



Hospitality Times

The New London Homeless Hospitality Center's Volunteer Newsletter
Fall 2011

From the Editor

In This Issue

- Meet the new AmeriCorps VISTAs!
- Read reflections on service from our volunteers
- A guest performs an honorable act, holds high values
- A letter from our Executive Director

Inside Stories:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-----|
| Letter from the editor | 1-2 |
| Fundraising Coordinator | 3 |
| What is the Help Desk? | 4 |
| Volunteer Reflections | 5-6 |
| Victor's Story | 6-7 |

It's been about four months now since I embarked on this year long journey called being an AmeriCorps VISTA. Upon entering, I realized that picking up and running with what Alyssa and Bob have created here would be a challenge, as they developed volunteer programs and resources in a year better than most can do in five. However, I knew it would be a fun challenge, especially in such a new organization that is located within close distance to four colleges, countless faith communities, and talented individuals with a desire to dedicate their time and hearts.

I am so shocked at how much has been done in these past four months. Gabi has pretty much completely staffed the Help Desk day and night with incredible volunteers, Michelle is writing grants like it's her job...oh wait...it is, and our food volunteer calendar rarely has a gap in it. We work among an extremely supportive and entertaining staff, and I could not be more grateful for that.

What really makes this job a beautiful experience is the guests. I remember walking into the community room that first day on July 1st, 2011 and being painfully shy around the guests. I was so terrified of their judgment, which in retrospect is absurd because they are the most accepting people I have ever met. My heart breaks a little bit every time I work on a resume or application with a guest that is not confident in their skills and potential, and it shows me how important it is to work with them to remind them that they can set goals and then they can reach them.

Something that I've noticed that really allows our guests to shine their true brightness is participation in workshops. At our poetry workshop a couple months ago a few guests shared their own poetry with the group. I feel liberated just reflecting on it, thinking about seeing these people allowing themselves to become so vulnerable and delicate. At the first drawing workshop I watched a guest who always appears so shy and unsure of herself open her mind to the idea that art isn't about perfection, it's about the artist. She became an artist in those two hours and now every time I see her, I remember her as the young adult who was opening up and enjoying herself that night.

The beauty I'm seeing does not go unopposed the opposition being doubt. Can I really make it through this entire year and look back thinking that our guests have succeeded



*Service to others is
the rent you pay for
your room here on
Earth.*

- Muhammad Ali

in some way? I know that it really depends on how you define success, but I can't help the disappointment that comes along with seeing that someone did not complete their chores or that someone missed an employment appointment. The best way I can fathom to define success in this path is seeing someone happy. Sometimes this happiness comes with getting an interview, receiving financial aid for college, being reunited with a family member, but sometimes the happiness comes with meeting a new friend, showering and putting on a clean tee shirt, or sitting by the waterfront with a sketch book and pencil. Simplicity should never go overlooked or unwelcomed.

I want this year to bring me to tears. I want to be so overwhelmed with emotion that the world never stops being beautiful. Sometimes I feel like I already live in a completely different universe than other people because I am so easily moved by the human condition. Go ahead, call me a cry baby, I'm over emotional, whatever you want to call it, but to me this is real. A young man in detox or rehab pulls at my heart-strings, a girl with her heart broken for the hundredth time never hurts any less. For people who keep all of their belongings in identical blue duffel bags on metal wire shelves that they cannot access before 7:00 pm, feeling lost is what feels normal. This doesn't seem fair, but it is why the HHC staff is so dedicated and compassionate and it is why we rely on our volunteers to hold this organization up.

Before I end this letter, I'm going to take some time to brag profusely about and thank greatly the volunteers that continue to serve at HHC. Every single night of the week 365 days a year, two or three individuals feed our approximately 50 guests. They spend their own time deciding what to cook, purchasing the ingredients, making the snack, and delivering and serving it at the shelter all the while making conversation with familiar friendly faces that would not know their kindness otherwise. About 30 hours of the week, day and night, a volunteer is available to our guests to assist them in building a resume, applying for jobs, picking a college to attend and a program of study,



Volunteers from the PCU Mississippi buffing the floors at the overnight shelter



From the Fundraising Coordinator

As a new VISTA with the New London Homeless Hospitality Center, I arrived in New England from the tropics of Florida during the summer, in time to experience a freak east coast earthquake originating in Pennsylvania and a hurricane the likes of which have not been seen in Connecticut since the mid 1980's. These events helped to alleviate my feelings of being uprooted. It certainly gave me another thought path to travel down. Is this the end of the world as we know it? Is it the end of Michelle as I know her? This VISTA's adventure is a beginning, a rebirth, a new ME.

