BOXTOWN 2 at MOLLOY - A HUGE SUCCESS!

October 23rd was a much colder night than we had expected. A chilly frost quietly settled over Molloy College’s Cedar Grove while enthusiastic college students and faculty members diligently covered this same ground with plastic tarps and large refrigerator boxes.

The city of BOXTOWN sprang up around us as a silent and powerful reminder of the reality of the homeless poor. On this cold October night, more than 150 persons slept out in boxes in solidarity with the homeless poor of Long Island who number over 40,000 at any given time. And, as the dampness worked its way up from our feet, we sensed for the first time what it means to be on the street without shelter, without food, without hope. Each of us tasted the bitter crumb of homelessness, and this bitterness chilled us to the bone. It made our souls weary.

We began the night with an ecumenical call to prayer which was led by members of HAVEN [the Molloy College/Bethany House Coalition for the Homeless]. A young woman from Bethany House sang a song she had written about a woman who lived in a cardboard box. I felt a warm tear slide down my cheek as she sang, “So oft in life we do not know the struggles of a soul for if we did we’d find a way to make each other whole.”

The soup and bread line was another poignant reminder of what it is like not to have - even the smallest thing becomes important. A cup of Campbell’s chicken noodle soup and a piece of soft bread was like a banquet out there in Cedar Grove!

It seemed to me that each person reacted to the homeless experience in a unique way. Some of my BOXTOWN neighbors were very creative - they decorated their boxes, even to cutting out windows and adding curtains as if hoping to disguise the painful reality of this night. Others put their boxes close together so they could huddle as a group, trying to find ways to ignore the creeping cold. One whole family came to sleep out, and it was touching to see the two young children take the experience so to heart.

BOXTOWN has raised over $10,000 to help the homeless through Bethany House, and this is truly remarkable. But it has done so much more - it has also raised the consciousness of its residents and, as Kimberly said when she spoke to us of her own experience of homelessness, “you never know - it could happen to you... next time you see someone in need, take a closer look - maybe now you will understand a little better.” I know that I do.

A BOXTOWN resident, 1997

This was to be “home” for the night - no lights, no heat, no telephone, no Internet - just a box and a blanket to stave off the damp cold night air.
Imagine... 
WHAT IT'S LIKE NOT TO HAVE ONE -

[Each issue of Turning Point will feature the story of a family or individual who has struggled with homelessness and how life has changed because of it, often in spite of the crisis.]

Her name was Kayla, and she was as striking and elegant as her name implies. I met her at Bethany House last year while I was helping Marion to prepare one of her superb Italian dinners. Kayla came to us because her ex-husband had beaten her and because she was not able to leave her job, she could not be housed in the domestic violence shelter.

The bruises on her face healed far more quickly than the scars in Kayla’s mind and heart as she tried each day to look at life in a positive way and to be cheerful and pleasant to all. Within a short time, Kayla found a lovely room that she could rent within her budget. She would be the only tenant, sharing the house with an older woman whose children were grown. It seemed to be the perfect answer as it would provide Kayla with both space and privacy. The only drawback was that she was not given a key to the house or to her bedroom door. But Kayla managed with just minimal inconvenience for almost two years. Kayla and the landlady had become friends, and the older woman had come to depend upon Kayla for little kindnesses and for her warm companionship. At times Kayla wondered how her landlady would get on without her if she ever decided to move.

Then, without warning, the unexpected happened - Kayla was told that the landlady was going into the hospital and did not want anyone in her house for the next three weeks while she was away. Kayla had no place to go so she went to the Department of Social Services and was placed in a shelter in Westbury.

It was nothing like Bethany House! The residents [women with young children, babies, single women] were housed in the basement, four to a room. The door to the upstairs was locked at 10 PM, and the emergency exit had a deadbolt lock that had no key. Panic set in as Kayla realized that she and the other homeless women and children could burn to death if there were a fire. The thought of fire was a real concern as one of the women stayed awake all night smoking crack cocaine.

There were no blankets on the beds; there was no crib for the baby; there were no emergency telephone and no working smoke alarms. A sign on the wall told you that, if you needed food, you should go to the Salvation Army in Mineola for canned goods. Of course, there was no way to cook this food if you did get it.

Kayla and all the other “residents” were required to leave the shelter by 8 AM and could not return until 6 PM. It would be wise to eat before returning since there was no way for them to cook, no place for them to eat. One very frail woman who was sick with bronchitis leaned on Kayla each morning as the two left without breakfast for a day on the street.

After a few days, Kayla decided to call Bethany House to see if we could be of some help. Needless to say, Kayla slept well that night in a clean, private room with fresh linens and warm blankets. She woke up to the smell of coffee and shared a pleasant breakfast with other smiling guests of Bethany. No one was afraid there, no one worried how to find food or to keep warm or to get medication if needed.

Within a week, Kayla found a room that she could rent in a lovely house - but this time, it had a KEY! Kayla didn’t need Bethany’s help for very long, but without it she might still be homeless, without a KEY in her pocket.

