



Hospitality Times

The New London Homeless Hospitality Center's Volunteer Newsletter

Summer 2011

From the Editor

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- Read about a beautiful concert at All Souls Church
- Learn how a group of volunteers made a difference in the lives of our guests
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- See community support come to life in the Walk for the Homeless

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A Fond Farewell

Our year as AmeriCorps VISTAs is drawing to a close. As of July 17, Alyssa and I will no longer be volunteer coordinators for the Hospitality Center. Alyssa will stay on at the NLHHC working as a permanent staff member, while I will go on writing and researching. Where, I do not know.

Our experience has been amazing! I have seen a part of our society which I had not know before: the homeless. I have also seen a wonderful community coming together to bring hope to these people, lifting them up out of a situation seldom deserved. You all are truly amazing!

What have I learned this year? For one thing, homelessness is often undeserved. Those in the shelter are not bad people. If they are desperate, it is the situation that makes them so. Talking with guests I have learned that it was the loss of a loved one, sickness or disease, or a bad job market that brought them to the shelter. If alcohol or drugs are a problem, they only became a problem as our guests lost hope in their future. Each time I work at the shelter I ask myself just how much could I take before I lost hope? How much could I endure before I felt myself cursed, an exile from the community I love?

Hope is a valuable thing. I find hope from my family, from my community, and from my religion. These people have lost one or several of these connections, and more. And with the loss of these connections, they have lost hope. They lost hope and they lost any support that they had to get out of the shelter. I have studied this, writing a weekly blog, a resource manual, and writing or editing articles for this newsletter.

Many take advantage of those living in poverty. With payday loans, rent to own scams, etc., our society preys on the poor. Others make it nearly impossible for our guests to lift themselves up or to change behavior. This, I see in how difficult it is to find a job if a felony is in ones past. And, worst of all, our society tends to believe if you are poor, it is because you did something: people deserve what they get! Our society stigmatizes the poor. We do ourselves an injustice with this. I firmly believe that we as a society cannot solve homelessness and poverty without accepting the homeless and poor into our community. We need to look at everyone in our shelter as a member of our society before we can begin to tackle the problem of homelessness.

And we have. In fact, you were part of their community before Alyssa and I came here: Each of you who brought in a meal or snack showed those residing in our shelter that they were part of the community, that the community they lost still cared for them.



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This was an important base for us to build off of, a base which proved to us that this community is genuinely concerned about its fellow citizens.

Certainly, your goodwill kept us going throughout the year. This goodwill was proved, time and again in many ways: A Girl Scout painting our shelter, an Eagle Scout renewing our daytime center, a group bringing in canvas bags, another bringing blankets, students bringing us supplies, and the entire city coming together in the Homeless to Hopeful Dance and again in the Walk for the Homeless. All of these activities, and many others, have been a source of encouragement and pride for Alyssa, myself, and all the staff as we try to alleviate homelessness in our area.

Alyssa and I have been laying a foundation to make our guests part of the community. This foundation is built on the rock of your goodwill and support. Without all of you, we could not have gotten much done this year. And we got *a lot* done! We’ve written an almost 500 page resource manual, newsletters, blogs, improved bookkeeping procedures, and increased community awareness. What’s more, we’ve added new volunteer roles, bringing new faces to the Hospitality Center, new people supporting the staff and allowing them to branch out and improve their affect on the community.

This year has been a trying one too, a year in which your support has been even more necessary than ever. We’ve seen one of the roughest winters in years, but you all stayed active. We have more people in our shelter, yet the evenings go by easier. Food is still provided even though the numbers stayed high and the weather poor. We’ve seen more people looking for help. And they find help with volunteers aiding us at the front desk and others providing one on one support writing resumes or helping to fill out complex applications. It’s been a rough year but we have weathered the storm through all of your support.

