Overwhelmed

By

Kindness . . .
Sister Says . . .

Last month we celebrated the 27th Anniversary of The Great American Sleep-Out. Hundreds of activists gathered outside the capitol to advocate for an end to homelessness. This event eventually resulted in the passing of the McKinney-Vento Act. This Act was the first significant federal response to homelessness, and to this day, it supports numerous programs that provide assistance to individuals and families who struggle with homelessness nationwide.

Bethany House continues to recreate the dynamic of The Great American Sleep-Out by bringing together people who have experienced homelessness with concerned individuals who want to help us change this reality. Each April, Molloy College hosts BOXTOWN on the college campus to provide the students, staff, faculty, and administration with an experience of homelessness – all are invited to sleep-out in cardboard boxes in solidarity with the homeless. The students seek out sponsors who donate money in support of Bethany house and the many needs of our families. On April 10, 2014, we will celebrate BOXTOWN XV at Molloy.

The participants gather in the evening and build their BOXTOWN Village from hundreds of refrigerator boxes that are provided each year by P. C. Richards. At 9:00 PM, everyone gathers for a reflective prayer experience during which some of Bethany’s residents share their stories and struggles with the participants. There is rarely a dry eye in the audience.

Please join us on April 10th! If you would like to sponsor our own Sister Diane who will be sleeping-out, please send a donation to Bethany House and mark it for BOXTOWN. Thank you so much!

Sister Aimee

Bethany Goes Green

With a $22,500 rebate from LIPA and a generous grant from The Nassau County Bar Association’s WE CARE Fund, Bethany House has furthered its efforts to Go Green. In September 2013, our 54 Solar Modules officially began producing electricity for our Whitehouse Avenue residence in Roosevelt.

Bethany’s staff worked on this project with SUNation Solar Systems located here on Long Island in Oakdale, New York. Mike Copeland and other staff members saw this project from beginning to completion, meeting all deadlines and expediting all transactions with our town’s Building Department. We highly recommend SUNation for efficiency, professional service, competitive pricing, and competent installation.

Bethany now has a grid-tied photovoltaic system of 15,660 kilowatts, and this system has not only reduced our electric bill, but we are well on our way to producing approximately 16,000 kilowatt hours per year, valued at close to $3,500. This will be a great savings for Bethany as we try to do our part to care for our environment and use our resources wisely.

As Margaret Mead, the famous anthropologist has said, “We won’t have a society if we destroy the environment.” We at Bethany are engaged in many efforts to re-use, re-cycle and re-purpose in order to limit our carbon footprint for future generations.

Solar Roof Panels at Bethany One

As I thought about this past year of 2013, - when we have seen jobless rates rise and spirits plunge - when we have had to question our security as a nation and our own prosperity as individuals

I was compelled to push away the negativity that surrounds us and take note of Kindness: For the first time in many years, we have seen Kindness begin to shine in the darkest of corners – people who never noticed the pain of another are now reaching out to help and comfort; offers of time and personal sacrifice are beginning to re-shape our moral fiber! I cannot help but think that this world is starting to look more like Bethany – because your Kindness is what makes Bethany so unique.

And so, we thank you for all you have done this year for the women and children of Bethany House and we ask a special blessing on you and your loved ones from the God of All Kindness as we journey together during this New Year!

Sister Aimée, the Board of Directors, and the Staff of Bethany House

What’s in a Word: Kindness

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Earlier this year, I had the distinct pleasure of participating in a training exercise with the residents of Bethany House and the students of Molloy College. As I sat listening to what was unfolding before me, I was reminded of the seminal works of Jane Adams in the 1860s. Ms. Adams was a strong advocate of the Settlement House movement. She promoted the view that there should be in many indigent communities a Settlement House wherein the residents worked to assist other residents who were under-served or not served at all by government programs.

Bethany House is one of the embodiments of the Settlement House tradition. It is a place to go when all other doors seem closed. In my work with homeless individuals [especially women], I often had to call upon Bethany House staff. My clients, for various reasons, were not eligible for government services. Their situations were critical and it was most important that I locate a residence that was safe and would keep them from harm’s way. Bethany House was that haven.

