



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

Spring 2018

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

A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Welcome to Bethesda House's 2017-2018 Spring/Summer Newsletter



As winter fades, we welcome spring and the time of renewal and opportunities to commit to living intentionally. The warmer weather and longer days is a perfect time to get re-energized and re-commit to caring for others and ourselves. Living intentionally is in part renewing our dedication to this place we live in, embracing it as home, and making it a rich environment.

Within the last seven years, Bethesda House has implemented new programs, developed existing services, and stretched our arms out to reach the far corners of our community's most vulnerable citizens. Along the way we sought to activate community members who have been here their whole lives, who came for college and decided to stick around, who showed up for a new job; people who dispose of their income, who live in the heart

of the community, and who live in the areas just a few miles beyond. We are deeply grateful to our donors and volunteers who make it possible to live our mission.

We are looking to grow once again with a new capital project, pending State approval, just a short distance from our main location. Our new residential program is designed to have permanent supportive housing and emergency shelter units. Words and education can shape a life or change things forever. The service rich environment will include educational components designed to help residents live independently, act with a purpose, and be positive contributors in our community.

I hope you join us on our journey to continue to make a difference!

Many Blessings –

Kimarie A. Sheppard



(L-R) Ellen S, Ellen M, Nancy V, and Sharran C, PG Wright Food Pantry Volunteers



Case Management, Social Work Team

CODE BLUE: A FIRST POINT OF ENTRY

By Caroline Codd

This past November, Bethesda House launched their Code Blue program, which is designed to provide overnight shelter for the homeless community during the coldest months of the year. The Agency is grateful that, with the approval of Schenectady County DSS, the program can transition to a year-round overnight shelter, opening our House of Mercy to those lost in the darkness.

Code Blue at Bethesda House opened in an effort to help manage the overflow that other shelter agencies experienced. However, our case management and social work staff quickly realized the issue ran much deeper than a simple matter of space and bed numbers on cold nights.

Coming through our doors were some of the most severe cases of homelessness, those who slipped through the cracks during the day and only sought shelter as a last minute resort from the bitter, dangerous cold at night. Many of them had untreated physical and mental illnesses and were in critical need of intervention. Some were part of the full-time working poor, juggling multiple jobs during the day but for a myriad of reasons, still unable to maintain permanent housing. These are the faces we don't see during the day and we quickly made it our priority to ensure they were treated with the same dignity and respect as our day guests.

Whoever walks into this House of Mercy, when they walk through our doors they are first and foremost treated as a human being. Participating in our Code Blue program is often the first point of entry to our full range of services including mental health screenings, money management, housing services, and basic hygiene and nutrition needs. Overnight guests, who have not participated in our day services, walk in weary and skeptical but are able to build trust and relationships with our newly implemented full and part-time overnight staff. This trust and consistency is of the utmost importance to ensure these guests feel safe enough to come to Bethesda House during the day and take full advantage of our services.

One such guest has already begun to reap the benefits of consistent shelter coupled with our day program. Timmy is known as the mayor of Schenectady. A boisterous and joyful persona, Timmy suffered from untreated alcoholism and was chronically homeless with no end in sight. Bethesda House staff had tried previously to bring him in for an intake to no avail as his mental illness clouded any desire to regain autonomy and change his lifestyle. But on a cold night in January, Timmy came to Bethesda House seeking shelter and agreed to an intake. He is now in stable housing and works with our staff to manage his mental illness and substance abuse so he can maintain a steady job.

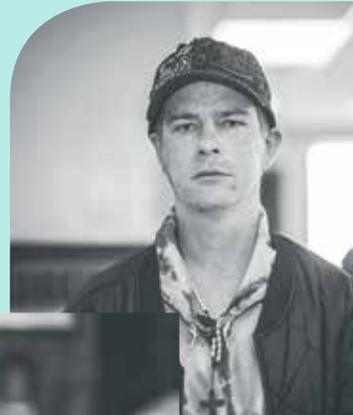
Stories like Timmy's are those that highlight the resiliency of the human spirit and bring to light the need for true human connection when aiding the impoverished and homeless community. Healing and self-improvement are more than possible when one can take their first steps within a safety net. We at Bethesda House are forever grateful and humbled by our volunteers, donors and partners who have made this year-round overnight service possible. You are the heroes in this narrative and a voice for all who are fighting to live in the light.

