



Rays of Hope

With the Help of Our Community, We Continue Our Work to End Homelessness

The Face of Hope: Anne Firmender

Her incredible triumph stands as proof that good things are happening in the fight against homelessness; and demonstrates that each win is a victory for us all.

She could have been a statistic, existing at the fringes of our town's busy comings and goings. Instead, this is a story of what happens when courage and commitment come together.

Anne Firmender is the Job Readiness Coordinator at The Shelter for the Homeless. She is also a mother and a grandmother, a poet and a student who is completing her certification as an addiction counselor. As a recovering alcoholic, Anne has celebrated 25 years of continuous sobriety.

But her life was not always under control. Illness caused Anne to lose her job.

Bankruptcy forced Anne onto the streets. "I was at one of the lowest points in my life," she stated plainly during her keynote speech at the 2010 *Rays of Hope* Gala. "Because I listen to my doctors and take my medication as prescribed, I have been symptom free, without any hospitalizations for six years."

Anne's story underscores the simple fact that supportive housing works. St. Luke's Women's Shelter was the first stop after she was released from the hospital. Classes at Norwalk Community College and a part-time job followed.

Anne credits her case managers with helping her secure health and disability benefits and the apartment where she has lived since 1996.



Can donations to a Shelter really make a difference? If you ask Anne Firmender, she will say, "Yes."

Anne still relies on her case managers' support and her family's encouragement, but her contributions to her community allows her to feel useful to others. She enjoys being part of the team at the Shelter for the Homeless in a profession that she loves.

Anne now has a sense of freedom that she doesn't take for granted. She is self-sufficient and enjoys success in her recovery.

What can we learn from Anne? Perseverance for sure. She never said her journey was a cakewalk. It takes hard work to embark on a journey like this. Anne says she couldn't have come this far without supportive housing.

She wants to raise awareness of the need for additional housing so that more people can find help during their journeys.

She implored the Gala audience to take her message with them; to remember there are hundreds of people in Fairfield County who will not have a chance at self sufficiency and success at recovery unless new units of housing become available.

"Life is good for me and it can be good for others with a little help. There are good people in this county ready and willing to help.

"Let them help those that have given up hope."

Our work began nearly 30 winters ago, following the death of a homeless man as he slept in the shadows of downtown Stamford. This silent tragedy haunted a small group of Stamford citizens and moved them to give voice to the countless human tragedies that go unnoticed in our community. Their response was modest and personal: a tiny homeless shelter to give warmth and safety. But it spoke loudly in the face of those who denied the existence of homelessness in our community.

From that small oasis of warmth and safety, *Shelter for the Homeless* has grown into a premier social services and human development agency that not only provides for the homeless in our area, but also advocates on their behalf.



The reasons for homelessness are many... poverty; isolation; mental illness; substance abuse. The recent recession has had a significant impact, as people have lost their jobs or suffered a reduction in income at the same time that state and local governments have cut budgets for many 'safety-net' initiatives designed to address these problems.

Regardless of the reason, we continue to develop and deliver programs and services to address homelessness. Beyond our distinction as the only regional shelter serving Stamford, Darien, Greenwich and New Canaan with overnight emergency beds for men, *Shelter for the Homeless* offers needs assessments, counseling, referrals, support groups and job training to men and women. At Berkeley House, we provide housing for men combined with access to support services for employment, education and health to assist their transition back into the community. And permanent affordable housing for men and women who live completely independent is available at Beacon House, where case management services are provided on an as-needed basis by our Outreach worker.



None of this would be possible without the dedication and support of the people who volunteer their time to help our clients and donate their money to fund our programs.



With corporate donations down last year, compounding a reduction in funding from the state and other grant-makers, the generosity of churches, charities and individuals allowed us to maintain our level of service – which included serving over 33,000 meals, providing overnight beds to nearly 450 men and counseling more than 215 women and men.

Our work is important. And that which we accomplish to assist those who are homeless is due, in large part, to your contributions of time, talent and treasure.

We have developed the 2011/2012 operating budgets to fund our Employment, Recovery and Housing programs, as well as our Emergency Shelter and Drop-In Center.



We appreciate your support of our efforts to reduce and, ultimately, end homelessness. Because the work we do not only provides hope and opportunity for the men and women who come to us for assistance, it also improves quality of life for the larger community in which we all live.

Our Mission

Shelter for the Homeless is a safe and caring environment that serves lower Fairfield County by providing temporary housing to homeless men, striving to obtain permanent supportive housing and services for men and women tailored to meet their relevant needs, and empowering people to help themselves achieve their greatest level of self-sufficiency.

Message from the Executive Director



As I reflect on the challenges we have overcome and the good work that has been done, I am so thankful for the many donors, volunteers and friends I have met over the years. Our accomplishments are yours, too, because the support you have given to the Shelter, with volunteer hours, donations and friendship, has been vital to our progress across all measures.

Through the Workforce Development Project – under the thoughtful management of Edwin Cruz who serves as the Pacific House Director of Operations – clients are gaining self-sufficiency as they advance through the workshops on job search, interview techniques, readiness skills and job training, and then obtain employment. These programs are tailored to meet the individual client's needs, which we know helps to ensure better and longer-term success rates.

