

# COMMUNITY BUILDING

FALL 2023



## CEO INSIGHTS



Sadly, the results of the latest Point in Time Count have shown a 16% increase in homelessness in CT over the past two years. Studies like these make it crystal

clear that there is more work to be done in the battle to end homelessness. We are still seeing the ripple effect of the pandemic among the homeless. People are becoming homeless faster than service providers can rehouse them. As a result, there is bottlenecking in the service-delivery system.

On the service side of this equation it has become incredibly difficult to attract and keep experts in the Human Services industry. Funding for our staffing contracts have not kept up with the steadily increasing CT minimum wage coupled with record-setting inflation.

We are fighting an uphill battle. The number of homeless people is increasing and the number of people willing to work in the human services field is shrinking. Meanwhile, funding from state and federal sources has remained stagnant at best.

What will this look like for us this winter when individual lives are at stake, and we do not have the resources to house people? We will persist and you can help us in the fight, by letting your legislators know that the issue of homelessness is important to you - and should be to them as well.

*Kara A. Capone*  
Chief Executive Officer



## STUDY SHOWS HOMELESSNESS ON THE RISE IN CT

**AFTER DECADES OF DECREASES** in homelessness, a new study shows that the number of unhoused people in Connecticut was up by almost 3% last winter and up 13% in the winter of 2022.

The cause? Experts believe these increases reflect the residual impact of the Covid pandemic and the current state of the economy for people working the service sector.

The 2023 Annual Point-in-Time Count study, presented by Advancing CT Together, is a HUD-required annual survey of sheltered and unsheltered people experiencing homelessness on a single night in January. Conducted on Tuesday, January 24, 2023, the survey captured information on those in the housing and shelter systems as well as those living outdoors.

It was found that on January 24, there were a total of 3,015 individuals experiencing homelessness, which is a 3% increase from the previous year. The report also found that the number of homeless youth in CT (24 years old and under) has seen a 7% increase in community members counted as unhoused. Additionally, the report noted that there were a total of 14 Transgender or Gender Non-Conforming persons reported as unhoused throughout the state of Connecticut.

In presenting the report, Advancing CT Together commented, "We are not just counting the number of those who are sheltered and unsheltered for the sake of knowing the scope of "the problem". We are doing the count to cast a spotlight on the challenge that our society must do better."

# THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT



- 1** Youth from Camp KO (Kingswood-Oxford) created hygiene kits and organized the food pantry at St. Elizabeth House.
- 2** Eversource held its annual summer barbecue for residents at St. Elizabeth House.
- 3** Volunteers from UConn ran a cupcake decorating station during My Sisters' Place's Back to School event.
- 4** Volunteer and Donations Coordinator Leah Reyes, Director of Development Annette Scheidecker, and COO Kathy Shaw accepted a \$1,300 check from the Metropolitan District Commission's 2023 Summer Internship cohort.
- 5** Sister Patricia McKeon, previous executive director of Mercy Housing and Shelter Corporation (1998-2015), reconnected with staff during a visit to St. Elizabeth House.

- 6** Volunteers from Allied World Assurance Company ran a bingo station at My Sisters' Place's Back to School event.
- 7** Metrum Research Group provided back to school supplies for My Sisters' Place's Back to School event.
- 8-9** Amwins Brokerage volunteered at Mercy and My Sisters' Place this past August, painting the patio furniture at St. Elizabeth House and preparing for My Sisters' Place's Back to School event.
- 10** Volunteers from KPMG helped serve those utilizing the food pantry at St. Elizabeth House.
- 11** Otis Elevator completed various landscaping and beautification projects around St. Elizabeth House.

**CONTACT INFORMATION**

development@mercyhousingct.org  
860.808.2044

For more information visit  
[www.ctcha.org](http://www.ctcha.org)  
[www.mercyhousingct.org](http://www.mercyhousingct.org)  
[www.sistersplacect.org](http://www.sistersplacect.org)

**CONNECT WITH US!**






Due to space limitations we are unable to include photos of all the great support we receive. However, we are grateful to you all nonetheless.



