



Building a more compassionate community one person at a time

THE BEACON

Spring/Summer 2023

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

A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



At Bethesda House, we have always been passionate about growing and evolving in the face of adversity. The last three years have been challenging to say the least, but I am filled with pride at the resilience of our staff, residents and guests. Everyone who walks through the doors to this “House of Mercy” – whether they seek help or deliver it – carries a bravery and strength of spirit to meet our modern-day challenges head-on. As we near the end of this fiscal year, I look back and see incredible growth, dedication and commitment to creating a better, brighter Schenectady County.

While many of us may be returning to a sense of normalcy, the waves of destabilization from COVID-19 are still breaking through the homeless and impoverished populations. Whether it be increased health complications or loss of housing, these individuals have tried everything they can to stay afloat and are coming to Bethesda House for assistance. I would say it’s a miracle that we’ve remained a stronghold during this time, but I know it is a direct reflection of the unwavering support of our staff, volunteers, donors and sponsors who continue to show up every day for those in need.

2023 has already been an incredible season of growth as Bethesda House continues to explore innovative systems to aid the complex needs of vulnerable individuals. In the pages that follow, you will read all about our joining of the Schenectady HUB, a coalition of Schenectady-based agencies to tackle the needs of the homeless in real time, our efforts to aid the rise in senior homelessness, our plan for upcoming economic disturbances and the grand opening of Cara House later this summer.

After years of applying for state funding to open a desperately needed affordable and emergency housing unit, Cara House broke ground last year and is set to have its grand opening in early September. With 26 apartments and 16 emergency beds including medical respite beds, Cara House is one of the affordable housing infrastructure projects to take place in Schenectady. We are grateful to Schenectady County, the City of Schenectady and our capital partners for making this a reality. Our current foundation supporters include The Wright Family Foundation, The Neil and Jane, William and Estelle Golub Family Foundation, Hannaford Foundation, W.G. Gundry Broughton Foundation, Arnold Cogswell Foundation, Carlilian Foundation, Schenectady Foundation, Schenectady County, American Rescue Plan Act, Federal Home Loan Bank of NY, and New York State Energy and Research Department. We are continuing to seek support to provide comprehensive services to meet the many, complex needs of those seeking quality care and stabilization.

To help us meet these goals, you can purchase a brick as part of our Cara House Brick Campaign and join us for our summer fundraiser on August 9th at Wolf Hollow Brewing. There will be live music, food and more!

I am deeply grateful to the individuals, foundations, businesses and congregations who year after year support our mission. To be a part of this community is a gift and an honor. Here’s to another year of growth and rising to the challenge to make a better Schenectady for all!

Kimarie A. Sheppard



Cultivating Community Care with the Schenectady HUB

By Caroline Codd

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.” – Margaret Mead

For 31 years, Bethesda House has served as a cornerstone for helping the homeless and impoverished in Schenectady recover, rest and rebuild their lives. As this “House of Mercy” has expanded, so have the needs of a population who is, as we all are, simply trying to do their best under their given circumstances. While Bethesda House has made it a priority to expand our in-house offerings to address these needs under one roof, we have also relied on our community partners and support systems to provide adequate resources and compassionate services to those in need. This year, partnerships have unified into the Schenectady HUB, a collective of service providers in Schenectady County led by the Schenectady Police Department and the Office of Community Services.

In 2019, the Schenectady Police Department had launched a pilot program called Schenectady Cares, which encouraged anybody struggling with drug addiction to come to the department without risk of arrest to be set up with rehab services. The program was highly successful and gaining a lot of traction, however, slowed to a halt during the pandemic. Sgt. Nick Mannix, who has been with Schenectady PD for eleven years, knew that many were still struggling but were hesitant to come to the police.

With support from Lieutenant Macherone, he acquired overdose reports from the Schenectady Fire Department and began boots on the ground outreach with case workers from Catholic Charities and New Choices. It took time and patience to gain trust, but Sgt. Mannix’s kind and empathetic nature resonated with those who were living on the fringes and he was able to set them up with supportive services on the spot.

