



*Building a more compassionate community one person at a time*

# THE BEACON

Fall 2017

A Semi-Annual Publication of Bethesda House Schenectady, Inc.

A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## Welcome to Bethesda House's 2017-2018 Fall/Winter Newsletter



**A**s we enter this holiday season, our thoughts reflect on the year that has passed -- the changes within our families, how we embrace tradition and learn from our successes and shortcomings. The fresh breath of the New Year is on the horizon and we look to the future with excitement.

We live in a country that is full of tremendous opportunity, people who do the right thing every day, work hard, and encourage their friends and relatives to be good citizens. It is because of your generosity of spirit that Bethesda House has been able to embrace Schenectady's homeless and impoverished citizens bringing hope and a chance to improve lives for the last 25 years!

We have made tremendous strides within the last few years implementing new programs, increasing employment opportunities, and increasing our community partners. Please take a moment and visit our new website [www.bethesdahouseschenectady.org](http://www.bethesdahouseschenectady.org), our 2016-17 Annual Report details our growth.

I am deeply grateful to you, our donors and friends. Your support is a testament to your commitment to societal change and addressing social injustice. Your gifts help to change people's lives and bring light where there was once darkness. We see the spark in people's eyes and smiles on their faces; our hearts are warmed and we know that the work we do, however challenging, is greatly needed.

I wish you and your family a blessed, safe, and wonderful holiday season and blessings of prosperity and success in 2018.

Thank you!

*Kimarie A. Sheppard*

## And the beat goes on

On a hot summer's night, we cooled down with the great beat of music and rhythm from the 2096 band led by lead singer, Kevin Green. Thank you to Tom Trier, owner of The Firestone 151 Bar & Restaurant who provided the venue. We had a great turn-out and loads of fun!

**Mark your calendars, next August we will have a repeat performance.**



# More than a Hospital Bed: A Look at Mental Health

By Caroline Codd



**H**ow do we define change? We may see it as a milestone of success, a global movement, or a sudden and shocking point of no return. Often, it is a subtle accumulation of interwoven events that create a slow, but consistent shift until, for better or for worse, a tipping point brings us to: “how did I get here?”

This is a familiar narrative in the homeless community. While the events and circumstances that force people into the streets may vary, the tipping point is often cumulative – a wave built on years of trauma, abuse, instability, and neglect until it comes violently crashing down.

As Bethesda House’s 25th year comes to an end, we reflect on the changes we have gone through as an agency and the events that brought us to where we are today. In order to serve as a safety net for those who have found themselves at the point of no return, we must address the crisis at the root.

In the 1960s, deinstitutionalization of public psychiatric centers sent mental health patients into the care of the community. In theory, this was meant to cut taxpayer dollars and to provide funding for preventative care and treatment facilities. However, between the Vietnam War and an economic crisis, the programs were never adequately funded. This led to thousands of mental health patients trading a hospital bed for the streets or often, a jail cell.

In Schenectady County, we are still feeling the shock waves of this. This last year, Bethesda House served 53,225 guests and saw close to a 20% increase in first-time visitors.

Bethesda House began in 1992 as an afternoon drop-in hospitality center at Friedens United Church of Christ on Franklin St. and since then we have committed to alleviating the homeless and mental health crises in our community by addressing our guests as a whole person, not just a hospital bed. This ensures the strategic use of every dollar received through funding, government partnerships, and your generous donations to create permanent, powerful and positive change.

For 25 years, Bethesda House has offered services to stabilize our community by addressing the problem at the root. This would not be possible without your constant support, kind hearts, open minds and generosity. As Schenectady continues to grow as an economic and social hub, it is imperative we don’t forget our neighbors in need. Change may be slow to come, but when we ask how we can be of service to people as *people*, we will see it through.

**“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”**

*Margaret Mead*

# DO SOMETHING FOR NOTHING

**It’s no secret we live in a material world.**

By Caroline Codd

**A**s we prepare for the upcoming holidays, lists of treats, toys, jewelry and other goodies pile up as tokens of love and appreciation. While gift giving is a source of great joy, feelings of shame and stress can also arise this time of year as we reflect on the true meaning of the season. Are we feeding greed instead of grace? Placing emphasis on materials instead of people? Are we leaning into the appearances we create instead of the relationships we nurture?

