

A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## Welcome to Bethesda House's 2018-2019 Spring/Summer Newsletter



**W**ith the coming spring and summer months, we embrace change and growth in all areas of our life. It is a time to look to the horizon and flourish in the fruits of our labor, planting seeds for future dreams and goals. While winter may be a time of inner reflection, we come into the warm embrace of community and build from support systems to help our planted seeds come to fruition.

For true and effective change to happen, we cannot do it alone.

At Bethesda House, we have always put community first and placed emphasis on the importance of individual attention as a greater part of a whole. Over the last year, our reach of services has significantly expanded in response to increasing needs

for stable housing, mental health and medical services, and homelessness prevention in Schenectady County. Where there is a need, we answer the call and rely heavily on the heartfelt dedication and passion from our staff, partners, and volunteers to do so.

Not only have we seen an increase in the quantity of these key building blocks, but their quality has never been stronger. With care and attention, we commit to "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'." We could not have built this house without the support of our community over the years, without the building blocks you have graciously given.

With a growing staff, increased wrap-around services, and projects on the horizon, Bethesda House is looking forward to another season of growth. We hope you will join us!

Many Blessings,  
*Kimarie A. Sheppard*



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2 (L-R) Director - Louise O, Housing Case Managers Catherine C, Rachel B

3 (L-R) Admin Asst - Melissa R, ICM- Madeline A

4 Savyon L., Social Work Department

5 (L-R) Director Louise O, Resident & Volunteer Paul B

6 (L-R) Bobby, Nicola

7 Social Work and Care Coordinator staff (L-R) John C, Director - Leina M, Rachael C

### 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.

# A Second Chance, an Act of Grace

By Caroline Codd, Staff Writer

The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world with 2.3 million people behind bars.<sup>1</sup> That is 2.3 million people who have their dignity, freedom, and human rights stripped away in some capacity regardless of their conviction or socio-economic circumstances. Once their sentence is up or they are released on parole, the shackles of their past still burden their path forward. Exiting the prison gates to hop on a bus with an extra pair of clothing and some spending money, their journey to freedom has only just begun.

Many return to broken homes, riddled with poverty, addiction and other traumatizing circumstances. Others find no place to call home at all, their relationships having dissipated in the time they were away. More than the financial obstacles they must overcome to re-enter society, there is a harrowing loneliness in the world of open space that can be debilitating to one who has been trained and equipped merely to survive in their own corner.

Our human instinct is to trust what's familiar and fear the unknown. For many recently released offenders, they are no longer welcome in their home or didn't have stable housing before their arrest. Struggling to find housing, work and community support, an astonishing amount resort to the behavior and means of survival that first put them behind bars. **73%** return to state prison after less than 18 months of freedom, according to the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision.<sup>2</sup> One report showed nearly half of all recently imprisoned persons released into Schenectady County return back to prison – the second highest number in New York State.<sup>3</sup> The longer they stay in the revolving door of the prison system, the harder it becomes to escape.

This is not only a grave downward spiral for the incarcerated. It is a costly and dangerous public health issue for the community at large. New York State spends the highest out of any other state per inmate, per year - \$69,355 to be exact.<sup>4</sup> A chronically homeless person costs the taxpayer an average of \$35,578 per year.<sup>5</sup> Considering formerly incarcerated people are almost ten times more likely to be homeless than the general public, we are posed with an immediate need to implement programs that keep recently released offenders off the streets and out of jail cells. <sup>6</sup>

In 2017, the sole Schenectady provider of dedicated re-entry housing closed its program, leaving the community without this critical service. Bethesda House is dedicated to addressing this immediate need. The Agency is submitting an application to the State for new construction of a 40-bed housing facility for Schenectady's most vulnerable cases. Sixteen beds will be reserved for recently released from incarceration homeless persons, who have been cut off from support services and are at high risk of being recycled through the prison system due to mental illness and/or substance abuse.

Only with the protection of reliable and consistent shelter can these individuals feel safe enough to deconstruct the harmful thought and behavioral patterns used as tools for survival. Those admitted to the Bethesda House re-entry housing program will have access to our full range of services and one-to-one guidance from our case management/social work team. The program will show individuals how to address personal needs and deconstruct insubordinate behavior towards authority (us versus them) while growing a sense of self-worth. Frequent and focused meetings with our staff will encourage residents to form trusting relationships and stay on track for their goals of employment, mental stability, permanent housing and ultimately, lasting autonomy within a safe society.