## Legislative Visit Keeps *Homelessness* Top of Mind

We were pleased to have a visit by CT Representative and Speaker of the House Matt Ritter in July. Representative Ritter took the time to tour The Friendship Center and St. Elizabeth House as well as The Haven. While on the tour, Community Housing Advocates CEO, Kara Capone, discussed funding concerns that could impact the programs at Mercy Housing and My Sisters Place. Familiarizing legislators with the work that we do is an essential part of securing resources for the important work that is being done to help those in need in our community.

## DONOR **spotlight**

### Thank You, Max Cares Foundation!

As the holiday season approaches the Max Cares Foundation is gearing up for their **Roasts for the Holidays** program to ensure that the underserved in our community are able to enjoy a special meal prepared just for them.

For the past five years, this non-profit organization founded by Max Hospitality, has been raising money from their restaurant patrons to help soup kitchens like Mercy Housing's Friendship Center to purchase all the items needed to prepare a full holiday meal for their visitors.

Along with providing food for our Friendship Center visitors, Roasts for the Holidays did the same for seventeen other charities in the Hartford and Springfield areas last year. The cost per location averages to about \$3,000.

Thanks to the Max Cares Foundation and their generous donors for helping to make the holidays a bit brighter for those in need.

## HAVE YOU JOINED THE SUSTAINERS SOCIETY?

Whether it's running your household or managing a business, anyone having to operate on a budget knows how crucial it is to have regular steady income to pay the bills. That regular income provides both stability and a sense of relief. That's just what our recurring donors provide for Mercy Housing and My Sisters' Place.



You who give routinely help to sustain both organizations with your weekly, bi-weekly or monthly giving. Your regular donations allow us to pay for programs critical to the work that we do on behalf of the people we serve. You are part of a special group of donors we are calling our Sustainers Society, and we are truly grateful to you.

If you are not already a member of this important circle of support, you can become one by scanning a QR code on the back of this newsletter to our secure online donation sites and follow the prompts to make your donation recurring – choosing your amount and the frequency of your donation.

Another way to participate is to sign up for workplace giving if your employer offers it. In this case, you can choose to have a set amount deducted from your paycheck and sent to the charity of your choice.

Thank you to all of the wonderful members of our Sustainers Society! You are making a difference, and we appreciate you and your support more than you may ever know.. If you have questions or need help registering a recurring donation contact **Annette Scheidecker** at [ascheidecker@mercyhousingct.org](mailto:ascheidecker@mercyhousingct.org) or call 860-808-2044.

## Board of Directors Take a *Tour*

Members of the Community Housing Advocates (CHA) Board of Directors took time for a guided tour of some of the facilities and programs operated by Mercy Housing in July.

The tour gave them a chance to visit a bedroom ready to be occupied by a new participant in Mercy's Women's Recovery Program located at St. Elizabeth House in Hartford. This program offers short-term, 90-day housing and supportive services for women in recovery preparing them to transition from treatment to living and thriving in the community.



Tour-goers also visited the computer room located at St. Elizabeth House where residents go to receive computer training to enhance job skills and even search for jobs.

Board members also had a chance to see the Friendship Center in action, while breakfast was being served to those waiting in line to be fed. From there the group was taken to The Haven, home to Mercy's newest program aimed at providing housing and services to young people who have aged out of the foster care program.

Tours like this help to give Board members and supporters a first-hand encounter with the services that their donations help to provide.

**▶ TO SCHEDULE A TOUR OF ANY OF OUR SITES, PLEASE CONTACT: [ascheidecker@mercyhousingct.org](mailto:ascheidecker@mercyhousingct.org)**

# Legacy35

## A TOOLKIT TO SUCCESS

Mercy Housing's newest permanent supportive housing program known as Legacy35, is already making a difference in the lives of those enrolled in the program. Since its inception in May, 10 clients have been enrolled and more than 20 have been referred. Legacy35 is designed to help them gain and maintain their independence through access to community resources and mentorship.

