



Building a more compassionate community one person at a time THE BEACON

Fall/Winter 2023

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

A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



The fall and winter season presents an opportunity to reflect on the year that is ending and to make plans for the one that is coming. Our ability to serve has grown with the completion of our capital project, Cara House. We brought you on our journey with each newsletter, sharing the excitement we have in providing affordable housing and shelter to the

homeless. The journey has been a long one but we feel more prepared than ever for this expansion, knowing it is needed in our community.

During this chilly time of the year, we recognize it as a time to come in from the cold, share hot, nutritious meals with our families, and enjoy the simple closeness and friendship of those familiar to us, people we trust and love. As the sun goes down earlier, it is time to rest, slow down, and cook our favorite comfort meals in the sanctity of our homes.

Imagine, as you are wrapped in your blanket of coziness that there are hundreds of people who are in the raw elements looking for shelter to escape the bone chilling cold. There are greater needs in the winter months due to the harsh weather, as vulnerable individuals seek shelter

from the elements. Bethesda House's emergency shelter and code blue shelter temporarily houses 40 individuals each night. With Cara House opening, our capacity to shelter those from the cold will also expand. We couldn't have done this without your support.

Our mission to serve others is not taken lightly. We value the opportunity to impact someone's life for the better by planting seeds of change. We meet people where they are and ensure resources are available and provided to them to help them achieve their goals.

Bethesda House offers food, clothing, basic living needs such as showers and laundry services, medical care and social work, case management and housing, which impact lives every day. Our comprehensive services wrap around each individual providing support until it is no longer needed. We walk with these individuals every step of the way, believing in their inherent dignity and worthiness of a meaningful life.

If you're in the area, feel free to drive by 917 State Street and see Cara House! It is so powerful to see in real life. Great things are occurring at Bethesda House because of the support we receive from all of you in the community. Whether it is financially or through other means, please know your support is making a difference in the lives of others for years to come.

Kimarie A. Sheppard



Cara House, a Friend for Those In Need

By Caroline Codd

“No man is a failure who has friends.” – It’s a Wonderful Life

In the last three years, everyone who has read our newsletter, donated, attended a fundraiser or spread the word of our mission has done so much more than keep the doors to this *House of Mercy* open and ready to serve. You have upheld a dream. A dream to fill a critical need for affordable housing in Schenectady and to continue to expand our services for the most vulnerable members in our community.

Cara House, meaning “a friend” in Gaelic, will welcome those in need with open arms. Our grand opening day is finally here!

On November 30th we will cut the ribbon in a ceremony to celebrate another door opening for those who have found every other door shut and locked. 26 permanent supportive housing apartments, 16 emergency beds, a myriad of offices, a fully stocked medical examination office, and a classroom. Its walls will hold the weary and lost. Cara House will offer opportunities to rest, re-evaluate paths taken, and rehabilitate and restructure lives of those in need.

Located within walking distance from our flagship at 834 State Street, it will serve as a gateway for those in need of shelter, wraparound services, and a sense of community. With state of the art appliances, furniture and storage space, those who have lived in the throes of chronic homelessness with only the belongings on their back, will finally have a place to call home. Many coming out of incarceration with no support system will have a sense of structure to lean on as they learn to live outside of prison walls. The medically compromised and disabled will have ongoing comprehensive care as they seek to stabilize.

Others will have a safe place to lay their head at night and a friendly face to connect them to life-changing services. Those suffering from addiction will have peer support to help them on the road to recovery. Our growing staff will have space to work.

This is so much more than another building in the area. Cara House is a beacon of hope to those encumbered with hardship and a symbol of the hard work, dedication and generosity of all those who cared to make this dream come true. To those who took the time, energy and commitment to make a difference. To you, our steadfast supporters over all these years – the last three especially.

Cara House will admit an initial group of residents before the end of November to fill some of the permanent supportive housing apartments. We expect to be at capacity by the end of the year. The medical care program is ready for operation and we are working to solidify the re-entry and educational components. Although we have all felt the effects of the delays in Cara House’s opening, the delay has given us additional time to ensure comprehensive and effective programming.

Cara House will carry on the legacy of Bethesda House’s mission for years to come. A simple thank you is not enough to let you know we hold the deepest gratitude in our hearts for your unwavering support in this journey.

May we all carry the spirit of Cara House in our hearts, seeking to be a friend to all.



CODE BLUE, A Growing Need

By Caroline Codd

As we gear up for the colder months ahead, we want to ensure we are prepared and ready for the influx of individuals seeking warm shelter at night. Many are street homeless, some are squatting or living in facilities with no heat, some seek a smaller, well-staffed shelter for safety reasons.

