

COMMUNITY



Community Housing Advocates ■ Mercy Housing and Shelter Corporation ■ My Sisters' Place Winter 2021



It has been almost a year since I began at CHA and the COVID-19 pandemic took such an unyielding grip on our lives, community, and country. With news of vaccinations, I am hopeful that their distribution will put an end to the devastation that the pandemic has brought to us all. But I am also fearful. Vaccinations alone will not solve all the economic fallout caused by COVID-19. We, as service providers, will have to problem solve new and innovative ways to manage the pending eviction tsunami looming over our heads. We also will continue to work on solutions to food insecurity. This has been exasperated by the pandemic, especially for the working poor, who have found themselves out of work for multiple months. Our response at CHA has been to ask for more donations from our supporters and to seek new grant funding to meet the demand we see and thus, increase services. Two of

our new programs, the Family Triage Program and the Housing Mobility Program, are highlighted in this issue of our newsletter. Here at CHA we strongly believe that housing is the stabilizing force in the lives of the people we serve, acting as a first step on the path toward good health, employment, and attainment of life goals. Now, in this winter of our discontent, we must find within us, an invincible summer and believe that this will, and must, get better. I sincerely thank you for all your support, especially throughout these difficult times.

Kara A. Capone
Chief Executive Officer



In the depth of winter, I finally learned that there was in me an invincible summer. ~Albert Camus



Shown on the set: Host Shelly Sindland of Sindland Strategy on the left and Kara Capone, CEO of Community Housing Advocates on the right.

2nd Annual Hope & Home Celebration Virtual Event Wrap up

Story page 5>

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For more information about
Mercy Housing and Shelter, visit
www.mercyhousingct.org.
For more information about
My Sisters' Place, visit
www.sistersplacect.org



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Mercy Housing and Shelter and My Sisters' Place always has, and always will, treat people with the compassion and dignity that they deserve no matter the color of their skin, heritage or sexual orientation. We are proud of our inclusiveness.

Generosity Galore!



Members of the RTX Women's Finance Forum fulfilled many wishes.



A young recipient of gifts from My Brother's Keeper.

COVID did not dampen the holiday spirit of the donors to our Holiday Wish Program this year! We are grateful to the companies and organizations that fulfilled wishes of our clients this year. Over 400 gifts and gift cards, totaling more than \$20,000, were given to help make the holidays brighter for those who receive services from Mercy Housing and Shelter and My Sisters' Place.

Donors included: Kristen Calpaldo, Employees of the IRS, LIMRA Insurance Company, MahoneySabol CPA's, MDC, Otis Elevator, PwC, RTX Women's Finance Forum, Sacred Heart Church in Suffield, St. Pius X Church in Middletown, and Travelers.

Residents of our Sue Ann Shay Place Apartments were treated to an outdoor, socially distanced event

thrown by a group of family members and friends called My Brother's Keeper. They provided gifts to every resident, along with hot chocolate and cookies.

If you are interested in participating in our Holiday Wish Program for 2021, please reach out to Christina Lessard, Director of Development, at clessard@mercyhousingct.org. ■

New Housing Program = New Opportunity

Research has shown that families who relocate to better resourced neighborhoods experience greater opportunity. Although that might seem like an obvious statement, it is not always easy for a family to make that move. This is where a new housing program at My Sisters' Place comes in.

The Housing Mobility Program helps individuals and families living in disadvantaged areas in cities relocate to neighborhoods in the suburbs of those cities. These neighborhoods offer better access to community

resources such as jobs, high quality schools, supermarkets, and open space.

Children's development and their chances of growing up to be healthy, productive adults are significantly influenced by where they live. Adults and children who relocate to a high opportunity neighborhood also experience lower crime rates, improved health conditions and less psychological distress.

"We are so excited to help families and individuals find better housing



opportunities. Our staff has worked really hard to develop this program and we are very happy to see the public responding and getting involved. This is something our State and its

New Housing Program = New Opportunity continued...

people need.” says John Thomas, Director of Housing Coordination.

Housing mobility counselors at My Sisters’ Place have a wealth of experience in housing, human services, case management, property management, and real estate. Additionally, they have undergone an extensive eight-week training program led by the Baltimore Housing Mobility Program - a national leader in this area. Counselors provide families with a myriad of services, including assistance

with credit repair, identification of potential apartments, information about neighborhood amenities, and negotiation with landlords.