Seeing the potential of this kind of community outreach and care, he reached out to Ms. Michelle Cejka, Adult Behavioral Health Coordinator at Schenectady’s Office of Community Services, to see how they could expand. He and Michelle, along with Ms. Jen Hayden, Dual Recovery Coordinator, went to a conference in Boston to learn about the Chelsea HUB, a Massachusetts “police-led initiative made up of designated staff from the community and government agencies that meet weekly to address specific situations regarding clients facing elevated levels of risk, and develop immediate, coordinated, and integrated responses through the mobilization of resources.” The model is designed to mobilize services already available to address risky situations before an emergency occurs. With the high-level of services already



available to the homeless, impoverished and mentally ill in Schenectady County, Mannix, Hayden and Cejka compiled their findings and in February officially created the Schenectady HUB.

The Schenectady County HUB is a multidisciplinary behavioral health team made up of invested community stakeholders. The primary lens of the model is harm-reduction focused, making the overall goal to reduce levels of harm and victimization for individuals being served. The HUB meets on the first and third Tuesdays of every month. Bethesda House was brought into the fold as a lead agency in the community with comprehensive and wraparound services. Delegates from each agency and department meet for about an hour to discuss active cases and plans of action. From there, they head out into the community to locate the individuals and connect them to services, whether that be housing, substance abuse treatment or general case management. For each team created, an integrated approach is required. The team remains in continuous communication until all identified goals have been met. The ability to convince someone to get help and help them fill out all the paperwork on the spot is critical as many of them don't stay in one spot for too long, don't have cell phones, or are in the throes of addiction or too overwhelmed to seek out services themselves.

This multi-disciplinary approach allows us to truly wrap the individual in services they need to find recovery, stability and healing. Bethesda House's in-house psychiatric nurse practitioner and registered nurse are often part of this outreach to address any immediate medical needs. One particular individual was going to the emergency room twice a day. After connecting with the Schenectady HUB, he has since been housed at the YMCA and hasn't been seen in the emergency room in over three weeks. Bethesda House has always operated under *Housing First*, which has proven time and time again that without safe housing, one cannot truly take the steps needed to stabilize their lives. *Housing First* alleviates the strain on already overwhelmed service providers by keeping vulnerable individuals out of the rotating door of emergency situations. The HUB has been able to successfully house every individual they made contact within their outreach.

Sgt. Mannix is passionate about solving problems on the spot and committing to follow-through, forming solid, trusting relationships by being on the streets almost every day helping those in need. Regardless of one's success in treatment or recovery, they are never exiled from the program and will always be met where they're at with compassionate care. We are so grateful to Sgt. Mannix and Ms. Michelle Cejka for their visionary leadership in bringing this much-needed community-driven coalition to life.

Bethesda House has always believed in the inherent goodness and potential of every human being. Working with the Schenectady HUB has allowed us to bring an even deeper level of human touch to the community we serve and the place we all call home. Many who work in Schenectady also live in nearby areas and want to see the county grow, thrive and prosper. With these shared goals in mind, we can create safe environments for all to flourish. The Schenectady HUB is a true model of what community care looks like, when we use patience and empathy in the face of challenging situations and uplift those who are beaten down by their life circumstances. The fact is, we never know what someone is truly going through and every single homeless and impoverished individual is a human being with a story. We will never stop advocating for their dignity and working together with our community partners to help make their stories one of redemption. We are always stronger together.

Getting Back Out There to Give Back

By Caroline Codd

After finding ourselves at home mostly for the last few years, are you looking to get back out into the world? Maybe you have retired or changed careers and find yourself with some more free time on your hands. If you are craving fulfillment and a way to give back, Bethesda House is actively seeking service-oriented individuals to join our volunteer program. This is truly one of the most direct ways you can make a difference in the community and help us in our mission to make Schenectady a safer, more livable and sustainable place for all. While many of our lives may be returning to a sense of normalcy, for the homeless and impoverished it has only gotten more desperate as pandemic-era assistance and eviction protection ends. We are surpassing pre-pandemic levels of vulnerable individuals seeking services and rely on our team of volunteers to help the agency run smoothly, efficiently and compassionately. By regularly volunteering, you get an inside look into the hope and intentional care that is offered to those with nowhere else to go. Getting to know our guests and residents brings tangible humanity to an issue we may only support from afar. If you have been pondering how you can help or how to better spend your time, volunteering may be the ticket to a greater sense of fulfillment, connection and purpose you are seeking. Fill out a volunteer application at our website bethesda.org and become part of the change today.



