

Liberty

FOR FRIENDS AND PARTICIPANTS OF LIBERTY COMMUNITY SERVICES

Homelessness Threatens Thousands in the Nutmeg State

Connecticut has a Crisis on Its Hands

With rents continuing to rise at or near double the rate of inflation and housing costs consistently outpacing benefit and wage increases, thousands of Connecticut residents are in danger of homelessness.

According to the most recent statistics from the Department of Social Services, 16,513 people became homeless during the last reporting year.

Of those, nearly 50% had no income whatsoever, 19% were employed and the remainder subsisted on benefits increasingly vulnerable to budget cuts.

Shelters Bursting at the Seams

"And it's not getting any better," reports Liberty Executive Director Sarah D. Caldwell. "The shelters are bursting at the seams, and successful housing programs like ours have waiting lists of three to 36 months."

For homeless persons also facing chronic disease, mental illness or hard-core addiction, even the shortest waiting list can be too long.

"When you're in that fast lane, it's dangerous," says Hezzie Redd, a 44-year-old resident of Liberty's Transitional Living Program, "your life's on the line."

[see CT in Crisis, next page]

The Big Buzz

[What's in a Name?]

It's official! After being known as the Connecticut AIDS Residence Program/CARP for 15 years, the New Haven-based supportive housing and service nonprofit has chosen a new name: Liberty Community Services, Inc.

The name change reflects a fundamental change in program. Based on its success helping people living with HIV/AIDS, and on unprecedented community need,

Fundamental changes, unprecedented need.

Liberty has expanded its programs to serve low-income neighbors battling other chronic conditions, mental illness or addiction.

Liberty, Community and Services

For many residents, the name Liberty evokes freedom—freedom from the dangers of the street, from unbridled addiction, from fear and uncertainty.

For staff and other committed friends, the change also symbolizes an agency rebirth and recommitment.

"I think of equality, freedom, and of not turning anyone away," remarks Chris Watert, Coordinator of Administra-

tive Supports & Services. "We are reinventing ourselves to respond to the growing, changing needs in our community, and to highlight the importance of community to all of us."

Because Liberty believes that almost no one freely chooses homelessness, its programs are designed to integrate participants into the community and to hook them up with the medical, psychological, social and legal services they need to stay safely off the streets.

Countering the Brutality of the Streets

"Let's face it," explains Executive Director Sarah

[see Buzz, next page]

Director of Clinical Services Yolanda Sidoti Looks for the Spark

To say that Liberty's Director of Clinical Services Yolanda P. Sidoti is an optimist misses the point.

Sure, she believes in people's ability to make their lives better. She sees life as a journey that we all try to enjoy. And, even after a decade of helping people face trauma, change and death, she still speaks of the "beauty of doing this work."

Beauty, Pain and Power

Yolanda feels the same ache any sensitive person would when witnessing another's struggle. Yet she also has a brutally keen

awareness of power, and of how it can undermine even the best of intentions.

She sees it with residents, who due to depression or trauma cannot always rally the strength to take good care of themselves.

She sees it with social service workers whose hearts may be in the right place but are too overloaded to notice the demoralizing effect of discourtesy and judgement on their most vulnerable clients.

And, running programs that can and do save lives, that are willing to give people as many chances as they need to falter and to succeed, Yolanda sees Liberty's power as well.

Unconditional Positive Regard

"So we just have to stop when a resident walks in here. Not just program staff, everybody. You stop and take care of that person, with dignity,

compassion and respect."

"Whether they stay and do well or give up and go back to the streets, we strive to give them an experience that is profoundly different than any other time in their lives. An experience of unconditional positive regard."

One Little Dot of Hope

It's the spirit of Liberty Community Services' residents that keeps Yolanda going. Their frailty, resilience and the faith that "so much can be overcome with just one little spark, one little dot, one little, little, little dot of hope." ■



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SUPPORTIVE HOUSING & SERVICES FOR OUR NEIGHBORS IN NEED

Getting the Word Out About Homelessness

How You Can Help

Welcome one and welcome all to Liberty Community Services' premiere issue of *Liberty*, our brand-new quarterly newsletter to keep you up to date on our efforts to end homelessness in Connecticut.

Whether you need our services, participate in our programs, want to help or are just plain curious, *Liberty* will introduce you to the people and programs that make us one of Connecticut's most friendly and innovative resources for neighbors in need.

