

# THE BEACON

"Building a just and compassionate community one person at a time"



Spring/Summer Issue May 2015

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

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

## **RESPONSIVE / INNOVATIVE / COMPASSIONATE**

These are more than just words to the staff and volunteers of Bethesda House. They reflect the values and goals of our interfaith ministry to the homeless, disabled and economically disadvantaged citizens of Schenectady County. We embrace our mission to build a just, hospitable and inclusive community one person at a time, affirming the dignity of those we serve and addressing the multitude of needs that can be overwhelming.

Fulfilling our mission on an ongoing basis means that we have to be **RESPONSIVE** to the needs of the homeless and impoverished in our community. With the differing needs of our clients, it is essential to evaluate the specific needs of each on a regular basis. We pride ourselves on forming relationships that are grounded in trust and respect, so that the programs and services we provide are effective.

In delivering programs and services, we also strive to be **INNOVATIVE** and cost-effective. We understand the financial restraints of our agency and how difficult it is to provide excellence in all service areas with shrinking resources.

Bethesda House staff and volunteers dedicate themselves to finding innovative solutions to housing, navigating the mental and physical health systems, and providing basic living needs. We are dedicated and **COMPASSIONATE** when working toward resolutions that surpass expectations.

Our staff is committed to being proactive advocates for those we serve. Embracing the goals of providing responsive, innovative, and compassionate services has strengthened our resolve to create more favorable outcomes for those we serve.

I feel honored to be part of such an inspiring team of individuals who display spirit, strength and determination each and every day. Together with our volunteers and community partners, we change lives and work tirelessly to end homelessness in our community.

Many Blessings,

*Kimarie A. Sheppard*



*Women's Group meets every Thursday.*



Photos: Clarence G. (Bottom Left), Kathy O. (Bottom Right), Guest on Clothing Room Day (Middle)



# A LOOK THROUGH THE EYES OF THE CHRONICALLY HOMELESS

by Caroline Codd



How often do we think of the homeless community as a collective? They are viewed as a collective mass of bodies who either desperately need help or desperately need to become self-sufficient. How many of us have volunteered at homeless shelters or housing programs without knowing a single name of someone who lives in that shelter? We feel good about our charitable work; however, we cannot go home to relay a single story of someone we fed or met that day.

**The homeless community is not a collective. They are people. They are people with backgrounds full of inspiration and love, fear and demons. Look through a new window, through the eyes of the chronically homeless.**

Max became a resident in Bethesda House's permanent supportive housing program. He arrived with the clothes on his back and the ideas in his head for a book he had been wanting to write. Max had difficulties interacting with staff and other residents, he did not feel comfortable sleeping in a bed, and did not have social skills. A towering figure, he appears ominous, but when confronted, he is passive and respectful.



Over the last six years, Max has become more comfortable with his environment and has made great strides with his social skills. He has commented that he never wants to be homeless again. His mental illness often makes it difficult for him to follow the rules, but his story is a testament to the success of the Housing First model.

Think of a time when you were overly paranoid about something. You just "knew" someone was looking or talking about you. *That* woman was judging your hairdo or you felt the uncomfortable stare of a stranger on a bus. Now imagine living with this paranoia every waking moment of every day.

For *Clay*, if it isn't someone staring at him, it's the voices he hears in his head that control and constrict his every breath. A victim of domestic violence with severe mental illness, he struggles to maintain stability in his life. It isn't uncommon for those who have suffered crisis and loss to see their "natural state" as the only part of their life they are able to control and when someone threatens their control, they take it personally. **Clay saw medication as restricting**



Take a moment to imagine the following scenario: 20 years of carrying all of your belongings in a bag that must fit on your person for fear of being stolen; 20 years of making an income off the streets; 20 years of surviving northeast winters; 20 years of sleeping in back alleyways, abandoned cars, vacant houses, or on park benches; 7,300 days without substantial human contact.

*Max* lived in Virginia until he was 20. He relocated to Schenectady and eventually joined the military. However, after a year of service, he was discharged due to mental health concerns. Eventually, his unstable mental health caused him to lose his employment and his stable home. Max was a guest of Bethesda House for many years; he would come in for a hot meal and a cup of coffee but ask for nothing else. He spoke to no one and his conversations with staff were minimal. **Max survived on the streets for 20 years.**



**his creative, artistic abilities. His refusal to take medication was detrimental to his social behavior.**

Clay has had several altercations with the police during the last two years. His severe social anxiety and mental illness result in the false idea that people want to harm him and therefore he needs to be aggressive.