Pattie McGlone

Kayla always spent extra time with the children at Bethany, and they all love her!
Welfare Reform Update - life gets harder.

New York State’s Welfare Bill was signed into law on August 20, 1997. Some changes took place on October 1, others on November 1, and some were implemented retroactively as far back as December, 1996 [for example: the 5 year lifetime limit on assistance to families].

*In order to emphasize the drastic changes, even the names of the agencies have been revised. The Department of Social Services will become the Department of Family Assistance (DFA), and all programs that relate to services for children and families will be its responsibility. The Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTADA) will administer benefit programs.

*Benefit Programs will also have new names to further add to the confusion of people in crisis. Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) will now be the Family Assistance (FA) Program, and will be funded with federal monies from Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF).

*The JOBS Program from now on will be the responsibility of the Department of Labor on both the local and state levels, and the Department of Health is running Medicaid at the state level.

*Single Adults who have received Home Relief (HR) will now receive SNA - Safety Net Assistance which can be either cash or non-cash. After two years of cash assistance, recipients will switch over to non-cash in the form of shelter payments directly to landlords and some utility payments. Cash money for personal needs will drop to 20% of the present $45/month, or $9 a month - this includes all carfare, clothing, over-the-counter medicines, personal hygiene items...all for $9 a month which is not enough for even a haircut!

*The TIME LIMIT for Benefits under the Family Assistance Program is five years in a lifetime, and the countdown began December, 1996.

*TIME LIMIT for Benefits for single adults [under SNA] is a total of two years in a lifetime for cash assistance. [Minimal non-cash assistance may continue, as explained above.]

*All parents and caretakers receiving Family Assistance must be engaged in work no later than 24 months from receipt of assistance.

*Job search activities are limited to 6 weeks. No person may be required to participate in assigned work activities for more than 40 hours per week.

*DSS [soon to be the Department of Family Assistance] is now permitted to assign work activity that interferes with school attendance.

*SANCTIONS are imposed for non-compliance. Single adults are sanctioned [denied assistance] for 45 days for the first offense, 90 days for the second. Heads of households are sanctioned by reduction on a pro-rata basis [e.g. for a family of 4, the grant is reduced by 1/4 or 25%]. This way of calculating results in a greater reduction than simply calculating a grant for a family of 3.

*Sanction periods for FA recipients are:

  1st offense: sanctioned until compliance
  2nd offense: 3 months or until compliance
  3rd offense: the longer of 6 months or until compliance.

*Persons no longer exempt from work rules:

  1. Care givers of children under 3 years of age.
     In fact, the only care giver exemption is for those with children under one year and for a maximum of 3 months.

  2. Care givers of a child under 6 who work 20 hours weekly - they will have to work an additional 20 hours to “work off their grant.”

  3. Persons employed 30 hours a week - they will have to “work off their grant” for an additional 10 hours weekly.

  4. Persons who live in areas where a work program in not available.

life gets harder.

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Did you know:

There are approximately 57,000 persons on Long Island who are classified as unemployed. Over 23,000 welfare recipients are now expected to find meaningful full-time employment here on this island or face sanctions.

There are, therefore, 80,000 persons competing for the 39,000 jobs available in this region, and many of these jobs are entry-level and cannot provide sufficient income for a family.

This leaves 41,000 individuals without work and without assistance as we approach 1998.
The average person spends 365 hours a month at home - imagine what it's like not to have one...

Today, homelessness is a harsh reality for over 40,000 Long Islanders - and more than half of them are children.

Join us at Bethany House in our efforts to change this reality - provide a gift for a homeless child or family as you help decorate Bethany's Christmas Tree for its twentieth anniversary.

A $5 donation will provide warm slippers for a little child and an ornament for Bethany's Tree.

A $10 donation will provide mittens and a hat for a homeless child and an ornament for Bethany's Tree.

A $20 donation will provide a cozy blanket and sleeper for a homeless baby and an ornament for Bethany's Tree.

A $25 donation will provide a warm sweater for Mom and an ornament for Bethany's Tree.

A $50 donation will provide snow boots for our homeless children or blankets for a homeless family and an ornament for Bethany's Tree.

A $100 donation will provide Christmas dinner for our guests and an ornament for Bethany's Tree.

[OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR GIFTS FOR OUR HOMELESS GUESTS ARE ALSO WELCOME! JUST CALL JANICE AT 868-6866 WITH YOUR IDEAS.]

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YES! I WANT TO HELP BETHANY HOUSE TO PROVIDE FOR THE NEEDS OF HOMELESS CHILDREN AND THEIR MOMS AT CHRISTMAS. ENCLOSED IS MY DONATION FOR: $___________

NAME____________________________________PHONE:________________________________

Please make your tax-deductible check payable to BETHANY HOUSE and mail it in the enclosed envelope to: 102 WHITEHOUSE AVENUE, ROOSEVELT, NY 11575 - ATTENTION: SISTER AIMEE