

Executive Directors Corner:

Happy Spring!

As I reflect on the past six months, it occurs to me just how busy the agency has been! Dave retired the end of September, my new role as Executive Director began October 1st, and we had a successful Homecoming event in November, all while state budget cuts remain a challenge. The agency has been in a constant state of transition... but with that said; there has been one main constant. All of You!

I would like to express our appreciation to all the many volunteers, donors and Mercy board members who so tirelessly assist us in our daily mission of ending homelessness. Our volunteers have been busy preparing and serving nutritious meals to the Saint Elizabeth House residents and Friendship Center clients. The Wethersfield Police and TJMaxx group donated their time and talent to 'stuff a cruiser' full of items for our program clients. Girl Scout troop 10831 put together care packages filled with various hygiene products for our Clinical Outreach program. For this, we are eternally grateful! Thank you!

This newsletter also highlights our newest program, the Diversion Center at Saint Elizabeth House. I am excited to inform



Stephanie Corbin (L), Shelter Diversion Coordinator, conducts a case conferencing session with case managers (L-R) Jackie Florez, Shefia Ibrahim, and Latoya Smith.

you that the Hartford Diversion Team will be the recipient of the *be homeful* Award for Innovative Work to End Family Homelessness presented by the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness. Furthermore, I have the pleasure of introducing a dear friend of mine

for many years, Donald Shaw. Don and I worked on several projects in the past, so it's only fitting that he is now a Mercy board member who just so happens to have a hobby of being a blogger! Don took an interest in our Diversion Center at one of our board meetings and decided to go over and learn more about it. And in true blogger fashion, he wrote a beautiful article that highlighted the good work that is happening there. Enjoy!

Life Saving Diversions at St. Elizabeth House

Article written by Don Shaw, Jr.

Waiting for the door to open, people are lined up as many as forty deep on a typical weekday morning at St. Elizabeth House's main entrance. They are our neighbors in crisis hoping for support once inside. In imminent danger of being swallowed into the downward cycle of homelessness, they are seeking a lifesaving diversion from living on the street. This is their reality. And it's just a small glimpse of their daily reality that I saw on my recent visit to St. Elizabeth's. I was there to learn first-hand about Mercy Housing and Shelter Corporation's innovative program to divert people away from becoming homeless. Twenty months ago on July 5, 2016, Mercy Housing and Shelter Corporation (Mercy) welcomed its first clients to its newly created Diversion Center at St. Elizabeth House on Main Street in Hartford. Faced with diminishing federal and state financial support for Mercy's long-established transitional housing programs, Executive Director Dave Martineau, now retired, and current Executive Director Judith Gough led a nine month multi-organization collaboration to develop an aggressive "up front" program designed to immediately divert people away from homelessness --- people who are on the brink of having to survive minute to minute alone with no place to go. "This program enhances Mercy's ability to prevent a person from becoming homeless before their situation spins into a full-blown, life threatening crisis," Executive Director Gough told me.

Throughout its thirty-five year old mission of providing housing assistance and supportive services to persons who are homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless, Mercy has prided itself as being on the forefront of creating workable community solutions. Simple and direct, the Diversion Center's goal is to find its clients safe, stable housing rapidly. The Diversion Center's reach is wide. It provides services in what's organized as the Greater Hartford Coordinated Area Network, which, in addition to Hartford and its surrounding towns, includes Enfield, Manchester, East Hartford, Ellington, and Tolland. "Nearly thirty percent of people in this situation [of being homeless] can be diverted from this tragic outcome with minimal mediation," according to Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness workshops. "Often the solution can be overcome with little or no money to reverse the events leading to homelessness," saving Hartford and Connecticut thousands of dollars.