And we hope you will continue. We need you to continue! And we have brought in new, highly motivated and skilled VISTAs to continue building the volunteer program. I believe this city will see a wonderful transformation this year and years following: Together, you will usher in a new sense of hope and community to our guests at the shelter, a shelter that is vital to our community. I see the winds bringing change, change for the good. Thank you all for a wonderful year!

Farewell,

—Bob Middeke-Conlin

Around Town



John and Barbara Metz. Photo courtesy of Metz Music.

For Old Times’ Sake—Time Travels through the Old World

Barbara and John Metz performed another delightful concert on our behalf. On the 10th of April, 2:00 p.m., at All Souls’ historic Brick Church, a crowd filling the pews was treated to a recital of early music—Barbara playing the viola de gamba and John on the harpsichord and organ. The musical selection ranged from works by Spanish composer Diego Ortiz, an artist of the court of king Phillip II, to Italian composer Girolamo Frescobaldi, an organist at St. Peter’s Basilica during the 17th Century, to

French composer Élisabeth-Claude Jacquet de la Guerre, a Parisian, and Marin Marais, whose music graced the court of king Louse the XIVth at Versailles, to music from Leipzig by Christian Ferdinand Abel, and Finally to Hamburg with Georg Phillipp Telemann.

John Metz is a Juilliard educated pianist and professor emeritus of Arizona State, while Barbara studied with Professor Altis Teickmanus at the Hochschule für Musik in Freiburg, Germany, and has worked with numerous music ensembles. John was active locally with the Connecticut Early Music Festival from 1982 through 2007, working as Artistic Director starting in 1999. Both Barbara and John have performed together widely and have brought old works to life, such as six early American cello sonatas composed by Rayner Taylor but lost in the Library of Congress for years until they found it, or a sonata for cello and piano published in 1891 by Leonhard Emil Bach but lost until 2005 when John and Barbara restored it for the world to hear again. For more information on John and Barbara Metz, their music, their lives, and their works, visit <http://metzmusic.com>.



John and Barbara Metz. Photo courtesy of Metz Music.

The program we heard on Sunday afternoon was itself a melding of history and beauty, as we were taken on a tour of music throughout the Mediterranean and Western Europe of the 16th and 17th centuries. The skills of both performers were made evident when technical problems struck first the viola de gamba and then the harpsichord. A string broke Sunday morning, especially problematic as a new string continually stretches until it reaches its proper tension. Until it reaches its tension it needs constant tuning. Barbara explained this to us as she tuned the instrument. She played beautifully until a suitable stopping point, so well that we hardly noticed a problem, then fixed it on the spot. John also had a problem, a problem with the harpsichord. Again, he played until a suitable stopping point and fixed it on the spot as Barbara gave a brief introduction to the viola de gamba. It was a delight to witness two expert performers, deftly resolving problems while constantly entertaining.

The music was lovely, as was the atmosphere. Those, like myself, who enjoy early and classical music were charmed and absorbed in the performance. More importantly, all proceeds from the concert benefited the New London Homeless Hospitality Center. Competing against at least three other events occurring at 2:00 p.m. on Sunday, John and Barbara brought in an excess of \$1,000, all donations given at the free concert, in support of our efforts. In the end it was a delightful afternoon spent reminiscing of an old world.

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Help keep the Hospitality Center Open!



We offer an easy way to donate through [PayPal](#). Simply click the image to the left and you will be brought to our webpage, www.nlhhc.org. From there, just click on the red button at the upper right hand corner.



Volunteer Stories

Mock Job Interviews

On Tuesday, April the 12th, members from the Niantic Toastmasters Club conducted the first of a series of Mock Job Interview workshops to the benefits of our guests. Several interviewers, one of whom regularly volunteers at the shelter providing food, arrived to offer support and advice for those seeking employment on job interviewing, while one support volunteer assisted the group as needed. The workshop itself took place just upstairs of the shelter at St. James church. It was holy week, so there was a lovely backdrop of the choir practicing their Easter hymns next door. The soft chorus bestowed a feeling of hope, a feeling that greeted the guests as they arrived

From Idea to Action

I was approached by a member of the Toastmaster's Club, Joanne Moore, while visiting a church in the Fall of 2010. We were speaking after their worship service on opportunities to volunteer at our shelter. Joanne, a member of the Toastmasters Club, was interested in giving mock job interviews to our clients as her High Performance Leadership project. The idea was wonderful, but had to wait—it just wasn't the most opportune time for a workshop of this nature.

