# THE BEACON

"Building a more compassionate community one person at a time



Fall/Winter Issue November 2015

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

#### A message from the Executive Director Welcome to the 2015 winter edition of Bethesda House's semi-annual newsletter.

I began at Bethesda House in 2009, and during the last six years have seen tremendous growth in our services and renewed commitment from our staff.

Bethesda House provides basic needs, case management, and housing services which are the tools necessary for rebuilding the lives of homeless and impoverished adults in our community.

For the past twenty-three years, we have been blessed by extraordinary support from generous individuals, churches, clubs, businesses and organizations. We are deeply grateful to everyone who has made this life-changing work possible.

The services we offer, combined with the determination and hard work of our homeless and impoverished guests, completes the formula for success! In the last 12 months, we achieved the following results:

- 4,100 people received basic needs, case management, social work services
- 1,938 obtained stable housing
- 200 is our average daily attendance
- 23 remained permanently housed in our housing programs
- 14 Veterans have been housed through our transitional housing program

But there is so much more. At Bethesda House we know the strong connection between high-school dropout rates and poverty. We are committed to providing proper and effective educational programs so that those we serve can take steps toward living a sustainable life. We offer multiple educational services including literacy, nutrition, financial management, and budgeting programs which enhance our case management, housing and basic needs services.

#### LIVES ARE CHANGING IN PHENOMENAL WAYS!

If you are already involved at Bethesda House as a volunteer or donor, please accept my warmest thanks for being our partner in ending homelessness. If you are new to our agency and interested in learning more about how you can share your time, talent, and/or treasures to become part of this powerful work that changes lives, I extend a warm welcome to you! We are eager to have new partners join our team.

Many Blessings to you and your family,

Kimarie A. Sheppard



Resident Shari (left) and Sharran Coppola (right)





Union College Students

Niskayuna Middle School Student, Grace



Resident, "Ghost," who is part of the agency's Walking Group.

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# Change Is In The Air

As the leaves change color and the weather gets cooler, we are reminded of the things associated with fall. For some of us, this means pumpkin spice lattes and Halloween costumes, but to many, it means going back to school. This thought comes with equal measures of dread and excitement. Education can be an intimidating prospect, and often means a change in lifestyle; however, it is ultimately an opportunity for personal growth and learning more about the world around us.

#### For those who are chronically homeless, education means more than a high-paying job or a private practice, it means having tools that are essential to

**survival.** We at Bethesda House pride ourselves on offering a wide variety of educational programs and workshops. These classes educate our clients on important matters such as managing nutrition and finances, which make a huge difference in allowing them to lead healthy, stable lives.

Similarly, our volunteer opportunities provide other members of the community with a better understanding of the homeless.



Shari, a resident, prepares a healthy snack.

This two-fold approach to education is absolutely pivotal if we hope to end homelessness. To teach society about the homeless is just as important as teaching the homeless how to reenter society. We must remind ourselves that knowledge is not merely an academic pursuit, it is the currency with which all empathy, compassion, and awareness is purchased. In order to understand the people we help, we must learn to understand their struggles.

One of these struggles is basic nutrition. Eating healthy can be a challenge for anyone. Health officials have proven that fast food and "junk" food have devastating effects on a person's overall health. For the homeless and impoverished, making decisions to select nutritious food can be overwhelming; however, not making the right choice can have devastating consequences. Poor nutrition robs people of energy and the ability to recover from illness. It also promotes depression and anxiety. Simply put, it makes every other struggle in a person's life much, harder.

Bethesda House understands that a good diet is the foundation for positive change. As part of that commitment, Bethesda House hosts a Nutrition Class for our clients every Wednesday afternoon, where they learn how to select and prepare healthy, affordable meals from Jeanne Pennypacker, Wellness and Health Program Educator of Cornell University.

New recipes are also prepared and sampled, which is quite popular among the attendees.

This class, which is a part of the **Eat Smart New York** program, embraces Jeanne's philosophy that there's "no such thing as one size fits all!" Although most of the attendees begin class by asking if their favorite food is "good" or not, Jeanne steers them towards a discussion of what really makes a food "good." Using an easy-to-understand color wheel, challenging concepts are broken down into simple guidelines to determine a food's nutritional value.

Lessons are put to the test when the group has a shopping trip at a local market. Program participants have a hands-on

approach as they shop and select healthy food choices. Jeanne uses this arena to enhance what is taught in the classroom.

