

A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



I want to begin this message with gratitude for the amazing journey that I have experienced at Bethesda House over nearly 15 years of my career. With positive thinking and a growth mindset, alongside a great team, the agency has expanded the level of services we offer as well as developed new programs to be a public servant to people who face unpredictable and unstable lives.

We have navigated one of the most complicated times for society, facing a global pandemic and striving to create an environment that speaks to racial justice and diversity. The costs for basic needs are constantly rising and at Bethesda House, we witness the impact it has in our community.

Our daily meal attendance increased, as well as the number of people visiting our food pantries.

Our staff feels the heightened frustration of economically disadvantaged individuals who are detached from family and friends and have succumbed to despair. Each day, we open our doors and recommit to being intentional in making a difference however small in their lives.

As we begin a new year, we are motivated to continue to achieve new goals and make positive changes to support the people we serve and the agency.

I am deeply grateful of the support Bethesda House has received over the years. Your generosity is invaluable.

*When we are inspired, we inspire others!*

With heartfelt appreciation ~

*Kimarie A. Sheppard*

## The Journey Toward Healing

By Caroline Codd



As part of our holistic wraparound services at Bethesda House, we offer a comprehensive grief and loss program for residents. Our facilitator, Micki Basal, has a career's worth of experience offering guidance and education to adults, teens and children. "It's not therapy," Micki makes clear. Her goal is to impart the basic tenants of grief, trauma and loss so individuals can feel validated and empowered in their journey toward healing. She seeks to normalize the grieving process, acknowledging our society tends to avoid it which can create shame and feelings of isolation out of a very normal, very human process.

In working with Bethesda House's population, the program of course touches on things we may typically associate with grief and loss such as death or illness. But Micki points out this population is often dealing with disenfranchised losses, those that may not be socially acceptable or openly acknowledged due to the element of shame surrounding them. These can include loss of housing, incarceration, substance abuse, physical/sexual abuse, chronic invisible illness, and separation from family. For individuals experiencing these traumas, especially

the homeless and impoverished with little to no social network, it can be detrimentally isolating. Without proper attention and care, it often leads to self-destructive behavior and repeat patterns of trauma.

The grief and loss program eases that isolation by allowing these individuals to be in community with each other. They can share as much or as little as they want, in whatever modality they choose. "Grief needs to be externalized," says Micki. Recent trauma research shows that when grief is contained and not expressed, it creates further trauma on the survivor's body and mind. Micki encourages participants to show up as they are and if they feel called to share, share in a way that feels good to them. Whether that be verbal, written, through music, or simply just showing up and listening, it all belongs. Micki remembers one participant who never said a word during the entire 12 weeks of the course. At the end, he approached her and thanked her, saying the program saved him and changed his life. We never know what someone is processing, regardless of how they present, which is why the program is not meant to be an environment where individuals feel pressured to speak but instead, a holding of space for anyone willing to show up.

# CARA HOUSE FROM SEEDS TO SERVICE

By Caroline Codd



On November 30th 2023, Bethesda House staff, community leaders, members of the media, elected officials and state and county leaders gathered at 917 State Street. The occasion? The grand opening and ribbon cutting ceremony for Cara House, a multimillion-dollar capital project, years in the making. On that bright, brisk morning, this community celebrated a vision come to fruition, a manifestation of Bethesda House's mission to serve and care for the most vulnerable in our community.

For this newsletter, we would like to take you along the journey of Cara House. To our supporters who have

been with us for many years, thank you for your hard work, dedication and perseverance it took to bring this critical service to life. We could not have done it without your support!

## Early Beginnings – Identifying the Need

Bethesda House is located at 834 State Street in the heart of Hamilton Hill. Just half a mile down the road, you'll find the glittering lights of Proctor's Theatre and the bustle of vibrant downtown Schenectady. Drive two minutes up State Street, and you're in Hamilton Hill. Almost 30% of residents in Hamilton Hill live below the poverty line. Instead of patrons waiting in line for the theatre, you'll find individuals waiting in line for services.

There is a lot of history in Hamilton Hill; there are families and businesses who have been here for generations. It is as much a part of Schenectady as any other neighborhood. The majority of Schenectady's human service providers are located here, as it is a neighborhood in need.

Bethesda House has always welcomed anyone who comes through our doors looking for assistance. We welcome individuals as they are, and create a plan for stabilization to help create a path for a life that is not full of despair. Our reputation for welcoming anyone and everyone is known in the community, and individuals who are discharged from the hospital or released from incarceration with nowhere else to go frequently show up at our door.

Program staff noticed an increase in the number of people in need of emergency and essential services. Bethesda's Licensed Clinical Social Workers provided comprehensive services to address social determinants of health to Code Blue shelter guests and emergency shelter guests. A large portion of shelter guests were individuals recently released from incarceration. It was evident that there were gaps in care for this particular population as staff working with these individuals often faced barriers to success.

