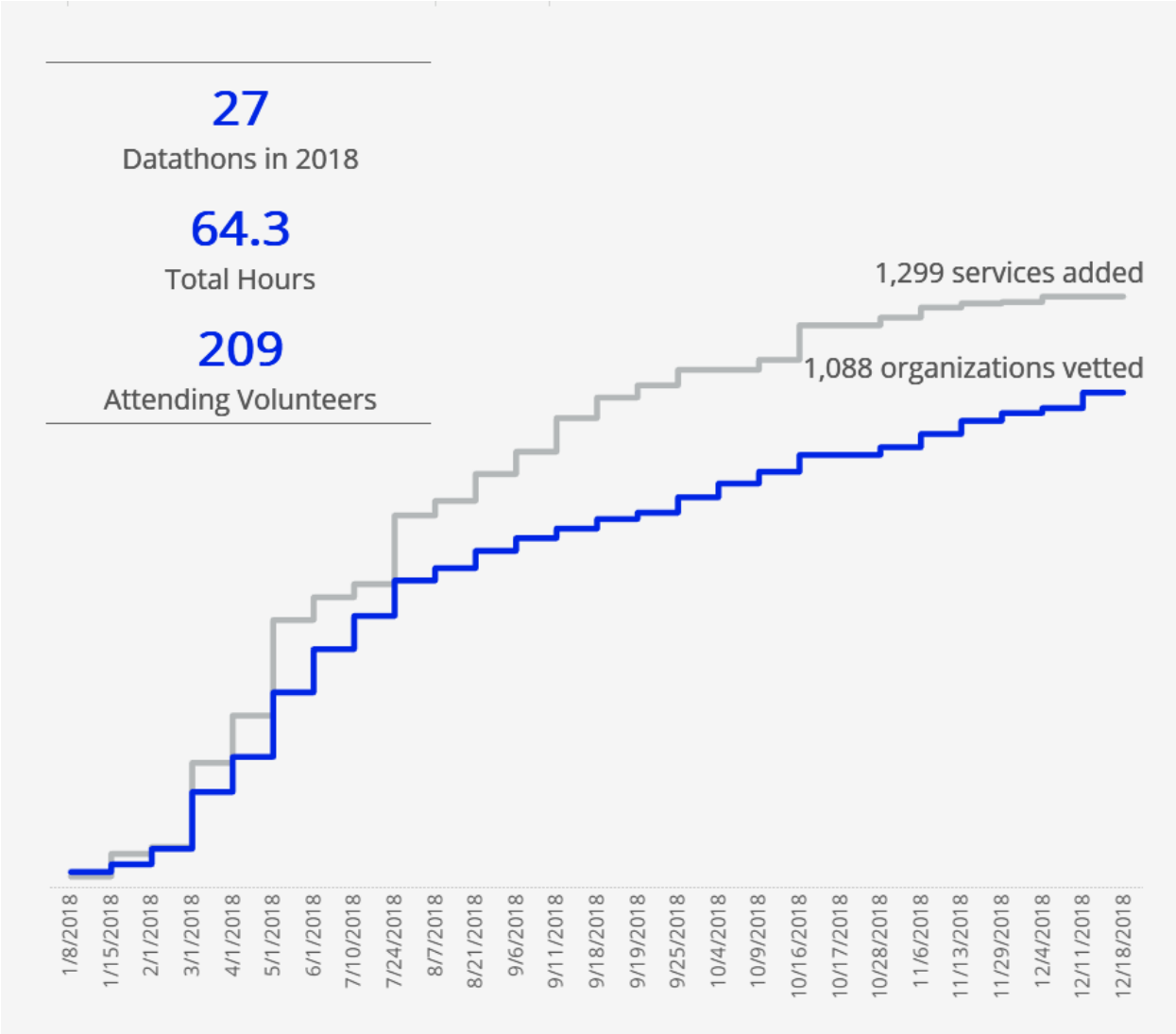
Datathon Volunteer feedback

The datathon model allows us to combine **community interest and enthusiasm** in helping those experiencing homelessness with the **collective knowledge** of those with lived experience of homelessness. It also provides a much needed opportunity for **mutual learning and understanding** between communities that do not often interact.