A beautiful balance can be found between these dualities. Appearances and materials allow our creativity and individuality to shine; they’re how we present ourselves to the world. But how often do we stop to think how appearances might impact the homeless veteran living in rags under a bridge? What does a new pair of slacks mean to the single mother working multiple jobs while studying for her GED? Can a fresh haircut give the recently laid off construction worker motivation to get out and find new work?

Josh Coombes, a London-based hairdresser, is using his talent and his social media presence to bring these small, but powerful physical changes to homeless populations around the world. By providing free grooming services to those on the street, he creates a mirror to who they could be – or who they once were. He shares their stories on his Instagram account (@joshuacoombes), encouraging his followers pay it forward in their own way, to #DoSomethingForNothing – even something as simple as smiling to a stranger.



It’s easy to get caught up in the big picture when we seek to help the impoverished and chronically homeless, especially during the holiday season. At Bethesda House, we are committed to tackling larger issues, but we also believe in the power of simple services. A hot shower or a fresh suit can build confidence and boost self-esteem, which are essential steps toward self-sufficiency and autonomy. Appearances may not mean everything, but can mean the world when they come from a place of self-worth. This season, may our greatest gifts be those given without expecting anything in return, building up our fellow human through love, humility and acts of mercy.

# *“I never thought it would happen to me. Until it did.”*

By Caroline Codd

Tony is a hard worker, a father of two, pays his bills on time, and always tries to be a good person. He volunteers at his church and runs a non-profit community garden, getting children excited about protecting the environment and eating healthy. He doesn't speak much and stands over 6 feet tall, but his soft-spoken voice and gentle nature can make anybody feel at ease.

Tony and his wife were saving to buy their first house. Both had come from low income families, working their whole lives to create a stable foundation for the family they would create one day. Now with two beautiful, light-filled daughters, they were prepared to give them a home where they could feel safe, supported, and free to spread their wings to achieve anything they dreamed. It was all right within their reach. Until one cold winter night, it all came crashing down.

Two weeks before Christmas last year, Tony's apartment caught fire from a faulty electrical circuit two floors down. He came home from work with his two daughters to find most of their belongings turned to ash, their livelihood blackened, charred version of the light that once lived there. They spent the night in the city mission and their dreams of owning a home became a faint memory.

Tony's wife and children went to stay with his wife's family while Tony stayed in town, working odd jobs in hopes of rebuilding their savings. He had to give up his garden, stopped attending church services, and fell into a deep depression. Tony turned to self-medicating with alcohol to cope with the loneliness,

estranging his family and slipping further and further from the stable life he had worked so hard to achieve. "I just didn't understand how I could have done everything right. I did everything right my whole life and it blew up in my face," Tony recalls.

After months of battling unemployment and homelessness, Tony felt called to reconnect with his church community. It was there that he was directed to Bethesda House, where he was assigned a case manager and found the grounding to put his life back together. Tony met with our social work staff, attended support groups, began treatment for his alcohol dependency and was finally able to hold a steady job again. He even rekindled his passion for gardening and became active in our nutrition education program. A year after his life turned upside down, he is beginning to see his life regain momentum. His wife and children are living with him again and, in three months' time, they'll be living in a house they can call their own. "The grace and power of community is the only reason I'm here today," Tony says. "I have my life, my family back again and this time I am grateful for it. Stability is fragile and I'm never taking it for granted again."

Tony's story could be any of us. Maybe his story has been our own in some form or another. It is a staunch reminder of our mission at Bethesda House to serve as a safety net for those in need, no matter the circumstance. We are all each other's community. May we continue to share that support this holiday season and beyond.

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## Using Support to Stabilize

By Caroline Codd

At Bethesda House, it has been our continued mission to serve those in need by addressing them as individuals first and providing a stable environment for them to regain self-sufficiency. Our services are varied – from hygiene to mental health to education – but at the core of this House of Mercy is a feeling of belonging the moment our guests walk through our doors. For the broken, hungry and battered, a smile from our staff and a warm cup of coffee may be the only time they've ever felt truly welcome.

For some, this may be jarring and trigger feelings of distrust and guardedness. Our guests often have no support system

and fostering a sense of trust takes time. As we move through the holiday season, let us be grateful for the support systems in our lives and continue to be of service for those who have none. A sense of community, of belonging, is paramount to stabilizing the chronically impoverished and homeless on their path to regaining control of their life.

Bethesda House is built on the generosity of our donors, volunteers, and public supporters; without you, this community would not exist. Your net of support is cast wide and strong and for that we are forever grateful. Blessings to you and your loved ones this holiday season.

