

# News FROM HOME



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

## A Sanctuary of Hope and Dignity



Photo by Shira Yudkoff

Breaking ground for the future Gloria Casarez Residence

**D**uring the mid-1980s to the early 1990s, as the crisis of homelessness was taking an increasing toll in Philadelphia, many grassroots groups were coming together to find solutions and to challenge the political and economic systems that were failing to adequately respond. It was in this period that Project HOME was born, as part of a broader movement. One of our partners was Empty the Shelters, a housing-rights and economic-justice organization based in Philadelphia but with chapters nationwide. It was founded and led by young people working in tandem with men and women and families experiencing homelessness.

One of the founders of Empty the Shelters was Gloria Casarez. Growing up in Kensington, Gloria was a passionate and dynamic advocate for economic justice. A brilliant organizer and coalition-builder, she never hesitated to take to the streets for the things she believed in. Early on, Project HOME provided office space for Empty the Shelters. Gloria and her fellow students inspired us with their energy and commitment.

Gloria's passion for justice led her to become a civil-rights leader and LGBTQ activist, in Philadelphia and across the nation. She was appointed the City of Philadelphia's first director of the Mayor's Office of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Affairs, a position she held until her tragic death in 2014 from cancer at the age of 42.

As the latest effort in responding to the growing number of homeless youth in our city, a large percentage of whom are LGBTQ, Project HOME made plans to develop a new safe and affirming residence for that very population. The name for this new residence, for which we broke ground on December 6, was clear to us: the Gloria Casarez Residence.

This residence, so aptly named, bears witness to a strong LGBTQ community in Philadelphia, which also shares our conviction that homelessness is solvable in our lifetime. The success of the project is due largely to the leadership and commitment of John Alchin, Mel Heifetz, Arthur Kaplan, Hal Maryatt, Duane Perry, and the Philadelphia Foundation, as well as many other caring Philadelphians.

For the past several years, Project HOME has been developing new programs to meet the needs of young adults, who represent one of the largest growing segment of the homeless population nationwide. Each year, approximately 1,000 young adults age out of foster care in Pennsylvania. Just a few days before the groundbreaking for the Gloria Casarez Residence, the City of Philadelphia released a report showing that nearly 600 young

persons were homeless on one August night. Thirty-one percent of that group identified as LGBTQ – nationwide that figure is close to 40 percent – and their situations of homelessness are often connected to family and societal rejection.

Working with the Neubauer Catalyst for Young Adults Program, Project HOME currently serves more than 50 young adults, living primarily at JBJ Soul Homes, Francis House of Peace, and the newly open Ruth Williams House. We have partnered with local LGBTQ organizations to provide appropriate supports.

This project takes that commitment to a new level. The Gloria Casarez Residence will be the first young adult-only, LGBTQ-friendly permanent supportive housing in Pennsylvania. Scheduled to open later in 2018, the residence will be a new-construction four-story, 36,547-square-foot building at 1315 North 8th Street – not far from where Gloria did much of her early organizing. It will include 30 affordable units for young adults (age 18-23 at entry) who currently are or have been homeless or are at risk of homelessness. The residence will also feature a community room and a large outdoor courtyard to accommodate events and gatherings. Residents will have access to a range of services at Project HOME, including employment, education, and healthcare, in addition to case management, life skills, and community-building activities and programs.

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*“Every young adult, regardless of social status, race, gender, or sexual orientation, deserves a chance to grow up and face the challenges of the adult world with a stable home.”*

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The Gloria Casarez Residence is the sixth project funded by MPower, a community investment partnership that is multiplying the impact of Project HOME's proven approaches to breaking the cycle of homelessness. The partnership focuses on revitalizing entire communities, including building new homes and programs to support vulnerable individuals and breaking the cycle of homelessness for young adults.

Speaking at the groundbreaking, Project HOME's Executive Director Sister Mary Scullion said, “Every young adult, regardless of social status, race, gender, or sexual orientation, deserves to be treated with respect. Every young adult deserves a fighting chance – a chance to grow up and face the challenges of the adult world with a stable home; a place to return to at night and feel safe and protected. A sanctuary as they figure out the adult they want to become. Gloria Casarez believed that. She worked every

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## Roots and Branches: Reflections from Sister Mary

Last fall, Project HOME opened its newest residence, the beautiful Ruth Williams House (2415 N. Broad Street). The move-in day for the first group of residents was highly emotional. Our staff personally accompanied each new resident to his or her unit. Each entrance was decorated with a large ribbon and bow, like a package about to be unwrapped. As the resident opened the door and entered the spacious, furnished efficiency apartment (complete with a gift basket of household supplies provided and assembled by CapitalOne), there was a palpable sense of excitement and amazement. And often, after a stunned silence, there were tears, followed by hugs. Several new residents felt a sense of awe that this was “really my home!”

