



Celebrating 20 years of rebuilding lives

Vision: Formerly homeless seniors will obtain and sustain safe, appropriate, and affordable housing.
Mission: To empower older men and women who are homeless to restore their lives and to live independently. We do this by providing transitional housing, case management, counseling support, and life skills enhancement tailored to the unique needs and aspirations of each resident.
Values: Empowerment, respect, resiliency, client self-determination, and self-advocacy.
Beliefs: Homelessness is a solvable problem. Decent and affordable housing is a basic right. With guidance and support, older men and women who are homeless can and will have the strength and skills to rebuild their lives.

Renewal House Case Manager Marlene Moore-Callands Inspires Students at WCSU

Marlene Moore-Callands, Renewal House Case Manager, recently spoke with students in the Community Psychology course at Western Connecticut State University about her work experiences. As a WCSU alum, Marlene showed her dedication to the university, bringing her upbeat and unique personality into the classroom environment and teaching students about a real-world approach to the field of Community Psychology. Marlene made two statements that caught my attention:

- 1) "The first thing I say to a client is that my job is to get you out."
- 2) "I let my clients tell me what puts a smile on their face; what do you love to do that makes you smile?"

These are two statements that in all of my experiences, and probably in many of the experiences of my classmates, we have not heard in the Psychology Field. Community Psychology is revolutionary; it is supposed to break the barriers of traditional Psychological research and the constraints of Clinical Psychology. The talk Marlene gave us was in perfect alignment with stepping out of the traditional boundaries of Psychology. It is also about not getting stuck in a system, which through my own internship experiences, I have witnessed all too much.

The students in my class seemed quite surprised when Marlene shared the first statement she makes to a client who has just walked through her door. This was surprising to me as well, but it opened my eyes and validated the fact that even

those in the profession may struggle in getting too tied up in the problem when at some point it is, indeed, time to talk about the solution; both are equally important and yet so interdependent. It is about the client recovering steadily and efficiently, yet with care and mindfulness on the part of the mental health professional.

It is about walking hand in hand down a path and together pruning the branches that block that path. That is what the mental health profession is about. Marlene's visit and the wisdom she brought into our classroom gave us that revolutionary perspective. It provided an understanding that Community Psychology emphasizes collaboration and the positive aspects of people and communities. Marlene gave us that message within the context of an organization right in our community.

- Becky Antonaccio

WCSU Undergraduate in Communication & Psychology

SAVE THE DATE

Wednesday, May 2, 2018

7:30 – 9:00 am

Join us at our Annual Breakfast

as we celebrate

20 years of empowering formerly homeless
older men and women

to restore their lives and return to independent
living

"I think many of my classmates would agree when I say that we in the mental health field need more focus on the strengths of individuals and communities to overcome challenges."



A Reflection of the spirit and creativity of our Residents...

As Renewal House celebrates its twentieth anniversary, we celebrate the spirit of hope, faith, joy, and creativity that allows us to connect with others. This is reflected in the beautiful quilt that was

created by its founder, Karen Messina, and volunteer Diane Costello, who designed, hand-stitched, and sewed the quilt. Each square was designed by a resident, board member, or volunteer, reflecting an inspirational piece of history specific to each individual. Renewal House aka "Shelter of the Cross" may have changed its name, but the quilt endures as a legacy to the collaborative effort and the individual inspirations that have allowed Renewal House to flourish for the past twenty years. ***Come and check out the Renewal House Quilt, which will be on display at the twentieth anniversary breakfast at the Westside Campus Center, Western Connecticut State University, on May 2nd from 7:30 am to 9:00 am.***

THE RENEWAL HOUSE COOKBOOK 2018

As part of the Renewal House food program residents are encouraged to serve and write up one recipe weekly in order to learn and share cooking techniques and nutritional information. Residents store recipes in a community recipe box. Last year our residents decided to combine those recipes and some gathered from other people connected to the program and create a cookbook to support their program and to distribute to graduates of the program. We presented this cookbook at our fundraising breakfast last year and it was quite a success. Most donated \$20 for the cookbook. This year residents have created a new cookbook!! ***We will have this cookbook available at our fundraising breakfast on May 2nd.*** We can't wait for you to see it!! If you do not attend the fundraiser the cookbook is still available to you by contacting Renewal House at renewalhouse622@gmail.com or 203-791-1050. Thank you for your interest and support.