# Fundraising

Wow – Bethesda House’s 7th Annual Fall Fundraiser was quite an event! The attendance surpassed all previous years, we met our fundraising goal, AND we had fun.

We honored former Board Presidents and our wonderful food pantry volunteers and had an exciting night of Trivia.

## Former Board Presidents:

In 1999, **Richard (Dick) Werner** picked up the Gazette and read about Bethesda House. A champion of the underserved, he soon had a significant role in shaping the future of the agency. Through his tireless work, mentorship, and fundraising he led the Board of Directors for over 10 years. In 2011, Dick left our Board, only to return again in 2012. With levelheadedness, he continues to help us navigate our way through our new growth.

Long before becoming a Board Member, **Sharran Coppola** was an employee of Bethesda House working in the former Development position. Since her start in 2000, she has had the best intentions for our staff and program operations. She left our Board in 2015 but continues to volunteer at the agency in many of the service areas.

Bethesda House was born out of Schenectady’s interfaith community coming together to provide services to the homeless population, which had grown. The stage was set, but much work needed to be done to ensure on-going support.

**Genghis Khan**, a member of the Human Rights Commission, and provides counseling to individuals who are incarcerated, became part of Bethesda House through the interfaith community. A friend and supporter of the agency, it was only natural when he joined our Board in 2010. In 2011, as our Treasurer, he worked with Administration to process our accounting system conversion, as well as address the agency’s compensation package. Within Genghis’ tenure, the agency was able to enhance our compensation package, resulting in recruiting and keeping talented and dedicated staff.





### **Food Pantry Volunteers**

Volunteering is an essential part of our agency. The amount of people we serve, the number of times one person comes to us for assistance, and the number of different services we offer are consistently and rapidly growing. We just would not be able to do this without our strong volunteer force.

At our Liberty Street location, our emergency food pantry dutifully served the community. However, it was when we moved to our 834 State Street location in 2010 that our food pantry services took on a new face. The success of this program was noticed and we were approved to open a satellite food pantry.

In 2016, in partnership with the Schenectady Public Health Department and Schenectady Municipal Housing Authority, our satellite food pantry opened in North Schenectady.

Both locations have regular hours of operation and offer a client choice setting. They are run by committed volunteers who stock, organize, and inventory the pantry weekly. They ensure the area is clean, presentable, and welcoming for the program participants.

During 2016-17, our 834 State Street food pantry provided over 26,000 meals to those in need and at our PG Wright Food Pantry, located in Yates Village, over 20,000 meals were provided.

**THANK YOU** to Karen & John Sapone, Terry Stroble, Carole Merrill- Mazurek & Budd Mazurek, Sharon Sudduth, Sharran Coppola, Sue Williams, Ellen MacNeal, Ellen Schultz, and Nancy Vaccaro!

JD, [knightslive@rocketmail.com](mailto:knightslive@rocketmail.com) , led the TRIVA festivities. Laughter rang throughout the room as the competition heightened for a fun-filled evening.

#### **Thank you to our Event and Table Sponsors:**

Robert Christoffel, The COINS Foundation, Dr. Gary and Kathleen Dunkerley, James and Lynn Grant, Islamic Center of the Capital Region, Genghis and Nahla Khan, Marty's True Value Hardware, Kevin McCormick, Schenectady PBA, SGR Architects, Richard (Dick) and Eunice Werner, and **Honorary Committee members:** Michael Aragosa, Keith and Patricia Barney, Ralph Blackwood, Barbara Blake, Susan Bouton, Joanne Coppola, Sharran Coppola, Stephen and Abby Curro, Neil and Jane Golub, Alex Hallenstein, Gerald and Donna Hartman, Mary Isabella, Karen B. Johnson, Bradley Lewis, Rick and Kathy Mausert, Anne McGhee, Linda Moffett, Louise O'Leary, Jill O'Neil, Danny Payne, John and Karen Sapone, June Schermerhorn, Kimarie Sheppard, Ellen Schultz, Terry Stroble, MJ Teresco, Chris Trow, Richard and Eunice Werner, Sue Williams, Andrew and Annie Wood



**Mark your calendars for October 2018 for our 8th Annual Event!**



# Healthy diet, healthy life and then some

Melissa Zampino, Day Program Supervisor

Food pantries are a lifeline for many people struggling with poverty and hunger.