At Bethesda House, we believe that when we invest in and uplift one individual, we invest in and uplift an entire community. At our core, we are dedicated to a safe, integrated and thriving Schenectady County. Not every individual with a criminal

“Freedom  
is not an  
instantaneous  
holiday, as we  
once dreamed.  
It is a road.  
A long road.  
We know this  
now.”

– Nobel Prize Winning Author  
Svetlana Alexievich

record is a threat to society and that is why we will assess re-entry housing program referrals on a case-by-case basis. By reducing the number of recently incarcerated people on the streets, we not only significantly reduce costs, arrests and public safety threats, but we give vulnerable individuals another chance at life - one that was taken away the minute the cell door closed behind them.

We are requesting State funding for the proposed 40-bed building, with an anticipated completion date in 2020. We cannot express enough thanks to our partners, donors, and volunteers who support this project and see its critical value in our community. With safe housing and integrated personal connection, we will have the opportunity to instill trust in those who have survived on fear alone. Trust in society, trust in others, and trust in one's own ability has the potential to redirect a path of crime and violence to one of stability and freedom. Trust can break the cycle.

Thank you for trusting us all these years to serve the most vulnerable in Schenectady County. We could not create this lasting change and offer this network of support without your kind, open hearts. Together, we can break the devastating cycle of incarceration and homelessness to help individuals recognize their potential in a productive, creative, and free society.

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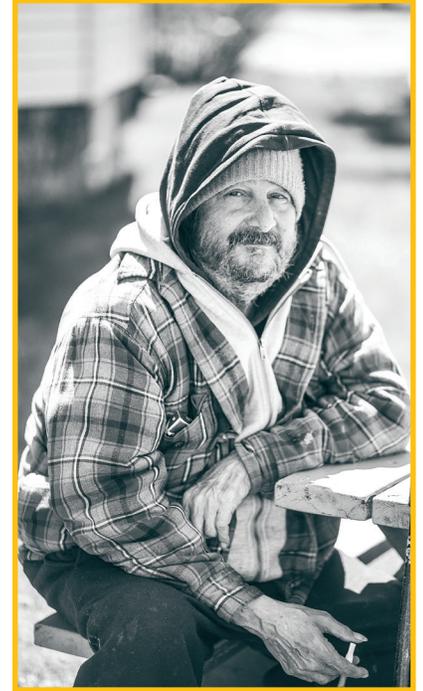
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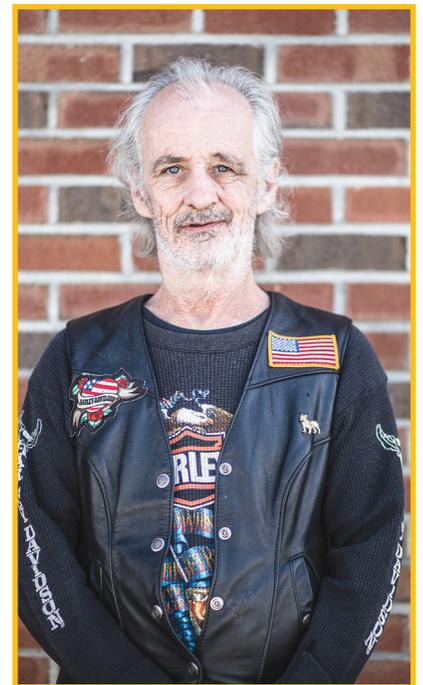
**Day Program Guest, Tom B.**



**Resident - Scott M**



**Resident - Melinda B**



**Resident - Ghost**

# LET'S TALK ABOUT TRUST: HOW TO BUILD A MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIP IN MEDICINE

By Caroline Codd, Staff Writer

During this season of growth, we are overjoyed to share how our Medical Care program has manifested from the seeds we planted last year. In order to address the cost and public health concerns of medical care for the homeless, Bethesda House partnered with Ellis Medical Center's Residency Program to incorporate in-house medical services for our residents and guests as a critical strategy for long-term stabilization.