"This is my 3rd Datathon and I like coming here to meet the community reps and listen to their stories!"

Cynthia Istanto

"Datathon helps you realize how terrible it is for a homeless person to live in the city."

Mikael Harseno

Volunteer feedback

4.65	4.46	4.34
Datathon enjoyment	Increase in awareness	Event organization

Note: scale 1-5. where 1 - worst. 5 - best.

Standard guide for volunteers

Created by ShelterTech team in 2018 to streamline the onboarding of volunteers and to standardize quality of vetting

ASK *darcel*

3 Step Processes

A. **Claim your resource listed on google sheets (bit.ly/2pA5qVu)**

B. **Vet resource & update information on askdarcel.org**

C. **Fill post-vetting survey form (bit.ly/2xD92uv)**
   a. Refer to table scoring standard on last page of vetting quality guide **(bit.ly/2zs7lBm)**

ASK *darcel*

Vetting Quality Standard Guide v1

Some General Quality Rules to follow:
1. Never use sfhomeless.wikia.com as reference
2. Don't put/leave contact information on the description.
3. The "Notes" section should only be used for the any special business hours of the service or overall organization

Examples of great, good & poor resources that have been vetted

1. ☆☆☆ Perfectly-vetted resource ☆☆☆

Shriner's Hospital Children - Northern California Unit
https://askdarcel.org/resource?id=604

☑ Services are broken out into separate entries with concise definitions

☑ Has hours of operations listed

☑ Contact information is complete in "Info": Phone Number must be listed

☑ Relevant contact information for specific Services listed in Service Notes

Scoring standard for each quality criteria

Scoring Standard	Contact Information	Description	Category	Services	Usefulness of resource
3	- The complete hours, location, website and email are all provided in detail in the proper fields - Called phone number and confirmed the line is still in service (via voicemail or talked with someone on the line)	- The description of the resource is complete and concise. - All the information provided bears relevance to what people need to know and would want to find out about the resource at a glance.	- Able to add minimal of 1 category from the dropdown list	- All the resource's relevant services are listed clearly, briefly, but with a comprehensive scope. - It will be straightforward for anyone looking for information to find out what they need about the services.	- Community rep agrees the resource is relevant and useful for all homeless, low-income & people in need
2	Missing some essential contact information (if resource has either a missing website or a third party website)	- The decription may be lacking clarity and might be difficult to understand due to wordiness etc. - The description provided is complete and accurate but lacks relevance in certain areas.	- Unable to add any category from the dropdown list but able to add custom category on the notes	- All the resource's services are listed, not just the relevant ones. - The descriptions of the services may be wordy and contain many unnecessary details.	- Community rep thinks the resource is applicable and useful only to some homeless, low-income & people in need
1	- Unable to confirm two or more of the resources information including website, email, phone number, address, hours of operation	- Description is not sufficient to figure out the what the resource is for. - Essential details are not present and the description may contain irrelevant data. - Description of resource is missing, incomplete or incorrect.	- Unable to add any category (from the dropdown option nor custom)	- Services missing in part or entirety. - May contain incorrect information. Will not be useful for anyone trying to find out about the services.	- Community rep things the resource is not helpful for the homeless, low income and people in need and should be deleted

Datathon Photos FY17-18

Partnership with other organizations / corporations in co-hosting Datathons in 2018

Tatari TV

Thursday, 10/4 5:30-8PM
WeWork Montgomery

8 volunteers x **8** Community Reps
30 organizations vetted

AdRoll

Tuesday, 10/6 5:30-8PM
AdRoll's San Francisco office

12 volunteers x **8** Community Reps
37 organizations vetted

YGL - World Economic Forum

Wednesday, 10/17, 6-8PM
Google Community Space

10 volunteers, including:
- Member of Parliament of Romania
- Director General of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam
- Several CEOs / Founders of global nonprofits

8 Community Reps

3. ShelterConnect

ShelterConnect installs **wifi in shelters** and **transitional housing facilities** in conjunction with Internet Service Provider, MonkeyBrains.