Bethesda House has offered CODE BLUE services in Schenectady since 2016. Turning our hospitality room into a shelter, we offer beds, blankets, food and hot drinks for those seeking shelter for the night. Everyone who comes through the door has the opportunity to sign up for social work and case management services on the spot, to begin their pathway to stability. It is crucial to our mission that we make these points of contact to ensure no one is falling through the cracks.

However, this requires diligent seasonal staffing. In previous years, it was a scramble to find a group of driven individuals who are passionate about our mission and able to work overnight hours. This year, we are thrilled that we have fully staffed our CODE BLUE program for the year, thanks to the efforts of our finance and program management teams. They came together to recruit, hire and train our largest pool of qualified applicants to date. This is no small feat and we are so grateful to have such a great, dedicated team set up in place.

This year it will be especially important to be as prepared as possible considering the influx of migrants coming into Schenectady with nowhere to go. Over the summer, Schenectady County issued a state of emergency over the number of migrants who were coming from downstate and elsewhere in the country and put onto buses with little to no integration plan in place. Nearly 200 families were sent to Schenectady County over the summer and with current affordable housing shortages, few have been stably placed. Now in the Code Blue season, their ability to find safe shelter is all the more dire. These asylum-seekers include families and children with real and urgent needs. Bethesda House has a strong working relationship with Schenectady County Department of Social Services and we stand strong to shelter those in need.

Anyone who has spent a night in the cold, even if it was just being underprepared during a camping trip, knows it can be a harrowing experience. Long-term exposure poses serious physical and mental health threats. Many succumb to self-medicating to either sleep or stay awake through the night. It is not something to wish upon any human being and Bethesda House will continue to work with local providers to ensure there are enough warm beds this season. May we continue to offer the warmth in our hearts and of our services to all those who seek refuge here in Schenectady.



Hidden Homelessness

By Caroline Codd

At Bethesda House, we work to serve the most complex, chronic and debilitating cases of homelessness. Our doors are open and our rooms provide a safety net to all who come seeking help, no matter the condition they come in. Some come without having showered or having had a proper meal in days. Some come after leaving dangerous living conditions. Some come from the bus stop with nothing but the bags they carry, dropped in an unfamiliar place with no one to turn to. While there is not one single version of homelessness, these are the kinds of situations we often think of when we think of what it means to be homeless. Haggard, weary, no security blanket and no shelter. These cases are real and challenging and we see them every day.

There are other, less obvious forms of homelessness, however. They are just as real and just as challenging but may slip under the radar. These are the lives of the hidden homeless, those who may appear to be well-off, employed and put-together but are secretly crashing on couches, staying in shelters or more often – living out of their car.

Vehicular homelessness has been on the rise for years now due to lack of affordable housing, lack of wage increases, and the rising costs of rent. We see cases all the time of individuals with good, steady full-time jobs who come to Bethesda House to shower or get a hot meal. They show up to work every day cleanly dressed and their coworkers have no idea they spent the night in a parking lot, driving around looking for a safe, well-lit space to spend the night.

“Van Life” has been coined as a trendy lifestyle decision for those who choose to revamp their cars or RV’s into stylish, comfortable living quarters while they travel long-term and highlight their adventures as a rustic, bohemian way of life. However, for many, living out of their car is not a lifestyle choice; it is a necessity.

There is a nation-wide affordable housing crisis and Schenectady is no exception. It has existed for years, but has risen dramatically due to inflationary pressures compounded by stagnant wages that are unable to meet the rising costs of housing and of living. While there has been an influx of new apartment buildings in the city, specifically downtown and near the Mohawk River, these are often out of the Section 8 voucher price range. The Schenectady Municipal Housing Authority has a combined waitlist of more than 7,000 seeking a public housing unit or housing voucher that would pay for a portion of a qualified applicant’s rent. 60% of the list, which has a years-long waiting period, are residents of Schenectady.

We have learned over our 31 years of serving the most vulnerable, that homelessness and poverty do not discriminate and there is an extremely fine line between relative security and losing everything. Bad health, bad debt, or any unexpected major expense or major life change can cripple one’s ability to make rent payments on time or come up with the savings to find a new lease – even if it’s a more affordable one. Those living out of their

car may have freedom of mobility, they may be able to make it to work on time, they may have friends to rely on or money to buy the necessities, but the bottom line is they are still at risk and should not be overlooked.

Over the past decade, municipalities around the country with large homeless populations have passed laws banning activities such as panhandling or sleeping in public areas. Ordinances limiting where people can live in vehicles are now the fastest-growing type of such restrictions, according to the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty. These restrictions severely compound the stress that already exists in mobile homelessness. Living out of one’s car makes them vulnerable to robbery or assault and every night is spent hoping for protection to get through it.