Even with easy access to medical care, one's personal medical history is a sensitive topic and often we don't share the whole story. Maybe we don't know how to recognize our symptoms because we've become so accustomed to them. Or maybe there is shame surrounding a condition as a result of lifestyle choices and environmental pressures. Either way, unless we have established an open, trusting relationship with our doctor, we may not feel fully comfortable expressing our needs and divulging information. Seeking medical care is, in its own way, a cry for help; a juxtaposition against a pervasive culture telling us to pull ourselves up by the bootstraps and deal with it ourselves. It is a moment of vulnerability.

For the vulnerable in our community – the homeless, impoverished, abused, addicted, disabled and abandoned – asking for help can be seen as a sign of weakness they can't afford to show. Bethesda House saw this pattern repeated in many of our clients who neglected medical treatment or were not fully honest in their intake assessments. To mitigate discrepancies between care within and outside of Bethesda House, we launched our own in-house medical care program to serve our guests within their comfort zone.

Last fall we first launched the program and since then, we have welcomed Registered Nurse, Molly McTernan, to our staff. She serves our guests and residents as a day-to-day contact for any of their medical needs and while she's been with us since January 2019, aiding care coordination and offering medical services, it is only recently that regular Bethesda House guests have built up enough trust to directly ask her for help.

Like any of us, the homeless and impoverished population needs consistency to feel a sense of stability and enact long-term change. Seeing Molly's face every day shows them that help is here *and it is here to stay*. It also symbolizes help not as an entity or establishment, but as a human being. One who can truly listen to their needs and see their pain points as the relationship deepens, versus a one-off five minute appointment in a cold doctor's office. Through this consistency, individuals are able to feel comfortable asking for help and addressing the source of their medical ailments instead of just scratching the surface.

This March, Bethesda House hosted our first bi-monthly in-house medical care station in partnership with Ellis Medical Center at State Street Presbyterian Church. We welcomed guests, residents, and anyone in need of medical attention for a free exam and a long-term care plan - regardless of whether they had insurance. Tests were offered for HIV/AIDS, diabetes and other diseases prevalent in the homeless community. A comprehensive intake indicated immediate medical needs and long-term rehabilitation options while social workers and case managers assisted

in connecting attendees to services and care providers.

This bi-monthly event serves as a safe, trustworthy space for new guests to benefit from Bethesda House services while simultaneously serving as a routine check-in for existing clients. With case management and our Registered Nurse working in tandem, issues can be addressed on the spot instead of reverting to a third-party at a later date. This eliminates factors that keep individuals from getting the help they need when their mental health becomes debilitating or an emergency takes precedence over prevention.

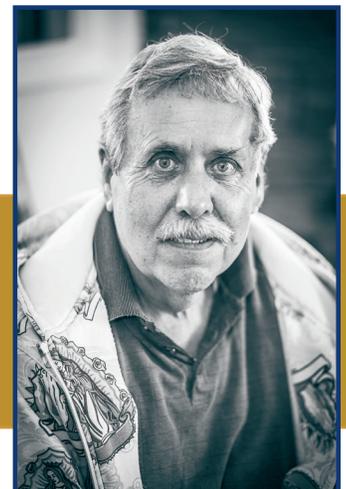
Within this *House of Mercy*, our guests are provided the tools and support they need for finding solid ground to build a life on. However, this becomes virtually impossible when one's health is threatened. As the medical care program becomes embedded as a trustworthy, ongoing service, our guests and residents can view asking for help as a safe choice. A choice they have the autonomous power to make in their journey towards a healthy and abundant life. We should all feel empowered to make this choice; to trust connection and support as the hands that lift us up toward independence and fulfillment of our potential.

To all who support us - you are the hands that helped build this program and for that, we are deeply grateful.

Sometimes asking for help is the most meaningful example of self reliance

– Cory Booker

Resident - Dave B



# Free Mind, Free Life

## Resident Stories: Hannah and Corinne



By Caroline Codd, Staff Writer

Everyone has different thresholds of tolerance for fear and uncertainty. Where one person might thrive in the challenge of instability, another might crumble under the weight of insecurity. As we get older, we're told we have a choice of how we react to life's challenges. We can choose to rise or fall. We can choose to learn and grow or repeat the same patterns. We can choose. It's an empowering and powerful thought – but it's also a privileged one.

