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Agency celebrates hard-won success for homeless

Brittany Galla, Special to the Register

NEW HAVEN — For Barbara Vosburgh of Liberty Community Services, celebrating 20 years of the agency's work means two things: success and saving lives.

"It's been our constant mission to reach out to the homeless," said Vosburgh, director of organizational development in human resources.

Liberty Community Services, formally known as the Connecticut AIDS Residence Program, is beginning a yearlong anniversary celebration for its service to the community, services that provide three independent living programs that offer a long-term solution to homelessness and aim to keep formerly homeless people permanently off the street.

"We're thrilled," said John Bradley, Liberty's executive director. "It's been a battle. In the beginning, AIDS was tremendously stigmatized; it took dedicated people to get the program going."

There are three residential programs offered: the transitional living program that houses 16 individuals living with AIDS; the supportive living program that houses seven individuals living with AIDS; and the Safe Haven program, which offers 33 permanent apartments for individuals who are confronting homelessness, chronic illness, or mental illness. Residents in the transitional living program have two years to stay there. Liberty provides permanent housing to more than 85 people a year..

There is an admissions process and certain criteria that needs to be met in order to become a resident at a house or at the apartment building. Each person is required to pay 30 percent of their income each month for rent.

"Our services aim to give a new beginning to homeless people while offering a stable place to live with supportive services," said Vosburgh. "The programs are

designed to help them get back on their feet. It's one of the answers to end homelessness."

The original Connecticut AIDS Residence Program was founded in New Haven by a small group of nurses and clergy concerned with the lack of housing available to individuals living with AIDS.

In 2000, its name was changed to Liberty to offer its doors to other homeless individuals, not just those living with AIDS.

The Safe Haven apartment was opened in 2005, and offers various services and programs, including a food pantry and life skills classes that cover money management and food preparation.

The anniversary event will be a tribute concert to Harry Chapin at 7:30 p.m. June 1 at the Shubert Theater. Chapin was the co-founder of World Hunger Year and a recipient of the Congressional Medal of Honor. The concert will feature the Steve Chapin Band, with members of the original Harry Chapin Band, and the Local United Network to Combat Hunger Ensemble, which is made up of adults and children. The ensemble aims to engage children and their families around the issue of hunger and homelessness.

"I love the idea of a concert and using music and artists to educate people about social problems in our city and country," said Bradley.

Liberty is also in the process of planning a celebration on Oct. 18, which will honor those who helped establish the program.

Concert tickets are \$20, \$18, or \$15. Tickets can be bought at the door or are available at www.shubert.com or (800)228-6622. All concert proceeds go to Liberty.