## Call to Action

Agency staff identified the strong need for stable housing for the re-entry population. Bethesda House programs follow the "Housing First model" and in Bethesda House's commitment and passion to make change, the overall vision of a capital project was developed.

Bethesda House's capital project, Cara House, was 5-years in the making. The agency's application to NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance was approved and, construction began in the spring of 2022.

Funding for the over 8.5 million-dollar project was provided by NYS OTDA HHAP, the Federal Home Loan bank of NY, The Wright Family Foundation, The Golub Family Foundation, The Schenectady Foundation, Schenectady County, American Rescue Plan Act, The Arnold Cogswell Health Care Fund, the Carlilian Foundation, the City of Schenectady, and donations from private donors.

During the construction phase, we were fortunate to have additional funding applications approved from CDPHP, William Gundry Broughton Foundation, Broadview CU,



Highmark Blue Fund, KeyBank Foundation, Hannaford Foundation, The Community Foundation for the Greater Capital Region, and donations from private donors.

Cara House completed construction in November 2023. The 3-story building has 26 permanent supportive housing units, 16 emergency beds, community rooms, offices, a medical care office, and a classroom. A community kitchen that is designed to teach nutrition and healthy meals. Laundry facilities that are on each floor are a tool for life skills counseling.

Our vision of opening up the pathway to stability for the chronically homeless and re-entry populations in our community became a reality. In December 2023, the emergency shelter and the housing units were operating and ready for use.

### **Open to Serve**

The response to the apartments from its new tenants has been overwhelming. Crystal Thatcher, Director of Homeless and Residential Services at Bethesda House, recalls a particular touching moment with a new re-entry tenant.

*One particular man had been in and out of jail for most of his life. With Cara House open, the residential team made contact with him, approved his qualifying status, and let him know he would be one of the first to move into Cara House.*

*When the day came, he was completely overwhelmed to the point of sheer panic. When faced with the reality that he would finally have a room of his own, he physically couldn't believe it and started to reject the idea. This is an extremely common trauma response. When we are used to bad things happening to us, we cannot fathom something good happening and begin to self-sabotage against it. For someone with a lifetime of unresolved trauma, this reaction can be extreme.*

*Crystal worked gently with him and was able to convince him to at least come and see the apartment. When he opened the door and saw the room, he fell to his knees and wept. Over and over again he said "Thank you. Thank you for doing this for people like me."*

When you've spent years incarcerated or on the street, having a place of your own can be unfathomable. There's resistance, just like we see in those entering our medical care, case management or social work services for the first time. There's a lack of trust in a system that has failed them. But we remain steady. We build that trust and meet them right where they're at to begin their journey.

Mr. Tim Staples, Schenectady County Reentry Coordinator, leads the re-entry program once or twice a week. Residents work through parole mandates and additional

interactive journaling to assess cognitive behavioral barriers, criminal thinking patterns, job readiness and societal reintegration to reduce recidivism. Tim says, "Working with Bethesda House feels like coming home. These individuals are coming to us, showing us a part of them that's vulnerable and needs help."

Staples notes that for the re-entry program, and the homeless population in general, individuals need consistency and easy in-house access. They need relationships with people they trust and providers with the capacity to follow-up. They need somewhere to go where they know they will always be welcome. No matter what.

Cara House offers this landing pad, as we have done at 834 State Street for years, but in a much larger, more integrated capacity. It is a monumental example of our holistic approach to helping the homeless and impoverished in Schenectady County.

### **Future of Cara House**

We are building the "Pathways to Success" program, which will address educational and vocational barriers to independence and stability. It's a multi-path program that will build upon the re-entry program to offer additional services such as basic skills education, life skills assessment like budgeting and grocery shopping, grief and loss processing, expression through art and music, nutrition awareness, cooking classes, job readiness and higher education. We are currently seeking funding for materials to support these programs such as cooking supplies, art supplies, education platforms, and more.

In addition, we are working on addressing barriers to attending re-entry and other rehabilitation programming due to time constraints with parole requirements, outpatient treatment and job hunting. Even when someone gets stable housing, there are still many moving pieces that need to be put into place to create goals and a routine that work for them. Bethesda House has history and experience providing stability and a skilled and talented staff to help individuals achieve the success they want. We are confident we can create a system that makes our re-entry residents feel supported as they navigate their next steps.

As long as Bethesda House is open to serve the most vulnerable in our community, we will always attend to their immediate needs and help them toward long-term healing through innovative, holistic approaches to care. As long as there are people in need, the beacon of light in the House of Mercy will shine, guiding them toward hope for a better tomorrow, welcoming them as they are today.

# Volunteer Today!

By Caroline Codd

Bethesda House is asking for your help to provide much needed services to the unhoused population in Schenectady. We are very appreciative of individuals and families generously sharing their time! Volunteers have been the heart and soul of our agency over the last 32 years.

