

Rebuilding Lives



Stories from Caritas Communities ■ Preventing Homelessness Through Affordable Housing ■ Spring 2015

The Caritas Annual “Dinner Table” Provided Food for Thought

The dinner table, for most of us, conjures up warm memories of family, comfort and love. Sitting around a makeshift table at the 2014 Annual Dinner for an evening of celebrating the women of Caritas, residents Brenda and Meghan painted a picture of life without a dinner table. Brenda had it all until the death of her husband and the burden of raising four children in a tough neighborhood plunged her into homelessness. Meghan, raised with love but in poverty, became the breadwinner at 16 years old and homeless at 18 when her mother died. Sharing their personal stories silenced the large crowd of 800 guests, moving many to tears. **Their bravery and resilience required contemplation of the tender line between “them” and “us” and the universal hope for family, comfort and love.**

It was a night to honor Ann Marie Connolly, celebrating her tireless achievements as philanthropist and community leader. Ann Marie invested the time to meet our residents and understand the population we serve and how Caritas restores lives through supportive housing. Alongside longtime friend Gloria Clough, the room came alive with an outpouring of generosity during the Fund-Our-Mission portion of the evening. **The magnitude of our donors’ collective response is what allows Caritas to provide housing and improve lives.**

Thanks to your generosity, Brenda and Meghan are secure and safe in their homes and moving forward with their education and careers. They now sit down to their own dinner tables. ■



Top: Ann Marie Connolly with husband Dick, displays her Caritas Humanitarian Award. Bottom: Helen Corcoran, center, flanked by Dinner Co-chairs Jim Coughlin, left rear, and Diane Rubin, right front.

A CLEAN START Ten years ago, Caritas Communities partnered with Boston Pre-release, a minimum security facility enabling selected inmates to hold down jobs as they transition to life after prison.

It is the ticket to a clean start. Carol Allen, Caritas Housing Manager, is passionate about this program. She knows the complications facing these men whose past records (CORI’s) will serve as a barrier to housing and employment for the rest of their lives. She asserts that they are some of her favorite residents. Carol spends extensive time vetting each potential resident. She knows that the men she selects are employed and can pay their rent. They are open to help and regret the lost time and pain they may have caused. Carol assures them that there is still time. For these men who have paid their dues, Carol and Caritas provide a way back.

At Caritas We Believe In Second Chances

Kevin had a great job and a 10-year marriage. He was a law-abiding citizen until he had an accident at work. He became addicted to his prescribed painkillers, which drove him to rob pharmacies and to a decade in and out of jail.

Through the Boston Pre-release program he met Caritas’s Carol Allen. Kevin regrets his wrongdoings and the bridges that were burned. “It is not easy rebuilding your life at 52, but I count my blessings. After pre-release, this is the only

continued on page 2

Dear Friends,

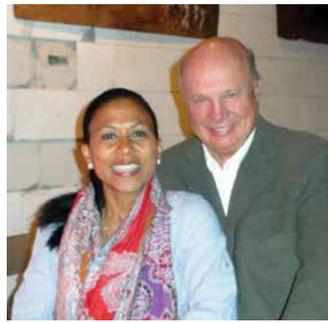
What a winter. Did you miss work because your office was closed or you couldn't get there due to the roads or the T situation? Was your paycheck reduced because you missed work? Many of our residents who couldn't get to their hourly wage jobs did not get paid. For those earning under \$15,000 a year (59% of the Caritas residents), one hour of missed work at \$9 an hour equals no food for the entire day. When you live paycheck to paycheck and your income is interrupted for any reason, you may be forced to decide whether to pay rent or buy food or a T pass to get back to work. These are terrible choices that no one should have to make.

I am grateful to you for helping to care for our residents. Our Homelessness Prevention Fund, fully funded at the 2013 Annual Dinner, is allowing us to alleviate fears of returning to homelessness by assisting with rent and allowing our residents to take care of their other basic needs.

