

HOME for the Holidays (continued from page 1)

Numerous organizations and community groups came to Project HOME to bring to life the light, hope, and good cheer of the holiday season. Here is just a small sampling of all these wonderful friends:



◀ **Saints Peter and Paul Parish** in West Chester has been providing holiday gifts for Project HOME residents for more than 20 years. "Social justice and caring for the less fortunate is a fundamental part of what it means to be Catholic," says Daniel Hoover, Director of Pastoral Ministries. "It is who we are."



▲ **McCarter & English, Attorneys at Law**, sponsored a holiday party with gifts for the residents of Kate's Place. As a Center City law firm, employees view the needs of homeless persons as very important. "One of our lawyers expressed sympathy to a resident who did not win in bingo," recounted John McAleese, Office Managing Partner. "The resident's positive disposition and optimistic reply of hoping to win next time brought smiles to our faces. It reminded us that having hope in life is essential to one's well-being, whether in a bingo game or in times of despair."



▲ **World President's Organization and Young President's Organization**, who have been involved with Project HOME for more than eight years, donated and distributed over 600 Thanksgiving meals to our neighbors. "One of the most impactful moments is hearing some of the residents speak about their lives before Project HOME and how they are doing now," says Melinda Justi, who organized this year's volunteer project for WPO. "Seeing the heartfelt gratitude and hearing how their lives were saved and changed is so powerful."



◀ **Ron Toles and Ordinarie Heroes** donated and served a meal for Connelly House. "We strongly believe in the need to affirm the dignity, respect, and love that all human beings deserve," OH's Ron Toles says. "Project HOME's

efforts have the power to restore those things that homelessness can strip away from a person such as self-esteem, community, and purpose."



▲ **The DoGooders** got involved with the holidays for the first time this year, providing a holiday party and gifts for families at Rowan Homes. "Being able to meet these wonderful families and interact with the children is the best gift of all," said Bonnie Young, DoGooders member. "Watching the children smile and laugh; what could be better?"

If you or your organization wants to volunteer, check out our webpage at www.projecthome.org/how-to-help/volunteer.



1515 Fairmount Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19130

Our Mission

The mission of the Project HOME community is to empower adults, children, and families to break the cycle of homelessness and poverty, to alleviate the underlying causes of poverty, and to enable all of us to attain our fullest potential as individuals and as members of the broader society.

Our Residences

- 1515 and 1523 Fairmount Avenue
- Hope Haven I/II, 2827-28 Diamond Street
- Connelly House, 1212 Ludlow Street
- Francis House of Peace, 810 Arch Street
- Kairos House, 1440 N. Broad Street
- Kate's Place, 1929 Sansom Street
- James Widener Ray Homes, 2101 W. Venango
- JBJ Soul Homes, 1415 Fairmount Avenue
- Rowan I, 2729-A W. Diamond Street
- Rowan II, 1901 N. Judson Street
- St. Columba, 4133 Chestnut Street
- St. Elizabeth's Recovery, 1850 N. Croskey St.
- Women of Change, 2042 Arch Street

Support Services & Programs

- Adult Education, Employment & Arts
- Neighborhood Services
- Advocacy and Public Policy
- Honickman Learning Center and Comcast Technology Labs
- Outreach Coordination Center
- Personal Recovery Services
- Stephen Klein Wellness Center
- Volunteer Program

Businesses

- HOME Spun Resale Boutique, 215-232-6322
- HOME Made Products, 215-232-7272, ext. 3023

Administration

215-232-7272

Homeless Outreach Hotline

215-232-1984

Human Resources Hotline

215-232-7219 ext. 5200

www.projecthome.org



NONE OF US ARE HOME UNTIL ALL OF US ARE HOME®



Photo by Harvey Finkle

"I still believe that love is the most durable power in the world."

REV. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

Hundreds of people gathered on December 21 for the annual Homeless Memorial Day service, to remember homeless and formerly homeless persons who died in the past year, and to recommit to the struggle to end homelessness.

A copy of the official registration and financial information may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll-free, within Pennsylvania, 800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.

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The Road Ahead



Project HOME residents and staff participate in the January 16 Martin Luther King Day march in Philadelphia.

Last November 8, Election Day, staff, residents, and volunteers from Project HOME put in long hours as part of the Vote For Homes voter mobilization. Their hard work empowered numerous low-income and homeless Philadelphians to get to the polls and enact their democratic right and responsibility of voting. We were especially moved by one older man from a recovery residence who, despite fragile health, made it to the polls with the aid of volunteers, to vote for the first time in his life. Emerging from the polling site, he said, "Now I feel human!"

We all recall what a long and draining election season it was, marked by sometimes bitter social divisions. Now, we are living in new political realities. As the Trump Administration and new Congress begin their work, many Americans feel anxious about their future, and many struggle for economic stability and a secure place in our community.