WE ALL NEED A PLACE TO REST

By Caroline Codd

Aging is a natural part of life and yet it is a process filled with complex emotions. Grateful to have made it this far while also wondering if we've made the best of our lives. Have we lived truly and loved deeply and will we get to rest? Whether it is embraced or resisted, getting older ideally means that we can take a breath and enjoy our families, knowing we are cared for as our faculties leave us. Sadly, this is not the case for many older Americans whose families may not have the health coverage or financial ability to truly take them in once they are no longer able to work and provide for themselves. They end up in government-run care homes far from their family or as we're seeing more of now – homeless with nowhere to go.

The senior population has found themselves in the middle of a storm. With housing prices rising and a severe affordable housing shortage, plus inflation and loss of the ability to work due to the pandemic, many must make ends meet with limited social security and disability benefits – neither of which have kept up with the rising cost of living. Baby Boomers have long been the dominant unhoused group of adults – and they're entering their senior years. They have lived a lifetime of economic and social uncertainty and now, they're coming to Bethesda House with nowhere else to go.

Carl* is one such senior. Carl, now 63 years old, came to Bethesda House five years ago and has been part of our permanent supportive housing program since. He was in and out of shelters most of his adult life. When he was



finally able to find an apartment in community housing, his health declined and he then found himself in and out of the hospital. During one hospital stint, he let a friend stay in his apartment to look after it while he was gone. Carl came back to find his apartment trashed and a letter notifying him he had broken housing rules and was expected to move out immediately. Taking what little belongings he could carry, he came to Bethesda House with his health ailing and his future uncertain.

This is unfortunately, not an uncommon story. Scores of older individuals are getting kicked out of their housing for a myriad of reasons. Some are months behind on rent after the pandemic, some are barely scraping by on fixed income and unable to afford staggering rent hikes. Some are unable to keep their apartment clean under affordable senior housing guidelines due to untreated mental illness or general mental decline. Now that eviction courts are open again, landlords are taking every opportunity they can to get these older tenants out so they can raise their rent prices. This population cannot afford appropriate legal counsel and due to mental illness or general mental decline in old age, are not able to advocate for themselves. Therefore, these cases often go in favor of the municipal housing or landlords and once kicked out, it is extremely difficult to get back in.

You might be thinking wait – 50 or 60 years old is still young! And with modern medicine and a healthy lifestyle, it absolutely is. But geriatric conditions have been shown to occur in the homeless population 10 to 20 years younger than the general population. At 63 years old, Carl needs frequent breathing treatments and is not able to live on his own. Another woman came to Bethesda House's emergency shelter recently with a walker after being kicked out of her senior housing. These individuals don't only need case management, they need active medical support and treatment.

This will be directly addressed by Cara House's medical care program and medical respite beds, a first of its kind for Schenectady County. The medical respite beds will provide ongoing care for residents in our permanent supportive housing apartments in addition to the care provided by the in-house medical program, open to the public with a fully equipped and staffed office that will address ongoing medical and psychiatric care needs.

To meet the complex needs of the increasingly vulnerable elderly population in our community, Bethesda House has continued to ensure we are ready and capable to serve. Our day program opens first thing in the morning so anyone who has stayed in our emergency shelter or is waiting for services can access

them right away. This population can be hard to follow as many don't have cell phones or permanent contacts, so ensuring contact is critical. With the older population, we specifically make sure they are signed up for benefits and food stamps and will advocate to get them the highest amount possible. SNAP benefits have been drastically cut this year after pandemic benefits were removed. Some individuals are seeing their benefits drop as much as over \$200 a month and the elderly population has been most affected by this change. According to research from AARP's Public Policy Institute, among households that participated in SNAP benefits, 8.7 million included at least one person age 50 or older. With grocery prices continuing to linger at an all-time high, hunger and food-security are critical issues for this population. Maintaining a well-stocked food pantry and providing financial, housing and medical services are priorities for Bethesda House as we aid these individuals in finding peace in their later years.