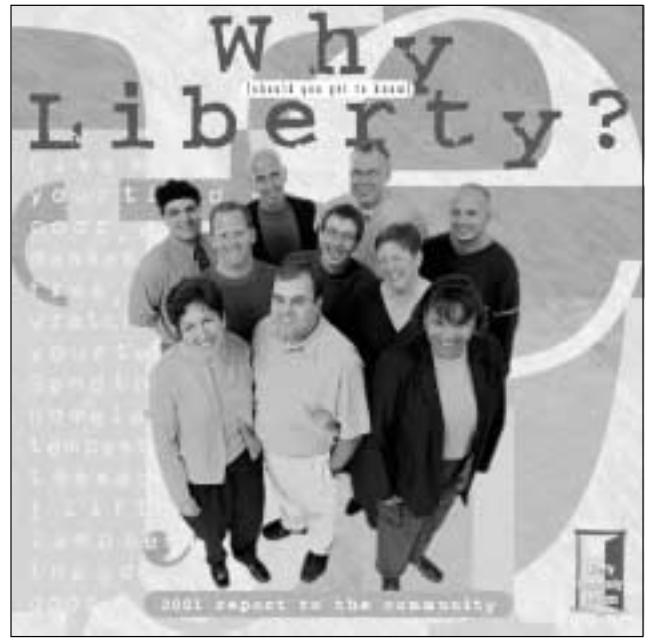
So don't be shy!

Here's how you can get involved with *Liberty*:

- Tell us what you would like to read about in upcoming issues.
- Ask questions.
- Lend us your artwork or poetry about experiences of homelessness.
- Pass along this issue to a friend or colleague when you're through with it to help spread the word.
- Attend an upcoming event, volunteer your time and consider making a charitable donation.

Together we *will* make a difference. Gratefully,

Sarah



To learn more about our recent accomplishments and upcoming challenges, call for your free copy of Liberty's 2001 Report to the Community. Or visit www.libertycs.org today!

[Buzz, cont.]

D. Caldwell, "even if ill health, abuse, poverty, criminality or emotional instability didn't *cause* an individual's homelessness, the brutality of life on the streets can often *lead* to those issues.

"So when you're talking about ending homelessness, you must talk about supportive services. And you must treat every resident—no matter how much they do or do not conform to your hopes for them—with dignity, compassion and respect."

Which Way to Turn

Liberty's outreach, transitional, supportive and independent living programs have one main goal: to provide supportive housing for individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

For some residents, moving in is momentous. It may be the first time they've ever had a place to call their own, a telephone or a mailbox. For others it may be the first home in which they've ever slept soundly or felt safe.

"When you're out there and you don't know which way to go, which way to turn," recalls Participant Felix Colon, Jr., "getting into Liberty and having a roof over your head, having a base, gives you security."

Personal, Achievable Goals

From there, Liberty counselors work with each resident to set personal, achievable goals, give encouragement and foster hope. For Participant Lenny Peace, this meant "sharpening my skills," including communication, hygiene and meal preparation, as well as keeping medical appointments and battling a long history of addiction.

Making the Connection

Even with the best program and the best of intentions, not every participant will achieve their goals. Some will leave before they are ready. Others will relapse. Others will succumb to their illnesses.

"That's why it is crucial for agencies to work together," says Sarah. "We have to provide more than one option for people and more than one chance to succeed on one's own terms."

Through collaborative projects like the Open Door Alliance, CTCARE and our Community Van Service Program, Liberty looks forward to celebrating success with its partner agencies, and with participants like Felix and Lenny. ■

"You must treat every resident — no matter how much they do or do not conform to your hopes for them — with dignity, compassion and respect."

[CT in Crisis, cont.]

Hezzie knows what he's talking about. For him, life on the streets brought hardship that could break even the strongest among us. Constant hunger. Unexpected violence. Illness. And soul-crushing despair.

Two Chickens, Two Fishes

Within a year, Hezzie landed in the hospital after a family friend found him moaning in agony. In a refrain not uncommon among participants, he describes one of the major benefits of hospitalization, "They let me stay in there another day. 'Eatin' good now,' I thought. I was eatin' double. I said, 'Give me two chickens, two fishes, whatever.'"

Yet hunger is not the only issue. For individuals without a permanent address and the security of having a roof over one's head, navigating medical, social and legal services can become both a psychological and bureaucratic nightmare. Finding or keeping a job becomes a Herculean task.

Stopping Homelessness Before It Starts

That's where Liberty's Independent Living Program (ILP) steps in. Designed to prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place, ILP provides or accesses rental subsidies for residents unable to maintain rent payments in low- to moderate-income apartments.

"Last year alone, more than 50 individuals qualified for this 24-unit program," says Director of Programs Yolanda Sidoti. As the months went by, the waiting list of approved applicants grew steadily.

"The reality is that the success of ILP is directly related to the generosity of the community," adds Yolanda, "I'm so thankful that people care enough to pitch in." ■

Liberty is a quarterly newsletter distributed free of charge to help prevent and end homelessness in Connecticut. Founded in 1987, Liberty Community Services is a supportive housing and service nonprofit offering outreach, transitional, supportive and independent living programs for homeless and at risk of homelessness adults. • **We gratefully acknowledge participants highlighted within these pages, each of whom has granted permission to tell their story that it may help other neighbors in need.** • Copywriting & design by Cavanaugh Creative • Photography & illustration by Bob Feather, Robert Lisk, Karen Cavanaugh & Artville • © 2002 Liberty Community Services, Inc. All rights reserved.