Legacy35 serves up to 35 individuals and families who are currently holding a housing voucher and are referred by the Greater Hartford Coordinated Access Network or the Capitol Region Mental Health Authority. The program provides short-term case management services to help a participant address a pressing need, with the goal of "graduating" from the program. Legacy35 is staffed by community social workers and a certified peer support specialist who has faced similar life experiences as the client. The community social worker connects the participant to resources in their community, and the peer support specialist provides the participant with in-home support and mentorship to help them succeed.

A unique feature of Legacy35 is that it is a service-only program, meaning that it does not pay a participant's rent. Team Supervisor Angie Bremser notes that because Legacy35 focuses on the person and their needs, participants are more willing to engage in services. Bremser adds that programs like Legacy35 have been requested by the permanent supportive housing community for a long time. When a participant "graduates" from Legacy35, Bremser hopes they have gained confidence in their choices, the tools and knowledge they need to feel successful, and the understanding that they don't need to have limitations to their dreams.



Angie Bremser is the Team Supervisor for Legacy35

## PREPARING TO MAKE *Holiday Wishes Come True*

Staff for both Mercy Housing and My Sisters' Place are already preparing to make sure that our clients and their children have a holiday season filled with love and cheer. Staff is starting to collect gift wish lists from clients from both organizations to post on our Amazon Wish List.

Every year through our Holiday Wishes Program we ask our supporters to look at the wish list to see if there is something that they would be willing to purchase as a holiday gift for a client(s).

If you are interested in purchasing a gift please contact **Leah Reyes** at **lreyes@mercyhousingct.org**.

### OR YOU CAN SEND A GIFT CARD(S) IN INCREMENTS OF \$25 TO:

Community Housing Advocates  
Holiday Wishes, 221 Main Street, 4th Floor  
Hartford, CT 06106

*Thank you* for whatever you are able to do to help us spread some holiday cheer for those in need.

## New Board Members Join CHA

Community Housing Advocates (CHA), the parent organization of Mercy Housing and My Sisters' Place welcomes three new members to the organization's Board of Directors. Nicole Terry, Colin Wrinn and Kelly O'Connor Britt were unanimously voted onto the Board during the July Board meeting.



**NICOLE TERRY**, RPA, MBA, MPA, ERG Leader, is the Associate Director of Sustainment Operations – Military Engines for Pratt & Whitney. She is a financial professional with diversified experience in financial analysis, fixed asset accounting, business support, government pricing and performance reporting.



**COLIN WRINN** is an Associate Attorney for Reid and Riege, P.C. in Hartford. He studied History and Political Science at Boston College and received his Juris Doctorate from the University of Connecticut School of Law.



**KELLY BRITT** is a licensed real estate agent in the State of Connecticut and holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Connecticut. Prior to becoming a real estate agent, she worked for a major insurance company, and has a background in Marketing.

## CALENDAR OF *events*

- SEPTEMBER 29** **Silent Auction Early Online Bidding Opens for Hope & Home**
- OCTOBER 13** **Hope & Home Event at Hartford Marriott Downtown**
- NOVEMBER 11-18** **National Hunger & Homelessness Awareness Week**
- NOVEMBER 28** **Giving Tuesday**



# From Foster Care to Homelessness to *The Haven*

**IT IS ESTIMATED** that more than 23,000 children age out of the US foster care system every year.

Without the proper support, these young people face some very tough odds. After reaching the age of 18, at least 20% of the children who were in foster care will become instantly homeless. Many dealing with direct effects of trauma will end up with substance abuse issues, criminal records, mental health challenges and unwanted pregnancies.

