Turning Point

Bethany House is a place to come when there’s no place to go... and you have lost all of your Connections.

Something unfortunate has happened to many of the women and children who come to stay with us at Bethany House. They have lost their connections... those familiar ties that bind them to family, friends, and places. These ties are all gone. You know, it is different for many of us - we have all lost some connections throughout our lives: people lose jobs, friends die, neighbors move away, etc. But when we have trouble we usually have the support of our families and/or friends to help us. However, many of the guests who come to stay with us at Bethany, for whatever reason, have lost all of their connections with Life...they have "burned all of their bridges." They feel that they have no one, no place, and no existence worth living. They don’t belong anywhere.

In contrast, Bethany House is a composite of many connections consisting of a caring and helpful staff assisted by a cadre of capable and dedicated volunteers, and a knowledgeable Board of Directors, all of whom are committed to our Mission of changing children’s lives.

At first glance, it seems that providing shelter for people who have no place to go is Bethany’s ultimate goal. If accomplished, then homelessness will disappear. A Newsletter from an organization called “Rebecca’s Community” writes about the Homeless Myth. The article states: People who don’t have shelter are houseless - not homeless! Homelessness has nothing to do with a lack of shelter. They define homelessness as “an inadequate experience of connectedness with family and/or community.” Bethany House understands this concept and works towards its true ultimate goal of helping its guests to reconnect with a full life and to rediscover their connectedness.

This work of connecting begins the moment a new family arrives at Bethany. Our knowledgeable, compassionate staff members complete an intake assessment so that each guest’s strengths, challenges, current situation and specific needs can be evaluated; trained case managers ascertain the services that will best meet each individual’s needs. And the connections are begun. When a new guest arrives, she soon realizes that she is staying with a family of caring persons who all face similar problems of feeling disconnected and not belonging.

As the families at Bethany become closer, they strengthen their connections: they prepare meals together and sit down to share these meals around one big table, with the little children in highchairs. The children play together sharing toys, reading books, or watching TV while their moms enjoy one another’s company. This experience of bonding and acceptance helps them to realize that it is possible to reconnect. They learn skills, attend workshops, find jobs and begin to feel that maybe there can be a Life for them.

We at Bethany don’t just save a life; our goal is to give life back to someone by giving her tools, guidance and encouragement. Little by little, Bethany’s families re-experience the feeling of true connectedness. And, as a result, many of our guests are ultimately reconnected with their families; some of our mothers are also reconnected with their older children; and all reconnect with their own inner strength. Bethany believes that the rebuilding of connectedness is the best way to insure that homelessness is not simply interrupted, but ended. [See guests’ reflections on page 2.]

Jessie Fentnor
Santa’s Workshop Helps Our Moms Celebrate Christmas at Bethany

Preparation for Christmas is always a concern for the mothers at Bethany because they do not have the means to purchase those special gifts that their children have dreamed about. This Christmas was different, however, because Santa set us his Workshop for our moms right here at Bethany! With the help of some of our Board members and local politicians, our mothers spent the afternoon picking out the gifts that their children would most enjoy and then wrapping them in bright paper and ribbons. Their faces lit up as they signed the gift tags “Love, Mom.”

Bethany’s moms Paulette, Ramona and Monique were helped with wrapping Christmas presents for their children by Hempstead Town Supervisor Kate Murray, State Assemblyman Dave McDonough, and our State Senator Charles Fuschillo [left to right].

Fall Fashion Show a huge Success -

A special THANK YOU to Liz Cronley, Carolyn Melillo and all the Committee members who worked to make our Harvest Moon Fashion Show and Awards Dinner such a wonderful success. Once again, Bethany’s moms stole the show as the models of distinction, and they were joined this year with some of Bethany’s children who showed off the latest winter fashions for all to enjoy! Our 2006 date is already set, so mark your calendars: Bethany’s Harvest Moon Fashion Show and Awards Dinner will be held on October 19, 2006 at the Uniondale Marriott.

