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Beth-El Center Newsletter March 2021

Hello Friends,

As our seasons change, and we welcome the warmth of sunshine and longer days, we're grateful to reflect on our winter "No Freeze" shelter program which is critical to our Mission and saving lives by providing key respite from the harsh winter weather. A notoriously difficult time for people experiencing homelessness, winter often brings the need for additional community resources, ensuring that every person in need of shelter has the ability to access it safely and without condition. With limited funding, the program has been successful over the past 8 years through partnerships of faith leaders like St. Peter's Episcopal Church and food sponsors like Subway World Headquarters and we are so thankful for these community efforts. With this said, COVID-19 has shined light on the gross underfunding and inequity in these programs and what we can achieve as outcomes when these interventions are funded properly.

Crisis response resources through FEMA and CT Department of Housing related to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic allowed us to partner with Motel 6 for four additional months and safely operate our No Freeze shelter program with the use of hotel rooms. Our work to expand greater community-based case management, through our [Outreach and Engagement](#) program and [Diversion program](#) in 2020 allowed for each patron of No Freeze to be provided with an individual case manager and the ability to work towards housing goals while utilizing our 24/7 temporary shelter facilities. Furthermore, food partners including but not limited to those featured in this newsletter helped to provide consistent access to fresh and shelf-stable food items over the four months. What previously was a night-to-night resource, became a robust extension of our year-round shelter resources and with this increased investment, we were able to engage and house more individuals in this program than in seasons past. We look forward to sharing our program summary report in the weeks to come.

As our No Freeze shelter program closes today, information on how to remain engaged in our community programs and/or pursue non-winter shelter programs is important to share. **For anyone looking for shelter resources, we encourage all to contact 2-1-1 first.** Should a phone or further case management support be needed to access emergency homeless response services, our Outreach and Engagement staff provide weekly open office hours, currently on Tuesdays from 11:00 am-1:00 pm, located in our Soup Kitchen Dining Hall on 90 New Haven Avenue. Lastly, always feel free to call our offices for further direction and support as our business office remains open from 8:00 am-4:00 pm, Monday-Friday.

I would like to close by thanking all of the partners that helped to make this program a success. Taking on new challenges during the uncertainty of our current times is an incredible undertaking and we could not be more thankful for their trust and collaboration. Many thanks to Haven's Harvest, Purple Pantry Boxes, Dean Macchio and friends from Our Lady of Victory, First Congregation Church of West Haven and



Vertical Church, United Way of Greater New Haven, Milford Motel 6 and Connecticut Department of Housing, as well as all of the independent supporters who have dedicated donations to this life-saving program. Lastly, I would like to personally highlight the staff of our No Freeze program. Without fail, our six residential counselors responded to the needs of this incredibly vulnerable population throughout the season, providing dignity, respect, safety and connection to long-term interventions for all.

I look forward to sharing what Beth-El Center has planned for 2021. Please continue to stay engaged through our website and social media platforms and I look forward to seeing you all soon!

-Jenn

Client Testimonial: *"I Never Saw Myself as Someone Who Would Be Displaced"*

Kamilia Norfleet, founder and CEO of iCare Diaper Bank, started this non-profit business last fall when a vision came to her about helping out moms in the community. During COVID, she became aware of the many struggling single parents and grandparents who couldn't afford access to an adequate supply of diapers for their babies.

Resourceful and determined, Kamilia began her mission of helping and nurturing families in need by providing these basic essentials.

To understand Kamilia's motivation and strength in starting this business, it's important to take a look at what she's been through and what she's accomplished in the past few years.

Kamilia is a former resident of the Beth-El Center, having stayed in the shelter for just two months from December 2018 to January 2019. As the single mother of two sons, now ages 10 and 5, Kamilia unexpectedly lost her nonprofit job when a new company took over and her contract didn't get renewed.

"We don't plan to fail, but fail to plan- that's the reality," according to Kamilia. "Although I knew the right way, I didn't expect the worst. Who expects to lose their job suddenly?"

Without any savings or backup plan, Kamilia was evicted from her apartment in New Haven once her job ended. "I never saw myself as someone who would be displaced," says Kamilia.

[Read More](#)



Legislative Priorities

Ensure Homeless Service Providers Can Pay Living Wages

Describing one of her own staff member's experience with becoming homeless, watch Jenn Paradis's moving testimony at the Connecticut State Legislature.

Jenn is advocating for adequate funding for professional housing services at the levels that reflect the true cost of these services including fair wages and benefits.

[Read more here about S.B. 340 and the push to pass laws to increase pay for homeless and housing frontline workers.](#)

Beth-El Staff Testifies in Support of Reaching Home Campaign

Reaching Home is a campaign to build the political and civic will to prevent and end homelessness in Connecticut. Made up of more than 120 organizations across the state, it develops policies and elicits community support and resources to support this mission.

As part of Reaching Home, members of Beth-El Center's staff recently testified at the Dept. of Mental Health and Addiction Services budget hearing regarding line items that impact homelessness and housing services in CT. Below is the testimony of two of our staff members:



Bianca Shultz is Beth-El Center's permanent supportive housing case manager. She provides assistance to the residents of our Liberty Pointe apartments to help them maintain their affordable housing and independence.

"We need change for those who have had to make decisions between paying their rent or feeding their children. I have worked with many families who struggle and live day to day deciding which bill is more important than the other. The importance of funding housing, shelters, diversion services, essential staff, and every resource for those in need is at an all time high."

Tabitha Brown is one of our shoreline shelter diversion specialists based at the Women & Family Life Center in Guilford. Tabby works to prevent homelessness by identifying and supporting individuals and families in the shoreline area who are housing unstable and at the brink of homelessness.