Treat people as if they were what they ought to be, and help them become what they are capable of being.

-Goethe

Attending VISTA Pre Service Orientation in Philly, I had an a-ha moment. Being a VISTA means experiencing poverty in order to more clearly understand the plight of those who live in it. I have lived in poverty my entire adult life. Some say by choice. My parents are financially stable. My childhood was full of love, compassion, hospitality, discipline, support, and, as far as my sister and I knew, money growing on trees in the backyard.

As soon as I became an adult, I went into the social services system. I had a baby when I was 19 years-old. I was married and divorced before I turned 21. My financial life consisted of income from a part-time job, financial aid from college, food stamps, WIC, Medicaid, Section 8 housing and other social service assistance.

When I met my fabulous husband 15 years ago, I thought, this is it. This is right where I am supposed to be. Our combined family, he with a son, me with my daughter, felt right. We worked and struggled financially but lived with love and laughter in our home. We bought a house and a brand new vehicle and were living the American Dream.

Then, when we lost it all to the downward spiral of the economy, I wondered, why did we not live within our means? Why did we not plan for disaster? A-ha, even with good planning, a disaster is not always predictable. Good intentions often fall short of prevention. Living life to its fullest, enjoying every moment, is what makes life worth living.

This experience with poverty shall be my last. When you make changes, changes occur. One door closes and another opens. Opportunity knocks, it doesn't come barging in with all the answers. I have chosen this path because of its adventurous and prospective educational aspects. I have learned so much in this first quarter of my year of service to America; about people, society and especially myself.

This is it. This is right where I am supposed to be. This is exactly what I am supposed to be doing. I am grateful for the chance to make a difference. I am appreciative of the opportunity to make changes in my life. I will live every moment, in the moment and enjoy every bit of it!

From the Help Desk Coordinator

What is a Help Desk? When I applied for the AmeriCorps VISTA Help Desk Volunteer Coordinator position I admit I had no idea what this new program at the New London Homeless Hospitality Center meant. In July, I stepped into this new role only to find a solid foundation that set me up to not only better understand the complexity of homelessness but also the extensive network of resources available to our homeless community in Southeastern Connecticut. The Help Desk essentially serves as a bridge between our homeless community and the resources available to our guests. The stated goal for Help Desk Volunteers is to assist the guests in taking their next step out of homelessness. Help Desk volunteers have considerable leeway in how to do this, whether they simply talk to/interview someone, advise them about treatment options, assist them in compiling a résumé, or applying for an ID, etc. Help Desk volunteers assist our guests as they need to achieve the goals they set out. In July, we had four consistent Help Desk volunteers along with several others who came to volunteer when their schedule permitted. Now, the Help Desk schedule consists of 10 dedicated, passionate volunteers! This volunteer program has grown so much since July and we recognize the large range of guest needs being met by the Help Desk.

Recently, I came across a powerful quote that I feel best describes the overall feeling Help Desk volunteers express to me about their work with our guests. Paul G. Thomas tells us, "Help people become more motivated by guiding them to the source of their own power." Time and time again I have heard guests describe a sense of helplessness with regard to their lives, yet they are usually expressing this while sitting before a staff member or volunteer seeking a resource to better their lives. The Help Desk provides a time and space for guests to identify and utilize the numerous resources available to them to get out of homelessness. Help Desk volunteers give their time and talents to our organization because they recognize that people need a hand-up to aide them out of homelessness. Further, many of our Help Desk volunteers have shared accounts of witnessing our guests reveal the profound depth of their inner power and talents. It usually comes across in the form of compiling a strong resume or completing several job applications. The Help Desk and Guest reflections in this newsletter best illustrate what I am trying to say about the purpose and success of this new program at the New London Homeless Hospitality Center. I look forward to the remainder of this VISTA year because of the tremendous potential for the Help Desk to make a difference in our guests lives! Volunteers are vital to the success of our organization and we are always searching for more dedicated, fantastic individuals to contribute their time and talents to NLHHC. If you would like to volunteer on the Help Desk please contact me, Gabriela Arias, at helpdesk.nlhhc@gmail.com.

I send a warm thank you to all the volunteers, donors, and staff who have allowed us to reach this point at the Help Desk. Thank you for all your patience, dedication, and kind work.

Help Desk volunteer, Mary-Beth working on employment with a guest.