Access to the internet offers **numerous benefits** for people experiencing homelessness: it can help them **apply for housing** and benefits, **schedule appointments** with doctors and case managers, search for jobs, access **educational opportunities** and stay in touch with **family and friends**. It is a lifeline to support and opportunities, and also a way to relax at the end of a long and stressful day.

Prior to 2018, ShelterConnect installed wifi in Episcopal Community Services' NextDoor shelter, and at Mary Elizabeth Inn and The Verona Hotel, using a grant from the California Public Utilities Commission. **In 2018**, leveraging funding from MOHCD and private donations, ShelterConnect wired **seven new facilities** with wifi:

- ECS's The Sanctuary, a shelter serving over 300 people per night

- Dolores Street Community Services' Dolores Shelter Program, serving over 80 people per night

- Community Awareness & Treatment Service Inc.'s Coronado Hotel, serving over 60 people per night

- Larkin Street Youth Services' Headquarters, serving over 1300 youth per year via its engagement and community drop-in center

- Larkin Street Youth Services' LarkInn, serving 40 transitional-aged youth per night in an emergency shelter

- Larkin Street Youth Services' Geary House, serving 35 clients per night

- Larkin Street Youth Services' AC/AC, serving 12 clients living with HIV and AIDS per night

Now, on any given night, over 600 people have access to wifi thanks to ShelterConnect's work. A small amount of money goes a long way: $50 provides Dolores Shelter Program with wifi for a month — serving 86 people per night for a cost of $0.02 per person per night.

Aside from providing free wifi, ShelterConnect also seeks out other opportunities to improve access to technology. Numerous community members and non-profit organizations noted that access to chargers and electricity was a huge gap for those living in shelters, especially during the day when people may be out and about and not near an electrical outlet.

To help fill this gap, the ShelterConnect team led a holiday gift drive and offered over 200 Mophie portable chargers to individuals experiencing homelessness during the holiday season to spread good cheer and provide functional, useful goodies and essentials to people in the community who need it most.

ShelterConnect holiday gift drive

4. Casey

While AskDarcel provides a comprehensive listing of resources and ShelterConnect offers those living in shelters wifi to access AskDarcel, the **goal of Casey** is to make the **information within AskDarcel more accessible** to support people who are transitionally homeless.

In order to address the needs of individuals experiencing transitional homelessness, the Casey team conducted **service design research** (also known as human-centered design or participatory design) through a **combination of interviews, observations, and activities**. They recruited case managers and people with experience of homelessness through partner organizations, including Episcopal Community Services (ECS), Compass Family Services, Community Awareness & Treatment Services (Cats), and Larkin Street Youth Services. The interviews helped the team understand the **explicit, implicit, and latent needs and behaviours**.

In 2018, the team:

- **Interviewed** more than **50 people** during their problem and solution interview processes, including individuals experiencing homelessness and case managers

- Created a **Product Requirements Document (PRD)** and initial **interactive prototype** to be able to conduct usability tests for a solution

Click here to read a summary of interview insights.

In 2019, Casey team seeks to:

- **Test and iterate** on a minimum viable product to incorporate larger scope over time (starting with general guide focused on pre-crisis and crisis journey points)

