

New London Homeless Hospitality Center

Annual Report

July 2009-June 2010

From our founding in 2006 our mission has been clear.

First, we provide a place of safety and welcome to our adult homeless neighbors. Our overnight shelter and daytime hospitality center have served over 500 different people in the past year.

Second, we help our guests move from homelessness to permanent housing. What every homeless person most needs is a permanent home. Through the staff at our daytime hospitality center and by partnering with others, we have helped hundreds of people chart a path back to housing.

Hospitality is the foundation of our work. This hospitality is practical—we offer a place to sleep, access to showers, help finding clothing, a place to sit protected from the weather, a phone and a place to pick up mail. This hospitality is also psychological, and maybe even in the deepest sense spiritual, as we seek to create a place where everyone feels welcome. This hospitality seeks to meet both the present need and to open doors out of homelessness.

The Year in Numbers

- We provided 37,727 nights of shelter and days of hospitality.
- Helped 200 people find permanent housing.
- Made 135 treatment or health referrals.
- Helped 32 people find work, enter a job-training program or secure disability benefits.

For more information,
see pages 4-6 of this report.

Every year teaches us that hospitality is not easy. We are flooded with requests for help. On our busiest single day, 114 different individuals visited our daytime hospitality center. Our 50-bed emergency shelter continues at capacity even as we get better and better at helping people move on to permanent housing.

Along with these high numbers come many pressing needs. Some guests arrive with all their worldly possessions following an eviction. Some arrive with absolutely nothing because

they were released from prison directly to the street. Some arrive deep in the grip of mental illness made worse by weeks without medication. Some arrive with active addictions to alcohol or drugs. Some arrive with serious health problems. All arrive burdened by challenges of being very, very poor and without a stable place to live.

These large numbers and high need, combined with a small staff and tight quarters, make it a daily challenge to maintain the spirit of open-handed welcome that is our goal. But we were founded to meet a need, not simply offer a service until it runs out, and every day we see people get a new start on life. Every day someone finds an apartment, enters treatment, gets the medications they need, finds work or simply has a place where they can finally get a decent night's sleep.

The truest measure of our work is the day-to-day, person-to-person hospitality we offer to hundreds of unique individuals who find themselves facing homelessness. Against that backdrop a few things stand out:

No-Freeze Shelter: Last winter we again met our promise to turn no one away from emergency shelter due to lack of space. Every adult who could stay without harming others was given a place of refuge from the cold. This commitment required us to find ways to let in some individuals with challenging behavioral issues. We had to add an extra staff person unexpectedly in order to provide intensive support to the very small number of guests with very challenging behavior.

The Vet House: In July 2010 we opened a new eight-bed transitional home for homeless veterans. Each has his/her own bedroom in an apartment shared with one other veteran. We partner with the Veterans Administration to supplement this stable housing with the services each veteran needs in order to find permanent housing. Through this program we have the resources to give each person individual attention and support to help them achieve their goals.

Homeward Bound Treasures: Our thrift store on Golden Street continues to mature. Homeward Bound Treasures now makes a significant contribution to our operating budget. Equally important, the store provides one full-time and eight part-time jobs—most of which are filled by current or former shelter guests. Finding work is central to escaping homelessness, and experience in our store can be a stepping-stone to regular employment.

Volunteers: After years of work, we were awarded two VISTA positions through the Corporation for National Service in the summer of 2010. VISTA is providing two fabulous young people (Alyssa and Bob) to help us improve our volunteer program. Through their efforts, we are expanding both the number of volunteers and the complexity of work volunteers can undertake. Given the massive need for one-on-one assistance, we can never hire enough staff to give our guests the attention they need and deserve. With the appropriate use of volunteers, however, we can do much more.

Mental Health Services: A small number of our guests struggle with very serious illness that makes it almost impossible to navigate daily life—especially without a home. The Southeastern Mental Health Authority (SMHA), located in Norwich, is their primary resource for help. Over the years we have developed a deepening partnership to link

guests with the services SMHA provides. Last year this partnership matured to another level as one of our staff people was invited to be part of the committee at SMHA that helps allocate treatment resources. This allows us to advocate even more effectively for our homeless guests who are often invisible to conventional systems.

Paying for Housing: The Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program (HPRP), approved by Congress as part of the federal stimulus package, provided money for security deposits and short term rent subsidies. By combining this funding with other smaller funding streams we were able to help 32 individuals pay security deposits and their first month's rent. We were able to substantially reduce the length of shelter stay for these guests.

Staying Focused on Housing: Available housing subsidies meet only a tiny fraction of the need, so we have needed to be creative. In July 2009 we began a Housing Savings Account, which allows shelter guests with income to save 30 percent of their pay toward future housing. In the first year, guests saved almost \$29,000. Most of these savings were paid out in the form of security deposits and help with initial rent payments.

Working with Neighbors: The past year has seen a continued improvement in our relationship with city officials and the local business community. We have worked hard to get out into the community to listen to people and respond to issues. In the warmer months, shelter guests offered community service twice a week with a focus on removing trash from downtown streets. Our staff paid regular visits to the train station, library and pier to talk with homeless individuals who are not using these public places properly. With help from John Russell, we responded to calls from the police and local businesses to address trespassing and littering issues. These efforts, along with the continued responsible administration of the daytime hospitality center and overnight shelter, is slowly creating a greater sense that we are a resource rather than a burden.