Throughout the years, many women and children have come in through our doors and gone out reconnecting to a life of independence, purpose and dignity. Many guests have written to us expressing their thoughts and feelings about their stay with us:

Thank you, Bethany, for helping me get my life in order and back on track.
Bethany has restored my belief in myself and given me the strength to go on.
I have learned something precious from each of you, and I take that with me each day.
No matter how much, how long you struggle, it is never easy. But with Bethany’s help, I will succeed.
Bethany House has taught me to work toward the day when I will see what everyone else sees in me. Because of Bethany House, I am in a good place now.
Aren’t these comments an inspiration? Aren’t you glad that you are connected to Bethany House and able to help fulfill its Mission?

I would like to help support Bethany House

Enclosed is my donation of: $__________

☐ Please add my name to your Newsletter mailing list

Name:__________________________________________

Address:_______________________________________

City:_____________ State:______ Zip:______________

Please make checks payable to: Bethany House

Thanks so much!
If someone expresses concern about a “Homeless shelter” in their neighborhood - Show them one of these:

It’s a familiar dilemma: families grow and need more space. It happened to us. While we were very busy providing women and children with emergency shelter at Bethany One and Bethany, too!, it soon became obvious that many of our families needed assistance beyond the immediate crisis. We quickly realized that we had a unique opportunity to develop the concept of “transitional housing.” Why not offer our guests longer term services that would give them the ability to function independently and reconnect with Life? As the story goes, since these two homes function so successfully, why not open another one to serve people with a more specific need?

And so it was decided that Bethany should expand its commitment and look for a third property. A Real Estate Planning Committee was formed and after a search, they found a wonderful legal two-family house in Baldwin. The house was in poor condition but the price was right, and we knew we could renovate it to fit our needs.

We received funding to purchase the property from HUD’s HOME Program. It was April 1994 when we took possession of this house and began another major project of restoration with a $250,000 Grant. Upon completion, there was a beautiful 2 bedroom apartment on the second floor and 3 bedrooms on the first floor with an attached studio. We could provide both transitional and permanent housing: the first floor apartment became home to a small innovative program for women and children; the second floor apartment provided permanent housing (for at least one year) to a low income family. Originally, because it was the place where so many women and children found refuge and “turned their lives around,” the house was named Turning Point. Later it seemed appropriate to change it to Bethany South because of its location south of Sunrise Highway and south of our other houses. And doesn’t the trilogy sound great: Bethany One, “Bethany, too!” and Bethany South.

Lest you think that just because we had another house and more space that we would be content, let me tell you how this story further unfolds. Two more important things were to happen at Bethany South. First, we were able to establish a unique program called HEADING HOME which provided transitional housing and services for women recovering from a chemical dependency or from a traumatic experience such as sexual abuse or an emotional breakdown. HEADING HOME creates a space and time where mothers can work on their return to health and where families who have been separated can reconnect and start their family life over again, beyond the pain and crisis that had originally caused their dissolution. HEADING HOME was designed to help women and their children grow together, excel and succeed.

The second important thing that occurred at Bethany South also involved the universal dilemma of a growing family needing more space. Once again, through the generosity of The Florence M. Glaser Charitable Trust, Bethany House expanded. In 2004 an extension was built on the second floor which enlarged the original apartment and added three bedrooms and a full bath. Georgia Brown, Residence Director of Bethany South, will tell you that her caring, professional staff and volunteers work to assist our guests with advocacy, referrals, and follow-up case management while offering the “helping hands and listening ears” that are so very important for those struggling with homelessness. And the beautiful grounds with a large fenced-in back yard and a patio provide a great place for children to play and for families to enjoy one another.

So many families have been able to reunite, reconnect with each other, and “head home” together! Bethany South has served as a place where an abused young woman recovered, attended college and became a school teacher. It has served as a place where a terminal cancer patient was able to find peace in a caring, safe environment. It has served as a place where a woman coming out of a drug treatment center was able to regain her health, her stability, find a job and bring her child home to live with her in their own apartment. It has served as a place where a recovering addict was rehabilitated, studied to be a counselor, reconnected with Bethany and came to work here. Bethany South is truly a place that “serves” and will continue to serve and fulfill its mission as the stopping place on the journey that gives one’s life its direction. Jennie Fentnor
"UNLESS someone like YOU cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not." The Lorax by Dr. Seuss

someone like YOU . . .