OVERNIGHT EMERGENCY SHELTER AN EYE OPENING EXPERIENCE

By Louise O'Leary, Director of Program & Case Management Services

As you are reading this newsletter, I want you to look around your surroundings and imagine fitting everything you need into a book bag or suitcase, your clothing, your medications, your personal items, family pictures, and all your important papers. Now I want you to think about taking that book bag or suitcase and leaving your home and going out into the nowhere. You have no place to call home and you have no family or friends that can assist you and help you out. Now imagine that you have been told that because it's freezing outside, you can go to a Code Blue Shelter that will give you a cot to sleep on and somewhere to put your "worldly belongings". This is what our guests experience as they enter the door at Bethesda House's Code Blue Shelter.

The Agency's 2017- 2018 Code Blue Shelter opened November 2017. I had just returned to Bethesda House at the end of October to re-join the professional team, this time as the Director of Program and Case Management Services. One of my new responsibilities was the oversight of the Code Blue Shelter. I have worked in Schenectady County for approximately 17 years in some capacity as a caseworker or prevention worker. The last 9 years I have worked with the adults at risk population. However, it was not until I started to get to know the shelter guests that I really began to understand what it was like to be homeless. I always thought that these were the people that DSS took care of and placed somewhere in emergency shelter until they could find an apartment. Not true at all. These guests made it very clear to me



that they are literally homeless. Upon completing intakes, it was even more evident to me that the majority of this population has no income, no insurance, nobody to help them; except each other.

Over time, I began to see relationships form. I began to see the guests starting to take care of each other. I began to see many of them leave and not come back and would always ask myself, "Where do they go?" This population is so fluid in their movements around the county and they take care of each other. It is a very secretive and quiet population.

As Code Blue ends, it is noticeable that the "frequent fliers" have stopped utilizing the shelter. It saddens our hearts to know that some have returned to the streets leaving us with no indication of where they returned. My hope is that with our new year-long Overnight Emergency Shelter, DSS referrals will result in the return of some of the Code Blue guests and the stabilization work that they started with staff will continue. Our wide variety of services will help each gain safe and permanent housing. One can only hope that this is the case.



For Homeless Community, Weather is more than Small Talk

By Caroline Codd

There's a reason the weather has become a cliché for small talk. From close friends to in-laws to business partners to the cashier at your local co-op, it's one thing we are all universally impacted by, a variable to which we can all relate. It affects our mood and our mobility. We plan around it by the outfits we choose and the activities we allow ourselves to look forward to. In many ways, the weather runs the course of our lives.

For the homeless community, however, the weather is more than a conversation starter. For the most vulnerable, weather can be a life or death situation, especially this past northeastern winter. We all remember that week in January with record breaking temperature drops and a below freezing wind bite when traveling from our car to our destination was an act of bravery against the elements, a mad dash to regain feeling in our fingers again. This cold was deep and for those on the streets, it was desperate.

For those without shelter at night, some dive further into self-medication as a means to numb themselves to sleep for survival. This action serves as grounds for other shelters to turn guests away, which tragically led to a fatality in Albany this past winter. No human being should suffer that way, which is why Bethesda House is committed to providing 24/7 shelter and case management services during the cold months to the most impoverished and chronically homeless in our community.

This year, Bethesda House was able to transition our seasonal Code Blue program to a 365-day overnight shelter, something we could not have done without support from funding sources or the gracious support and giving hearts of the volunteers and donors who lift us up daily. The weather impacts our daily lives in more ways than one and coming out of this seemingly endless winter has been challenging for us all. Next time the weather is brought up to pass the time, let's keep in our hearts those who are battling the elements with their livelihood. A warm bed may save their life and one small act of kindness may reignite their spirit to get through the winter and harsh conditions. We all deserve the chance to experience the life that is reborn, renewed and restored again with the coming of spring.

It Starts Within: Mental Health Services at Bethesda House

By Caroline Codd

After keeping our winter coats begrudgingly in the front closet and holding our breath for a ray of sun, the fresh air has finally arrived with the springtime. A season of new opportunities, renewed aspirations, elated moods and increased activity, spring can serve as the motivator we need to approach our lives intentionally and with clarity.