We have touched hundreds of lives and made a real difference. Some of this difference can be quantified, and in the following pages we share some of this data. Most of what we do is, however, hard to measure. We will never measure the new energy someone got from having a safe place to sleep. We will never fully measure the new doors treatment will open. We will never be able to quantify what it means to the spirit of our wonderful city that our homeless neighbors were treated with dignity and provided the most basic necessities of human life.

We are always open to your questions. For more information about our goals, programs and finances, visit our web site (nlhhc.org). Our audited statements also will be posted soon. If you'd like to volunteer, follow the links on our web site. Finally, we are continually in need of financial support and rely on the generosity of our community—on you—to keep our doors open.

2009-2010 BY THE NUMBERS

1. Emergency Shelter—Night and Day

37,727 nights of shelter and days of hospitality

■ Nights of shelter provided: 16,792

We provide overnight shelter 365 nights a year to adults who are experiencing homelessness. We seek to be a relatively low barrier shelter and accept individuals who are still struggling with substance abuse so long as they can use the shelter safely. In the winter we provide a “no-freeze” option that assures that everyone in need has access to a warm place to spend the night. Our goal is to reduce the need for emergency shelter by helping people move to permanent housing as quickly as possible.

■ Individual visits to the daytime hospitality center: 20,935

On average, 80 people visit our daytime program at 19 Jay Street in a single day. Many come simply for a place to sit, to use the phone, collect mail or have a shower. Others take advantage of a variety of services offered on-site, including a nurse from the VNA of Southeastern Connecticut, representatives from the Veterans Administration, mental health outreach workers, employment providers and many others.

2. Health, Mental Health and Substance Abuse Treatment

135 treatment or health referrals

■ Guests referred to intensive case management services: 38

A variety of state programs provide one-on-one support toward recovery for homeless individuals with serious mental health and substance abuse challenges. These programs have highly trained staff with the time to work intensively with a small number of guests. Guests with very serious challenges can get the attention and assistance they need. We work very hard to help guests in need get access to these more intensive case management services.

■ Guests entering intensive drug/alcohol treatment programs: 26

The road to recovery often begins with a 3- to 5-day stay at a specialized medical facility that helps people through the early stages of withdrawing from alcohol or drug abuse. Our staff has the knowledge and contacts to help anyone ready to take this first step. From this beginning many guests are willing to move on to residential treatment programs which provide several months of intensive treatment. Because we virtually “live” with our homeless guests, we often can spot an openness to treatment and take advantage of the small window of opportunity to help people enter treatment quickly.

■ **Guests we helped to secure health insurance: 71**

Without insurance, our guests' access to health care is severely limited. We provide weekly transportation to the closest office of the Department of Social Services in Norwich and one-on-one assistance in applying for state medical insurance. Having this insurance opens many doors to desperately needed care.

3. Finding Permanent Housing

200 people transitioned to permanent housing

■ **Guests receiving financial support to secure permanent housing: 32**

We gave 32 of our guests direct financial support to help them enter into permanent housing. We were fortunate to be able to access federal stimulus money authorized under the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program (HPRP). We also drew heavily on the Department of Social Services Security Guarantee Program. Additional financial support came from our own budget, guest savings, private groups and the Veterans Administration.

■ **Individuals given financial assistance to prevent homelessness: 14**

We had access to special funding (HPRP) to prevent homelessness. During the very short time this funding was available, we were able to help these individuals avoid eviction.

■ **Guests referred to subsidized housing: 17**

A variety of programs provide housing where rent is set as a percentage of income. This type of housing is affordable to anyone, and highly competitive as a result. We work hard to apply quickly for any openings that occur.

■ **Guests linked to specialized housing: 10**

A variety of short-term housing options are available for individuals with special needs. We helped guests enter halfway houses, residential programs offering training, inpatient mental health programs and board and care facilities. In addition, one guest had deteriorated enough to require placement in a nursing home.

■ **Guests moving to market rate housing: 105**

Acquisition of a market-rate apartment is what moved most people out of the shelter. In some cases we provided extensive assistance in locating an apartment. In others our involvement was more limited, including making payments from guests' Housing Savings Accounts.

■ **Guests assisted in relocating outside SE CT: 22**

People get stranded in our area and become homeless. Often a bus ticket back home is all that is required to give them back access to housing.

5. Increasing Income

32 people found jobs, entered job programs or qualified for disability payments

■ **Guests who found employment or entered employment related programs: 27**

The ultimate road to permanent housing is a job that provides enough income for rent. Many of our guests are already working and saving toward housing. Last year we helped 27 of our unemployed guests find work or enter job programs, such as training.

■ **Guests awarded social security benefits (SSI/SSDI): 5**

Securing SSI is a virtual life-saver to a disabled individual because it provides access to a very modest but steady income. The application process is very rigorous and our staff devotes dozens of hours to helping individuals prepare their applications.

Contact Us With Any Questions

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NLHHC.org

Day time hospitality center: 860-439-1573
Overnight shelter: 860-701-0574
Homeward Bound Treasures (Thrift Store): 860-444-8800

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