One of the most fortunate and vital connections ever accomplished at Bethany began on a day in 1981 when a young woman named Linda Wilkonski had a conversation with Sister Aimee at Queen of the Most Holy Rosary Church in Roosevelt. Before this, Linda had attended Brooklyn College, gone to work, married Thomas, and moved to Baldwin, Long Island where they began to raise their three children: Jennifer, Susan and John. At this opportune time, Linda’s youngest child, John, was in Kindergarten and she was babysitting others in her home and volunteering at the Church’s Outreach Program. Sister Aimee asked Linda to become Bethany House’s first staff member, and she started to work there two mornings and two afternoons per week.

And that is how it began. When Linda first came to Bethany One, she brought to us her wonderful sense of commitment, compassion and competency that has become her trademark. She still remembers that time almost twenty-five years ago when she felt an immediate connection with this unique place we call Bethany House. She identified with its remarkable mission and decided she wanted to acquire more knowledge and training so she could help in the best ways possible. She studied Social Work and Psychology and took CAC Training Courses at Nassau Community and Molloy Colleges to prepare herself for the challenging job for which she had been chosen by God. Within a short time, Linda knew that she had found her place - it was Bethany House!

And we have all reaped the benefit of Linda’s presence and special touch ever since she came through that door at Bethany One. She started as a House Manager, cooking delicious meals and welcoming our homeless guests. Within a short time, Linda became a Case Manager in charge of the details of assessment, advocacy and case planning; this role evolved into the House Director for Bethany One with numerous added responsibilities; and now Linda is Bethany’s Director of Residences for all the Bethanys. Linda has always understood that providing emergency shelter is not enough - she helped to develop Bethany’s transitional housing, bringing the HEADING HOME Program to fruition and was also instrumental in Bethany’s purchase of the Bellmore Apartments for longer-term housing.

Linda is the "hub" and the heart that keeps Bethany flourishing and growing because she has a handle on everything - from the beginning, to the follow up, to the follow through. In every aspect of her life at Bethany, she leaves her imprint, inspiring others to follow. Whenever our guests speak of someone who has touched their lives in a meaningful and lasting way, Linda's name is always the first one mentioned - she is our special blessing!

If you want to get something done, ask Linda. If you have a problem and need a solution, call Linda. If you need encouragement or advice, or direction, turn to Linda. When Bethany has a fund raiser such as The Fashion Show or The Golf Outing, Linda provides the organizational skills and enthusiasm necessary for its success. And when an elderly person is lonesome or alone, it is Linda who invites her home for dinner! And so, it goes without saying, if you want to meet a special person, meet Linda. She enjoys everything that she does and will tell you, "It's a great ride and if you don't enjoy it, it's your own fault!"

Even though it may seem that her "van" is always parked in the driveway at Bethany One, Linda does lead another active life with her family. She describes her husband Tom as the "man behind the woman" whose support and
understanding have enabled her to succeed in all of her endeavors. As Linda says, Tom is the wind beneath my wings. She and Tom are also happy that their grown children are nearby. Their older daughter Jennifer is a CPA who lives in Commack and is busy with her first child, Richard Thomas. Susan, who lives in Long Beach, is an elementary school teacher who works with children with special needs. John works as an electrician in the city and lives close by in Freeport.

Whenever possible, Linda and Tom love to travel, and she describes "romantic Italy" and Hawaii as God’s gifts to the senses.....not to mention her “spiritual cruise” to Alaska and memorable trips to Florida and California. When she has spare time between trips, Linda likes to quilt [she made a magnificent wall hanging of the Bethany houses] and to sew [she made a beautiful heirloom Christening gown for her grandson, Richard Thomas].

Whether it is just supper for two or a big meal for a large family gathering, Linda also loves to cook and bake. She’s an expert at "whipping up a quick, delicious meal" from whatever ingredients are in her pantry and refrigerator whenever she gets home. She is always trying new recipes and creating her own special dishes, and is especially famous for her crab dip, her lattice cookies, and the best cheesecake in New York!

Because she enjoys cooking so much, Linda applies the idea of a Recipe of Love to Bethany: what ingredients make it work; what needs to be added - everyone can contribute and together we create a unique "dish." This is also the way Linda feels about her staff at Bethany - "They are all special individuals who contribute so much and make my job so worthwhile."