Volunteer Reflections

“I was nervous about meeting everyone, it's hard to know what to talk about when meeting new people, and even more difficult when someone is living through such hard times as not having a home. The first night of volunteering a really nice guy forgive me I can't remember his name, helped us bring in the food and talked about the fishing pole in the back of our car. We talked about going fishing for the first time. From there everyone was nice and warm and helpful. A woman Named GiGi told me she liked my pocket book, I was so grateful she did that, we had a great conversation which led to meeting other guests. Thank you GiGi :) The benefits of giving will result in Karma, cooking and serving to people who have nothing results in a good feeling {and finding my lost keys at Wal-Mart}. Being a good listener, giving hope and kind words can turn someone's day around. It's not just about the cooking, I always look forward to the next volunteer night, and seeing the people I meet the week before so we can continue our conversation, and make sure their O.K.” Thanks for the Opportunity, Lorrie Sosin

The heart of a volunteer is not measured in size, but by the depth of the commitment to make a difference in the lives of others.

“My position as a help desk volunteer is truly beneficial as we are able to make connections with guests at night shelter. All of the guests that I have worked with are truly thankful that we are there and that we really do care about them. Recently, I assisted a resident with an online application for employment. It was a very long application and it took us over an hour to complete. After completing the application, the guest gave me a huge hug and thanked me. I almost cried. This is what keeps me coming back; the fact that every Monday, I am directly impacting a resident who wants to be a better them. There are no barriers, no middle man. It's just you and the guest working on their small or big goals, (from getting a copy of a birth certificate to completing a resume, or finding housing) which get them to where they want to be in life.” –Jessica Hill

Everyone can be great, because everyone can serve.

-Martin Luther King, Jr.

“I volunteer at the HHC because I enjoy interacting with the people. Everyone there is nice and welcoming. I've never seen such an appreciative group of people before. It makes me realize that I have a lot to be thankful for. I believe when I go to volunteer at the HHC, that I get more out of it than the people that I serve.” –Sarah Blatt

Fall 2011

Never doubt that a small group of committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

-Margaret Mead

“Being homeless is just hard. With apologies to Clausewitz: "In homelessness, all things are simple, but the simplest thing is difficult". Our guests generally don't have access to computers except for the public ones at the library, with very limited time. So, writing resumes, searching or applying for jobs, or replacing lost forms of ID (no place to store papers when you're homeless!) is a real chore. I think that's where I can lend a hand. I have a little skill at interviewing and writing resumes, and since I come with a laptop, I can help to make job searches and applications much easier. Interviews for resume development are especially fun and revealing. So many of our guests have real and substantive work experience. They have been trusted with money, property, and leadership responsibility. Often, they have had a range of life experience that makes them "well rounded" candidates for many jobs. Sometimes they have incredible qualifications like post-graduate degrees (which says something about a society in which such people have to live in a shelter). One of the things I love about our shelter is that often... with just a little help in the simplest areas... our guests can get back into permanent housing and work. What a blessing for us all! Did I mention that we have great Volunteer Coordinators who keep us highly motivated!?” - Ron Steed

Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as you ever can.

- John Wesley

“As a children’s book illustrator, I have found that drawing can be both stimulating and relaxing. I have always wanted to share my love for drawing and volunteer in the community. The two went hand and hand when I was able to offer the drawing workshop at HHC. Everyone who has participated in the workshop has a different way of approaching drawing. Some become very talkative and share stories and interests while others get very involved in their drawings and seem to go into a world of their own. I have been so enriched by the people I have met so far at HHC. I set out to volunteer and give back not realizing that I would get so much more in return.” -Abby Carter

Join us on [Facebook](#), just search New London Homeless Hospitality Center. This is a great way to keep up with the happenings at NLHHC as they happen.



Guest Update

You've heard the phrase, "if it bleeds, it reads", right? Media prefers to take every worst case scenario they can find and make it the front page of your morning paper. At HHC, we like to highlight positivity since it creates a domino effect of motivation. Luckily, these uplifting events are not as rare as our common public media makes it seem.

A guest of ours, Victor Rivera, was working on Broad Street last week cleaning out a house that had belonged to a man that had passed away. The man left his house to his nephew, and his nephew hired people to move all that inhabited the house to another location. Victor said they were taking out clothes and moving a cabinet when he heard a pipe rattling inside the cabinet. When he opened it to see what it was, he found money that he thinks must have slipped out of the top of the pipe. Victor assumed that the man living in the house may have hidden valuables to protect them at some point. He did not count the money, as he says "it wasn't mine to count." As he continued to move the cabinet, Victor came upon a box of old jewelry and diamonds as well.

Victor brought the money and jewelry to the nephew who was inheriting the house, and the man was pleasantly shocked at his honesty. Through the moving, Victor came across another wallet with money in it, which he also returned to the nephew. Victor was offered a percentage of the money as a reward for his honesty, as he gained trust from this man who was so impressed with him that he set out to find more work for Victor. Currently, Victor is working for the realtor of the property, continuing to clear out the house.