However, spring was the perfect time! With construction season beginning and tourism jobs starting to open up, the time was ripe for many of our guests to seek jobs. And many of them did search. Mock job interviews would be a boon to these guests. With this in mind Joanne emailed and we met to discuss further how our guests could best benefit from her offer. In the end it was decided her group would do at least two workshops at the evening shelter, and more workshops for OIC. Joanne did a wonderful service for our guests by organizing and planning the event. I needed only find space for the interviews, she did the rest.

The first interview workshop, after a slow start, went very well. While most people were aware of the workshop, some were timid, some were hungry, some were just plain tired after looking for a job all day. Our support volunteer was wonderful at this point; she went downstairs and encouraging people to come upstairs to the workshop. Joanne, as organizer, went down as well.

An Amazing Transformation

One young lady in particular needed encouragement—she was just plain nervous at going up and talking to people. She would have been remiss had she missed this event, however. A very skilled young lady trying to survive college, she and her husband came against hard times and found themselves in the shelter. To be quite frank, this couple, like so many others I meet, should never have found themselves in the shelter. They were simple victims of circumstances and hard times: Both are skilled, both are smart, and both are very nice.

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Front row: Eva Menon, Cate Steele, Rick Guenard, Judy Clinton, Gerri Thom. Back row: Joanne Moore, Valerie Gilson, Becky McClain, Mark McClain, Dave Nelson. Missing from photo: Gary Young. Photo courtesy of Joanne Moore

Earlier that day I was talking to her, giving her advice. “You have to network to get ahead: volunteer, go to meetings, make yourself a part of the community and you may just find the community accepts you and wants to help.” She was skeptical, skeptical and timid. With our volunteer’s encouragement, with Joanne’s encouragement, with my encouragement, with all our encouragement she walked timidly upstairs and started a session.

The transformation was amazing! This nervous young lady came out excited: her interviewer was a member of her field! He knew people in her field! The confidence she had lost in the downward journey to our shelter she picked right up in that meeting. She applied herself more, redoubled her job search, and found a job within two weeks. An amazing transformation!



Mark McClain working with Chris, one of our guests, at the Workshop. Since the workshop, Chris was offered a job. He will be leaving the shelter shortly. Photo courtesy of Joanne Moore.

One Interviewer’s Experience

Interviewers came from all walks of life: Eva a nurse, Cate a speech therapist, Rick a salesman, Judy a writer, Gerri a small bus owner, Joanne a physical therapist, Val an occupational therapist assistant, Becky a scientist, Mark a pharmacist, Dave a designer, and Gary from L&M. Each had a story from the event. Joanne forwarded me this email following the evening relating one such story:

Joanne,

I want to thank you for the invitation to help with job interviews at the homeless shelter. I was blown away by the fortitude of these men and women in their desire to find a job and improve their condition. But I also empathized with their plights and the arduous task they had because of a lack of resources.

I interviewed a young man and an aged man. They both had unique struggles ahead. Their problems were vast and varied.

The elder man was on social security disability due to medical issues. His disability payment, unfortunately, was too little to afford a home. He was looking for a job for \$120.00 week so he could have a little more money and live better. He could not make more than \$125.00 per month or he would lose his social security disability which he depended on to survive.

The younger man had a better chance of obtaining a job because of his age and health. He was smart too. But he appeared worried and fearful about his need for a job and the difficulty of finding one in order to afford his own apartment and pay child support.

He did not smile once. He said he could not.