Linda attributes her sense of ministry to her loving and wise grandmother who told her, “We don’t know what tomorrow will bring, and so we need to do our best today. If anyone comes to your door in need, help as best as you can. It’s a gift to be able to give to and help those in need.” And so, Linda lives as her grandmother taught her and as she believes. Truly Linda embodies the Spirit of Bethany!

Congratulations, Linda, on your 25th Anniversary at Bethany and may you continue your strong connection with all of us for many years to come!

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Not Just Arts ‘n Crafts

On Wednesday evenings while the mothers are engaged in lectures, workshops or skill sessions, the children spend some time with Bethany’s Early Childhood Specialist, Sister Fran Marrinan. We are most fortunate to have S. Fran with us, and here are some of her reflections on this special time.

The children seem to be very happy with our sessions together which consist of story time, games, art projects and puzzles. Their ages vary from 2 to 10 years old, and I work with the 4 to 7 year olds while Linda and volunteers work with the 2 to 3 year olds on a 1-1 ratio because they usually require more attention at this time of day.

Each week will bring some new children into the session, so we are usually adjusting the session to respond to current needs. The children often demonstrate special needs which require behavior modifications without humiliation, and these have to be addressed promptly in order to continue. Some of the older children have exhibited anger issues, so I have worked with them using a story book on anger and the techniques they could use when they are angry. This culminated with an art activity which they all enjoyed. It is beautiful to see the empathy that exists and how the children try to help and support each other.

Some of the children have problems relating to their current situation of homelessness. Since they have lost some of their connectedness, they tend to grab for things and want to possess all the art materials for fear they won’t get any for themselves. They often need to be reassured that they will all get what they need.

One of our younger ones seems to exhibit an emotional failure to thrive and has minimal verbal and interactive skills. This may stem from the lack of stimulus given to the child by the mother [which is probably not deliberate as she appears to be mentally challenged]. This child needs special 1 on 1 attention as he acts out with fists banging, yelling, etc. because of the frustration of being unable to communicate. These observations have helped our Bethany staff to get special assistance for both the mother and child from the Early Intervention Program, and improvement has already been noted.

These little ones are so wonderful, and I enjoy being part of their Bethany experience.

Sister Fran
THE AVERAGE PERSON SPENDS 365 HOURS A MONTH AT HOME.

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 or in spite of this overwhelming crisis.]

Maintaining a place to live is the hardest thing to do on Long Island. Today’s society is such that if you are not making a very good income, it is tremendously difficult to provide the proper necessities for your family. Shelter is a main issue, and I emphasize this because I am among the many who has struggled with homelessness.

In 2004, I sat in a small, cramped room in a dingy hotel [with no place to cook and no safe place for a child to play] and remembered how life had never been like this for me before - I had a good job as a dental technician and a cozy little apartment that was more than adequate for me and my eight-year-old daughter Tasha. But, in just a moment, everything changed. A fire had torn through our apartment building and left us and seven other families with nothing but our memories. All our connections unraveled before our eyes.

The Department of Social Services sent us to a hotel in Freeport, fortunately not too far from my daughter’s school. Each morning I would walk her to school and leave for work; each afternoon I would pick her up from school and we would return to our dark, little room in the hotel. Since I was employed, I was expected to pay a portion of the hotel bill weekly, and this left us very little for food, winter clothing and other necessities. But we had each other and we were sheltered from the cold.

Then I lost my job because I could not leave my child alone at the hotel and could no longer count on family and friends to “help us out.” We were no longer allowed to stay at the hotel because I had no income, and Social Services said we were being sent to a family shelter. The idea of a shelter was even more terrifying than the “welfare hotel” because I pictured an overcrowded, dirty place with lots of cots, lots of people, and lots of stealing. With a heavy heart, I boarded a bus from Mineola to Baldwin, with only a piece of paper that gave me an address and directions.

Until that day I had never heard of Bethany House. As we walked up the street toward the house, my daughter held my hand even tighter, preparing for the worst. But a smiling face welcomed us at the door, and we stepped into a beautiful, comfortable living room with a wonderful fireplace. There were children laughing in the kitchen and the smell of a delicious dinner filled the air. This was not at all what we had expected, and for the first time in several months, I felt a special warmth and that good feeling you get when you know you are safe. Our room was wonderful, too - Tasha and I each had our own bed with warm blankets, and the room was clean and comfortable and all ours! I had been afraid that we would have to share a room with others, but that never happens at Bethany.