Not surprisingly, Bethany House in those early days was not the Bethany House of today. The agency is now composed of five residences that provide a variety of programs to single women and women with children: client advocacy, skills training, supportive interventions, and play therapy are but a few.

The BOXTOWN learning experience between the Bethany residents and the Molloy students took place at Bethany One and Bethany South. It required that each participant take on a character role: the residents were the service providers while the students were the homeless consumers – I was Mary who had a plethora of personal problems!

As one can imagine, what followed was a lively exchange of information, emotions and humor. Again, Jane Adams came to mind . . . the residents must learn to access their government and the larger social system. I saw at Bethany an environment where residents were helped and encouraged to work within the system and to be socially responsible for themselves, their children, and the larger community.

At a later group discussion, it was clear that a host of preconceived notions and views about homelessness and those who struggle through it were engaged and changed. Although the Bethany residents shared the angst of homelessness, they also shared their strength, hope, and courage: thus creating a community of people all working together in a self-help effort to build understanding and foster independence. Kudos to the staff, the residents, and the students!

Herman Tibbs, LCSW [Bethany House Board Member and former Director of The Roosevelt Counseling Center]

BOXTOWN was a wonderful experience for all of Bethany’s children as well – when asked what she found most surprising about Bethany, one of the students responded, “That the children were so happy!”
Bethany’s 13th Annual Fashion Show a Hugh Success

- A Bethany House resident in her 70’s walks into Rockville Links Country Club, and murmurs, “This is so intimidating.” After modeling several outfits, she leaves the club all smiles and eyes sparkling.
- After modeling a casual outfit, a Bethany resident in her 20’s returns to the dressing area to change her outfit. So overwhelmed with joy, she literally could not talk! She just laughed and screamed: her happiness was infectious. Another young woman from Bethany, upon receiving her outfit to model, finds a note inviting her to interview for a position at the store which provided the outfit. [She has since been hired there, and both parties are extremely happy.]
- A young, handsome man of 23 struts down the aisle, evoking roars from the female audience. He was a former resident at Bethany House and is now a mechanic and plays semi-professional football.

These are just some of our success stories! This is what makes Bethany’s Fashion Show so different – and this is what Bethany House is all about: pursuing and creating opportunities for homeless women and children to return to a sustainable lifestyle. In our fashion shows, both residents and graduates of Bethany participate, and the transformation and the smiles on the models’ faces, time after time, confirm that we are uplifting spirits and instilling hope.

Bethany House held its 13th Annual Fashion Show and Awards Dinner, on October 23, 2013 at the Rockville Links Club in Rockville Centre. Almost 200 women and men attended the event and helped to raise close to $13,000 for the many needs of our families. Casual, business and evening attire fashions for ladies and men were supplied by Chico’s of Garden City, Estelle’s Fancy Dresses of Farmingdale, and Bertalia Menswear of Rockville Centre.

Jane Banfield and Jane McCabe, co-chairs of the event, were overwhelmed by the generosity of local businesses. Jane McCabe said she was especially touched by many Rockville Centre individuals in town who generously donated their time and services to support the event. Jane Banfield reiterated the community’s kindness and said donations were still being brought in even as the evening began. Photos for the Fashion Show were provided by Leslie Renee Photography. For additional photos, see http://bhny.org and LeslieReneePhotography.com.

Overwhelmed by Kindness

This Christmas season has been an especially giving time for Bethany House. Several organizations, families, individuals and businesses have embraced our homeless women and children in many ways. Here are a few of the countless ways we have been blessed:

- Donations surpassed last year’s providing $33,690 for the needs of our families!
- 38 generous families participated in our Adopt-a-Family Program along with North Shore Hospital, St. Kilian’s Outreach, and many others. ALL of our families received wonderful gifts, beautiful clothes, and useful gift cards!
- Lucky Finds, an upscale consignment shop in Rockville Centre, held a Coat and Costume Jewelry Drive for us early in December. Shop owner, Shannon Mc Comb, collected 55 coats and bags and bags of costume jewelry for our little ones to give as gifts to mom.
- Many of you purchased our Bethany Christmas Ornaments, raising more than $1,200!
- South Side High School’s Leo Club and Mothers Club wrapped presents and sold ornaments for us.
- The 18 Hole Women’s Golf Association of The Hempstead Country Club raised $750 from a 50/50 raffle to help us provide for our many needs.

