

Liberty

Dignity ~ Compassion ~ Respect

Fall 2010



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A Decade at Liberty

Cindy Mercier Reflects on Her Time with Us

Liberty has undergone countless changes over the years and Cindy Mercier, our Supportive Housing Case Manager at Safe Haven, has been around to witness many of them. Cindy has been with us for the past ten years and can share numerous stories and memories about her time at Liberty. She started at the Transitional Living Program (TLP), worked for some time at our main office, and then returned to TLP before finally beginning at Safe Haven, where she works today. When she first started at Safe Haven, Cindy was a Life Skills Manager. While serving in this capacity, she coordinated a Sunday brunch for residents, which she would cook at home because Safe Haven's kitchen wasn't ready to be used yet. Cindy says that, for many clients, the brunch was their favorite part of the week and she really enjoyed running it.



Cindy has many stories she can reflect back on about various clients she has assisted and befriended at Safe Haven. She recalls one woman, Lucy,* who had a traumatic brain injury and had been in and out of shelters and rehabilitation programs until she finally made her way to Safe Haven. Lucy had not seen her sister for nine years and treasured a quilt that her sister had made, always keeping it with her wherever she went. Cindy was able to help Lucy locate her sister through the Salvation Army. They were happily reunited and Lucy recently left Safe Haven to live with her sister.

For other clients, however, because of their difficult medical histories, Safe Haven is the final place they live before dying. While some people may find this to be tragic, Cindy points out that residents who pass away while living at Safe Haven die receiving support and comfort that they otherwise would not have received while living in shelters or on the streets.

She remembers one man in particular who was homeless for eighteen years before entering Safe Haven. Although he passed away soon thereafter of cancer, the man was happy to have had a place to call home before he died.

Throughout the years Cindy has worked at Safe Haven, she has observed that, more often than not, clients who enter the program experience personal growth, becoming more mature and independent as they receive the support and guidance offered by staff and fellow residents. Indeed, she is convinced that clients benefit most not when they are simply given things, but rather when they are taught how to take care of themselves. Cindy and other Liberty staff members teach residents basic life skills and, in doing so, help them to restore their dignity and pride. She would like to see Liberty continuing to offer such essential help to people by expanding its programs to include one for inmate reintegration that would assist those formerly in prison to learn important life skills as they reenter society. We are extremely grateful to Cindy for the many years she has contributed to making Liberty what it is today.

*The client's name has been changed for the sake of confidentiality.

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A Note from the Executive Director

In June, the federal government, under the direction of the US Interagency Council on Homelessness, introduced a major campaign to end homelessness. The Council issued a report and a challenge to State, cities, non-profit agencies, and citizens that our goal should be to end chronic homelessness and veterans' homelessness in five years and family homelessness in ten years. Now, with the state of the economy and the wars in the Middle East, it would have been easy to say, "This isn't the time to take on such a major goal." Even so, the federal government made the point to everyone involved in the current efforts that the status quo was not acceptable.



It's good to know that the federal government is ready to embark on a plan to end homelessness and now it's up to communities and agencies in Connecticut to be good partners in that effort. This includes adapting programs, redirecting resources, and measuring results so that everything we do is pointed to the task of providing housing for people in need. We are doing this in partnership not only with federal and State governments but also with community members who make donations, volunteer, and give advice on how to accomplish our goal of making homelessness infrequent and of short duration. In doing so, we hope that homelessness will no longer be seen as a disability or a label but rather as a temporary situation that can be solved. Ending homelessness is an exciting challenge and we are appreciative of your support in that effort.

Board Update

Paula Crombie, Director of Social Work at Yale-New Haven Hospital, was recently elected President of the Board of Directors for Liberty. Upon assuming this role Crombie stated, "it is exciting to be associated with a dynamic organization such as Liberty, in addressing the needs of our community in creative and innovative ways. Liberty has the vision to assist in ending homelessness in our community and I want to be part of this effort." Crombie is also a member of the Community Impact Cabinet of United Way of Greater New Haven, on the Board of the Community Health Charities of New England, and Chair of the Connecticut Hospital Association's Social Work Leadership Group. In 2007, she was named Social Work Leader of the Year in Health Care by the National Society of Social Work Leaders in Health Care. Some of Crombie's career highlights during her 18-year tenure at Yale-New Haven Hospital include establishing a pediatric sexual abuse program; a Family Advocacy Center located at Long Wharf, developing community education and literacy programs for first-time parents; and creating a lead program with outreach services to identify and help children at risk for lead poisoning. We are excited about Paula's leadership of the Liberty Board.

Joyce's Jeans

One of our greatest joys at Liberty is to share client success stories with our community of supporters. In the following, one of our case managers, Chante Austin, describes the recent success experienced by one of her clients, whose name has been changed for the sake of confidentiality.