It is an opportunity for landlords as well. Rental assistance (Section 8, housing choice vouchers, or RAP housing certificates) is guaranteed from the State, renters have undergone budget counseling to prepare them to be good tenants, and counselors remain in contact with renters to help avoid any potential

issues moving forward. Research and data shows that tenants with housing vouchers tend to stay longer in their apartments than regular tenants.

To learn more about the Housing Mobility Program, visit <http://sistersplacet.org/housing-mobility/> or call (860) 808-2041 ■



Mercy on Main in Middletown

Mercy Housing and Shelter opened a new office on Main Street in Middletown in November—but providing housing services in Middletown is nothing new for Mercy. Mercy first started serving Middletown’s homeless in 1989 through its Shepherd Home Transitional Shelter on the grounds of Connecticut Valley Hospital. When that program ended in 2014, Mercy continued to serve the formerly homeless in independent, affordable apartments throughout Middletown. Staff would meet clients in their homes or out in the community to provide supportive services to help keep them stably housed.

As the need for services grew, the decision was made to find office space that was convenient for clients to access, as many do not have their own transportation. Office space at 363 Main Street, a building in which Webster Bank and other businesses occupy, became available and a lease was quickly signed.

Charles, one of the Middletown case managers, stated, “This space allows for common ground to meet clients. Some clients would hesitate to schedule an appointment with their case manager at their home for fear of neighbors finding out they were receiving services.”

“The location couldn’t be better,” said Steve Hurley, MSW, Manager of Supportive Housing. “Being centrally located on Main Street with public transportation options is ideal. Additionally, there are numerous community services within a short radius



Staff outside of new office at 363 Main Street in Middletown: (l to r) Nadia, Symphoni, Steve and Charles.

of the office: a food pantry, a community health center, social security office, and a soup kitchen - just to name a few.”

Providing supportive housing services to formerly homeless individuals who are now living independently is a critical part of breaking the cycle of homelessness. Mercy Housing and Shelter is currently helping around 60 people in Middletown to adjust coming off the street or out of a shelter, connect them to services, and ultimately become self-sufficient. ■



Karen feels blessed to be in a position to make a positive impact in someone's life.

Charlotte, on the left, poses for a picture with Karen, on the right, before her shift.

Homeless to HomeGoods

It can be daunting for someone who does not like technology at all to secure employment. One needs access to the internet to search for a job, the ability to email a resume, perhaps to take an assessment to determine your skills, the possibility of an interview via video conferencing, and, if you receive the job, the capability to clock in and out on a smartphone. Now add that you live in a shelter and you want to find a job. These were the circumstances for Charlotte.

Some might perceive these circumstances as barriers, but Karen Lee-Torres, an Employment Specialist at Mercy Housing and Shelter, was not discouraged one bit when she started to work with Charlotte. Karen approached her new client with confidence and determination. She knew that with a little patience, Charlotte could find employment

and be successful. And Karen was right. Charlotte has been working as a full-time merchandiser at the HomeGoods distribution center since last February – all throughout COVID. She is now comfortable with technology. She is thrilled to be providing for herself, not relying on others and even has her own apartment now too.

It was not easy for Charlotte to get to where she is today. Her job history was spotty. She did not have appropriate clothes to wear to an interview. She needed to gain interview skills. When Charlotte was hired, she needed Karen's help to set up direct deposit at her bank. There was a brief furlough period due to COVID, and Karen helped Charlotte file for unemployment benefits. Karen helped Charlotte secure a smartphone to complete a daily health screening at the beginning

of each shift. Karen found an answer to every question and a solution to every problem.

Karen feels “blessed to be in a position to make a positive impact in someone's life.” She finds working with formerly homeless individuals to be inspiring, especially after someone who has never had a resume before sees themselves on paper. She watches the transformation in them as they begin to feel encouraged that they might have a second chance to prove themselves. People who are homeless have oftentimes made poor decisions in their past and can feel unworthy. Karen helps them to find purpose and to see value in themselves.

