

I Am Project HOME

VALERIE HOLMES



Behind Valerie Holmes' quiet, strong demeanor are experiences of deep trauma. Over the years, she has not only overcome that trauma, she has turned it into strength – for herself and for others.

A Philadelphia native, Valerie is a survivor of tumultuous years in the foster care system that included many episodes of physical, verbal, and sexual abuse. For most of her adult life, she hid much of that emotional and mental trauma through self-medication of drugs that eventually led her to “rock bottom.” It was only after coming to Project HOME, and with the support of staff, Certified Peer Specialists, and even fellow residents, that she began a journey of recovery. “Project HOME gave me my dignity back after I had lost it,” she says. “Having positive people in my life helped me a whole lot.”

She was moved to “give back” by becoming one of those positive people. Valerie became a Certified Peer Specialist herself (someone who has a personal history of behavioral health challenges, and who receives training to support others in their recovery process), and began volunteering as a case aide to work with alumni. After seven months of volunteering, she was hired to coordinate Project HOME's Resident Alumni Program (see “Continuing on the Journey” on page 1), which has been her job for the

past two years. In addition to coordinating the program and working to support alumni, she still serves on the Resident Advisory Board and facilitates tenant councils at two of our residential sites, 1515 Fairmount Avenue and her former home, Kate's Place.

“When I better myself, I can help people more.”

“This job has helped me sleep at night,” Valerie says. “It's a good feeling helping people.” She continues to take classes to learn more and refine her skills in counselling and peer support. “When I better myself, I can help people more.”

When she works with alumni, Valerie sees her work as equipping them to advocate for themselves. “My purpose is to see them stand on their own, even after going through storms, and come out after winning.” She acknowledges that she can get disappointed when a person is not taking the steps he or she needs to succeed. “I have to realize that it's not in my time, it's in their time. You have to meet people where they're at. It's in God's hands.” Knowing how much she benefited from the non-judgmental, affirming spirit she experienced at Project HOME when she needed support, she learns to take a gentler and more affirming tone with the alumni she relates to. “Project HOME doesn't look at people's faults, but at your good side, at your potential. That means a lot.”

Valerie's presence in our community truly means a lot to many people, and we are grateful.



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

www.projecthome.org



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News FROM HOME

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

Continuing on the Journey



Photo by Harvey Finkle

Project HOME alum Solomon Frazier, flanked by other alumni Richard Gist and Dana Barkley, speaks at the January 30 Grand Opening of the Hub of Hope. All three work for SEPTA.

Estelina Fernandez admits she was nervous as she prepared to move to her own apartment in Northeast Philadelphia after living over two years at Project HOME's James Widener Ray Homes. After all, it had been almost 25 years since she had been on her own – with tough years of addiction, incarceration, and homelessness in between. She was grateful to Project HOME for preparing her for this big step, and she knew there would be challenges. “As I felt the key in my hand, I asked myself, what am I going to do with this?” For Estelina, it was important to remember her past, and not lose touch with what got her to this point.

She also knew that there was an important support for her – Project HOME alumni, other former residents like her who

had moved on to their own homes. “I was on my own, but I knew there were others who understood me and would always be a group I could depend on and come back to if I needed anything.”

At Project HOME, many of our residents, particularly those who are older, choose to stay in our supportive housing units. Many choose to move out on their own, which is a powerful and important step worth celebrating. But the process of moving out of supportive housing into a more independent living situation can bring many challenges.

We have always sought to offer support to residents who move out of Project HOME, but in 2008 we started a more formal program as an intrinsic part of our mission. The Resident Alumni Program was designed to create a space for former residents to connect, meet, and create community. It also provides opportunities for residents to stay involved with some of the activities that are available to current residents. The Alumni Program is also open to residents who are struggling to maintain or even have lost their current housing and who need extra support.

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



Photo by Jennine Miller

Project HOME residents, neighbors, and staff participate in the March for Our Lives in Washington, DC, on March 24.

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.

Please join Project HOME's Rising Leaders Committee at the annual fundraising event that brings together more than 400 friends, supporters, and young professionals from across our city.

Enjoy an evening that includes fine hors d'oeuvres, cocktails, and a silent auction all while helping to provide resources for Project HOME's street outreach, supportive housing, services, and programs.

Thursday, May 31, 2018
6:30pm to 9:00pm

Loews Philadelphia Hotel
1200 Market Street
Philadelphia, PA 19107

Bring Philly

HOME

HOSTED BY THE RISING LEADERS COMMITTEE OF



To purchase tickets or sponsorships, please visit:
<http://bit.ly/bph18>

Questions?
Contact **Stephanie Lin** at
215-309-5239 or
SLin@projecthome.org

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www.projecthome.org

The Choices We Make



Photo by Jeffrey Stockbridge, from the series: "Kensington Blues."

Project HOME resident Matt Neal was once homeless and caught up in the opioid crisis in Kensington. Thanks to treatment services and affordable permanent housing, he is now healthy and stable.