And . . .

- Kaitlin Villalba, a student in Project Extra in the Oceanside Schools, asked her family members to help Bethany’s children this Christmas instead of giving gifts to each other. We received a check for $1,375 because Kaitlin cared so much!

Thank you all for caring “a whole awful lot” for us!
“Unless someone like YOU cares a whole, awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It’s not.” Dr. Seuss

It all started with socks . . . When Bethany House began their golf outings back in 1997, Tom Sedita donated wonderful, comfortable socks [a Disney brand] for all the golfers. Since that time, Tom has attended every outing, chaired the event for four years, co-chaired for several more, and still continues to be our #1 source of support and encouragement for the Golf Outing Committee.

You might say that Tom is Bethany’s publicist of sorts because he has so many friends – and he tells them all about our work at Bethany. Whether he is in Florida or New York, you’ll find him busy trying to help us by securing donations for the next golf outing or planning a party at his home as part of a package to bid on at our Live Auction or calling friends to remind them that Bethany needs their help. Since everyone is so fond of Tom, no one ever says no to his requests.

Tom feels that he gets too much credit for the time and generosity he shares with us. “The real heroes are Bert Accomando, Dan Lennon, John Sweeney, Chris Heckman, Steve DiMare, Sam Barretta, Ralph Woythaler, Mike Kemp, and so many more who give beyond their ability. If I am leaving anyone out, and I’m sure I am, I apologize. These are the ones who give until it hurts; and because they are so generous at my request, I get the credit. They are my heroes and I love them all!“ Tom stresses.

Tom grew up in Baldwin. His father unfortunately died when he was five and the family moved in with his grandfather (poppa). “We did not have a lot of money but we had a love of family that was incredible. My poppa was a kind man: if he knew of a poor family, he would buy them gifts at Christmas time and leave them at their door so no one ever knew where they came from. My Mom always taught me to surround myself with good people and I would become a good person. My Mom remarried when I was 12 to a kind and wonderful man who has been my Dad for over 50 years now. He also gave me many lessons in life,” says Sedita.

Tom has been married to Elaine for 30 years, and they have 6 children, 14 grandchildren and 1 great grandchild between them. Tom and Elaine moved to Florida a few years ago, but keep a townhouse in Merrick so that they can frequently come home to visit family and many, many dear friends. Even though he is in Florida for several months of the year, Tom’s commitment to friends and his faithfulness to helping our homeless children has never diminished.

Tom claims he was lucky to have a wonderful career, starting out in ladies hosiery. “In those days it was stockings, pantyhose had not come out as of yet. I was once again fortunate to be surrounded by good hard working, intelligent men who taught me so much about sales, business and how to be successful. I owe so much to them! Most of my family members were in business for themselves so in 1971, at the age of 31, I also followed that path. I was fortunate to be successful and built a thriving company, primarily in socks.”

“I have used the words lucky and fortunate over and over, but when it comes to my life you cannot say it enough. From the day I was born, I was blessed to have been born in America, into a loving and caring family. Through my whole life I have been surrounded by good people who have helped and guided me. My favorite quote is, “If God had come to me when I was 21 and said I could have anything I want, I would have asked for a lot - but I would never have asked for as much as I have.”

Bethany House has been lucky and fortunate also to have Tom involved with us for so many years! Tom is a person blessed with great gifts, a great spirit, and great energy. But, far more, he is a person of great integrity and generosity who has never failed to remember those who struggle for their daily bread!
Bethany House is fortunate to have many religious congregations, community organizations and school outreach programs assisting them in their mission to homeless families. During this year, two Jewish congregations have “adopted” our families at Bethany South, one of our residences in Baldwin. Central Synagogue of Nassau County’s Social Action Committee and the Tikkun Olam [Repair the World] Committee of Congregation Beth Emeth have joined together and created some wonderful, ongoing programs to show the women and children at Bethany how much they care about them!