Often pantries are stocked

with less than healthy options, and many clients don't know how to prepare different types of produce or whole grains.

At our P.G. Wright food pantry, we offer a variety of healthy items, such as kale, different types of lettuces, potatoes, seafood and dried beans. To encourage our clients to select these items, a nutrition educator from Cornell Cooperative Extension is on-site every week, instructing our clients on how to utilize produce and prepare new healthy ingredients.

Many of our food pantry guests now look for all the healthy options available to them. The ongoing education and support from our nutrition educator and our staff and volunteers have positively impacted our clients' diets.

P.G. Wright is a once a week food pantry, warming the hearts and filling the bellies of the residents of 12308, also known as the North-Side of Schenectady. Since our pantry doors opened in October of 2016, we have many memorable clients whose stories have touched our hearts.

Jamie is a single mother who has been coming to our food pantry since we opened in October 2016. Jamie's memorable story touched our hearts and reinforces why we continue with our mission to provide for the underserved in our community. A mother of a young boy, her income is limited to cash assistance from DSS and food stamps; she has no other resources or family support. The food she receives from our pantry supplements what she cannot purchase due to the limited amount of her food stamps.

One month, Jamie found herself in a difficult predicament, it was her son's birthday and she was out of cash resources to provide him a gift or any type of celebration. The staff and volunteers at P.G. Wright were able to provide her household with their typical food allotment per HPNAP guidelines, as well as the makings for a celebratory dinner. We were also able to gather donations that we had on site, a new water bottle, a blanket and a hoodie, to make a gift bag for her to give her son. This small act of generosity moved Jamie to tears.

It is our goal at P.G. Wright to meet the needs of the whole person. P.G. Wright is more than just an oasis in the middle of a food desert, but a community resource that continuously strives to go above and beyond to fulfill our client's needs.



## BETHESDA HOUSE HOLIDAY WISH APPEAL

It's time for Bethesda House's Wish Appeal! Each year we compile a list of gifts for friends and supporters in the community who wish to donate. Bethesda House gratefully acknowledges the generous gifts we receive that help us support the needs of so many. The items on our Wish List reflect our day-to-day needs. Donations are accepted between 9:30am - 4:30pm.

### Day to Day

#### Food

- Non-perishable items

#### Kitchen

- Spices, coffee, iced/hot tea, lemonade

#### Clothing

- Gently used items for men/women

#### Practical Shoes

#### Fall/Winter Clothing/Dresses

#### New Underwear and Socks

#### Hygiene Products

- Regular and hotel size shampoo, deodorant, toothpaste, soap, razors and toothbrushes

#### Linens

- Sheets, towels, washcloths
- Blankets

#### Seasonal

- Home Depot/Lowes Gift Card

### Adopt Our Food Pantry

A \$50 donation gives us \$200 in food products from the Regional Food Bank.  
A \$100 donation gives us \$500 in food products from the Regional Food Bank.

### Adopt An Apartment

Visit [bethesdahouseschenectady.org](http://bethesdahouseschenectady.org) for details.

### Gifts that Keep on Giving

Deferred gifts to Bethesda House can have a lasting effect on our future strength & sustainability. Please give serious consideration to:

- A bequest to Bethesda House
- A donation of a life insurance policy
- A gift of appreciated asset (stock, property)



**Bethesda House of Schenectady, Inc.**  
Friends of Bethesda House/Profile Update/Gift

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Organization \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Daytime Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Fax \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail \_\_\_\_\_

Enclosed is my contribution of \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
*(Please make checks payable to Bethesda House)*

Credit Card: MC Visa AMEX Discover

No: \_\_\_\_\_

Exp. Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Sec. Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you a GE Employee/Retiree? \_\_\_Yes \_\_\_No  
*(Bethesda House is a GE Match Recipient)*

Would you like to learn more about volunteer opportunities at Bethesda House? \_\_\_Yes \_\_\_No

**You can also make donations using PayPal at [www.bethesdahouseschenectady.org](http://www.bethesdahouseschenectady.org)**

## Bethesda House Donors: May 2017 - October 2017

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### Advocate up to \$25,000

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 The Coins Foundation  
 Werner, Richard and Eunice

Bethesda House is grateful to the individuals, congregations, businesses, and private foundations who donated from \$1 to \$25,000. Your generosity allows us to continue helping others by providing for basic needs in an environment that encourages and supports positive changes.