"What I have learned in my almost 25 years working for nonprofits is that every day resources dwindle and more and more families and individuals become homeless. They have to choose between feeding their children or paying their rent or deciding whether they buy medication they desperately need or paying the light bill."

Stay informed about what you can do to help end homelessness and support the creation of affordable housing.

Beth-El Program Profiles

Below are recent notable outcomes for our Soup Kitchen and Diversion Services, two of our six programs. Please refer to our [website](#) for information on all of our programs and services.

	Jan-21	Feb-21
Soup Kitchen Meals Served	3351	2617
Diversion Services*:		
Total Clients Enrolled	15	9
Families Enrolled	2	0
Individuals Enrolled	13	9

*Beth-El Center's diversion services prevent homelessness by identifying and supporting individuals and families who are housing unstable and at the brink of homelessness

Food Partners Donate and Deliver



Beth-El Center values and relies on the many organizations that provide food, supplies and meals for our shelter residents and soup kitchen clients.

Today we highlight our food partners who consistently deliver food and personal essentials to our residents staying at the Motel 6 (due to the pandemic, our shelter operations have moved to the Motel 6 so we can provide safe, independent living space for our resident families, individuals and veterans experiencing homelessness).

Every week 30 bags of groceries are donated and delivered as a result of the joint efforts of **Our Lady of Victory, Vertical Church and First Congregational of West Haven**. The steady, dependable donations and generosity of these parishioners has been invaluable.

Thanks to the food drives of [Purple Pantry Boxes](#) based in Milford and the food recovery efforts of **Haven's Harvest** in New Haven, their weekly food donation drop-offs have provided sustenance to our residents and great support to our soup kitchen staff.

Support an End to Hunger Every Time You Shop!

Help to put an end to hunger in the greater Milford community whenever you make a purchase at ShopRite!

We invite you to support our **ShopRite Charity Checkout** campaign **now through Saturday, April 3, 2021** at the ShopRite stores in Milford and Orange.

Simply add \$2 or \$5 to your total grocery bill at check out and you'll be supporting the children, families, individuals and veterans that the Beth-El Center serves through its shelter and soup kitchen.



Local Faith Communities Tackle Hunger!



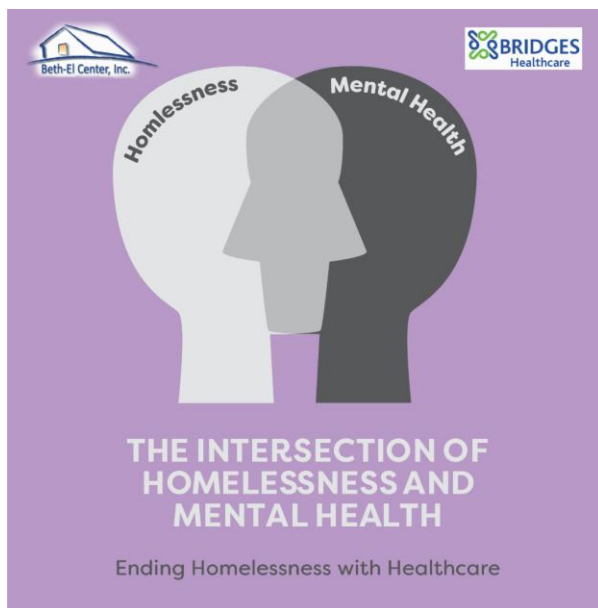
To Benefit the Beth-El Center
Serving the Homeless and Hungry

Many individuals and families struggle with food insecurity as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thanks to the following local parishes, who raised funds in February for our 2021 Souper Bowl campaign, Beth-El will be able to distribute more meals and sustain our food program to assist anyone in our community who is hungry:

First United Church of Christ
Knights of Columbus Holy Infant Parish
Mary Taylor Memorial United Methodist Church
St. Andrews Episcopal Church
St. Barbara Greek Orthodox Church

St. Raphael Parish

Upcoming Online Event



The Intersection of Homelessness and Mental Health ***Ending Homelessness with Healthcare***

Zoom Webinar
Tuesday, April 27, 2021
6:30 PM

The US Dept of Health and Human Services estimates that 25-30% of the people experiencing homelessness have a serious mental illness (such as depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia). The reasons for

homelessness among those with mental health disorders are many and varied but include the limitations in the ability to access the appropriate shelter and mental health services.

This presentation intends to open dialogue around the intersection of homelessness and access to mental health services. We'll discuss the community programs and practices that are focused on reducing barriers and increasing positive outcomes for this population.

[LEARN MORE](#)



Staff Profile: Ruth Saint Vil

Working with her team to help clients succeed is Ruth Saint Vil's favorite part of her job. As Beth-EI Center's Director of Programs and Facilities, working with the Center's Case Managers to optimize each shelter client's experience and outcome is an important and rewarding part of her position.

Ruth joined the Beth-EI Center in 2018 as a Housing Specialist and was promoted to her current position in November of 2020. She oversees the day-to-day operations of the shelter and food programs which include responsibility for a staff of sixteen people (including hiring and ongoing training) as well as maintenance of the facility at 90 New Haven Avenue in Milford.

According to Beth-EI Center Executive Director Jenn Parais, "Ruth's personality and professional experience brings everyone together. Her passion for data and for seeing staff and guests succeed in their housing goals helps us all in achieving our mission to make homelessness rare, brief and nonrecurring in Greater Milford." [Read More](#)

We're Hiring!

Visit the Beth-EI website for details on the following open positions at the Center:

Human Resources Manager

Outreach Navigator

[Make a Donation to the Beth-EI Center](#)



Beth-El Center | 203.876.0747 | bethelmilford.org