According to Stephanie Corbin, Mercy's Shelter Diversion Coordinator, the diversion process is best described as highly responsive "front door triage." It provides personalized solutions with accompanying emotional support aimed at mitigating the problems leading to a client's crisis. It's all accomplished at the

Volunteers - Community Partners Making A Difference

Diversion Center in centralized coordination with several Hartford based agencies serving the homeless, including Journey Home, the Salvation Army, Community Health Resources, and the City of Hartford. Corbin emphasized that the key to successful client outcomes is case manager creativity. The solution for



each client must address the direct question, "What do we need to do right now to keep you out of the shelter system?" To counsel people in crisis quickly and directly, a collaborative team of case managers from Mercy, the Salvation Army, and Community Health Resources staff the Diversion Center every week. People seeking the Diversion Center's support first all the 211 Infoline, which initially assesses the caller's need

for services, and then, as deemed appropriate, schedules an appointment for them to see a Diversion Center case manager with-in 24 to 48 hours. Appointments are scheduled Monday thru Friday beginning at 9:00 AM.

A sampling of client-specific crisis resolutions include: Arranging a family intervention allowing a teenager to seek redemption and return home after being kicked out for unacceptable behavior; working with a family facing eviction because of an unresolved rent dispute with their landlord; working with a family being evicted for violating a rental agreement by housing non-family members; assisting a client with short-term financial assistance needed to keep them in good stead with their landlord while they recover from a medical setback; providing a client with bus or train fare enabling them to reunite and live with family residing in another state.

In addition to crisis resolution assistance, Diversion Center clients may also see a nurse or physician's assistant in the center's medical suite staffed by Charter Oak Health Center, or find respite in St. Elizabeth House's Friendship Center with a healthy meal, or hot shower. Opened just twenty months ago, Mercy's Diversion Center is still in its formative stage, yet its results to date are encouraging. In fiscal year 2017, 2,577 individuals were seen by a case manager. During that period 456 were diverted from homelessness, sixty-two of whom were between the ages of 18-24, and 124 required limited financial assistance that helped them avoid homelessness. Further, 1,244 people, whose cases were not readily resolvable, were referred directly to city shelters, and the remaining group were either referred to other area programs, or were deemed ineligible for assistance. According to Executive Director Gough current demand for the Center's diversion service is showing an increase over last fiscal year. With one full year of experience, and a second well underway, the Diversion Center has charted a path for other agencies serving the homeless to follow, and to improve upon collectively. It's a path the Connecticut Department of Housing strongly endorses. It's a path leading to life saving diversions, or perhaps one could say "Mercy-full Diversions."

Volunteering - St. Elizabeth House

Over the past several months a collaborative of South-Asian American women from the Hartford and Tolland counties have identified Mercy Housing and Shelter Corporation as an agency that they wish to support as part of their service to the community. The women have generously donated food items and hygiene products to our residents as well as served meals in our dining hall and Friendship Center Meals Program. Volunteering is a wonderful way to give back to the community and/or a way to teach our young people how to donate their time and talents to those in need.



Members of Salad Bowl and Pink Power two newly formed groups of South Asian-American women, served Brunch at St. Elizabeth House. Also in attendance, Mercy's Board of Trustee, Shyamala Raman!

Stuff A Cruiser Event

Mercy Housing and Shelter Corporation was honored to be the beneficiary of the annual **Stuff A Cruiser** event hosted by TJ Maxx/Marshalls and the Wethersfield Police Department last month. "I was delighted to receive the phone call from Jeff Saddig, of Marmaxx National Task Force, indicating that Mercy Housing and Shelter Corporation's reputation for helping those



Wethersfield Police Detectives Michael Mendez, TJ Maxx Manager, Investigator of Marmaxx National Task Force and Norberto Task Force

in need came to the forefront as a charity he wanted to work with!" exclaimed Mercy's Executive Director, Judith Gough. The event was hosted at the Wethersfield Marshalls store on a warm Saturday in October. We were delighted to be the recipients of two

fully packed cruisers from the Wethersfield Police Department! Detectives Patkoske and Mendez, their sons and future police officer cadets James Darby and Morgan Dlugoleski were on hand to help out! Generous community members were given a list of "wish" items on their way into the store and low and behold came out with socks, under garments, gloves, blankets, boots and slippers for children and adults. In addition to the much needed items, we received cash donations netting our programs an additional \$700.00!