Those of us who are insulated from the economic stresses of lost wages due to winter storms are extremely fortunate. Our most basic human need is shelter. At Caritas, we are proud to offer our neediest neighbors high quality housing at a rent they can afford. Because of you, our donors, we are able to keep them in their homes no matter what Mother Nature has in store for us.

With tremendous gratitude,

Mark Winkeller



Shelley Hoon and John Keith: Changing Lives

Shelley and John have been supporting Caritas Communities for as long as they can remember. John's father helped Leo and John Corcoran build their business and

Leo and John Corcoran helped John Keith build his in 1964. When asked why they give, Shelley replied, "Because that's who we are. We want to help change lives. But credit is not important to us; outcome is. And helping people who want to help themselves is a worthwhile investment. When deciding where to spend your time and money, you have to figure out what's important." **The Keiths are drawn to Caritas and our residents for this reason — most need a helping hand, but once in their own homes, they have the chance to stabilize and go on to rebuild their lives.**

John's father, Oscar Keith, was a great influence in his life. Known for his words of wisdom, a favorite saying was, "If you want to live a happy, healthy life, give 10% of your earnings or time to charities, church or the less fortunate." As for John, the impact he wants to make is "for his children to be philanthropic, because he knows that will bring happiness." By the sounds of their community involvement, they are following suit.

At Caritas We Believe In Second Chances, continued from page 1

place I wanted to be because it is a positive, clean, secure environment. As for Carol, I would do anything for her. She gave me a chance."

Kevin's job performance reviews would make anyone proud. His housemates and site manager are grateful to have him in the house. He is grateful for his ability to rebuild his life, which in no small measure is due to Carol and her belief in him. ■

Their Median Income is \$9,468. Your Gifts, Invaluable.

Thank you to those who have played a part in lifting our resident's spirits and quality of life at Caritas's Salem, Mass. property:

Bill Lynch and the **Babson College Real Estate CAN (Career Affinity Network)** for the gift of repainting interior doors and halls; **Home Depot** and **Behr Paint** for generously donating the paint and supplies; **Commodore Builders'** employees for providing all the fresh ingredients for healthy, holiday meals and **CREW Boston** for the collection of new bedding. ■



Top photo, top row, from left: Michael Weil, Kris Yetman, Tyler Ewing and Max Lamson. Bottom row, from left: Amy Weil, Kerry McCormack and Bill Lynch. Bottom photo: Jose (left) and Wilson receive food donations from Commodore Builders employees.

Rebuilding Lives This newsletter is published twice a year for supporters and friends of Caritas Communities. For information about Caritas or to arrange a tour of our properties, please contact Karin Cassel, Director of Fund Development and Communications at 781.843.1242 ext. 23 or kcassel@caritascommunities.org. Mark Winkeller, Executive Director. Karin Cassel, Editor. Carol Maglitta/One Visual Mind, Designer. Wendy Price, Writer. Romana Vysatova and Wendy Price, Photographers. Caritas Communities • 25 Braintree Hill Office Park, Suite 206 • Braintree, MA 02184 • www.caritascommunities.org • 781.843.1242 Copyright 2015



A Young Marine Can Give of Himself Again

Robert, 33 years old, served two tours of duty in Iraq with the Marines. Returning home with PTSD, he hit rock bottom and numbed his pain through drugs for two years. In the parking lot of the VA, he came close to making a terrible decision, though stopped short when he realized that he had things to accomplish in his life. He was taken to the VA hospital where he found his footing and sobriety and, after a year, moved to the Caritas Bedford Veteran Quarters (BVQ), where he's lived for two years rebuilding his life.

"The case managers at the BVQ saved my life. They gave me my heart back. They helped put the pieces back together to bring me from the mess I was."

Unable to work, Robert has found his purpose through volunteering with Toys for Tots, helping to build the BVQ garden and, most important, working with autistic kids at a horse camp. "Volunteers are good people in this world. We are not talking about drugs and war when I volunteer with the children. I take the children for nice walks on a horse. They clap and smile. It's about the smiles on their faces when they accomplish the simplest things."