The young man had tried to have a roommate in an affordable apartment. But his living conditions soon turned too disruptive with seeing alcohol abuse and other undesirable conditions. He felt it was better and safer to leave and go back to the shelter. He

“I was blown away by the fortitude of these men and women in their desire to find a job and improve their condition”



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"I felt encouragement when the elder man thanked me for making him feel special. That made me feel special"

would have benefited from a resume on our interview. But he did not know how to write one.

Joanne thank you for the "cheat sheet" with interview questions that worked very well to frame the interview. It gave us an ability to quickly access the persons interviewing skills and provide effective individual feedback. I sandwiched my critiques between positive points and positive qualities.

I hope I helped these two men in some small way to prepare them for their next interview. I felt encouragement when the elder man thanked me for making him feel special. That made me feel special.

Thanks, Joanne for all your heartfelt and compassionate work! The only critique for improvement might be the actual paper that we hand back to the interviewee. It might need to be written with even more information to benefit the interviewee. Otherwise, I am very impressed with what you have done and the wonderful evening that we had. Well done! You lead WELL!

Yours truly,

Becky McClain

Results

The next afternoon at our staff meeting I presented the results to Cathy Zall, NLHHC's executive Director, and she was impressed. I can say that most of those who met at the workshop have a job, one acquired recently. Disabled, he had to wait for a doctor's clearance to go back to work. In the end I believe the biggest result was hope: the interviewees had a sense that they could find a job. They felt that they could work, that people wanted them to work. I think they felt like part of the community again, a quality lacking before the workshops.

Guest Update

Nate's Story

Nate seems shy. He's a quiet, soft-spoken gentleman, inoffensive in every respect and with a heart of gold. I met Nate last year, around mid-September, when he entered the St. James shelter. He was a very nice guy, he still is. I sat down to talk with Nate about where he's been and where he's going. Here's Nate's story.

Nate entered the shelter from an eviction, the condo in which he rented space foreclosed and he had no place to go. His job ended in 2007 when Nate refused to take a pay-cut. He had worked there far too long and honestly thought he could find a job quickly. But the recession hit and there were no jobs. And so, almost three years later, his nest egg gone, his home taken from under him, Nate had nowhere to go but the shelter.

The shelter isn't too bad a place for a guy like Nate. His soft-spoken demeanor kept him out of trouble. He didn't ask for much and was happy with what he got. Indeed, the shelter's staff were a source of comfort, they gave Nate hope and they were

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there for him when he needed it. What's more, the volunteers were wonderful! Their hearts were in the best place and the food they provided was excellent. "First rate! Are you kidding, I felt guilty taking it, it was so good," Nate said emphatically on the subject.

I asked Nate how he got out of the shelter. "Jessica! She called my landlord, took me to view it, and interviewed me to make sure it was a good fit." It was and Nate moved in on November the 3rd of last year. He loves his place, the property manager makes sure the common areas are clean and he feels at home. He is at home.

Now Nate has a plan and an idea of where to go next. He's been building his skills through workshops at CT Works. He's been talking to the Workforce Investment Act representative there for retraining in a new field where job prospects are better. "You just take it one step at a time, so as long as you're moving forward, that's what counts."

Above all, Nate is grateful. He's glad the hospitality center was there when he needed it. "It was a safe haven when I was in a bad place...It helped me climb out of the bad situation. Once I'm on my feet I won't forget them, I won't forget the shelter, the soup kitchen, First Congregational, all those places!"

News in Brief

This spring our staff was moved by a generous gesture and gift. Though living on a very fixed and limited income, a former guest sent five hundred dollars in gratitude of, and support to, the Hospitality Center. She made this donation because she was so grateful for the help our staff and volunteers provided, which created a hospitable environment while she was homeless and then helped her escape the cycle of homelessness. We thank her for helping us keep our doors open and our hearts full.



Remodeling? Moving? Make a furniture donation to Homeward Bound Treasures Thrift Store and help keep our doors open. Call (860) 444-8800 or visit the store located at 35 Golden Street in downtown New London.