Many of the choices we get to make about our future are dependent on our past. On how we were encouraged and supported, what our home life was like, what kind of schools we went to and how safe the world felt when we were little. If we learned to operate on fear as a safety mechanism as children, then it is inevitably going to be what we rely on as adults.

**Hannah** is a resident in our Lighthouse program. She is actively trying to unlearn the coping mechanisms that have made her so afraid of the world. She can't take a bus by herself, mechanisms that have put her in the hospital and two years ago – out on the streets. Frequent panic attacks violently halt her ability to take care of herself, let alone the three teenage children she maintains custody of. She's been coming to Bethesda House since we opened as a drop-in center when she was just a teenager herself and now relies on our services to function as an adult. Something as simple as a safe ride to a doctor's appointment is life-changing for her. "I can't imagine a life without these services," she says. "I also can't imagine a world where I'll be independent to take care of the kids full-time. But I'm taking it day by day."

**Corinne** has been with us for almost ten years. Nearing 60 years old, her entire life has been riddled with mental and physical abuse from her parents and then husbands – each more abusive than the last. After escaping her last marriage, Corinne was living in her car when she suffered a nervous breakdown once she ran out of money to take care of her dog – her sole comfort in the world. She is incredibly bright but has developed schizophrenic thought patterns from her traumatized past. At Bethesda House, she has finally settled into feeling safe for the first time in her life. By working with our Case Management team and a Life Skills Counselor, she has re-discovered her passion for reading, enrolled in on-line college classes and re-entered the work force part-time.

These two women lives were hijacked by the destructive thought and behavioral patterns they believed would keep them safe only to realize they needed to overcome them in order to feel free and independent in the world. They now share an apartment at our Lighthouse facility and have cultivated a supportive friendship. By trusting each other and trusting our staff, they are making great strides toward living healthy, independent lives.

Without proper coping mechanisms and support, we may feel beholden – enslaved even – to the thoughts telling us the world is a scary place. At Bethesda House, our commitment to building a safe haven for all who walk through our doors has given guests and residents like Hannah and Corinne another chance to see the world as a place they belong – not something to be afraid of. We all deserve to feel free in our own lives. We are so proud of Hannah and Corinne for embracing Bethesda House's network of support so that little by little, day by day, they too can feel free.



It's time for Bethesda House's Spring 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 on Tuesdays and Thursdays between 9:30am - 3:30pm.

## BETHESDA HOUSE SPRING APPEAL

### Day to Day

#### Food

- Non-perishable items

#### Kitchen

- Spices, coffee, iced/hot tea, lemonade

#### Clothing

- Gently used items for men/women

#### Practical Shoes

#### Summer 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.

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Organization \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

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

Fax \_\_\_\_\_

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Enclosed is my contribution of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

*(Please make checks payable to Bethesda House)*

Credit Card: MC Visa AMEX Discover

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

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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)

# Take Your Medicine. Eat a Salad.

By Caroline Codd, Staff Writer

We've all grown up hearing the melodic encouragement of "an apple a day keeps the doctor away." It is one of the only recommendations that has remained consistent against a slew of dietary fads over the last decade or so. However, we are just now discovering how palpably true the tune's sentiment is.

"Let food be thy medicine" is another frequently quoted phrase to demonstrate the effects of diet on our health. Originally quoted by ancient Grecian physician Hippocrates, one could not have guessed it would have the potential to save a modern medical system.

Healthcare costs have risen at an alarming rate and chronic illnesses are the leading driver of these costs, according to the Center for Disease Control.<sup>1</sup> This escalation directly affects the population we serve at Bethesda House, who are more than twice as likely to suffer from unmanageable chronic disease;<sup>2</sup> these costs are a burden they cannot bear.

Until recently, the standard treatment of chronic physical and mental illness was to manage the symptoms with pharmaceutical prescriptions, many of which are subject to sudden price spikes, confusing dose changes, and adverse side effects. Our case management and social work team navigate our guests and residents by walking them step by step through the healthcare system but often the path is riddled with obstacles. Just last week, a case manager was racing against the clock to retrieve medicine for a guest's newborn baby - medicine she could not get on her own due to an error in medical paperwork and insurance issues.