We thank you and look forward to another successful year. Every donor is important to us. Our goal is to list each person or organization as the donor wishes.

If your name does not appear as you would like it to, please contact the agency's Administration Assistant at either [adminasst@bethesdahouseschenectady.org](mailto:adminasst@bethesdahouseschenectady.org) or (518) 374-7873, ext 116 so we may correct our records.

A very special **Thank You** to donors contributing through United Way, we are grateful that you chose to direct your donor dollars to Bethesda House of Schenectady, Inc. **Thank you** to donors who participate in the GE Match.

Your gifts of spirit and generosity are deeply appreciated.

### In-Kind Donors:

Congregation of Agudat Achim	Sharran A. Coppola
Eastern Parkway United Methodist Church	St. George's Episcopal Church
Friendship Baptist Church	St. Stephen's Episcopal Church
Immanuel Lutheran	St. George's of Clifton Park
Ladies of Charity Schenectady Vicariate	St. Joseph's of Glenville
Niskayuna Boy Scout Troop 34 - Scouting for Food	St. Kateri Tekakwitha
Lane Press of Albany	Temple Gates of Heaven
Our Redeemer Lutheran	The Ladies Philotochos Society of St. George Greek Orthodox Church
Panera	Union College
Price Chopper	Unitarian Universalist Society

## Bethesda House

Is an interfaith ministry to the homeless, disabled and economically disadvantaged citizens of Schenectady County, building a just, hospitable and inclusive community one person at a time by affirming the dignity and addressing the needs of each guest entering this House of Mercy.

### Board of Directors

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Richard Werner  
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Director of Program & Case  
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**BETHESDA  
HOUSE**

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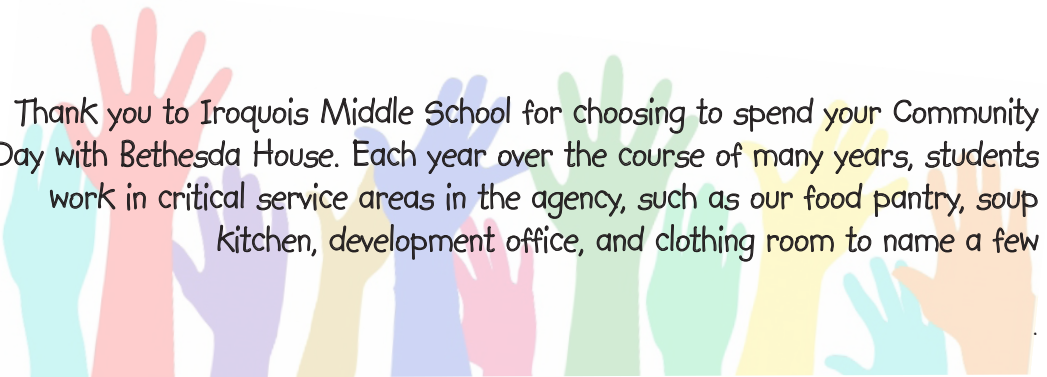
**Bethesda House participated in the Annual Capital Region Stand-Down, held October 14th, at the Colonie BPO Elks #2191 in Latham. We are honored to be part of this day each year, a day of support and connections to on-going services across counties.**

Union College had their community day on October 7th. The students worked over four (4) hours preparing our property for the winter months. Our amazing garden and beautiful flowers were readied for compost, pots were moved and when done, our property looked manicured. Inside, a group worked to prepare community outreach packets and bags that were later used at the SEFA fair and the Veterans Administration's annual Stand Down. The hours they provided were essential to the agency's on-going operations.



**Thank you** to Congregation Gates of Heaven's Mitzvah Day volunteers who teamed up with Union College students to re-create Bethesda House's clothing room. Many hands, working together sorting, folding and stocking shelves. Our clothing room looks great and was ready for our re-opening on November 8th!

Thank you to Iroquois Middle School for choosing to spend your Community Day with Bethesda House. Each year over the course of many years, students work in critical service areas in the agency, such as our food pantry, soup kitchen, development office, and clothing room to name a few



## SAVE THE DATE

FOR OUR ANNUAL SPRING BOWL-A-THON, MAY 4TH, 2018.

WE ARE LOOKING FOR LANE SPONSORS, BOWLERS: 5

PERSON TEAMS. VISIT OUR WEBSITE FOR MORE DETAILS.