"I am very grateful that I was given this opportunity," Victor says "so I'm trying to show my gratitude." By this, Victor means that he is dedicated to honesty in recording his work hours while the new owner of the house is away on business. "I'm trying to better myself as a person, ya know? I didn't even have to think about it."

Victor holds honesty in an extremely high regard, which is why the owner of the house has offered to be a character reference for any job applications he may have. Though this population is often given an undeserved negative reputation, Victor says "I've met a lot of honest people here; I want to be one of them."

With press coverage constantly in our minds and on our screens displaying arrests, crimes, accidents, and wars, we are inspired by the value being placed on honesty and respect for others in this situation. Victor reminds us of our priorities and what exactly helps us keep our hearts in the right place. "Honesty is very important in life, and it's not always easy to be honest." Victor has this right, but we can learn through our own actions and through the actions of others that honesty improves our lives.

*A candle loses
nothing of its light
when lighting another.
-Kahlil Gibran*



Follow us on
[Twitter](#), just go
to [twitter.com/
NLHHC](https://twitter.com/NLHHC) or look
for [@NLHHC](#)

Thank you, Victor Rivera, for restoring our own values within our hearts. You act as a great example for society, and we at HHC are proud to stand by you as you work to better yourself.

October 29, 2011

Dear Friends,

As I write this update, a wet snow is falling. The streets are slushy and the cold seems to go right through even a winter coat. I am so glad to know that our homeless neighbors are not without sanctuary even though it is Saturday and our regular daytime program is closed. We are not a program with fixed operating hours and a neatly defined program. Our goal is to make life more manageable for our homeless neighbors. When a need arises we do all we can to respond.

So on this cold wet day we find a way to open early because our guests need a place away from the elements. A staff member was identified, the keys passed off and the doors opened. Word of the early opening spread fast. Not even half an hour after we decided we needed to open, I found people at the train station who had already heard and were packing up to make the move up to St. James.

It is not just bad weather that brings out the spirit of the Homeless Hospitality Center. Every day I see our staff and volunteers bringing passion and commitment to supporting our neighbors experiencing homelessness.

Our beautifully organized supply closet, thanks solely to volunteers.



- Volunteers who spend hours assisting guests to complete a resume and on-line job application.
- A staff member who agrees to “foster” a guest’s cat until he can get into an apartment.
- Shelter staff who exhibit remarkable patience trying to help a guest calm down so they can stay in the shelter.
- Volunteers who bring food, donate supplies, organize the closets, drive people to appointments and just sit and take the time to listen.
- A staff who went the extra mile for a veteran discharged from hospital care without enough medications.

I often wish we had more of the “big” things: money to help with housing, more access to jobs, better success in helping people break free from addictions and facilities that provided showers. We are working on all these things. But I know that it is small acts of compassion and connection that are the heart of hospitality. Most days we do the small stuff very well and make slow progress on the big stuff. If we can keep on that track we can accomplish amazing things.

Thank you to all who support our work—with your time, with your money, with your expertise, with your ideas and with your care. It will take us all working together to make New London the community of care and opportunity we all long for.

Cathy Zall

Executive Director

Volunteer Photos



Planting community gardens at the VA House

Volunteers don't necessarily have the time, but they have the heart.



Look how much fun our volunteers have on maintenance days!

9/11 Community Gardens Dedication Ceremony including the founders of Eastern Connecticut Community Gardens Association, our resident veterans, and a current submariner.



More Volunteer Photos



A small portion of the canned goods prepared on our 9/11 Weekend of Service

Silent Service Motorcycle Club Sub City Chapter with their generous donation.



PCU Mississippi volunteers sanitizing tables on a maintenance day.

Check out our [blog](http://nlhcvolunteer.blogspot.com/) at <http://nlhcvolunteer.blogspot.com/> where issues in homelessness, poverty, and perspectives from our shelter are discussed.



**New London Homeless Hospitality
Center**

PO Box 1651
19 Jay St.
New London, CT 06320

Phone: (860) 439-1573
E-mail: hhc.volunteer@gmail.com



**New London
Homeless Hospitality Center**

Providing a place of safety and welcome,
to our homeless neighbors

New London Homeless Hospitality Center – 19 Jay Street, New London, CT 06320

Phone: **(860) 439-1573**

8:30am – 4:30pm, Mon – Fri

St. James Shelter – 76 Federal Street, New London, CT 06320

7pm – 7am, 7 days a week

Homeward Bound Thrift Store - 35 Golden Street, New London, CT 06320

Phone: **(860) 444-8800**

11am – 5pm, Mon – Sat