Joyce decided that she wanted to become more self-reliant and no longer wanted to depend on the government to totally support her. She explored various opportunities to gain employment and, when this did not lead to any promising job opportunities, she decided that she wanted to own her own business. The Connecticut Mental Health Center invited Joyce to apply for their Loan Enhanced Assistance Program (LEAP) and she did so. She was accepted into the program and now works as an entrepreneur designing jeans. Joyce is given a pair of jeans by her customer; she then creates a design by using slits, cuts, oil paints, buttons, and bows. As her case manager, it makes me proud to see all of the hard work and dedication that Joyce has shown in getting the necessary paperwork done and pursuing her goal to launch this venture. She has even ordered business cards and has started to distribute flyers! I know she is ready to take on this exciting challenge and I applaud her for it.



Liberty Hosts Two Volunteer Groups

This past August and September, two groups of volunteers, students from Yale's FOCUS on New Haven program and employees from Yale-New Haven Hospital, gave of their time and energy to support Liberty

From August 23rd to 26th, approximately ten Yale undergraduates volunteered for projects at Liberty. These students participated through FOCUS, a program run under the auspices of Dwight Hall and Yale's Office of New Haven and State Affairs. One of their activities at Liberty was to create a large mural located at Safe Haven. They also assisted the Town Green Special Services District in cleaning up a street median located near Safe Haven. In addition, they prepared lunch for residents at our Transitional Living Program (TLP). Liberty clients and the students learned about each other as they exchanged stories over a meal together. Students improved their understanding of life in New Haven and the clients gained a better awareness of Yale's diverse student body.

On September 10th, a group from Yale-New Haven Hospital volunteered at Liberty as part of the United Way's "Days of Caring," an annual series of events during which volunteers offer their time and talents to help local nonprofits. This year, Liberty invited the volunteers to perform some yard work at Safe Haven and TLP. They also had lunch with one of our clients to learn more about Liberty's programs. Afterward, the volunteers had an ice cream party with residents. Liberty staff and clients really appreciate the work of both volunteer groups. All the same, the time that they spent involved more than what they accomplished. Volunteer efforts such as these recent ones show that people beyond Liberty care about its concerns.



The Day Program's Writing Workshop

Maureen Gaffney discusses her experience as a writing tutor at Safe Haven's Day Program

For five months, I have been a volunteer at the Safe Haven Day Program, facilitating a weekly, hour-long writing workshop with men and women who are homeless. The Day Program provides access to meals, showers, computers, and other activities during the day when shelters are closed.



The work is highly rewarding and quite challenging. As a drop-in group with a changeable composition, facilitating it demands flexibility on my part and works against building momentum. Participants may come for a few weeks and then not show up for a month because other things demand their attention. New people can start at any time but integrating them into the group may take several sessions.

I can't use a one-size-fits-all approach, either, because participant's ages and backgrounds also vary. Some have been successful businesspeople. Some held union jobs. Some have gone to college. Some are still in school. Some have children. Some have done hard time in prison. Many have been traumatized by abuse, sexual and otherwise. Some are mentally ill. Many had substance abuse issues—and sometimes relapse. What they have in common is being homeless.

Once they trusted me, which sometimes took a while, participants wrote earnest explorations of themselves, their present situation, and their past. Newcomers usually focus for several sessions on personal essays about coming to terms with being homeless, questioning their own actions, and sometimes affirming redemption.

The heart-felt quality of their writing constantly amazes me and I am deeply moved when a participant feels enough self-confidence to risk something new, such as writing a poem or revealing something previously hidden. Participants take the writing and sharing process seriously. In so doing, the workshop creates a space for spirit-nurturing where their inner beauty and personal struggles can be acknowledged, respected, and shared.

I deeply admire their motivation and generosity of spirit in the face of daunting obstacles. Working with these men and women inspires me. In fact, I feel honored to be able to do it. And I miss the people in the group if I have to skip a week's session.

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Liberty Joins giveGreater.org

Donations made through giveGreater.org by December 31st help Liberty compete for grants



Liberty is one of the latest nonprofits to join giveGreater.org, a new easy-to-use online knowledge and charitable giving resource provided by The Community Foundation *for* Greater New Haven. giveGreater.org offers comprehensive information about nonprofits serving the Greater New Haven. Potential donors who visit the giving resource and search for Liberty's profile will find information about us, including our mission, programs and services, community impact and financial data. Liberty is eligible to participate in the giveGreater 2010 Challenge. Beginning on November 1st, donors who give \$50 or more through giveGreater.org to Liberty will help us to qualify for matching funds. The Challenge ends on December 31st.

Support Liberty through Workplace Giving

You may also contribute to Liberty Community Services through your workplace giving campaign. If your employer participates in the United Way, please consider designating Liberty on your pledge form. Contact us at (203) 495-7600 for further details.