As a nonprofit organization, Project HOME is committed to nonpartisanship. We do not assume any specific political orientation among our community members. But we believe – and know from experience – that the federal government (as well as state and local) is an invaluable partner in the ongoing mission to end homelessness and poverty in our society. We have always engaged with elected officials from both political parties, showing them our success and dialoguing about how we can work together to expand effective solutions.

We face many challenges and opportunities in the months and years to come. We must not let the federal government shirk its critical role in promoting the general welfare (as it says in the Constitution). We must continue to work with coalitions and community partners to advocate for public policies that help expand desperately needed affordable housing. We must continue our efforts to ensure that access to healthcare, quality education, and genuine economic opportunity are available for all citizens. We must speak out against any policies that threaten to reverse the tremendous

(continued on page 3)

IN THIS ISSUE

- The Road Ahead 1
- HOME for the Holidays 1
- Roots and Branches 2
- I Am Project HOME 2
- Rebel With a Cause 3
- Something Fulfilled 3
- HOME Happenings 4
- Mission/Residences/Services & Programs/Businesses 6

www.projecthome.org

HOME for the Holidays

Each year as the days grow shorter and colder and the holidays approach, the reminders of home are everywhere. For so many in our community who have experienced homelessness, the holidays were the most difficult times of all. April Venesha, a long-time resident of Project HOME's Connelly House, expressed the longing to be home beautifully in her poem:

*"HOME"
There is a place / Where I can go /
Where I belong / Where there is warmth /
Where there is love / Amongst family & friends /
I call this place home.*

At Project HOME, we have long recognized that the solution to homelessness may begin with a roof and four walls, but it takes relationships and community – really knowing one another – to create a home.

Once again this past season, hundreds of generous

volunteers brought us home for the holidays. For Thanksgiving, over 1,250 full turkey dinners were donated and prepared for our residents and neighbors in North Philadelphia. For the winter holidays, parties and dinners were prepared for all of our 15 residences. Presents were donated to 800 residents, children, students, and community members at the Honickman Learning Center and Comcast Technology Labs and the Stephen Klein Wellness Center.

We are deeply moved by so many of you who bring joy, love, and warmth in abundance to share with our community. We wanted to say THANK YOU to all who participated in our HOME for the Holidays.

On page 5, we share photos and stories of just a few of the great volunteer groups who made the holidays special for our residents, families, and neighbors.

(continued on page 5)

Roots and Branches: Reflections from Sister Mary

As I write this at the turn of the year, the chill of winter is deepening. Project HOME staff, particularly our Outreach Coordination Center, are working long hours, in collaboration with the City and many partner agencies, to expand outreach and services as part of the winter emergency plan for people living on the streets. We have opened our Hub of Hope (see page 4) to offer a critically needed point of contact for some of our most vulnerable citizens.



Sister Mary Scullion, Co-founder and Executive Director of Project HOME

In this new year, we face significant challenges. The number of persons who die while homeless is alarming. We are witnessing a horrendous increase in drug overdoses, including the epidemic of opioids, which is affecting persons in all sectors of society – and, like the advent of crack in the 1980s, is having a devastating impact in poor communities. Despite the economic recovery, Americans at the bottom rung of the economic ladder are continually struggling to get by. Philadelphia's poverty rate is still over 25 percent – an utterly unacceptable number. (More than 200,000 Philadelphians live in "deep poverty" – under \$12,000 per year for a family of four.)

While we undertake the winter emergency plan to save lives during these especially threatening months, we recognize that this is hardly a short-term emergency. There are no quick fixes to ending homelessness. Real solutions require a long-term vision and a sustained effort to preserve and expand affordable housing while investing in quality education for all our children and ensuring healthcare for all citizens. We know what works, and we have seen much success in recent years – but we can only continue that success where there is public support and political will. All sectors in society have important roles to play – including a renewed federal partnership, which is absolutely essential.

If we want to truly make America great, we must foster an ethos of compassion and mutual care, especially for the most vulnerable among us. We must work together to build a stronger future for all citizens.

Sister Mary Scullion

I Am Project HOME

RACHEL EHRGOOD



Photo by Kevin Pierce

Rachel Ehrgood (left) with Project HOME resident and artist Darlene Allen.

Rachel Ehrgood knows how beautiful art can be – but she also strongly believes in its transformational power, for individuals and for our society.

For the past four years, Rachel has served as coordinator of Project HOME's Arts Program. A core part of her work is facilitating workshops for residents and community members, featuring a variety of art media through which participants explore various concepts and ideas as well as aspects of their selves.

She also coordinates exhibits of residents' art and works with a range of community partners (including Studio Incamminati, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the Barnes Foundation) to develop arts curricula and programs for residents. And since the Arts Program is part of our Social Enterprise program, Rachel often has the satisfaction of seeing residents' art sell.