There are, however, a large number of those who do not find peace and stability during the spring transition and instead feel a heightened sense of the inner turbulence brought on by winter. Most of us are familiar with Seasonal Affective Disorder, a condition in which cold temperatures and lack of Vitamin D can trigger and exaggerate episodes of mental illness. As the season changes, we rely on the sunshine to be a quick fix and while there may be temporary relief, many are still left wondering, "Why don't I feel better?" The affects of seasonal transition on our minds and bodies can leave us feeling lost, listless, distracted, and scatter-brained.

This is especially true for the countless cases of untreated mental illness within the homeless community who do not have access to or awareness of aiding services. It's estimated approximately 26% of adults living in homeless shelters suffer from serious chronic mental illness and 46% of adults are dually diagnosed with severe mental illness and substance abuse disorders. At Bethesda House, an estimated 90% in the Emergency Overnight Shelter, suffer from mental illness, and while the cold months may bring some of the most severe cases through our doors for shelter, the spring and summer can push them back into the fray. With very few affordable housing options in Schenectady, the most vulnerable and mentally unstable in our community will opt for the warm outdoors over a crowded shelter, if given the choice. For this reason, Bethesda House is committed to engaging the population not only within the agency walls, but also out in the community, and collaborating with other community based organizations in order to establish a continuum of care year-round.

A long-time goal of Bethesda House has been to offer in-house mental health services with walk-in availability in a safe, trusted environment. In this season of growth, we are fortunate to have received funding to see this goal come to fruition through our new community outreach intensive case manager and psychiatric nurse practitioner. These positions allow us to provide emergency intervention and access to treatment, whether they are primarily involved in day or evening services, or out in the community.

The key to mental health care is consistency. As life begins again in the spring time, we are reminded that mental illness is a year-round struggle and can ebb and flow during periods of transition. By providing mental health services within our House of Mercy, we can begin to consistently and effectively help this community heal and create hope for a better, lighter tomorrow.



Carlos S, Community Outreach Case Manager

Thank you, *Union College Empty Bowls Project* for a fun, entertaining, and informative event on April 22nd. A wonderful way to end Earth Day! The musicality of the students was impressive and many in the audience sang softly along. The bowls, as always, were colorful and eye-catching - another great year! Thank you for including Bethesda House!

IT TAKES A VILLAGE

By Caroline Codd

It takes a village to raise a child. It takes a village to build a business. It takes a village to follow a dream. It takes a village to help us all feel like we belong.

At the heart of Bethesda House is our belief in the healing power of community. Without the help and selfless support of our village, we would not be able to provide the building blocks for our community – starting with those who are the most vulnerable. Everybody needs a support system and it is part of our mission to provide that to those who feel they have run out of options, or who are in desperate need of a place where they feel safe, seen, and understood.

We are here to offer that refuge in our house of mercy. Over the last few years, Bethesda House has seen exponential growth in the range of services we offer and the number of people we serve. We are now able to offer full-staffed case management solutions, mental health engagement and stabilization, educational resources, and overnight shelter services in addition to standard housing, nutrition, and education programs. We have expanded our staff so that our guests and residents can receive the best quality care and we have served many who, until this year, were merely surviving on the fringes.

None of this would be possible without the continued support, generosity and collective heart of our donors, volunteers, and community supporters.

We are forever grateful and will continue striving toward meeting the needs of our village.



Thank you, Matt Sammarco from Tri-City Valley Cats, for providing tickets to a game during this season. How exciting! Our residents really do enjoy outings - you brought smiles to many faces.

THE POWER OF PATTERNS

By Caroline Codd

Have you taken notice of the patterns in your life lately? Some patterns are useful to us - healthy morning routines or a metro system that runs like clockwork.

Other patterns, however, have the ability to take control of our lives and make us feel powerless to our circumstances such as, poor spending habits or recurring health scares. These are the kind of patterns that keep us from feeling truly free. Bethesda House is committed to helping identify and addressing the kaleidoscope of behaviors that prohibit long-term stability for the homeless and impoverished in our community.

We find ourselves in unhealthy and destructive patterns because they create a false sense of security within our own comfort zone. For the homeless, the mentally ill, and those who have grown up only knowing violence and trauma, the bar for their comfort zone is set incredibly low. These cycles of abuse, poverty, and violence are all they know; they are the only means of coping they have.