We need you to join us! Volunteers are the heroes of our agency, dedicating time, giving a smile, listening, and developing relationships by offering a hand and kindness.

It's not just around the holidays that we need extra hands; all year long. Volunteers make a difference by providing extra help in our kitchens, common rooms, food pantries and donation rooms. As a volunteer, we match your interests and skills with the different opportunities at the agency.

From joining our Board, to being an advocate for the agency and the services we

provide, joining the development committee for our fundraising events, prepping and serving our daily meal, working in our food pantries, to helping keep our properties clean, there is a place for you!

If you have special skills and teaching experience, we're looking for volunteers to be part of our literacy and nutrition education programs at our new facility, Cara House!

Volunteering at Bethesda House is rewarding, your gift of time makes a difference in the community and in the lives of the economically disadvantaged individuals in Schenectady. We are grateful for the support we have received over the years.

Join and support us, we look forward to meeting you.

E-mail [adminasst@bethesda.org](mailto:adminasst@bethesda.org) to sign up today and join a community passionate about creating a better Schenectady for all.



## BETHESDA HOUSE 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 Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:00 - 4:00 or by calling Bethesda House (518-374-7873) to make arrangements.

### Day to Day

#### Food

- Non-perishable items

#### Kitchen

- Spices, coffee and tea
- Can openers
- Pots and pans
- Cooking utensils

#### Hygiene Products

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

#### 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 [bethesda.org](http://bethesda.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)

#### Our Veterans' Program needs the following:

- Twin sheets
- Twin comforters
- Pillows
- Bed bug covers (mattress, box spring and pillow covers)
- Blankets
- Hygiene kits
- Socks (varying in size)
- Underwear (varying in size)
- Undershirts (varying in size)
- Towels
- Wash cloths
- Hand towels
- Slippers (varying in size)



**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 at [www.bethesda.org](http://www.bethesda.org)

## Bethesda House Donors: June 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024

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 Smalls, Herb & Phyllis  
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### Benefactor up to \$20,000

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Bethesda House is grateful to the individuals, congregations, businesses, and private foundations who donated from \$1 to over \$100,000. Your generosity allows us to continue helping others by providing for basic needs in an environment that encourages and supports positive change.

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 at either slotano@bethesdaohs.org or (518) 374-7873, ext. 1220 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. Thank you to donors who participate in Amazon Smiles, Clynk and other Hannaford fundraising initiatives. Your gifts of spirit and generosity are deeply appreciated.

### In-Kind Donors

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 Mary Christoffel  
 Robert Christoffel

Marianne Sheppard  
 June Schermerhorn  
 Clarie Racicot

Barbara Koster  
 George Moffett  
 Mark Bonitatibus

Linda Jateau  
 Elaine Ognibene  
 Michael & Beverly Roscoe

### 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.

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- Anne McGhee  
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- Crystal Thatcher  
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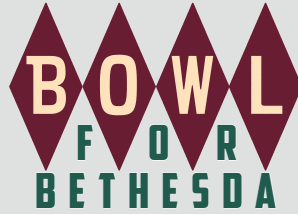
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# FUNDRAISING

*“Fundraising is the gentle art of teaching the joy of giving.”*

– Hank Rosso



Another blast at the bowling alley is in the books! On May 9th, 2024 we had our **11th annual** Bowl for Bethesda Fundraiser “Strikes Against Homelessness”. The theme this year was *Color Wars* and everyone was decked out in tie dye and their favorite colors! We saw old and new faces and loved getting the community together for the evening. There’s something special about the energy at this event. We get to see so many of our long-term supporters in person and feel lucky to have this tradition to look forward to. Together, we truly can make a difference and strike out homelessness in Schenectady!



Along with our bowlers, a **special Thank You to our four (4) lane sponsors and nine (9) turkey sponsors.** We raised a total of **\$12,000!**



**Lane Sponsors:** Greenbush Tape & Label, April Pilczuk, Representative Michelle Ostrelich, Kimarie Sheppard.

**Turkey Sponsors:** Greenbush Tape & Label, SRG Architects, Rivers Casino & Resorts, CapitaLand Motors Inc., Tech Solutions LLC, Regeneron, Clark Financial Planning, Susan Williams, John Sheppard.



We gave out prizes and medals to best team name (The Loaded Tie-Dice), highest team score (Rivers Casino & Resort), highest men’s score (Mike Marley from Rivers), highest women’s score (Emily Colasanti from Rivers) and most gutterballs (our very own Deanna Cipollo!). Eastern Parkway United Methodist Church (Holy Rollers) raised the most funds as a team – their second year in row!



Thank you so much to **Boulevard Bowl**, who has hosted our event each year. Boulevard’s management and staff are professional and accommodating, helping us each year to make this night a great time for everyone.

**NEXT YEAR’S BOWL FOR BETHESDA WILL BE MAY 9, 2025. MARK YOUR CALENDARS, WE WILL SEE YOU THERE!**



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Photography by Jessica Gravelin