The headlines screamed of “a national disgrace.” It was a report on the growing encampments of persons experiencing homelessness in one of several cities in California. The stress in the article was not so much on the aggregate of human suffering represented by the hundreds of persons in such a desperate situation. It was on the outrage of local communities “fighting back” against being “overrun” by human waste, needles, and other trash. Subsequent reports on the clean-up of the encampment highlighted the hundreds of pounds of trash and feces collected.

“Homeless.” “Trash.” “Needles.” “Waste.” A powerful use of words that can evoke fear and disgust. We've seen this in the past: Waves of negative media that contribute to public demonizing of “the homeless” as practically sub-human and certainly a public nuisance.

Do these articles – and similar articles reporting on other cities – portend a new wave of hardening attitudes towards our sisters and brothers struggling with homelessness, addiction, and mental illness? It would only fit into a dangerous pattern in this country of “othering” – demeaning those “not like us,” such as immigrants, Muslims, or other groups who, it is insinuated, threaten our public order.

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Roots and Branches: Reflections from Sister Mary

Many years ago, one of our residents, Richard Brown, was sharing his story with a group of students. "When you see me here today," he said, "You would never think I was once on the streets, addicted, lost, dirty, hopeless. The people who passed by me on the streets back then probably assumed that that was who I was – a homeless drug addict. But it wasn't – it was just one moment in my life, a period of real struggle. I had a whole life before that time that nobody could see. They also couldn't see the person I would become later."

Richard went on to tell the students, "So when you see someone on the streets today, just realize – that's not the whole of who that person is. They are more than that. And a lot of change can happen in his or her life – just like it happened in mine."

Years later, Richard's wisdom still rings with deep truth. Most of us pass people living on the street. We might be moved by their plight. We shudder at the terrible circumstances we see them living through. And it can be hard to see beyond that. Only a few of us get to see what is like when their talents and potential are tapped and they have a chance to blossom.

Project HOME's Resident Alumni Program (see "Continuing the Journey," page 1) shines a light on the pathway out of homelessness and enables us to see that people who once experienced homelessness are us. They are heads of households, friends, voters, artists, employees, taxpayers. They are civic-minded people working to make our city and nation a better place to live, work, and raise a family. When one of our alumni gives a presentation or volunteers on a committee or works at a job using skills and experience to help others, it is a teachable moment for all of us. As Richard challenged the students years ago, we must learn that when we see a person at their most vulnerable or broken, we must also open our eyes and hearts to that person's strengths, gifts, and potential. None of us want to be judged or defined by our weakest moment – so we must not inflict that on others.

Our alumni are living witnesses of transformation. They invite us to look beyond the surface of a person in the midst of struggle and look with eyes of hope. They remind us of all that is possible – in ourselves and in others. They are signposts to all of us, pointing us toward home.

A Mary Scullion



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

Continuing on the Journey

In 2015, with a growing number of alumni, the program re-assessed its needs, goals, and outreach strategies and evolved into a more formal peer support program. Currently, two Certified Peer Specialists (CPS) staff the program. (A CPS is someone with a personal history of behavioral health challenges who is trained to support others in their recovery). They provide regular communications as well as invite alumni for monthly meetings or special events, and make sure they still have access to resources they need, either Project HOME services or other community services.

"Transitions are often the times when we most need each other's support and care."

"More important than the connection to services is the human connection," says Valerie Holmes, CPS and Project HOME alum who has led the program since 2015. "They have been used to the strong support when they lived in Project HOME, and when they are on their own, they still gravitate to good, loving support and understanding."

Alfonso Geiger, a current resident and CPS who also staffs the program, reflects on his own goals to move on. "It's a daunting change. It's what you want, but you don't comprehend the magnitude of the move." He cites the need to take up new responsibilities and not go back to bad habits or bad ways of thinking. "The support of other alumni helps you to make it."

Almeda Smith moved on from our 1515 Fairmount Avenue residence in 2006 to find her own place. Twelve years later, she still connects to Project HOME through the Resident Alumni Program as well as

through our advocacy committee and through her service on our Board of Trustees. The monthly meetings of alumni are important to her. "They are celebrations where we get together to share our experiences and challenges when it comes to 'the outside world' and talk about how we are managing."

Solomon Frazier lived for two years at Project HOME's Hope Haven, a supportive residence for men who have gone through a recovery program. With a steady job and determined to succeed, he "was ready to continue on with my journey." But he knew there was lots to learn – paying rent, getting a W-2 form, dealing with persons who didn't understand recovery. Project HOME's Resident Alumni Program is part of a support system that helps him "feel connected and protected." Employed at SEPTA as a maintenance custodial driver, Solomon occasionally gives talks for Project HOME. Speaking at the recent Grand Opening of the newly expanded Hub of Hope, he said to the crowd that included numerous political, civic, and business leaders, "I would never have believed I'd be here today, talking to all of you. But today I want to live."