Many of the participants in Project HOME's Arts Program are experienced artists, whom Rachel calls "experts in their media, with an incredible capacity to tell the truth in art-making." Their creative gifts and personal leadership are core to the success of the program. For other residents, artistic creativity is a new experience, and they often carry resistances to believing in their own capacities. But as they persist in disciplined practice, Rachel

says, they are able to achieve the visual concepts that validate aspects of their personal experience. "Their work ranges from gritty social critique to beautiful still lifes to abstracts. The results are impressive and often surprising – you see creative expressions that you would never have imagined."

Rachel brings her background of degrees in fine arts and art history and experience teaching community art programs, as well as her own art, to her work at Project HOME. She treasures the in-depth relationships she forms with participants in the program, and finds great meaning and joy in seeing creativity blossom and in learning about people's wide-ranging perspectives that inform their artistic expression.

For Rachel, the Arts Program is an important expression of the mission and values of Project HOME. "The work that comes out of the experiences and perspectives of our residents influences our work and helps us know how we can better take care of each other." And it nurtures a more just and compassionate society by creating space for visual expressions of dignity of those who have experienced poverty and social marginalization.

Casundra Pressley, a resident and artist from Connelly House, probably speaks for many participants in the Arts Program when she says, "Rachel is a radiant, beautiful spirit who instills a creative essence in me."

"Expression of the soul is the most enriching thing to our culture." Rachel (a new mother) is grateful to be able to midwife much soulful creativity – and we are all richer for it.

To learn more about our Arts Program, including how to purchase residents' art, go to www.projecthome.org/artprogram.

The Road Ahead (continued from page 1)

progress we have made in reducing homelessness among veterans and youth.

We must also be truthful: Over the past many months, we have witnessed a frightening increase in voices that call for an America that is closed off from others, an America that protects "us" from "them." These voices evoke the ugliest parts of our history – chauvinism, nativism, racism. These are truly dangerous voices, often rooted in fear. When economic opportunities shrink and the futures of many persons and families are more and more uncertain, it is easy to project blame on those we deem outsiders (including persons experiencing addiction, mental illness, and homelessness). Rather than addressing the real issues that are undermining the health and viability of our communities, it is easier to believe in and castigate imaginary villains.

"When we build a community that reaches across social divides, we are stronger."

For almost three decades, we at Project HOME have sought to live out a very different vision: When we build a community that reaches across social divides, when we embrace those at the margins of society, we are stronger. We are all enriched when we uphold the sacred dignity of each person, and when we celebrate the diverse gifts and experiences and perspectives that make up the marvelous tapestry of the human spirit.

In this new political moment in our nation, it is urgent that we work to heal the wounds of shattered human community. Let us speak out loudly and forcefully against fears, discrimination, and other barriers that keep people apart. We must also find ways to work together for public policies that uphold human dignity and foster a healthy community for everyone. Let us challenge ourselves, in these times, to live out the deepest truth of our humanity, and challenge America to be its truest self.

Perhaps then we will all know what it means to feel truly human.

Something Fulfilled

Last fall, our dear friend and former staff member Ed Speedling contacted us with the sad news that he was diagnosed with a severe cancer and would likely have only a few months left.



For several years, Ed worked in many capacities in Project HOME: outreach worker, community liaison, director of the PECO employment program for veterans, facilitator of recovery roundtables, consultant on organizational and strategic initiatives. His compassion and wisdom left a huge imprint on our mission and on our lives.

Several of us, staff and residents, visited Ed one afternoon. His body was fatigued but his spirits were strong. We shared stories, memories, reflections, and tears. Two of our residents spoke with raw emotion about how Ed literally saved their lives by helping them come in off the streets. Ed and his fellow outreach workers laughed at some of the oddest moments they shared while doing outreach. We all spoke about the importance of the mission and vision we shared, about how blessed we were to give our lives to this work, and about the wonderful relationships we formed with each other along the way.

The following day, Ed sent us a note: "A great sense of calm came over me after you all left, something deep in me was fulfilled."

Ed passed away on December 13. He made his final journey home. Accompanied by his beautiful spirit, we continue on the journey.

To honor Ed's legacy of compassion and justice with a donation, go to bit.ly/PH_Give. Indicate at the bottom of the page that the gift is in memory of Ed Speedling.

You can read a reflection on Ed's impact at Project HOME by Sister Mary Scullion at projecthome.org/enduring-gifts.



Rebel With a Cause

By Michael Kozisky

Michael Kozisky lives at our Connelly House residence

This year I will celebrate my 20th anniversary of being in Project HOME, so it is a good occasion to recount my experience here.