Jeanne, a 15-year nutrition expert, has experience educating lower-income consumers and understands the challenges they face. People on a



Jeanne Pennypacker shares a recipe for Northwest Apple Salad

fixed income make hard choices, "bills go up while income stays the same. Bill money comes out of their food budget." Jeanne has found that there is misconception among the poor that healthy choices are expensive. She said that her education includes looking for specials and sales.

Jeanne fondly remembers a woman from her class showing off an entire shopping cart of food one day and saying to Jeanne "do you see what I was able to buy because of you?" Moments such as those are what truly make the program an enriching experience for the seasoned educator. As encouraging as it is to see education make a difference, it's also important to remember that people face challenges in life. For many of the chronically homeless at Bethesda House, the inability to make sound fiscal decisions is what brought them here, and it is therefore our task to ensure their finances are properly supervised.

In our Rep Payee program, Case Managers manage income in order to create a sustainable budget that ensures rent, food, medical care and other essential needs are met before giving these clients a spending allowance.

John, a long time area resident, former construction worker and veteran, is a program participant. A graduate of Malcolm-King College in Harlem, he had difficulties maintaining employment due to numerous work and sports related injuries, which took a toll on his cognitive abilities. His life took a serious turn for the worse after a mugging with a baseball bat left him with a concussion. As a result of his injuries and the effect they had on his overall health, John was forced into retirement at 47. John came to Bethesda House in need of housing and case management services. He was "blown away by the services he received."

Our Case Management staff found him safe permanent housing and he enrolled in our Representative Payee program. He recounts his experience and said, "This agency is beautiful. It takes care of me. I am glad they pay the bills."

Without the program, John wouldn't be able to keep track of all of his bills or remember to make payments in a timely manner. The Rep Payee program removes the doubt and anxiety of keeping a regular payment schedule.

Assistant Director - Case Management, Ronya Bynum, understands why the program appeals to someone in John's



situation.

"I believe the Rep Payee Program is important because it provides our clients with a sense of independence, reassurance, and security that they won't end up

Shantay, a Union Student, helps with the Lighthouse's yardwork.

homeless on the streets," said Ronya. "It sort of shields them from being taken advantage of by the people who prey on this vulnerable population."

"The positive effect on the community has been wonderful because it allows us to maintain an ongoing relationship with landlords and to work with partnering agencies to make sure our clients are engaged in much needed services."

Positivity is also evident in the way John talks about his life. "I survived all these years, and it was always a struggle," he said. "I accomplished everything I wanted. I'm proud of it, and my family's proud of me." Today, John repays the kindness shown to him through his volunteer service towards others at Bethesda House.



Case Manager Catherine Casolo counsels a client.





Warren Lavery presents on emergency safety.

Molly and Shiraz, Union College Students

While it is crucial to help people plan their daily routines, it is also important to prepare them for the unforeseen. At Bethesda House, there are also workshops to help staff, volunteers, and clients know what to do in the case of an emergency. As anyone who witnessed the damage caused by the March 6th fire can attest, there is no such thing as being "too prepared." At the American Red Cross Disaster Preparedness Training Class, attendees were taught how to deal with crises as commonplace as a winter storm and as unusual as an electromagnetic pulse from a solar flare.

Attendees walked away from the course with an Emergency Kit shopping list, a checklist for supplies, and the confidence of knowing they are better equipped to deal with hazardous situations should they arise.

For certain health-related emergencies and treatment, an important partner to Bethesda House is **Alliance for Positive Health** *(formerly known as the AIDS Council).* With every visit, representatives inform our homeless guests and residents of the various services available to them should they contract a serious disease.

Much like Bethesda House, **Alliance for Positive Health** understands the value of education in a client's life, and

therefore offers a nutrition program, case management, and safe sex awareness classes. These informative sessions not only give our clients the tools and services necessary to deal with life's crises, but also the knowledge needed to mitigate them.

However, the clients, staff and residents of Bethesda House are not the only ones to learn something valuable within its walls. For several volunteers, Bethesda House offers an education in the world that they cannot find in a classroom.



Union College's Gamma Phi Beta Sorority

Day Program Coordinator, Melissa Zampino, gives several tours of the building to students and service groups that are interested in finding ways to help the homeless. Melissa finds that people often walk away from the experience with a new perspective. "People's ideas of homelessness change," she said. Visitors learn that poverty can take many forms; women, men, children, and families.