I asked Carl what his dreams were and he said, "to stay healthy and to find [his] own space to rest." At the time of our interview, he had an interview scheduled with Section 8 housing later that day. They opened up appointments for the first time in years and with the help of our residential program leaders, Crystal and April, his dreams might be closer than he thinks. At Bethesda House, we will always strive to make these dreams a reality for all who walk through our doors. Everyone deserves the decency of a peaceful life and we will continue to carry those into this realm of possibility, no matter their age, background or ability. In this House of Mercy, we offer the chance to rest.

Sources:

- <https://www.aarp.org/home-family/your-home/info-2022/americas-homeless-over-50.html>
- <https://www.aarp.org/politics-society/advocacy/info-2023/emergency-snap-benefits-ending.html>
- <https://www.npr.org/2023/03/07/1161417967/snap-benefits-food-stamps>

Save the Dates!!!



August 9, 2023
Cheers - Live Band



October 19, 2023
Dinner and Trivia

Visit www.bethesdahs.org for details.

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

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>Food</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-perishable items <p>Kitchen</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spices, coffee and tea • Can openers • Pots and pans • Cooking utensils <p>Clothing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gently used items for men/women • Men's sweatpants, sweatshirts, T-shirts in various sizes • Practical shoes • Spring/Summer clothing • New underwear and socks <p>Hygiene Products</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular and hotel size shampoo, deodorant, toothpaste, soap, razors, toothbrushes and feminine hygiene products | <p>Linens</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sheets, towels, washcloths • Blankets <p>Seasonal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home Depot/Lowes gift card <p>Our Veterans' Program needs the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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) |
|--|--|

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 bethesdahs.org for details.

Gifts that Keep on Giving

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

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



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

Name _____

Organization _____

Address _____

Daytime Phone _____

Fax _____

E-Mail _____

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

Credit Card: MC Visa AMEX Discover

No: _____

Exp. Date: _____ Sec. Code: _____

Signature: _____

Are you a GE Employee/Retiree? Yes No
(Bethesda House is a GE Match Recipient)

Would you like to learn more about volunteer opportunities at Bethesda House? Yes No

You can also make donations at www.bethesdahs.org

WEATHERING THE STORMS TOGETHER

By Caroline Codd

While we are still grappling with the health risks and fallout of COVID-19, the post-COVID economy is here. For most people, regardless of income or financial security, this has meant tighter budgets, more frugal spending, and best attempts at maintaining stability during a possible upcoming economic downturn. For those who remember the Great Recession, December '07 – June '09, this is an unnerving scenario, especially for those who may not have the financial capital to weather the storm. However, financial experts are resoundingly telling the public not to panic. Be prepared, but don't panic. The labor market is strong, household income is generally healthy and no two recessions look the same. In this case, many are planning for a slow burn, a "slowcession," in lieu of a large economic crash.

In the spirit of preparedness, how does a possible recession affect the homeless and impoverished, who don't necessarily have the means or capacity to plan for the future and are just trying to get through the day with adequate food and shelter? Increases in homelessness are one of the last visible results of an economic downturn as individuals and families do everything they can for as long as they can to avoid eviction, including stretching credit cards and falling back on family and friends if they can. We are just now seeing the numbers following the pandemic shutdown and while overall, rates remained similar or decreased for families, veterans and children, HUD is reporting a 16% increase in homelessness from 2020-2022 in chronically homeless individuals and individuals with disabilities.

This is the population Bethesda House is designed to serve. It is a population already vulnerable to economic volatility as their disabilities often prevent them from fully participating in the labor market and creating viable safety nets. 32% of the population we serve has a developmental disability, 59% has a physical disability and 95% struggle with mental illness. Our wraparound services are designed to provide the safety net they need to make their day-to-day life more manageable with the goal of finding long-term stability and fulfillment in their lives. We have continued to grow our outreach in spite of



unfavorable economic circumstances over the years and will always continue to answer the call of those in need. The doors to this "House of Mercy" will always stay open.