A stable place to live is essential for overcoming homelessness. That stability, that place to come back to, makes it much more possible to take care of physical and mental health, to continue the work of recovery, to pursue education, and to hold a job.

As Jessie Keel puts it so well (page 3), home is “a place to lay my head at night,” but also a secure foundation that enables us to develop our gifts, to grow into our future and our vocation. It is the launching pad for our life’s work.

But the tears and deep emotion we witness when persons with experiences of homelessness and alienation come into their own permanent residence point to much more: Home is a place of sanctuary from the trials and stresses of life. Many of our residents speak of the importance of closing

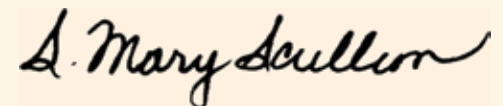
their door at night and knowing they are safe inside, with the experiences of danger, deprivation, and isolation left outside.

Home is also a place of dignity. To say a place “is mine” is to say as much about one’s self as it is about the place. To have a home is to experience a fundamental truth of our humanity: that we belong, that we deserve to belong.

Home is a sanctuary for our inner lives. It is a place of retreat, where we can be still, think, reflect, pray. It is at home that we come to know ourselves in our deepest, most intimate depths.

Home is the place out of which we move into relationship and community. A rich and powerful dimension of home is that it is the place where we can provide hospitality to others. Whether it is a shared meal, a guest bed, or simply a place for a listening ear or a caring heart, our own experience of home empowers us to seek to meet the ache for home in others.

Ultimately, as much as home is a specific place – where we lay our head, where we put our photos and mementos on the wall, which we decorate with expressions of who we are – home is also a shared experience at the heart of our common humanity. We are all on the journey home, and whenever any one of us comes home, we are all enriched.



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

Photo by Dave Hering

## I Am Project HOME

OWEN RIORDAN



Photo by Michael Gainer

Owen Riordan always wanted to help people, though as a younger person, he didn’t know what that meant for his life. But he knew why: He had grown up in the Kensington neighborhood of Philadelphia. He and his family knew poverty intimately: parents struggling with addiction and mental health; regular visits to the food bank; standing in long lines for assistance; the feelings of shame and judgment. “I know how hard it can be,” Owen remembers. “Poverty is just an awful place.”

Several years ago, that instinct to help led him to volunteer at Project HOME, helping distribute turkey baskets at Thanksgiving. The experience was amazing, he says, and he hoped to get connected again.

Not long afterward, at a time when he says he was “going nowhere” with meaningless jobs, he decided to check out Project HOME’s website for jobs. His life would soon take a dramatic turn.

Starting as on-call support staff at our St. Columba safe haven, Owen began almost 13 years as part of the Project HOME community (with a few years away at school and another short break at a different agency).

In that time he has held a variety of jobs, including street outreach, residential casework, and support for homeless veterans. About a year ago, he took on the position of Program Manager at our Connelly House permanent housing residence.

Working at Connelly House has been especially enriching for Owen. “Some of the folks here I worked with when they were on the streets.” He sees firsthand how people had come from living on the streets or under bridges to having their own place. “It shows me that you can meet people where they are, and when permanent supportive housing is available, transformation happens.”

“I absolutely love Owen,” said Stephen Penna, a resident at Connelly House. “He’s part of the reason I stay on track. He goes out of his way to help and do what he can for all the residents at Connelly.”

Gillian Martenson, Director of Residential Services, says that Owen has a vision of making Connelly House a great place to live and work. “He works hard every day to fulfill that vision through his skills, humor, creative thinking, and compassion.”

The biggest lesson he has learned at Project HOME, Owen says, is the importance of relationships. “It’s remarkable just how far a relationship can go. Just extending a hand, acknowledging someone’s existence, listening and being kind – these are such easy things to do, but for our folks it means so much. You can build on these simple acts. When you help someone realize their worth, you can then help them make better choices and get connected to the support they need.”