Bethesda House is fortunate to have a long-term relationship with Union College's volunteer and internship programs. The benefits of this relationship are two-fold, students become acclimated with Schenectady and area providers benefit from the additional help and interactions the students have with consumers. Students volunteer to help prepare our daily meal and have worked with our program staff to clean-up and ready the landscaping around our facilities for the fall and winter months. One volunteer, Shiraz said, "helping the community is definitely the most rewarding." Shantay takes a lot out of the community service experience, she comments "I feel like a lot of times as a college student, you forget that life goes on outside your little bubble. It's great just seeing that the little things you do still matter. They still have a huge impact."

An eighth grade class from Iroquois Middle School in Niskayuna also visited Bethesda House recently to help decorate placemats for Thanksgiving, assemble kits of hygiene supplies, and organize our Clothing Room. After they returned to class, their teacher asked them to write about the experience. One thing the students were surprised by was the variety of services we offer. "It was a great experience to be able to help people in need," wrote one student. "I did not know that there were 'hygiene bags' and choices for a food pantry."

Another student, Brad, wrote "One thing that I thought was really cool was that over Thanksgiving you served over 400 people. I thought that was amazing that you helped that many people on Thanksgiving."

A common theme was how good it made the students feel to help those in need.

"Thank you so much for letting me come and help you. It meant a lot to me because I was helping people in need," wrote a young lady named Zoey.



Eighth Grade Students from Iroquois Middle School.



Thanksgiving placemats designed by Iroquois Middle Schoolers.

What is so encouraging is not just that the students had a good time or did worthwhile work, but that they realized they could make a difference in someone's life. Thanks to their experience, they now know that charity is more than putting money in a donation bin or clothes in a drop-off container, it's doing the small, personal things that show the homeless that their community has not forgotten them.

## Everyday Education is Woven Into the Services We Offer by Anne McGhee



Bethesda House's Walking Group.

Learning can be a scary experience. Being able to open your mind and allow new information to filter in takes energy and acceptance. For adults, it is also being brave enough to say, "I don't know. I was never taught. I will try."

Education is woven into every service Bethesda House offers. We help people realize and understand that learning leads to being confident and a higher degree of independence.

Many in the homeless and impoverished community lack basic living skills such as personal hygiene, personal environment organization and cleanliness, how to do laundry, and/or how to dress properly. Staff and volunteers provide guidance and education which has had proven positive results.

Our Case Managers discuss long-term life and employment goals. We provide resume building, readiness for employment interviews, and use our free clothing room to put together appropriate work attire. Recently, Bethesda House entered into a partnership with SUNY College and Career Counseling Center in Schenectady (SCCCC). Together we are creating a system to ensure all obstacles are eliminated in the search for employment.

### A Space in Time; Summer at Bethesda House By Rachael Chabot

I will never forget JL. Bethesda House placed him in an apartment after his twenty-five year prison stay.

He has a short fuse and a short tolerance for just about everything. Every day, he would stop in to visit with Kevin M, LSCW, and me. When overwhelmed, we saw him two-three times a day. He had trouble keeping track of his appointments for his six medical issues. We began to develop a relationship early on; he was appreciative and showed progress in controlling his anger.

With each passing day his trust in us grew. I sat and listened to him talk about his life. I could feel his pain as I heard it resonate



Resident Mattie making a healthy meal choice.

in his voice. JL suffers from poverty, uncontrollable and irresistible addictions, crime and mental illness. For him, these are everyday problems, yet he can still make jokes and be positive.

When Kevin was assembling success stories from the Social Work Department, he turned to me and said, "You know, the residence and case management departments have all these successes. But I can't think of one from this summer." At the time, I agreed with Kevin. For three months,

I helped Kevin fight to make it at least an inch upstream. For three months, I felt as though I didn't provide anything that the clients asked for. But yet, after every session, JL thanked us and told us "you have no idea how much you're helping me." He was not the only one that communicated their appreciation - there is one woman who comes in every week to give Kevin a cake. There are many success stories. Not conventional, monumental accomplishments; but we show them that someone is paying attention- that somebody cares. We ask them to stop in -"no appointments necessary, at your convenience." We do not try to fit them into a schema that is designed like the system in which they are failing. There are no time limits, no restrictions on the conversation. We are people that they can trust just a little bit more. We are the floating object that they cling to in a society in





*Resident Dave* which they cannot keep up.

Resident Paul

Bethesda House's clients who suffer from mental illness have been my most exciting education. Initially, I was intimidated by the phrase "mentally ill homeless population." I soon came to realize, that simply means "human beings." JL is etched in my heart and will be part of me for a very long time. He made jokes and tried his best to stay positive; he is a funny, good man. I can attest that so many of the clients are good natured human beings. Some of the most beautiful souls in Schenectady are found in our hospitality center.