Why Supportive Housing is Important to Those Who Are Homeless... And to You

Homelessness should be non-existent in one of the wealthiest counties in one of the richest states in America. But every night the Pacific House emergency shelter in Stamford is full of homeless men. According to "Portraits of Homelessness in Connecticut," a study published this year by the Connecticut Coalition to End Homeless (CCEH), *emergency shelters in the state served 11,700 people last year, including more than 1,500 children; and there are approximately 3,800 men, women and children staying in Connecticut emergency shelters and transitional housing programs on any given day.* If those statistics alone aren't alarming, the study notes that "...half of all families and 40% of single adults in shelters reported that this was their first homeless experience."

The way to reduce and, eventually, eliminate homelessness is to build permanent supportive housing. Supportive housing is linked to accessible mental health, substance addiction, employment and other services. It gets people out of emergency shelters and back into the community.

Supportive housing saves tax dollars and makes sense. Local non-profit organizations have significantly reduced the level of homelessness by developing permanent, affordable housing for people who are homeless, together with the supports they need to maintain their housing and recover their lives once again. Connecticut cities and towns that have developed supportive housing have realized significant savings through the reduced use of public services by those who are homeless. Construction of supportive housing units helps stimulate local economies by providing jobs for people who build and maintain the structures. Neighborhoods with supportive housing are more attractive to developers and businesses.

As a result of this initiative, nearly 20 clients have graduated into part- and full-time jobs.

The Strategic Plan implemented by the Board in 2009 has helped guide our initiatives and prioritize our projects. Foremost in the plan are supportive and affordable housing issues. Toward that end, we have been very involved in discussions at the state level where lawmakers are pushing for funding and development. And I am pleased that the Governor has included a significant allocation for this initiative in his budget – millions in capital expenditures and operational expenses to create supportive housing for people who are homeless and those most at risk of homelessness.

The reasons for homelessness are complex. But with the combination of our aggressive goals, demonstrated leadership on the national level in addressing the issues and ongoing support from the community, we know that the work we are doing together is having an impact.



Offering Far More than Basic Shelter

We may be best known for **Pacific House**, where we provide emergency shelter for up to 100 homeless men on a daily basis; including dinner and breakfast. But we also provide a variety of programs that help men and women obtain permanent housing and achieve self-sufficiency.

We offer case management services, a drug and alcohol recovery program, plus job readiness and workforce development to men and women at our **Drop-In Center. Pathway to Housing** is a 12-bed, shelter-based transitional housing program that meets the needs of those preparing to move out of Pacific House. A supervised setting for up to eight men who are ready to take the step from the emergency shelter to more permanent housing is available, where residents learn the skills necessary for independent living; and we have five single-room occupancy units that provide permanent affordable housing for women and men who live completely independent.

By providing emergency shelter, delivering individualized services and addressing the root causes of homelessness, Shelter for the Homeless offers hope.

To All Who Help Us Make a Difference: *Thank You!*



Chocolate, Dessert & Wine Lover's Tasting

In February, more than 475 guests attended the annual *Chocolate, Dessert & Wine Lover's Tasting* in February.

A much-needed break from the harsh winter weather, it also served to introduce many new people to the work that we do at Shelter for the Homeless.

And we raised more than \$35,000... 100% of which goes to support our programs and services.

Rays of Hope Gala

The centerpiece of the Shelter's fundraising efforts is the annual *Rays of Hope* Gala, at which individuals and businesses are honored for their significant contributions to the Shelter and commitment to enhancing quality of life for all in the community.

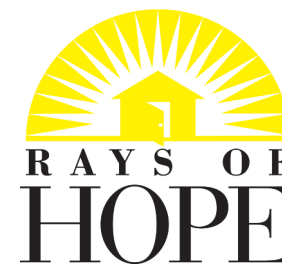
2011 Honorees

- *Rays of Hope* Corporate Award: First County Bank Foundation... For its ongoing support of the Shelter and other community initiatives
- *David Mond Volunteer* Award: Saint Luke's Parish in Darien... For the volunteers who have prepared and served dinners at Pacific House for more than 10 years
- *Rays of Hope* Community Award: A special thank you to our colleague and friend, Thomas W. Hynes... For his lifelong dedication to ending homelessness and his efforts to ensure the long-term financial and operational stability of our agency

Coming together to commemorate achievements and bestow accolades, we are always mindful of the fact that this annual event serves as our major fundraiser – helping to support our efforts to offer the men and women who come to us for assistance the opportunity for a life that is productive, secure and filled with dignity.

This year, we raised over \$200,000...

So we celebrate you all. Your contributions of time, talent and treasure help our clients achieve self-sufficiency.



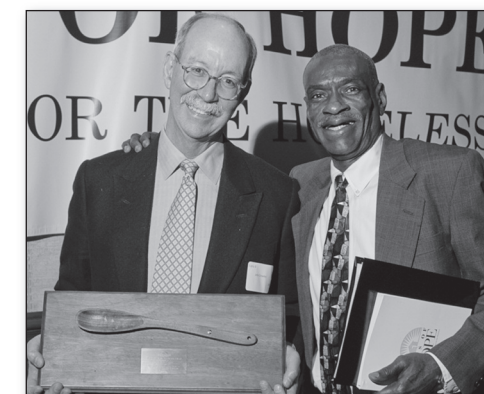
Jeff and Susan Bruno



Tom Hynes and daughter Liz



Ellen and Michael Funck



John Crowley and Sidney Elmore



Jan Jepsen Montana, Jay Sandak and Jeff Boal