At Bethesda House, we are committed to advocating for more affordable housing in Schenectady and guiding vulnerable individuals gradually through the housing lottery and voucher program, as well as taking stock of their personal finances to ensure they have the most support possible. Our staff is well-trained to recognize the less obvious signs of homelessness and poverty. We conduct regular outreach to wrap these individuals in services that will put them on the path toward long-term stability and safety.

Homelessness, in any shape or form, is a not a choice. We will always commit to doing everything we can to ensure those who walk through our doors have the proper resources and support to empower them to make decisions to improve their livelihood. We work together so no one is lost.



Volunteer!

By Caroline Codd



Volunteer with us and see the tangible difference you can make in your community! There is truly no greater gift than your time this holiday season, and we'd love to spend that time with you. Our volunteers are like family to us and some have been with us for many years. We

love to utilize each person's unique skills and passions so they truly feel fulfilled at the end of their day. Whether you are a total people person or prefer working alone, we have a variety of opportunities to help the homeless and impoverished in Schenectady.

If you are passionate about getting to know the population we serve, the hospitality room is a great way to engage with them for a few hours. If your love language is food, our kitchen is always in need of preppers, cooks and servers for our daily meal. If you're a Type A organizer, our clothing room and food pantries are great projects to tackle. If you are an office worker, our admin office is open for assistance with a variety of in-house projects. Seasonally, we have volunteers help in the garden so if you have a green thumb this would be great for you!

There is truly something for everyone here at Bethesda House. When Cara House opens later this year, we will need volunteers more than ever to help those operations get up and running. If you are looking for a way to give back, we make it our mission to make everyone feel welcome, supported and have fun while they are volunteering here.

Send us note online at bethesdahs.org or to adminasst@bethesdahs.org! We'd love to have you.

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

Clothing

- Gently used items for men/women
- Men's sweatpants, sweatshirts, T-shirts in various sizes
- Practical shoes
- Winter clothing
- New underwear and socks

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
- 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)

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

Save the Dates!!!

Bethesda House's 2024 Fundraisers are scheduled!



February 8, 2024

Virtual Bingo



May 10, 2024

Bowl for Bethesda



August 8, 2024

Cheers - Live Band



October 17, 2024

Water's Edge at the Lighthouse: Dinner and Trivia

Details for each event will be posted on our website:
www.bethesdahs.org

View our website for photos of the summer and fall fundraisers.

Ahead of the Curve

By Caroline Codd

When it comes to helping the homeless and impoverished in Schenectady County, Bethesda House has always been on the cutting edge of the best way to serve their needs. Our 32 years of expertise and team of talented, committed individuals has strengthened our ability to look at the whole picture when it comes to meeting the challenges this population faces. Our work is effective, our mission is all encompassing, and our vision is future-oriented.

Over the years, we have implemented some key programs and services before they were national standards including Housing First, mobile Health Home care, and our in-house medical care program. As national conversations around homelessness continue to shift, here we will highlight Housing First – how it began, why it is important, and how it is a key tenant to our success in the future.

The Housing First model has its origins in “Supported Housing”, which was implemented in the 1990s as a way to meet a rising crisis in homelessness across the nation. Previously, hospitals had served as homestays for those with physical and psychiatric conditions that kept them from living independently. However, as hospitals began to decentralize in the 1960s, the following decades brought a swift fallout in the shortage of beds and services for this population. In its stead, the “staircase model” was introduced, which touted housing as the end goal to a program requiring abstinence from drugs and alcohol, willingness to receive psychiatric treatment, and proof of ability to live independently. While the goal may have had good intentions of supporting vulnerable populations, the model in itself was flawed. More often than not, individuals would get “stuck” on the staircase, unable to make their way up to housing as they were not just expected to be a normal citizen – they were expected to be a perfect one.

Supported housing came about as an alternative to the staircase model to quickly provide housing in tandem with flexible help and treatment from mobile support teams. There were no requirements for sobriety and treatment was provided for as long as needed. Built on the supported housing model, but applied to people experiencing homelessness, Housing First was developed by Dr. Sam Tsemberis, a faculty member of the Department of Psychology at New York University School of Medicine. It was tailored to individuals experiencing homelessness and made housing the first stop on the staircase instead of the last. If individuals were kicked out of housing due to behavior or support needs, Housing First would help them find another place to live and support them as long as needed. Research at the time and since then has demonstrated that this model is more effective at ending long-term homelessness than previous models of care. Housing First programs appear to reduce the use of hard drugs, improve the health status of people living with HIV/AIDS, and reduce the use of costly emergency services, all of which are indicators of improved health.