After a few days settling in at Bethany, I began to realize that I had a great deal of work ahead: I was twenty-four years old and had a child who depended on me - but I was homeless, I had no job, I had not completed high school, and I did not even have the motivation to change my situation. My life had been so disrupted that I had actually adjusted to having nothing, even though deep within I longed for so much more out of life. I talked things over with Georgia, one of the wonderful staff at Bethany, and together we began to plan my new beginning.

As the days went by, I again began to believe that things could change and, yes, they really were changing. I started to sense myself re-connecting and tending to things that meant the most to me: my child and my dreams. I knew that if I did not focus on my priorities and build a strong foundation, I would end up either in jail or back on the streets. I returned to school and finished my GED; I studied to become a Medical Office Assistant and graduated with a 3.5 average; I also worked part time in order to put something aside for our future apartment.

In September 2005, I moved into my own place and continue to work to support my daughter. I have met a wonderful guy, and we hope to marry in the fall. I remember with joy my days at Bethany House and all those who reached out to help me during my time of struggle. I come back now to volunteer - I help with office work and some cooking, and I always find time to encourage the guests by telling them how I moved from homelessness to stability because of a wonderful place called Bethany! I do not know what might have become of Tasha and me if Bethany had not opened its heart and its doors to us, and I thank God for the blessing that Bethany is for so many young families! Kimberlee
PRESIDENT’S REPORT TO THE BOARD  
MARCH 2006

Three years have passed since Bethany House formally separated from the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and launched out on its own again - in rough waters and headed toward an unknown destination. Many of you were with us then, and I’m sure you remember the challenges and concerns, the expectations and excitement of that time.

During these past three years, Bethany House has grown dramatically: in 2003, we housed approximately 30 persons nightly - now we can accommodate 75. Our budget has increased from $750,000 to $1,500,000. And we are not just getting bigger - we are also getting better.

Since 2003, we have restored Bethany to its rightful place as a full nonprofit corporation and we have expanded and enhanced our Board of Directors. Our Board Committees are active and energetic, as can be seen from these accomplishments:

- We have completely revamped our Bylaws and are working on a Board Policy and Procedures Manual.
- We have reviewed and increased our corporate insurances. We have investigated the risk management issues for our volunteers. We have created new banking relationships with both Commerce Bank and Washington Mutual and are now receiving interest on our business checking accounts.
- We have produced an outstanding Employee Handbook for our staff, and made up to them for the times when we could not provide annual raises. We have refined our staff’s job descriptions and are completing the staff evaluation tools. We have restructured our administration and management to more clearly delineate roles and responsibilities.
- Our fund-raising efforts are surpassed by none as we begin our preparations for our Tenth Annual Golf Outing, complete with a commemorative journal. We have an Annual Fashion Show each Fall and look forward to our Newsletter quarterly. We have reached out to other parts of the community and county through our public relations team, and have been on TV five times since December!
- And, along with all of this, we have completed Phase 1 of the Five Year Plan!

I call upon you today to get even more involved and... bring a friend! There is far too much work for a small group of people: we need YOU standing side by side with us, rolling up your sleeves, taking that extra step, believing in the dream.

As your President, I thank you for your presence, for your commitment, and for your support. And I challenge you to do even more because we can - we are all strong people, and I sincerely believe that we can do great things on this Board because our strength is limitless and it will continue to energize us all for the work ahead. At Bethany we always have “so much to look backwards on with pride and so much to look forward to with hope.” Let us look forward together!

Connie Kerwick
Imagine...

WHAT IT'S LIKE NOT TO HAVE ONE...

Bethany House of Nassau County
102 WHITEHOUSE AVENUE
ROOSEVELT NY 11575
516 868-6866

"a place to come when there's no place to go..."

HOLD THIS DATE

Bethany House announces its 10th Annual Golf Outing

Monday July 24, 2006

At TAM O' SHANTER GOLF CLUB

Our honorees will be
SAM BARRETTA

AND
SALERNO BROKERAGE CORP.