Charlotte credits Karen for not giving up on her but Karen sees it differently. Karen says that the reason Charlotte was successful is because Charlotte did not give up on herself. ■



Taylor A. Shea

New Board Chair

This past fall, Taylor A. Shea was elected as Board Chair for Community Housing Advocates (CHA) and will serve a two-year term in this role. Taylor is a partner in the Corporate practice group at Robinson+Cole, a law firm with a 175-year history that began in Hartford. The firm now has 220 attorneys in eleven offices throughout the Northeast, Florida, and California. She earned her B.A. from the College of the Holy Cross, magna cum laude, and her J.D., with honors, from the University of Connecticut School of Law ■.

The CHA Board is comprised of the following dedicated individuals:

Officers

- Taylor A. Shea, Chair
Robinson+Cole
- Diane Bengston, Vice Chair
Retired
- Andrew Meehan, Secretary
The Travelers Companies, Inc.
- Matthew Candiloro, Treasurer
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- Martha Leonard
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The Glastonbury Citizen
- Suzanne Nolan
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- Marva Patterson
Hartford Psychological Services
- Anthony Torsiello
The Travelers Companies, Inc.
- Sarah A. Treese
Immediate Past Chair PwC

Mercy Housing and Shelter and My Sisters' Place are two incredible, impactful organizations with whom I am very proud to be affiliated. Each entity has literally transformed the lives of thousands within our community. -Taylor A. Shea

2nd Annual



Hope & Home
Celebration
Virtual Event
Wrap up

Semi-formal attire was not required at the 2nd Annual Hope & Home Event. People had the opportunity to support the work of Mercy Housing and My Sisters' Place from the comfort of their own home this year. On November 5th, Community Housing Advocates' (CHA) largest fundraiser was held virtually and raised tens of thousands of dollars through on-line donations, silent auction items and sponsorships.

If you missed it, the event was recorded and can be seen here: <https://vimeo.com/eventresources/hopeandhome2020>.

Sponsors of the event included: Allied World Insurance Company; CT Housing Finance Authority; D'Esopo Funeral Chapels; Double Eagle Insurance Agency; HCC Tokio Marine; KPMG, LLP; Nutmeg Consulting; PwC; Robinson & Cole; Sisters of Mercy; Travelers; Tzedakah House, LLC; UBS Hartford; Virtus Investment Partners; and Webster Bank. ■

No Family Left Outside

This winter presented an opportunity for Mercy Housing and Shelter to serve more people, in particular families, who otherwise would be on the street or in their cars. "I could not bear the thought of children in the greater Hartford region sleeping in cars, especially during winter," said Kara Capone, CEO of Community Housing Advocates, the parent company of Mercy Housing and Shelter. "We needed to fill this gap of services within our community."

In past winters, when other shelters reach capacity, some churches around Hartford had been used as an overflow space for families who needed immediate shelter. This year, the churches were unable to provide this service because their staff and volunteers are mostly elderly and at high risk for contracting COVID.



One of the rooms used for families

The timing was right for Mercy Housing to step up and offer shelter for these families. Two programs that were housed at its St. Elizabeth House on Main Street recently moved to another location. The empty rooms were quickly outfitted with cots loaned by the churches to offer a family a place of their own for the night.

St. Elizabeth House is staffed 24 hours a day to serve its residential clients, so it made perfect sense. Families are welcomed in the evening, fed, given the opportunity to shower in the morning and offered breakfast. Services are provided by Mercy staff first thing in the morning to assist the families in finding more permanent housing.

Stephanie Corbin, Director of Rapid Rehousing and Diversion Services, oversees the services offered to these families. She states: "As a mother myself, I am particularly pleased that Mercy stepped up to assist these families. I credit our leadership for acting quickly in preparing to offer these services. And I credit my staff for their flexibility in their work schedules to meet the needs of these families in the evening and early in the morning. This is a team effort, and it is right thing to do." ■



Senator Richard Blumenthal visited our Friendship Center at our St. Elizabeth House on Christmas Eve to highlight the importance of protecting our most vulnerable residents during the pandemic. From left to right: Kara Capone, Chief Executive Officer; Senator Blumenthal; Kathy Shaw, Chief Operating Officer; and Dan Gurvich, Chief Financial Officer. ■



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Support, Empowerment & Independence

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