A RESIDENT GIVES BACK...



The scissors snipped together slowly making a crunching sound, and 12 inches of hair that I spent over two years growing are now gone. I experienced some frustrations along the way. Countless clogged shower drains and shedding hair on my clothing. I was also a little anxious on the day of my hair donation. But the moment my stylist cut all the way through my ponytail and handed it to me, all the anxiety faded. It was like a weight had been lifted from my shoulders, literally and metaphorically. I felt lighter and I didn't have to wait hours for my hair to dry. Blow-driers, curling irons and flatirons need to be avoided if one plans on donating hair. Colored or chemically treated hair cannot be donated either. Not such a hardship for me as I used to let my hair naturally dry in my teens (made me feel young again) and I haven't colored my hair in years.

But the strands didn't just fall to the ground to get swept up and thrown away. Instead, my hair is now in the hands of an organization called Pantene Beautiful Lengths that partners with the American Cancer Society to distribute free wigs to cancer patients. I felt that donating my hair was a much more personal gift than sending in a monetary donation which I could not afford. I was sending a piece of myself to an adult who has a disease that's caused them to lose their hair. My daughter Skylar gave me the idea, as she donated 16 inches of her hair to Locks of Love.

Locks of Love doesn't charge children for the wigs, but they do sometimes sell the hair if it's too short or gray. Shorter hair is separated from the ponytails and sold to offset the manufacturing costs. Because Locks of Love only provide hairpieces to children, they cannot use gray hair in a hairpiece and will also sell it to offset costs.

Locks of Love and Wigs For Kids both give their hairpieces to kids with any medical hair loss, while Pantene Beautiful Lengths focuses on adult cancer patients. It takes about eight ponytails to make one wig.

Losing one's hair is an outward sign of being sick. It's a reminder that the body is fighting cancer. Hair in the drain when one takes a shower, on the pillow when one wakes up and on clothing. I think that getting a wig provides an important boost, making one feel a little closer to one's self again. It's hard enough that a cancer patient is going through treatment that has altered their very being. A wig was the least thing that I could do to try to make at least one person feel a little bit better about what they're going through.

- Alexis White, Renewal House Resident

JUST A STEP IN THE JOURNEY

For most, the stop at Renewal House begins in crisis. It is important to remember that Renewal House is not the end, but a step in a continuing journey that leads to a successful return to independent living. Here are two heartwarming stories about just how wonderful that can be.

Tim was our very first resident at Renewal House. Epy was one of our first volunteers. Both helped to get the house up and running with lots of hard work on repairs and updates. During this time our founder, Karen Messina, gave Tim tickets to Phantom of the Opera, in New York. He asked Epy if she'd like to join him and go see it and she said she would. Their relationship grew from there.

They met regularly during Tim's stay at Renewal House and when he left it was to go to be with Epy. They found they had a common interest in music and, amazingly, came from the same home town and had both belonged to the same high school band, Tim on sousaphone and Epy on drums! They were married in their home town and remained so for over 17 years. They played music for a group of disabled people every week at 80 Main Street and also at the Renewal House holiday party. Epy and Tim maintained their connection to Renewal House throughout their years together participating in group functions, putting together news articles, and more. Tim describes Epy as a "spark plug" and a "go getter". She set out to get something done and made it happen. I always considered Epy our historian and she kept many volumes of pictures and articles and knew the history of the program. Sadly, Epy passed in October of 2016. Tim continues to join us for pot lucks and remains connected to the program. His calm presence and wisdom are a big help to those who are residents now.



Terri and Paul were both residents at Renewal House during the same time period. Terri states they, "were the epitome of the unlikely couple." Terri is a country girl and enjoys the outdoors and woods. She worked with the Girl Scouts for many years. Paul, on the other hand, was from the city of New York and the city streets were where he was comfortable. Terri liked the lakes and woodlands; Paul the ocean.