After years of struggles, avoiding doctor's appointments, and refusing to take medication, Clay finally agreed to meet with medical staff and begin daily medication. This milestone and breakthrough would not have been possible if it were not for a collaboration and partnership with area providers. Clay no longer walks in the shadows of darkness. His medication has stabilized his mental health and led him to a path of management and self-sufficiency. Clay is a kind soul who does not belong in jail and it is our intention to keep him safe from his greatest fear – *himself*.

### **The Lighthouse and Liberty Apartments Residential Programs**

Our residential programs follow the *Housing First* principals. The underlying concept of the housing-first model focuses on moving people into housing directly from streets and shelters without preconditions of treatment acceptance or compliance.

In 2002, The Lighthouse program opened its permanent supportive housing program for single adults who are chronically homeless and have a history of untreated mental illness and/or another disabling condition. Over seventy-five percent of the residents have been living at the Lighthouse for over six years. Many have reconnected with their families, have engaged in social activities, and have worked to improve upon basic living skills.

In January 2010, the agency opened a sixteen bed permanent supportive housing program. Ninety-five percent of the residents in this program have been stably housed and ninety percent of the residents have voluntarily engaged in the goals on their service plans. Thereby, improving their income stability and enhancing their basic living skills.

The two residential programs are an essential part of Schenectady's community. They are a testament that the *Housing First model*, along with cohesive community partnerships, is a formula that brings us closer to ending homelessness in our community.

Bethesda House's residential case management and social work team work with our residents addressing their physical, emotional, mental health and substance abuse concerns. The team approach is essential to the long-term success of our residents' stability.







**Every Thursday, from 11:30am – 1:00 pm, Bethesda House's Men's Group meets at the State Street Presbyterian Church, which is directly across the street from our main location. Pastor Parsons and William Oliver, a dedicated Bethesda House volunteer, facilitate the wide variety of topics which range from domestic violence, substance abuse, personal challenges, community concerns, mental and physical health concerns, and interfaith conversations.**

Guest speakers address nutrition, smoking cessation, terminal illness, and conflict resolution. From the very first meeting, attendance has been consistently over 30 each week. I sat down with one facilitator to capture what this long awaited program was about:

### **What is Men's Group?**

A group of men gather together weekly and share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences of what it means to be a man. The group engages in lively discussions with speakers from many disciplines and talks about community activities in which they can participate.



### **Why was this initiative important to start and where did the idea come from?**

Bethesda House tried a few times to get a men's group up and running. However, while the interest was there, it was difficult to find committed facilitators. Over the last year, staff and volunteers talked about it to our guests and residents and found there

was still interest. One particular

volunteer found that every day he saw men who were sitting around without a constructive plan. He decided that he wanted to offer men a sacred space to share their burdens and to find hope again. He created a plan, had it approved and from that point we keep growing in attendance.

### **As a new program, what is the greatest challenge?**

Amazingly enough there are few challenges at this time. The group has taken off and far surpassed the expectations of

most. The one worry right now is for the future and being able to sustain the enthusiasm and interest.



### **In your opinion, what is the most rewarding part about Men's Group?**

Men coming together to share their thoughts and feelings and to work toward breaking down the barriers that confine these men.

### **What improvements would you like to see as the program becomes more established?**

More men becoming involved and opening up with their feelings. Empowering themselves to cry and to be open with who they really are.

### **Do you see a difference in people before and after Men's Group?**

Absolutely! The men are letting go of the stereotypical behaviors within their cultures. They are grateful and relieved to be a part of this group and gaining confidence with their status as men.



# A GIFT OF TIME

## Volunteers are Essential to Non-Profit's Success

Volunteers are critical to the on-going operations of non-profit agencies. The cost of services is reduced and valuable assistance is provided to staff. Agencies would have difficulties sustaining and fulfilling the high demand for services if it were not for the volunteers.

Each day at Bethesda House, over 200 people walk through our doors in need of help. It is impossible to meet their needs without the dedication and loving hands of our volunteers. We need your help, and we have endless opportunities in which to serve. Daily meal preparation and clean up, presence in our clothing room, our food pantry and Hospitality Center, assisting our case management and program staff, and providing basic needs are all ways in which you can help. We need volunteers to pick up pre-scheduled food donations, to work and maintain our two gardens, assist with fundraising activities, and participate in our literacy program. Your gift of time is crucial to us and to Schenectady County's homeless and impoverished community.

We invite you to join our volunteer team, please contact Melissa Zampino or Anne McGhee at Bethesda House at (518) 374-7873.