It is because of odds like these that Mercy Housing established The Haven a little over a year ago. Located at 7 Charter Oak Place in Hartford, The Haven is a 10 bedroom home for young people who have aged out of the foster care system. Here, they receive a comprehensive array of services and supports specifically designed to move them on to independence and successful community living. Some of those supports include:

- **CASE MANAGEMENT**
- **BASIC LIFE SKILL BUILDING**
- **EDUCATION SERVICES**
- **MONEY MANAGEMENT SERVICES**
- **OUTPATIENT MANAGEMENT**

"The earlier we are able to tackle the issues that they are facing, the better we are able to bring some stability into their lives and get them ready for independence," explained Susana Villalobos, Director of Youth Services at The Haven.



Susana and her team provide 24-hour on-site staff support for up to ten young people ages 18 – 25, who have been referred by the Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services Young Adult Services Program. The average stay for residents is between ten to twenty months.

"If it weren't for this program some of these young people would be on the streets. Others would end up selling themselves for drug or rent money," commented Kara Capone, CEO of Community Housing Advocates the parent organization to Mercy Housing. "The need is great, and The Haven is our effort to begin to meet that need."

## IMPACTING LIVES *Affecting Change*



***There's gotta be something more to life than just pain, right?"***

**-RYDER**

Ryder learned that the answer to that question is a resounding YES, after becoming the first person to graduate from The Haven, Mercy Housing's one-year-old residential program for young adults who have aged out of the foster care system.

Sent to foster care at the age of three, Ryder watched sadly as their twin sister was soon adopted without them. At the age of ten Ryder was thrilled to be adopted by a couple and have a place to call home until Ryder says the adopted father began his abuse.



At age 16 Ryder left the abuse and was sent to different group homes and moved around a few more times, until being admitted to the hospital for depression and substance abuse. From there, Ryder was sent to St. Elizabeth House to stabilize before entering The Haven, which helped to turn things around.

Since graduating from The Haven in July Ryder is now 10 months clean, lives independently in an apartment and has a steady job.

***"The Haven was truly a safe haven and taught me things I wish I had I would have been taught all along,"*** Ryder commented. "The staff and programs showed me how to do money orders to pay rent and how to cook. I've learned to drive and have a job that I love."

This now bubbly 23 year old, who once suffered from depression after a young life of trauma, is preparing to go to college to put their culinary skills and love of baking to good use thanks to the work being done at The Haven.

*We wish you well, Ryder.*

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**HOPE AND HOME**  
CELEBRATION 2023  
*To benefit Mercy Housing and Shelter Corporation & My Sisters' Place*

**MUSIC - OPEN BAR - AUCTIONS - DINNER - DANCING**

**Friday, October 13**  
6 – 10pm Hartford Marriott Downtown

LIVE AUCTION	SILENT AUCTION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gourmet dinner party</li> <li>UConn Men's Basketball</li> <li>Luxury Limo Bus</li> <li>Travelers Championship</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Approx. 80 ITEMS!</li> <li>\$300/\$200 Amazon Cards</li> <li>Tix to the Bushnell</li> <li>Wine &amp; Beer Packages</li> <li>Golf Foursomes &amp; MORE</li> </ul>

**MUST ATTEND to bid on these great LIVE Auction items. So Register Now!**

**EARLY BIDDING has BEGUN! You do NOT have to attend to win SILENT Auction items.**

Scan the QR Code to Register & Bid or visit: **TRAVELERS J**  
<https://bit.ly/HopeHome2023>  
Questions: 860.808.2044

**TOKIO MARINE HCC**  
**BANK OF AMERICA**

## Remember Us GIVING TUESDAY November 28

It is known as the global day of generosity and giving - unleashing the power of people and organizations to transform their communities and the world. You can help us transform the world of those who are homeless in our area by giving your financial support on their behalf on Tuesday, November 28th.

Created in 2012, Giving Tuesday is celebrated by non-profit organizations around the world on the Tuesday following Thanksgiving each year.

Thank you for keeping Mercy Housing and My Sisters' Place in mind this Giving Tuesday.



SCAN THE QR CODES TO MAKE A SECURE ONLINE DONATION.

MERCY HOUSING

MY SISTERS' PLACE