Why is this important now? Currently there is a bill on the House of Representatives floor that would undermine the

effectiveness of Housing First in reducing homelessness and keeping people off the streets. The bill is called Housing Promotes Livelihood and Ultimate Success (Housing PLUS) and would prohibit the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development from prioritizing providers who do not require drug rehabilitation and psychiatric care treatment as part of their programming. Housing and homelessness advocates have stated that this is simply an updated version of the staircase model utilized in the 80s and 90s. By restricting the amount of funding available to agencies like Bethesda House, it will restrict a key tenant of effective homelessness prevention – that housing is a human right that we should not deny to anyone. Regardless of their ability to maintain sobriety or comply with traditional psychiatric care models, they are human beings with significant traumas who will ebb and flow on their pathway to stability.

We know that life is not linear. It is full of obstacles, challenges, negative cycles and trauma that we all have to overcome. For the most vulnerable in our community, we cannot determine on what timeline or within what timeframe they should overcome the hardship they have endured. Regardless of their progress, they deserve a safe place to live with access to wraparound services should they so choose. Giving them the *choice* is what encourages self-sufficiency, not mandating it. By giving them the choice to engage in services unique to them, it is more likely they will commit to these services and make positive changes in their life. We have offered Housing First services since 2002 and have seen over the last 21 years that it is the most effective and most humane model to address the homeless crisis. It is not a one-stop solution to ending the flow of people experiencing homelessness entering into the homeless system. In order to do that, decades of overdue investments in affordable housing and rental assistance need to be established. However, we believe in a humane society as a just, hospitable and inclusive community rooted in and affirming the inherent dignity of every person.

Our Housing First initiative started with a few scattered apartments. We now have 31 permanent supportive housing facilities and will be adding 26 more with Cara House opening this year. This is only the beginning as we look to transition more locations in Schenectady into affordable housing, working alongside our community partners to offer life-saving accommodations for those in need. We believe in a Schenectady that uplifts all who call it home. We will always believe in the potential of all who come through our doors, no matter where they have been, who they are, or why they are here. Compassion comes in many forms and for us; it is accepting people exactly where they are.

Resources:

<https://www.huduser.gov/portal/periodicals/em/spring-summer-23/highlight2.html>

<https://endhomelessness.org/blog/why-the-housing-plus-act-is-a-threat-to-housing-first/>

Friends up to \$100

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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.

In-Kind Donors

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Robert Christoffel
 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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FUNDRAISING

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

– Hank Rosso



Fundraising makes a difference! Bethesda House's Development Committee has regular meetings to plan our annual events to ensure they are successful, meaningful, and fun. Fundraising dollars support Bethesda's work to provide critical services to the homeless and poor in Schenectady County. Our on-going fundraising motivates project and program planning, and it promotes program growth and development.

Light Up Bethesda House

On October 19 2023, we had Bethesda House's 13th Annual Fall Fundraiser and it was a hit! We raised over \$30,000 – the most we have raised out of any year! It was a magical night filled with positive energy, great friends, raffles, TRIVIA, prizes, and FUN!

Matthew Olmstead of TFLentertainment, tflentertainment.com, led the TRIVA festivities. He came in last minute to save the day and not only led a GREAT game of trivia but had people up and dancing!! We are so grateful he made time for our event.

Thank you to our Event Sponsors: Kevin McCormick, Michelle Ostrelich, SRG Architects, Quick Response Restoration, Tower Auto Sales, Rivers Casino & Resort, Tech Solutions, Cathy Terwilliger, Annette Guido, Jackie Hassfurter, Mohawk Honda, Niskayuna Reformed Church, Sunmark Credit Union, Stewart's, Fox Pest Control, Power Market, Schenectady Fire Department, Mengel Metzger Barr & Co, and Capitaland Motors.

Thank you to our Table Sponsors: Richard and Eunice Werner, Matt and Jenna Adams, Annie and Andy Wood.

Thank you to our Honorary Committee members: Leonard Herman, Loyola Guido, Kimarie Sheppard, Keith and Patricia Barney, Bill and Cheryl Gerstler, Susan Bouton, Paula Waselauskas, Richard and Eunice Werner, Sharran Coppola, Mary Isabella, Alex and Betty Hallenstein, Anthony Ward, John Sheppard, MJ Teresco, Margaret Coker, John and Karen Sapone, and Drew Clark

Special thank you to Times Union, who sent "Were You Seen" photographers to document the event!

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

OCTOBER 17, 2024 FOR OUR 14TH ANNUAL EVENT!



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