As time went by Terri and Paul found they had many things and interests in common. Paul was a policeman, as was Terri's father. They had a common religious background. And, importantly, they both had an interest in antiques and architecture. When they left Renewal House, it was together. Terri took her second train ride in her life with Paul when they visited New Haven. Five months later, Paul passed unexpectedly, but Terri says, "it was a short time we had together, but it was worth it. When we came to Renewal House we both thought we had lost everything, but we achieved something wonderful out of nothing." She misses holding hands, the wonderful support Paul was, and not being able to do the things they had planned but says, "we had 5 months together that I wouldn't trade for anything." Terri continues to support the Renewal House program, able to share items she has found to help new grads, sharing community connections that make surviving in tough times easier, and joining in pot luck dinners.

We thank Tim and Terri for sharing these poignant and heartwarming stories with you. Their journeys began in crisis like many others. The step in their journey that began at Renewal House was just that, a beginning along a wonderful, meaningful path in life.
-Carolyn Marston

More resident generosity...and a sneak peek at an auction item!!



Is your dog a fashionista? If so, you will not want to miss the fun and fabulous dog outfits that have been made by Renewal House resident, Ms. H. In the spirit of giving back, she has donated a few of her creations as **a silent auction item for the breakfast on May 2. Check them out.** They are sure to bring a smile to your face.

THANK YOU



LJ Edwards Furniture, a family owned retailer in Brookfield, donated this beautiful brand-new sofa To Renewal House! Paul Coleman, owner, has operated LJ Edwards Furniture for eight years and has been in the furniture business for more than 30 years. Coleman has a wife, three daughters and one granddaughter. He grew up in Danbury and lives in New Fairfield. The name LJ Edwards, Coleman said, came from a combination of his daughters' first initials and his mother-in-law's maiden name. He made a recent decision to close the store and retire. We thank Mr. Coleman and wish him well in retirement!

Source: Danbury newstimes

Renewal House appreciates these recently received grants:

Emergency Food and Shelter Program
Jensen's, Inc.
New Fairfield Community Thrift Shop
Newtown Lion's Club
Roxbury Congregational Church
Savings Bank of Danbury Foundation
St. Stephens Episcopal Church
Women of the Moose

amazonsmile
You shop. Amazon gives.

Renewal House is now registered with Amazon Smile. Simply go to the smile.amazon.com website, and you can select "Shelter of the Cross" (which remains our corporate identity) as your

charity of choice. Amazon Prime is available for Amazon Smile purchases.

Thank you for considering this way to support Renewal House.

Please share this news with others who may consider supporting us as well!



Didn't get to New Orleans for Mardi Gras? Not to worry! Next year just take a short trip to Bridgewater and join the members and friends of Bridgewater Congregational Church for their annual Fat Sunday celebration. Great food and lively music! This year, as in many years past, proceeds were donated to support Renewal House. Our thanks to Reverend Peter Hammond and the Bridgewater Congregation!

As we reflect upon 20 years of Renewal House, the breakfast committee members shared their stories of how we got involved.

Our church has been donating to Shelter of the Cross/Renewal House for a number of years and when I took over the Mission Committee, I was able to make contact and saw what wonderful work was going on. Then one Sunday, Janice and Jorge wanted to come and help do our coffee hour at St. Stephen's and some of the parishioners got to talk with them. Not long after that, I ended up on the breakfast committee and that has been nothing short of a true and rewarding experience!! There is always a great spirit among those at the meetings, in spite of the early hour of most of them. And then a visit to the house for a small event, or to deliver some donations, or just to say "hello" has been always a pleasure. I feel lucky to be as involved as I am.

-Georgia Carrington

I started a new job with the Savings Bank of Danbury in early 2006 and the first charity breakfast I attended was for the Shelter of the Cross. Ed Corolla was a lender at SBD and on the board at the time. Before I knew what hit me, I was having breakfast with Ed and Janice and soon after I joined the board too. I believe I became President of the board in early 2008.

One big reason I became involved with Renewal House was because of my cousin Billy who has been in and out of homelessness for a long time. Billy lives in Boca Raton Florida and to this day he still struggles to stay off the street. While there isn't a program like ours in Boca, there is a church family that has taken Bill in and has tried to help him. Unfortunately, Billy likes or chooses to live in the streets for months at a time and I wish there was a program like Renewal House in Florida, as I know it could have a meaningful impact on his life.

-Bob Peckham