Bethesda House offers financial case management, life skills & literacy training and a variety of support systems to help those struggling to make ends meet. Our active street outreach case management program and outreach through the Schenectady HUB and community partners allows us to get chronically homeless individuals connected to same-day services in addition to permanent supportive and transitional housing. Cara House – our new 42-bed permanent supportive and emergency housing facility – will help alleviate some of the affordable housing shortages in Schenectady and offer on-site re-entry, case management, and medical services. Even with uncertain economic times ahead, we are confident in the strength of our foundation and its ability to weather the storm. We have focused on proactive solutions-oriented growth so we can provide preventative care to a population that is susceptible to falling through the cracks. Bethesda House will stand strong through the upcoming months and years ahead – and so will our community.

Sources:

<https://www.marketplace.org/2021/01/14/pandemic-could-cause-double-homelessness-great-recession/>

https://www.hud.gov/press/press_releases_media_advisories/ HUD_No_22_253

We are Building Cara House and You Can Help

BUY A PAVER CAMPAIGN: Your eternal support to end homelessness

You can buy a personalized paver for the Cara House garden and entranceway to help us create the new Bethesda House residence, Cara House. Once you selected the size of the brick to purchase, you will enter what you would like to have engraved on the order form.

Paver Sizes & Prices

4" x 8" Brick Paver	\$100	3 Lines of Text, 20 Characters Total
8" x 8" Brick Paver	\$250	5 Lines of Text, 20 Characters Total, Clipart Available
12" x 12" Paver	\$1,500	7 Lines of Text, 20 Characters Total Can include a Custom Business Logo, Personal Logo or Clipart (call us for details)



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 Stroble, Terry & Anne Marie
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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@bethesdahs.org or (518) 374-7873, ext. 120 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.

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Elaine Ognibene
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In Honor of

William & Janis Phillips

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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Director of Residential Services



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Photography by Jessica Gravelin

FUNDRAISING

At the end of the day it's not about what you have or even what you've accomplished... it's about who you've lifted up, who you've made better. It's about what you've given back.

Time flies! On May 5th, 2023 we had our **10th annual** Bowl for Bethesda Fundraiser "Strikes Against Homelessness". Falling on Cinco de Mayo, we had bright colorful decorations everywhere and the spirit of festivities was high. Bowl for Bethesda is always one of our favorite fundraising events as we come together as a community for some good old-fashioned friendly competitive fun. Getting staff, friends and our long-term supporters together in one place means so much more after not being able to for two years.

Seeing the passion, commitment and heart-felt support from the attendees reinvigorates us and reaffirms our mission to help the homeless and impoverished in Schenectady County. This year our fundraising efforts are especially critical as we approach the grand opening of Cara House.

Together we can strike out homelessness! Along with our bowlers, **a special Thank You goes out to our eight (8) lane sponsors and nine (9) turkey sponsors.** We raised a total of **\$17,000!**

Lane Sponsors: Greenbush Tape & Label, Frank and Son's Body Works, Sunmark Federal Credit Union, Bennett Contracting LLC, Regeneron, COINS Foundation, Paul Frank, and Kimarie Sheppard.

Turkey Sponsors: Rivers Resort and Casino, SRG Architects, Capitaland Motors Inc., Tech Solutions LLC, Representative Michelle Ostrelch, Genghis and Nala Khan, Gary and Kathleen Dunkerly, Susan Williams, and John Sheppard.

This year we had awards for Best Team Name: Bethesda House Staff "Bowlaritas", Women's High Score: Eastern Parkway United Methodist Church "Holy Rollers" Men's High Score: Rivers Resort & Casino "River Riders", Most Gutter Balls: Bro-ling; and Team Raising the Most in Donations: Eastern Parkway United Methodist Church's "Holy Rollers."

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 3, 2024. MARK YOUR CALENDARS SO WE CAN SEE YOU THERE!