## A Time for Reflection; By Caroline Codd Bringing the Invisible Into Focus

As we enter the holiday season, we are blessed with time for joy, love, sugary sweets and the presence of loved ones. But more importantly, we enter the holiday season as a time for reflection. Have we lived our past year with purpose? Have we given and received the love we needed to? Have we served our community and tried to live every day with gratitude and humility?

Beginning this reflection process, we are reminded of our small but significant presence in this world and the manner in which our daily actions affect those who surround us. With each passing year we notice the changes and similarities of friends, family and coworkers that we put on our "gift list," those who we feel drawn to give of our energy, time, love and money. We make up a list of individuals, yet there is an entire community that desperately needs to be on our list. In the hustle and bustle of the holiday frenzy this group is often ignored and rendered invisible.

This holiday season we are calling on you to shed light and bring this community into focus. Nearly 13% of Schenectady County lives in extreme poverty, many of them disabled and unable to take control of their lives. Perhaps you see them as a community in the background, but they are individuals with pasts, presents and futures that rely on the generosity of others. At Bethesda House, we serve our guests and residents on the basis of their individual needs as they grow and learn to live again.

It is your generosity that allows us to help this invisible community become empowered individuals, to become more than the collective they have fallen into. As you run through your list of loved ones, think of those who may not be fortunate enough to give, but are still worthy of receiving. You have the power to be their light and at Bethesda House we are forever grateful for your willingness to be a generous, loving force this holiday season as we serve the homeless and impoverished. They are as much a part of this community as you or I, and we can be the power to bring them out of the background and into focus.

## **CHILLING STATISTICS**

-Each year, 700 homeless people die of hypothermia.

-Hypothermia can set in between 32 and 50° F.

-In January 2013, over 213,00 homeless people were living in unsheltered locations throughout the United States.

#### BETHESDA HOUSE HOLIDAY WISH APPEAL

It's time for Bethesda House's Fall 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 recieve 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

#### Adopt Our Food Pantry

- Hygiene Products • Regular and hotel size shampoo, deodorant toothaste soan razo
- deodorant, toothpaste, soap, razors and toothbrushes
- Linens
- Sheets, towels, wash clothsBlankets
- Seasonal
- Home Depot/Lowes Gift Card

BETHESDA HOUSE

#### **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			
Credit Card: MC Visa	AMEX	Discover	
No:			
Exp. Date:	Sec. Code		
Signature:			
Are You a GE Employee/Retiree?_		Yes	N

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

A \$10 donation gives us \$500 in food products from the Regionals Food Bank.

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

#### Adopt An Apartment

Visit 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 Donors: May - October 2015

Friend Up to \$100

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Bethesda House is Grateful to these Individuals and organizations who donated from \$1 to \$20,000. Your generosity allows us to continue our mission this fall and winter with helping others by providing for basic needs in an environment that encourages and supports positive life 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.

A 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.

If your name does nor appear as you would like it to, please call Bethesda House at 518-374-7873 so we may correct our records.

Thank you for your continued support.

#### **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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# FUNDRAISING

In the world of non-profits, it's all about fundraising. During the last twenty-three years, Bethesda House has been blessed with the generous support of its community and donors. Your self-less giving has allowed us to reach thousands of homeless and impoverished citizens in Schenectady. Your dollars provide the path to permanent housing, crisis management, basic living needs, and educational opportunities leading to self-sufficiency.

Bethesda House's 5th Annual Event was held on October 15, 2015. Phillip Morris, CEO of Proctors Theater, captivated the event's attendees with his unique speaking style and creative expression, and knowledge on change, growth, and the resurgence of energy in a community. The evening was fun and very interesting.

A special Thank You to: **Event Sponsors**; Nahla & Genghis Khan, Nancy Nicholas & Ralph Blackwood, Robert Christoffel, Gretchen Dekalb, Kevin McCormick, Susan Williams, Dennis & Wendy O'Connor, Richard & Eunice Werner, Thomas Weiss, Susan Salamah, A.M.F. Refrigerated Products, MOOD Media, Marty's True Value, and Lane Press of Albany.

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With your continued support we are partners in our commitment to end homelessness. Thank you for your generosity. "Gentleness, self-sacrifice and generosity are the exclusive possession of no one race or religion." Mahatma Gandhi



(From left to right) Jacob Rowe, Kevin McCormick, Melissa Zampino



Sharran Coppola



CEO of Proctors Theater, Phillip Morris



CEO of Proctors Theater, Phillip Morris