*"I like to help people and talk to people, it makes me happy. Bethesda House has done so much for me and I like to give back. Bethesda House does a lot of good things for the community."*

- Mary Ellen Garry

*"I like helping people and staying busy"* - Richard Garry



*"I like volunteering at Bethesda House because I am helping people. I see people suffering, it is very hard but it helps me realize how much I have. Volunteering here supports and teaches me."* - Flo Costillio



*"I like helping people out."* - Louie Acquasanta





# A COMMUNITY COMES TOGETHER IN A TIME OF CRISIS

## March 6, 2015 lives changed!

Area providers stopped their normal routines and formed partnerships to respond to the devastation the Schenectady community faced as a result of a massive fire that destroyed two buildings.

In the early morning hours, a blazing fire overcame the frigid air that encompassed 100-102 and 104 Jay Street in Schenectady. While the fire department fought the raging fire storm, staff from the Red Cross and the City Mission made quick arrangements to provide shelter and warmth to the residents who lost their homes and belongings.

Knowing that people's urgent needs were being met, Bethesda House staff immediately began contacting area

landlords to set up available housing units. Agency staff joined a task force, which included all area providers; it was impressive to be part of such a dynamic group who focused on the critical needs of the fire victims. Within the last eight weeks, **Bethesda House housed over 30 people.**

Your donations directly to Bethesda House and to *The Schenectady Foundation* made it possible to replace household and personal items. Hope was restored; agencies worked as one to bring a sense of normalcy back into the lives of the fire victims. **March 6th was tragic and devastating to our community. Your support gave us light.**

*Thank you!*

## BETHESDA HOUSE SPRING APPEAL

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 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.

**\*Please call 518-374-7873 for details.**

### 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, wash cloths

#### Seasonal

- Garden Plants
- Home Depot/Lowes Gift Cards

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

### Gifts That Keep on Giving

Deferred gifts to Bethesda House can have a lasting effect on our future strength and 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 \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

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

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)**



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The Coins Foundation

**Visionary Up to \$50,000**

Upper NY Conference Of United  
Methodist Church  
The Edward D. Cammarota  
Foundation, Inc.



## 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.

## BETHESDA HOUSE

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Designed by: Molly Sheppard Graphic  
Design & Photography



## FUNDRAISING

*There is one who scatters, and yet increases all the more, and there is one who withholds what is justly due, and yet it results only in want. The generous man will be prosperous, and he who waters will himself be watered. Proverbs 11:24-25*

Since 1992, Bethesda House has been blessed with community support that has resulted in the agency's ability to transform from our humble beginnings to being a lead entity to end homelessness in Schenectady County.

*We are able to succeed because of you!*

We began 2014-2015 with a lack of certainty due to mandated funding reductions. As we progressed through the year, our voices were uplifted and heard. Throughout this year, we were honored by receiving generous support from *The Edward Cammarota Foundation, Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church*, and you, personal donors. This has allowed us to continue to offer our services to the hundreds who turn to us each day.

During our funding year, we have housed over 180 people, provided 38,000 meals and 2,200 meals from our food pantry. We stabilized housing and income for 76 individuals enrolled in our financial case management program and provided crisis and basic living services for 3,250 people.

## In-Kind Donations

BJ's  
Chipotle  
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Eastern Parkway Methodist Church  
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St. Josephs of Scotia  
St. Mary's of Gallway  
St. Joseph's of Glenville  
Subway  
Temple Gates of Heaven  
The Ladies Philotochos Society of  
St. George Greek Orthodox Church  
Union College  
Unitarian Universalist Society

Bethesda House is widely known as an essential agency within the fabric of Schenectady County. Together, you and Bethesda House have stabilized hundreds of households and stood against social injustice. **Your donations have made a critical difference; YOU have provided light and hope to the impoverished in our community. Thank you!**

On April 19th, Union College students had their Empty Bowls Event to increase awareness of those who live in poverty and are often without food. Bethesda House, Concerned for the Hungry, and the City Mission receive support from this community event. This year was well attended, had a variety of wonderful, exciting entertainment and was a great success.

On May 8th, Bethesda House's 3rd Annual Bowling for Bethesda House took place. Each year our fundraiser grows - mark your calendars for next May 6, 2016! **Help us Strike Out Homelessness!**

Bethesda House's 5th Annual Fall Fundraiser will be on October 22, 2015. We are excited for another fun-filled event.

Bethesda House is grateful to these individuals and organizations who donated from \$1 to \$50,000. Your generosity allows us to continue our mission this spring and summer. 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 not appear as you would like it to, please call Bethesda House (518) 374-7873 and ask for Nichole Salzano so we may correct our records.

**THANK YOU  
FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT!**