Robert is well liked and knows that "at the BVQ, people really care about veterans, and there is a mutual respect. I'd be in a grave without them. I've told them numerous times." ■

DONORS FUND MILESTONE POSITION

At the 29th Dinner, 74 generous donors funded the launch of Caritas's new Resident Renewal Program to hire our first in-house Residential Case Manager. Through this hiring we can help to provide a better life for our residents with complex needs who have come to us without any social services.

Since the recession, the number of Caritas residents who have experienced homelessness has risen from 20% to 60%, with 41% coming to us directly from homelessness. 50% are unemployed (many elderly and disabled), and 59% are living on less than \$15,000 per year. This demographic shift and dire reality bring complicated issues. Our new case manager will help rebuild lives. **Our goal is to help our residents find stability and dignity and this doesn't happen by chance. It happens because of your compassion.**

The Beauty of An Open Art Studio

Seamus is an artist, a musician, a member of the brotherhood of veterans. He speaks openly about the pain of PTSD and addiction that led him to the Caritas Bedford Veterans Quarters (BVQ), home to 66 previously homeless veterans. He now lives in his own apartment and shares that finding the BVQ gave him back his desire to live.

Eleanor Uddo is an attorney by trade, with an extraordinary passion to help people. She provides the art supplies and the stipend. Seamus provides his talent and connection to veterans like him.

What happens at the Open Art Studio for Veterans is nothing short of beautiful. Billy exuberantly sketches his long-haired women and trees, filling in the outlines with paints and pastels. Mike coyly enters the room, sharing the rocks he has painted with meticulous pointillist detail. Seamus invites him to sit with us, even if he doesn't want to do any art. And Gerry, reticently, agrees to try coloring as he shares with us the serious information he has just learned about his health. Our open art studio is perfectly timed to help him feel less alone.

In this room, we have a Bowdoin alumni, an optician and a doctor's son who has been a voracious reader since the age



Top photo, from left: Gerry, Billy, Eleanor, Seamus and Steve at the BVQ Open Art Studio. Photo at right: Steve, a BVQ resident and Open Art Studio participant.



of 7. The conversation is easy. "I forgot how relaxing it is to color." Men go to their rooms and return, sharing the models they've built, the carvings their mother did, their own paintings and drawings.

Discussions of their challenges rise to the surface. "When you are an alcoholic and skunk drunk, you are not brushing your teeth before you go to bed." Discussions of pride rise to the surface. "I am so proud of my granddaughter in college."

Seamus has lived with these men, and his presence is a comfort to them. There is no judgment and a lot of "I love that" in the room. That is the beauty of an Open Art Studio. ■



Caritas Communities

Preventing Homelessness with Affordable Housing

25 Braintree Hill Office Park, Suite 206 • Braintree, MA 02184

Nonprofit Org.
US Postage
PAID
Brockton, MA
Permit No. 679

SAVE THE DATE!

30th

Annual Dinner to benefit Caritas Communities

Tuesday, November 17, 2015, at 5:30 p.m.
The Westin Boston Waterfront Hotel



**Have a Few Minutes?
Give. Do. Receive.**

Second Annual Young Leaders Event!

Tuesday, May 19, 2015 at 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.

Tia's on the Waterfront. \$20 suggested donation for Welcome Basket essentials. *For more information, contact Karin Cassel at kcassel@caritascommunities.org.*



Share your skills. Run a drive. Provide relief.

Are you interested in running an educational workshop? Collecting basic essentials? Adopting a Caritas building? Please contact Wendy Price at: wprice@caritascommunities.org to make a difference.

Give the Gift of a Home.

Please support Caritas Communities.
Contact Karin Cassel at kcassel@caritascommunities.org or visit www.caritascommunities.org



Why Caritas Communities?

Because we believe every person deserves a safe, clean place to call home.

- Established in 1985 by P. Leo Corcoran, Caritas Communities is the largest non-profit owner and manager of permanent veteran and Single Room Occupancy housing in Greater Boston.
- Caritas provides low- and extremely low-income residents safe, clean and stable housing in its 895 rooms in 29 buildings in Greater Boston.
- Rents range from \$120 to \$145 per week and include all utilities and furnishings.