I was homeless for almost a year in 1996. I stayed under a bridge right across from where they were building the Wells Fargo Center in South Philly. One day, a construction worker came over to talk to me, and after a while he brought me over to his trailer for coffee and snacks. We talked for a little bit, and then I went back under the bridge.

The next day, the cops showed up and took me to the hospital. It must have been the construction worker who called, because no one else knew I was there. Looking back, I believe that construction worker saved my life: When I got to the hospital they learned that I had an infection in my feet up to my ankles and I would have died soon.

I was in the hospital for several months, both at Jefferson and in a rehab center in West Chester, and I kept getting visits from Project HOME staff. They took me on a tour of 1515 Fairmount Avenue and invited me to come live at Project HOME. Even though there were no rooms open, they wanted me to come live at Project HOME so badly that they set me up in a closet at Kairos House until a room opened up.

And I made the most of it. Kairos House was such a great fit for me, because I got to interact with a lot of staff and other residents. When I first came to Project HOME, I was 21. But I consider myself born and raised here. I came in as a young punk; a loner with a chip on my shoulder. But there are so many people who helped me change and grow up; Greg Jordan, Monica Parchesky, and Jeannine Lisitski (former staff members), just to name a few. Those three individuals especially made the greatest impact on my life.

In the past 20 years at Project HOME I grew up a lot. I learned to keep my anger in check, and graduated from Wellness Management classes several times. I got involved in a lot of volunteer activities, including starting Movie Nights, working in the Free Library, starting a Bible study, participating in the Speakers Bureau, serving on the residents council, and participating on a board that worked to open Connelly House where I now live. I even wrote my autobiography.

I used to be a rebel without a cause. Now I'm a rebel with a cause. I have great appreciation and gratitude for Project HOME. If it wasn't for Project HOME, I wouldn't be me, and I am who I am because of Project HOME. I owe a great debt of gratitude.

HOME Happenings

At the beginning of 2017, Project HOME opened its sixth annual Hub of Hope, a walk-in engagement center located in the Suburban Station concourse. The Hub provides a critically needed point of access for many persons experiencing long-term street homelessness, and offers an array of services, including case management, housing placement, medical and behavioral health services. We are grateful for the committed and hard-working staff of our Outreach Coordination Center, and to our invaluable partners who make the Hub a success, including the Student-Run Emergency Housing Unit of Philadelphia (SREHUP), Arch Street United Methodist Church, Public Health Management Corporation, Einstein Hospital, SEPTA, and the City of Philadelphia. *If you see a person on the streets who needs help, call the Homeless Outreach Hotline, 215-232-1984.*

In September, Project HOME expanded services and jobs at the Free Library of Philadelphia. In 2008, we entered into a partnership with the Free Library to provide employment for residents and alumni to provide outreach and restroom attendant services at the Library's Parkway Central. This has been Project HOME's most successful supportive employment program to date, providing many residents and alums with long-term employment while achieving high service levels for the Library. In recognition of its value and the increasing need for outreach at the Kensington Branch, the Library invited Project HOME to expand services. Residents are now employed at that branch, in similar roles – allowing us to provide outreach to a vulnerable community while creating new jobs. We are grateful for the unique contribution our residents make at the Library, and for our ongoing wonderful partnership with the Library.

As we go to press, Project HOME's Outreach Coordination Center is working tirelessly to prepare for the 2017 Philly COUNTS, which takes place on January 26. As in past years, hundreds of volunteers will join service providers in fanning out across the city to both count and survey people who are on the streets. The annual count is part of a national measure called Point In Time Count, mandated by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and undertaken in partnership with the City of Philadelphia, the Veterans Administration, Project HOME, and numerous nonprofit organizations. Information from the PIT Count provides crucial feedback about where services are working, where they're not, and what else needs to be done to bridge the gap to affordable housing so we can make progress toward truly ending homelessness.



Photo by Harvey Finkle

On November 29, the Project HOME Choir joined with the Temple University Choir in Temple's Performing Arts Center for a night of song, including the world premiere of "We Are HOME" – the Project HOME anthem, jointly written by Dr. Paul Rardin, the Elaine Brown Choir in Choral Music at Temple University and Project HOME's own Annette Jeffrey. To listen to the concert, go to bit.ly/PHTempleChoir.

One of our dearest friends, Steve Gold, was recently honored with the Andrew Hamilton Award by the Philadelphia Bar Association's Public Interest Section, for his lifetime of service in public interest law. Steve has provided legal support for Project HOME from our earliest years and served as the first President of our Board of Trustees. His entire career has been devoted to civil rights for persons with disabilities, including landmark cases that have broken down discriminatory practices. With his good humor and passionate commitment, Steve has been at the forefront of civil rights in Philadelphia for years – and Project HOME has benefited greatly from his friendship and his legal expertise. Congratulations, Steve!



Photo by Harvey Finkle

Steve Gold speaks to a group of Disabled in Action activists.