- **Collect content and test** it with case managers and partners

- Develop a **minimally-viable product** to be launched with AskDarcel focused on youth population (ages 18-25)
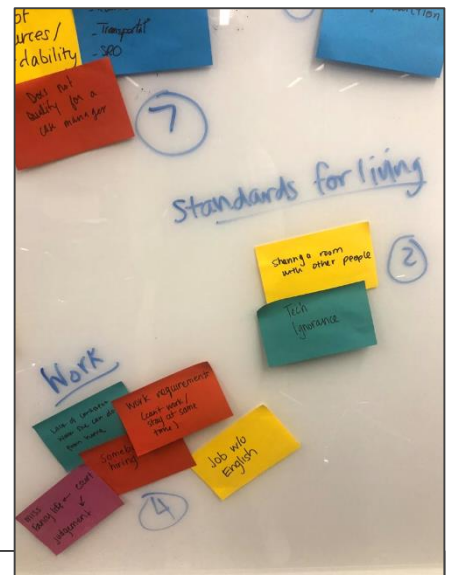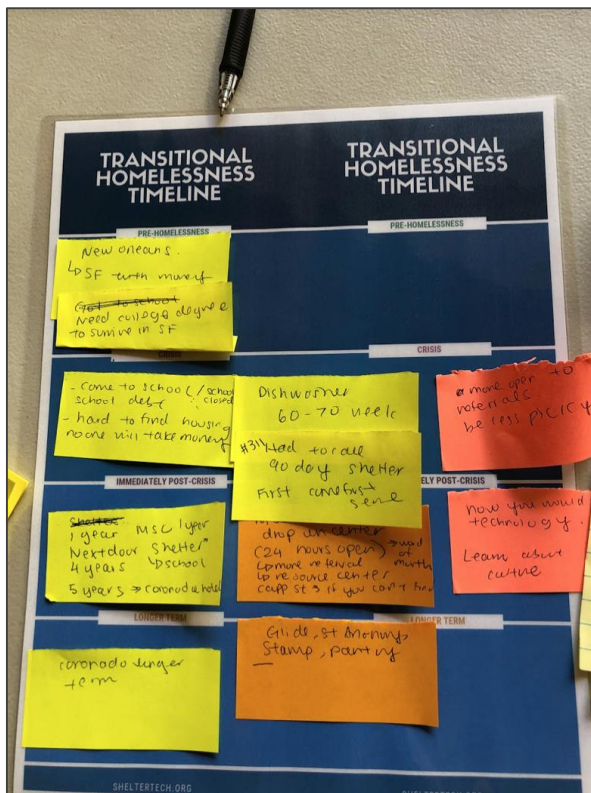
5. Events

ShelterTech also runs events that help **bring together** members of the **technology community** and **people experiencing homelessness.** The goal is to promote **mutual understanding** and to raise **awareness of homelessness issues** and empathy for underserved communities.

In 2018, ShelterTech hosted or participated in several events including:

• **Dinner with Your Neighbor** - bringing together individuals who are currently and formerly homeless and members of the housed community to break bread and talk about life in San Francisco and the issue of homelessness

• **Concert in a Shelter** - spreading cheer by hosting a concert by the SF Philharmonic brass section at St. Anthony's during lunch

• **What Would You Tell the Next Mayor about Homelessness** - educating people about various Mayoral candidates' platforms regarding homelessness, drafted questions to ask them about homelessness (which were provided to a moderator of a debate) and registered people to vote

• **Hackathon** - partnering with AngelHack to open our APIs in a hackathon with over 200 participants; more than a third of the teams used our technology, and the event provided us with new technology volunteers, new project ideas and a platform to dispel myths about homelessness

• **The Burrito Project** - sponsoring and volunteering at The Burrito Project providing funding for materials and manpower to wrap over 500 vegetarian burritos that were delivered by volunteers to individuals experiencing homelessness

• **Unravelling Stories of Homelessness in SF: A Panel Discussion** - co-hosting a presentation at LinkedIn in partnership with By the Bay. The event covered issues of homelessness and included a personal testimony from a ShelterTech community. Over 30 LinkedIn employees engaged in interactive discussion with By the Bay journalists, ShelterTech volunteers and community representatives

Shelter Tech

Are you interested in helping out?

Or do you have personal experience with homelessness?

Please reach out! We'd love your thoughts and energy!

info@sheltertech.org