Community



170 walkers participated in the 4th Annual Walk for the Homeless, traversing the average daily walk of our homeless guests

Walk for the Homeless

In the parking lot of the All Souls Unitarian Universalist Congregation located at 19 Jay Street, 170 walkers headed out on the fourth annual Walk for the Homeless. This walk, held to benefit our shelter and daytime center, is one of our two main community events of the year, building awareness and support of our mission at the hospitality center. The walk, as its name

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shows, is held annually in partnership with Connecticut College’s Holleran Center.

Starting with a rally filled with speakers and music, the walkers were sent out by the Connecticut College acapella group Connartists. They trekked a route familiar to our guests: Starting with the daytime Hospitality Center located across the parking lot of All Souls Church, they marched to the New London Community Meal Center which provided 73,518 meals last year, then to the First Congregational Church where breakfast is provided Monday through Friday, to the night shelter at St. James Church where our guests sleep, and then back to the All Souls Church and the Hospitality Center. For some of the walkers, guests at our shelter, this was a familiar route. For others, this was the first time they walked the circuit. For all, it was an important event bringing the community together and raising awareness of homelessness in our area of Southeastern Connecticut.

Preceding the walk, Tony Szramoski, one of our success stories gave a speech. Tony was once a resident at the shelter. But with much work and effort made on his part through the support of our staff he rose above his situation, volunteering time and working at the Homeward Bound Treasures Thrift Store, to become a caseworker at the daytime center. Tony talked about his experience and underlined the importance of the Hospitality Center for our community to the walkers.

There was an incredible amount of community support for the walk and our shelter. Bicycle cops provided by the New London Police Department stopped traffic along the walk’s route. All Souls Church let us use their space and many of their tables setting up the event. St. Mary Star of the Sea provided free parking. And our community sponsors, the Christ Church of God and Family Center, Charter Oak Credit Union, Dime Bank, Chelsea Groton Bank, Outthink, LLC, and Liberty Bank all helped us financially. Throughout the walk, cars honked their horns in solidarity while people stopped to watch and express their support.

However, it was the student volunteers from the Holleran Center, mentioned above and led by Laura Cordes and Rebecca McCue, who rendered us the greatest support. All of them helped make the event happen, putting in all the footwork organizing and

running the event. Moreover, each of these volunteers put in time preceding the event, volunteering at the Hospitality Center or the shelter. Connecticut College Volunteers who helped make this event happen are: Courtney Gardner, Elisabeth Speece, Matthew Newton, Jennifer Parry, Justine Keller, Mica Sloan, Kelsey Burke, Amanda Jones, Regina Deitz, and Maureen Sweeney.

In the end the Walk pulled in \$10,429.74 from donations, sponsors, and walker registration. This number, as well as the 170 registered walkers, well exceeded our hope of 125 walkers raising \$8,000. The importance of this cannot be overemphasized. We at the hospitality center thank everyone involved in the walk who made this event such a huge success.

The New London Homeless Hospitality Center
would like to thank all of our supporters for making

The 4th Annual Walk for the Homeless

A huge success!








Outthink, LLC Liberty Bank

www.nlhlc.org

A copy of the ad we placed in *The Day* newspaper on May 21 thanking our sponsors for their support.

News in Pictures

The Walk for the Homeless in Images



The Connecticut College acapella group Connartists sent the walkers off on their journey in style.



Students, as seen here, organized and staffed this event, which raised \$10,429, far exceeding our hopes.



Walker Tony Szramoski, seen here on the right hand side, gave a speech underlining the importance of the Hospitality Center for our community.



Teams, such as this one from the Christ Church of God and Family Center, joined us in expressing solidarity with our guests as well as support for our mission to the community.



Bicycle cops provided by the New London Police Department stopped traffic along the walk's route.



Cars driving by expressed solidarity for the walkers by honking their horns.

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
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**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