# A Sanctuary of Hope and Dignity (continued from page 1)

day to improve the lives of every single member of our city's LGBTQ community."

Gloria's wife, Tricia Dressel, also served as Project HOME's Director of Human Resources for many years, so she is especially grateful for all that the new residence represents. "Gloria believed that allies and community members working to advance LGBTQ civil-rights issues were simply standing up for justice and equality for all," she said. "It is my hope that this residence will serve as a safe and welcoming place for healing and inspiration for a new generation of LGBTQ community leaders."

As the construction starts at the corner of North 8th Street and West Thompson Street in North Philadelphia, we grieve the passing of this compassionate, dynamic leader at such a young age. But when its doors open and we welcome 30 young people to that sanctuary of home and hope, the Gloria Casarez Residence will be a powerful and fitting testimony to her life's work. It will bring us one step closer to ending homelessness, and it will shine as a beacon to the dignity and potential of each person in our society.

*We are grateful to the many public and private partners who made the Gloria Casarez Residence possible. The City of Philadelphia; Raymond James Tax Credit Funds; TD Bank; Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency;*



Photo by Chris Crisman

**Gloria Casarez (1971-2014) was a powerful civil-rights leader and LGBTQ activist in Philadelphia.**

*Philadelphia Housing Authority; US Department of Housing and Urban Development; City of Philadelphia Division of Housing and Community Development; Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority; Commonwealth of Pennsylvania; Leigh and John Middleton; John Alchin and Hal Marryatt; William Penn Foundation; Arthur Kaplan and Duane Perry; Maguire Foundation; Mel Heifetz; Aileen and Brian Roberts; Ira Lubert and Pam Estadt; The Neubauer Family Foundation; and The Philadelphia Foundation.*

## A Supportive Circle

*Jessie Keel, one of Project HOME's young adult residents, spoke at the December 6 groundbreaking for the Gloria Casarez Residence.*

**T**his gathering and my being here on this stage today is proof of what rallying and being supportive can mean.

After about two years of couch-surfing between family and friends' houses, I moved into Project HOME's

Ruth Williams House a month ago. Now that I have stable housing, I work, go to school, and even have hobbies. Even before I moved in, Project HOME staff supported me to reconnect with my education. I'm back to Community College, where I will be taking up veterinary medicine to pursue my dedication to animal welfare.

Getting back on track has helped me redefine hope. Working with Project HOME staff was the push I needed to remember what I am capable of – I am capable of everything, and so are all of us.

This new home, Gloria Casarez Residence, is going to be great, providing 30 other young adults like myself a safe haven and LGBTQ-friendly housing. We have a safe place to lay our heads and know that we have people around us who are supportive. And having a supportive circle is a large part of why I continue to have hope now.

I would like to thank all those who made this residence possible, and thank Gloria Casarez for being a large part in this next phase in the journey of my life.



Photo by Shira Yudkoff

## Take Action for Housing

A growing affordable housing crisis is making it harder for many Americans to have "a place of my own." Between 2010 and 2016, the stock of affordable housing nationwide shrunk by 60 percent. In Philadelphia, more than half of renters are spending more than 50 percent of their income on rent (the government recommendation is 30 percent). A Philadelphian would have to work 83 hours a week at \$7.25 an hour (minimum wage) to afford even a modest one-bedroom.

We must reach out to our elected officials and let them know that every American needs and deserves a place to call home. Send a message to Congress by visiting [www.projecthome.org/action](http://www.projecthome.org/action).

## Handmade at Project HOME!



Your purchase of these and any of our cards, candles, and soaps shares the love!

All proceeds support our work to break the cycle of homelessness and poverty by providing employment.

Buy them at:  
[projecthome.org/store](http://projecthome.org/store)  
or  
**HOME Spun Boutique**  
1523 Fairmount Avenue

# HOME Happenings

◆ **Our Teen Program's** new Robotics Team, partnered with the Robolancers from Central High School, took first place in its inaugural scrimmage, kicking off what they hope will be a successful first season of competition. The team, one of over 100 from around Pennsylvania, is taking part in the FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) Tech Challenge where they design, build, program, and operate robots to play a floor game. The initiative allows students at the Honickman Learning Center and Comcast Technology Labs to develop STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) skills in an interactive environment.