We believe everyone deserves to raise the bar. We believe everyone deserves the chance to regain personal power and autonomy over their life starting with the patterns they choose

to engage in. For those who suffer from mental illness or who have criminal records, this is not an easy process. With no resources and no guide, the actions that leave many out on the street or in a jail cell are relentlessly repeated.

This is why we provide services to address these problems at their source, whether it is mental illness, environmental influences, chronic poverty, or any myriad of external and internal circumstances. The core of our housing first model is to remove the most vulnerable from destructive environments so they have a safe, stable foundation on which to rebuild their life. Once basic needs such as food and shelter are met, our case management and social work staff can accurately assess the needs of the individual and set them up with an actionable plan for recovery, healing, and re-entry into society.

Patterns are broken when one learns to redefine their idea of safety, to walk outside of their comfort zone. With the gracious help of our endlessly supportive community, we have been able to build a safe haven for those ready to break free from the cycles holding them back. New patterns are created and a new life is born.

Mark Your Calendars!

August 9, 2018

Bethesda House's 2nd Annual Summer Event!
Great venue and a live band.
Visit our website for details.

October 18, 2018

Bethesda House's 8th Annual Fall Event!
Venue: the Stockade Inn,
Church Street, Schenectady.



The Agency's clothing room has been a main staple within the basic living needs services we offer. We are pleased to be able to continue to offer new and gently used clothing to our clients each Wednesday. However, due to growth and available space, we have found the need not only to modify the room but to qualify clothing donation drop-off times. Bethesda House will accept new and gently used seasonal clothing on Tuesday and Thursday of each week, from 9 am to 3.30 pm. Please visit our website for details.

www.bethesdahouseschenectady.org

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 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 between 9:30am - 3:30pm.

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, washcloths
- Blankets

Seasonal

- Home Depot/Lowes Gift Card

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 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 of Schenectady, Inc.

Friends of Bethesda House/Profile Update/Gift

Name _____

Organization _____

Address _____

Daytime Phone _____

Fax _____

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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 using PayPal at
www.bethesdahouseschenectady.org

Bethesda House Donors: November 2017 - April 2018

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Bethesda House is grateful to the individuals, congregations, businesses, and private foundations who donated from \$1 to \$25,000. Your generosity allows us to continue helping others by providing for basic needs in an environment that encourages and supports positive 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.

If your name does not appear as you would like it to, please contact the agency's Administration Assistant at either adminasst@bethesdahouseschenectady.org or (518) 374-7873, ext 116 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.

Your gifts of spirit and generosity are deeply appreciated.

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Thank you, for your gracious donations

In Honor Of:

Patricia Roeser

In Memory Of:

Joseph A. Early, Jr.
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 Elaine Ognibene

Thank you to our **Community Sponsors** for our October 2017 Event, Ralph Blackwood & Nancy Nichols and Genghis & Nahla Khan. Our deepest apologies for our oversight in not listing you in our Fall/Winter 2017 Newsletter.

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 –

It is the greatest of all mistakes to do nothing because you can only do little – do what you can.

- Sydney Smith



On May 4th, 2018, Boulevard Bowl hosted Bethesda House's 6th Annual Bowl for Bethesda fundraiser! The house was full of bowlers for Bethesda House and bowlers from leagues who were finishing "snow date" games due to this long winter season. The thunder of balls crashing into the pins down the alley were no match for the torrential rains and winds that whipped through surrounding communities. It was a joy-filled night as team members embraced the bonds of camaraderie and cheered each other on.



A special Thank You to our fifteen (15) lane sponsors, two event sponsors, and team fundraising. Lane sponsors: AMF Refrigerated Products, Armer Funeral Home, Bennett Contracting, BL's Tavern & Grill, COINS, Frank & Sons Body Works, Hunters On Jay, M&T Bank, Rick & Kathy Mausert, Karen Roach, Schenectady Fire Department, Schenectady PBA, Sharran Coppola, Wedekind Motors, and Tom Weiss.



Event sponsors: Dr. Gary and Kathleen Dunkerley, Sue Williams, and Innovative Computer Concepts, Inc. (ICCI)



Thank you to Boulevard Bowl, who has hosted our event each year. The ally's team is very professional and accommodating; they help us each year to make this night a great time for everyone.