The 2018 Farm Bill passed by Congress has the potential to turn the tables on our declining healthcare system. The solution is simple: food as medicine; produce over pills. The bill includes funding specifically allocated to a program which encourages doctors to prescribe whole foods as medical treatment. This alone is estimated to save over \$100 billion in Medicare and Medicaid costs.<sup>3</sup> Savings on this scale are attributed to a steady decline in chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart failure, which are primarily diet and lifestyle influenced, and are responsible for over 86% of healthcare spending.<sup>4</sup>

At Bethesda House, managing debilitating illnesses is part of the framework of our services. We have always touted a healthy lifestyle as the cornerstone of self-empowerment and stability. Our daily meals include a wide variety of fruits, vegetables and healthy proteins. Our Nutrition Program offers hands-on guidance for how to afford, cook, and plan for a balanced diet while our food pantry is stocked with simple but healthy alternatives to fast food. It's thrilling to see partners in our community incorporating diet into treatment plans, specifically Ellis Hospital's Food Farmacy designed for recently discharged patients who do not have the means to shop and cook for themselves. Change is happening on a massive scale and we are proud to be a part of a community leading the charge.



A few years ago nutrition was barely included in a standard medical student's curriculum. Now, the effects of diet on an individual's health and recovery are uncontested essentials to an effective treatment plan. Bethesda House will be incorporating these principles into our own in-house medical care program, designed to incorporate our daily treatment of guests as human beings with complex and specific needs.

By incentivizing healthy foods, we place power in the hands of the individual - not a system - to take control of their health and improve their livelihood. When one has the support and encouragement to be autonomous in their own healing, a life, a community, and the world can be healed in tandem.

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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 or (518) 374-7873, ext. 116 so we may correct our records.

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**Thank you** to donors who participate in Amazon Smiles, Clynk and other Hannaford fundraising initiatives.

**Your gifts of spirit and generosity are deeply appreciated.**

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Capital Roots  
PLUSH Hair Salon  
Burnt Hills United Methodists Church

### Honorarium/Memorial Name:

Anna Ria Soellner  
Barbara F. Horgen  
Lynne Snyder  
Mary Christoffel

Michael & Beverly Roscoe  
Rev. Robert Long  
Richard Vandercar  
William Vogt

**Board of Directors**

Sharran Coppola  
Interim Board President

Cathy Terwilliger  
Vice President

Karen Roach  
Secretary

Reverend Richard Parsons  
Rachael Ward  
Susan Williams  
Dr. Gary Dunkerley  
Robert Clement  
John Sapone  
Margaret Coker  
Abigail N. Rockmacher  
Carli Aragosa

**Bethesda House Administration**

Kimarie Sheppard  
Executive Director

Danny Payne  
Director of Residential Services

Louise O'Leary  
Director of Program & Case Management Services

Leina Minakawa  
Director of Social Work

# FUNDRAISING

On May 3, 2019, Boulevard Bowl hosted Bethesda House's 7th Annual Bowl for Bethesda fundraiser! What a huge success. Every year we are so grateful for those who come out to support our community and Bethesda House's mission to end homelessness in Schenectady County. Together we can strike out homelessness!

**A special Thank You to our seventeen (17) lane sponsors, pin sponsors, and team fundraising. Lane sponsors:** AMF Refrigerated Products, Bennett Contracting, BL's Tavern & Grill, CARES of NY, COINS, Frank & Sons Body Works, Friends of Bethesda House, Gateway Diner, Law Firm of Alex Dell, M&T Bank, Rick & Kathy Mausert, Karen Roach, Rivers Casino & Resort, Schenectady PBA, The Dilly Bean, and Wedekind Motors.

**Thank you to Boulevard Bowl**, who has hosted our event each year. The ally's team is professional and accommodating; they help us each year make this night a great time for everyone.

**SEE YOU NEXT YEAR! MAKE YOUR CALENDARS – MAY 1st, 2020**



**Success is not final; failure is not fatal:  
It is the courage to continue that counts.**

— Winston S. Churchill