The Teen Program Robotics Team at the Honickman Learning Center and Comcast Technology Labs.

◆ **Project HOME's** proposal to solve street homelessness, submitted for the MacArthur Foundation's 100&Change competition, was honored as a "Best Bet" by the University of Pennsylvania Center for High Impact Philanthropy (CHIP). The proposal included a partnership between Philadelphia and Seattle to meet the unique challenges facing populations at risk of homelessness in each city. It calls for expanding housing and providing holistic services to create a pipeline of support that ensures chronically homeless individuals will not end up on the streets again after being housed. The submission was published in the CHIP publication *Bold Ideas for Philanthropists to Drive Social Change*, which can be found online at [bit.ly/PH\\_BestBet](http://bit.ly/PH_BestBet).

◆ **Our congratulations go out** to the first graduating class of Temple Tech for Philly, a new partnership between Temple University and Project HOME's Workforce Development department which provides hands-on training in computer technology over the course of a 10-week training program during the summer. Classes – which focused on topics that included the installation and configuration of PCs, laptops, and related hardware – were taught by volunteers from Temple's Computer Services department. The program is designed to provide students with the skills required for jobs in the tech sector, and selected graduates will be offered internships on Temple's main campus to employ what they have learned. Graduates are expected to be ready to take the CompTIA A+ professional certification exam, with Temple providing assistance in resume writing and job placement.



Project HOME outreach worker Michelle Sheppard

◆ **The Philadelphia Inquirer** recently published an inspiring profile of Michelle Sheppard, an outreach worker with Project HOME, who experienced homelessness for three decades before coming inside. The piece captures the

credibility and sincerity Michelle brings to her work, qualities that have helped her convince 45 people to leave the street. Her story was particularly poignant during a prolonged cold snap that began on Christmas day and resulted in one of the longest Code Blue declarations in Philadelphia history and yet resulted in no fatalities. You can help Michelle and her colleagues in Outreach connect with folks in need by calling the Philadelphia Homeless Outreach Hotline at 215-232-1984. Read Michelle's story at [bit.ly/MichelleOutreach](http://bit.ly/MichelleOutreach).



Project HOME's Art Director Rachel Ehrgood (right, with some of the Project HOME artists) won the First Place Award for Social Enterprise Innovator in Philadelphia by *The Social Innovation Journal*. She was cited for her work in fostering individual expression, recovery, and the Beloved Community.

# HOME for the Holidays

**Our volunteers warmed so many of our hearts this holiday season!**

Once again, 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 over 1,000 residents, children, students, and community members at the Honickman Learning Center and Comcast Technology Labs and the Stephen Klein Wellness Center.

We are humbled by so many of you who bring joy, love, and warmth in abundance to share with our community.



**From all of us at Project HOME – a giant THANK YOU to all who participated in our HOME for the Holidays.**

*If you or your organization wants to volunteer, check out our webpage at [www.projecthome.org/help/volunteer-program](http://www.projecthome.org/help/volunteer-program).*

## INFORMATION THAT MATTERS TO YOU

Receive the news and issue updates that matter to you by subscribing to Project HOME's monthly eNewsletter and Advocacy alerts.

Subscribe at [bit.ly/PH\\_Subscribe](http://bit.ly/PH_Subscribe)

And don't miss the great stuff on the HOME Word Blog  
[projecthome.org/blog](http://projecthome.org/blog)

And don't forget to follow us online



@ProjectHOME @ProjectHOME projecthomephilly

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### 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
- Ruth Williams House, 2415 N. Broad St.
- 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
- Healthcare Services
- Honickman Learning Center and Comcast Technology Labs
- Outreach Coordination Center
- Personal Recovery Services
- Resident Alumni Program
- 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

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



Photo by Rachel Ehrgood

**"The human soul is hungry for beauty; when we experience the beautiful, there is a sense of homecoming."**

JOHN O'DONOHUE

[www.projecthome.org](http://www.projecthome.org)



Union  
Bug

Project HOME artists and Studio Incamminati artists have been collaborating for several years now in producing beautiful artwork. The next Project HOME art show is on April 12 at the URBAN Center at Drexel University. For information, see [bit.ly/PH\\_DrexelArt](http://bit.ly/PH_DrexelArt).

*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.*