Thank you to everyone who gave so generously!

Thanks to You, last year Mercy ...

- Provided housing assistance and support services to **4,835** individuals
- Served more than **105,229** meals
- Helped **216** individuals secure permanent housing
- Assisted **61** people to find jobs through our Jumpstart Program
- Helped divert **300** household from becoming homeless

Gifts given from July 1, 2016 to June 30, 2017

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Sister Pat McKeon

Paul and Kelly Campanelli

Myles and Sherry Hubbard

Sister Laura Marie Meskill

Sister Rita Garneau

Reverend William R Metzler

Rita Griswold

Gifts Made In Honor (continued)

Jean Morrison

Carol Gourlie

Mary Lou Onidi

James Iacobellis

Norman Pelletier

Margaret Collins

Sister Marian Slezak

Sister Julie Horvath

Ralph G. White

Joanne White



Girl Scout Troop 10831 from Hebron Avenue School donating "We Care Packages".

Mercy depends on the generosity of donors like **You**, who provide unrestricted financial assistance, we are able to provide basic needs and services to individuals and families to make the transition from homelessness into a permanent home.

Ways To Give :

Make a one time or monthly donation
In Honor/Memorial Gift
United Way Designation
Planned Giving
Matching Gifts

Donation items from our "Wish List":

Socks	New Twin/Full Blankets
T-Shirts	New Bath Towels
Bus Passes	Pocket-sized Calendars
Laundry Detergent	Disposable Razors
Soap & Shampoo	Non-perishable food: canned vegetables, beans, rice, soup, pasta, pasta sauce, peanut butter, jelly, cereal, baby food, baby formula, tuna etc..
Disposable Razors	
Toothpaste & brushes	
Deodorant	
Hand/Body Lotion	
New Full/Twin Sheets	Coffee
New Pillows	Sugar
	Gift Cards

Homecoming Celebration A Success!

Mercy's much-anticipated 23rd Annual Dreams Can Come True Homecoming Celebration was held at the elegant Society Room, on Pratt Street in downtown Hartford. The evening proved to be a perfect balance of energy and compassion for those we serve!



Celebrity Emcee Mark Zinni of WFSB Channel 3 was on fire with our "Virtual Home" live auction. Guests were treated to take a virtual walk-through of an empty apartment and bid on items to fill an apartment for someone moving into their first home. The auction raised more than \$6,000. Over one hundred and fifty guests and sponsors helped to raise nearly \$100,000 for Mercy.



In addition to the virtual tour, guests were able to enjoy gourmet dining stations, bid on silent auction items, and mix and mingle with friends and family while being serenaded by Saxophonist Dave Davis! What a fabulous time we had!



This year's "Sister Patricia McKeon Compassion & Dignity Award" was presented to The Travelers ITLDP Department for their continued support of our mission. The award recognizes an individual or an organization who exemplifies Sister Pat's passion to help homeless persons.

We would like to thank everyone who attended and contributed to the success of the event and a special thanks to all our sponsors:

Bank of America, Barnes Foundation, Charter Oak Health Center, Cheryl Chase & Stuart Bear Foundation, Connecticut Housing Finance Authority, Depcom Power, Farmington Bank, Halloran & Sage LLP, HCC Global, Hoffman Auto Group, Kataria Classic, Marsh USA Inc., PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP, Reid & Riege, PC., Ryan Business Systems, Service Press, Siracusa, Sisters of

Mercy Northeast Community, The Travelers, Tzedakah House LLC, University of Saint Joseph and All American Waste.

**SAVE THE
DATE**

November 1, 2018

**For this year's
Annual Celebration!**

Board of Trustees:

Sarah Treese, *Chair*
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Eric Hanly
Sister Janice Kidney
Andrew Meehan

Shyamala Raman
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For Information about Mercy
Go to: www.mercyhousingct.org

If you would like to receive this newsletter electronically, please email us at: gvendrillo@mercyhousingct.org



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