Patience, Perseverance and Partnership

One Woman's Story

Neither Supportive Housing Case Manager Howie Newton nor Past Participant Sue Anne Osborne will ever forget the day they met.

It was at the shelter where Howie used to work. Mid-summer, he thinks. At just 78 pounds and fidgety as a hummingbird, Sue Anne was as tiny as her problems were big.

From Spiked Punch to Crack Cocaine

When she met Howie, she was riding the tail end of a 25-year addiction that started with spiked punch and ended with heroin and crack cocaine.

Her habit cost her everything she had. Her father, who she believes died of a broken heart. Her four young children, given over to foster care. Her home, her possessions and her health.

Knowing she had to stop using yet fearing life on the streets would make it impossible, Sue Anne listened to Howie describe a program that could help.

"All of a sudden I just started crying," remembers Sue Anne, "I was so overwhelmed." Howie waited patiently for her tears to



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Moving In, Moving On

Within a week, Sue Anne moved into what she describes as the "penthouse apartment" of our Transitional Living Program.

After catching up on some desperately needed sleep, she began the hard work of restoring her health, getting her finances in order and reconnecting with family.

Today, Sue Anne is remarried and settled in a safe and clean apartment with her husband. She enjoys visits with her children, reading to her grandson and taking care of her cats.

How did Liberty help? "They gave me the space and opportunity to realize my own recovery," says Sue Anne, "And Howie was kind and persevering. I always felt close to him. We got along just fine." ■

To apply for Liberty's transitional, supportive and independent living programs, call Howie Newton, Supportive Housing Case Manager-Outreach at 203.495.7600, ext. 120.

Words of Wisdom

from "What If It Were You?"

Did you ever stop to consider and care
How a homeless person deals with despair
When he is always wondering where he'll get his next meal
With the onset of winter, and the cold he will feel.

He learns to adapt as best he can,
Debating whether or not he's less of a man
As a day mingles with a long, lonely night
He knows he's solitary in his hapless plight.

Sometimes he doesn't mind being apart from the norm
Why should he feel compelled to conform
When others go about their business in their usual way
Ignorantly callous to his dismal, drawn-out day.

by Sue Anne Osborne

I'm not out to hurt anybody. I'm just here to survive like everybody else. Liberty has given me the opportunity to do that. And I'm grateful, very grateful.

-Participant Felix Colon, Jr.

Liberty invites your poetry, journal excerpts, photography and artwork about your experiences with homelessness and healing. Please submit them along with your name and contact information. Thank you!

LIBERTY'S
COMMUNITY
& RESPECT

You're Invited to...

The Original Monterey Café 4th Annual Jazz Picnic

The Ince Family Home at 9 Rimmon Road, Woodbridge • \$25
Sunday, July 21, 2002 • 11:00 AM-5:00 PM

Join us for an afternoon of jazz brought to you by Delores Greenlee, featuring Rohn Lawrence, Jesse Cheese Hameen, II and Elevation. Bring your own picnic and seating (no tents or stakes). Proceeds to benefit AIDS Interfaith Network and Liberty Community Services. Call 203.468.9870 for tickets and info, including rain location.

Coming This Fall:

Liberty's Safe Haven Groundbreaking

Be part of history as we break ground on a project that, with your help and the significant support of The United Illuminating Company, promises to transform New Haven into a national model of hope for the homeless.

Scheduled to open in fall 2003, Safe Haven will provide permanent apartments with gallery, offices and retail space in historic Ninth Square. Watch for details!



Learn More About our Programs

Whether you need our help, want to help or are just plain curious, call Tyrone Moore at 203.495.7600, ext. 116 to ask for more information today.

Department of Outreach
& Supportive Housing Access

Transitional, Supportive
& Independent Living Programs

Safe Haven

The Open Door Alliance

Care Technologies Collaboration
& Resource Enhancement Alliance

Community Van Service Program

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Please Help

Yes, Sarah! I want to help spread the word about homelessness and house my neighbors in need. Here's my tax-deductible gift of \$_____.

- I have enclosed a check made payable to Liberty Community Services.
- Please charge my Visa MasterCard American Express
Card # _____ Exp. Date _____
Signature _____ Telephone _____
- I'd like to know how to include Liberty in my estate plans.
- My gift is in honor/memory of _____.
- I'd like to volunteer my time and talents. Call me at _____.

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

E-mail _____

Telephone _____

Please return this form to Sarah D. Caldwell, Executive Director • Liberty Community Services, Inc., 254 College St., 2nd Floor, New Haven, CT 06510 • Thank you for your gift!

\$25 provides bedding and toiletries for a new resident desperately in need of a good night's sleep.

\$35 equips a kitchen for an individual who can't remember their last home-cooked meal.

\$50 helps us offer much-needed emotional and psychological support for a resident battling mental illness, addiction or life-threatening disease.

\$75 helps us provide a home, transportation and round-the-clock support for someone escaping and recovering from the dangers of the streets.