Last spring, the planning began. A remarkable woman named Sara Hill, co-chair of the Social Action Committee of Central Synagogue came with Rabbi Skidell [from Beth Emeth] to see Bethany and to talk about a possible collaboration. It seemed like a perfect fit! Sara began the groundwork and set up various meetings to explain the proposed projects and to gather volunteers from the two congregations who would carry them out. A training workshop for these volunteers was held at Bethany in early October, and both Rabbi Gruber [from Central Synagogue] and Rabbi Skiddell were willing participants. Within a few weeks, these energetic volunteers from the two Congregations came to Bethany South and worked with our women in our computer lab. Some women learned programs such as Excel and PowerPoint. Many of the women just needed time on the computer to search the internet for job openings, apartment listings, or furniture on Craigslist. Others were helped to write their resume and cover letters.

Since many of the women have children, Ann van Praag from the Tikkun Olam Committee of Beth Emeth led volunteers from both congregations in conducting arts and literacy activities with the children while their mothers were learning computer skills.

“Our congregations plan to continue with programs to help Bethany House and its women and children throughout 2014,” said Ms. Hill. She is considering continuing the work with Bethany for an additional year, as well. In addition to the work of adult volunteers, a group of teens who are attending The Jewish Experience Religious School have created a series of self-esteem building activities for the children. These began in November and continued through the New Year. “One of the activities, the making of a super-hero, guided the children in creating super-heroes who had special powers that the children thought they recognized in themselves,” Ms. Hill said. These high school students, under the leadership of principal Marilyn Greenspan, have completed three of their planned activities and will conclude the series sometime in May.

Bethany House was also the beneficiary of Central Synagogue and Beth Emeth’s Mitzvah Day held on March 9, 2014. This is a day when the two congregations come together for a day of service, and Bethany House was the main recipient of the many mitzvahs [good deeds of kindness] performed on this day. The day began with prayer led by Rabbi Gruber of Central Synagogue, followed by breakfast and brief talks by persons who had experienced homelessness. Then everyone headed off to their assigned tasks as work was a central part of the day’s activities.

“We held a drive for items most needed in the houses [paper products, cereals, juices, etc.], prepared sandwiches for a local soup kitchen, collected and sorted children’s books for Bethany’s children, and wrote letters to elected officials raising awareness of the needs of those experiencing homelessness,” Ms. Hill said. “We also prepared and delivered delicious dinners for the guests of Bethany, and generous volunteers have also delivered fresh organic fruits for all three of the Bethany residences weekly since Mitzvah Day.

Most recently, on March 29, 2014, Central Synagogue and Bethany House co-sponsored a performance of The Vagina Monologues to raise awareness of violence against women and young girls and generate funds to combat it. This event raised over $2,600 and we are most grateful to Rabbi Gruber for his generosity in providing such a warm and comfortable venue for this event.

Bethany House has been greatly blessed to have these two wonderful congregations assist us with so many programs and activities. “Our Social Action and Tikkun Olam Committees try to get to the root of the problem and make an impact,” Ms. Hill stated. “There is a Hebrew word, ‘tzedakah’, which means both charity and justice. Charity is not only about kindness, it’s about justice, too. You can’t have one without the other.”

Lisa King
Upcoming Events

• **BOXTOWN XV at Molloy**
  Date: Thursday April 10, 2014
  Time: 9:00 PM
  Location: Molloy College

• **PSYCHIC Evening**
  Date: Wednesday, May 28, 2014
  Time: 7:00 PM - 10:00 PM
  Location: Rockville Links Club

• **Bethany’s 18th Annual Golf Outing**
  Date: Monday, July 28, 2014
  Time: 9:30 AM
  Location: Pine Hollow Country Club

• **14th Annual Fashion Show & Awards Dinner**
  Date: October 22, 2014
  Time: 6:30 PM

• and . . . the 35th Anniversary
  Details to follow

Join us for An Evening of
Psychic Experience

When:
**Wednesday, May 28, 2014**

Where:
**Rockville Links Club**
- invitations with details will soon follow -

Bethany House is offering Mother’s Day donation cards to thank our Mothers for their years of love and support as we try to offer the same for our Bethany mothers.

Give a Special Gift to a Special Mother

We have included one of our *Mother’s Day Cards* for you to send to someone special on *Mother’s Day*

All proceeds from these cards will directly assist the young Mothers of Bethany House.
Imagine... WHAT IT'S LIKE NOT TO HAVE ONE -

THE AVERAGE PERSON SPENDS 365 HOURS A MONTH AT HOME.