For Esterlina, the Resident Alumni Program means "you always have a home and people who will continue to help you to grow."

All of us go through transitions in life – including some challenging ones. Transitions are often the times when we most need each other's support and care. We are glad to be able to offer this support to residents who are taking the next step on the journey home – and we are grateful to our alumni for their courage and strength.

If you are or know a former resident of Project HOME and want to get connected to our Resident Alumni Program, contact us at 215-232-7272 ext. 3065.

The Choices We Make

(continued from page 1)

Here in Philadelphia, Project HOME is working with many groups in the city to address our own issues of encampments of persons largely in the Kensington neighborhood who are caught up in the horrific opioid crisis. City officials and nonprofit groups acknowledge that this is a health and safety crisis not only to the people living there but also to the surrounding neighborhoods. There are serious community concerns, and solutions are urgently needed, core to which are treatment options and housing – solutions which will ultimately help everyone.

"In this mix of out-of-reach housing costs and hardening attitudes, we must all come together to create the solutions."

The large encampments of persons with no place to live, wherever they occur, are in fact a national disgrace. But a central issue is the affordable housing crisis in the United States. As we reported in our last newsletter, the stock of affordable housing nationwide has plummeted, leaving low- and modest-income Americans with fewer options for a safe place to live. It is not only those who are homeless: Increasingly, the people who park our cars, who pour our coffee, who work in our hospitals and schools cannot afford a safe place to call home.



A delegation of Congressional leaders and city officials came to Project HOME's Ruth Williams House on April 9 (seen here with several of our residents) to call for more federal funding for affordable housing and human services.

In this mix of out-of-reach housing costs and hardening attitudes, we must all come together to create the solutions. The federal government is a critical partner in this effort.

We were grateful when in March Congress passed an omnibus spending package for the remainder of fiscal year 2018 that actually increased funding for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). But the proposed federal budget for fiscal year 2019 includes cuts of almost \$9 billion in funds – over 18 percent of the current HUD budget – and well over \$3 trillion over ten years from basic needs programs. Such cuts would worsen the affordable housing crisis, with a devastating impact on poor and low-income Americans, as well as on cities and towns across the country. This comes at a time when recent federal tax reform will create a windfall for huge corporations and the wealthiest Americans.

On Monday, April 9, a Congressional delegation including Representatives Bob Brady, Brendan Boyle, and Dwight Evans, along with local elected officials, came to Project HOME's Ruth Williams House to highlight the urgent need for federal funding to support affordable housing and other critical safety net programs that would face severe cuts in the proposed budget. Thanks in large part to federal investment, 88 persons have a safe, affordable, permanent home at Ruth Williams House – not far from some of the worst encampments in Kensington where hundreds of persons struggle with addiction and homelessness.

It's a stark portrait of the choice we face as a nation. We must continue to urge our elected officials to do their share to solve the national disgrace of poverty and homelessness – just as we continue our efforts at the grass roots. We do not want to see more large encampments on our city streets while other Americans reap millions of dollars in tax cuts. It's up to us what kind of nation we want to be.

The proposed FY2019 federal budget contains drastic cuts that could worsen the affordable housing crisis – and could severely impact our work at Project HOME. Please reach out to your elected officials and tell them we need affordable housing for all Americans. You can send them a message by visiting www.projecthome.org/action.

We've Been Here Before

An excerpt from the September 2005 edition of the Project HOME newsletter:

Homelessness has never been popular – nor should it be. But all too often, the object of public ire is not the cruel and unacceptable situation of destitution that lands persons on the streets, but the persons themselves.

Sometimes it's caused by misdirected fears. Sometimes it's a matter of "compassion fatigue" at a social crisis that, despite years of efforts, seems intractable. Whatever the reason, skewed and prejudicial attitudes that degrade, blame, and seek to marginalize homeless persons are not only dehumanizing, they are socially counterproductive.

We should not be asking whether these homeless persons are threatening the public order and safety. We should be asking what is the cause of homelessness, and how can we provide effective solutions – both for the sake of those persons suffering and for the sake of our city's overall health.

We need to counter rising anti-homeless sentiments and instead put the focus on solutions. This entails genuinely listening to the public's concerns and fear, but we need to stress that people are not the problem – poverty and homelessness are.

This Mother's Day, create a memorable gift to honor the love that your Mother has given to you by empowering mothers at Project HOME. Your gift will support formerly homeless and low-income mothers as they continue their education, train for employment, prepare nutritious meals, and spend quality, well-deserved time with their children.

To make a gift, please visit: projecthome.org/mothers-day

HOME Happenings



Photo by Kris J. Eden

Over fifty members of the Project HOME community, including dozens of young people from our Teen Program, traveled with CeaseFirePA to Washington, DC, on March 24 to participate in the "March for Our Lives" calling for an end of gun violence. You can read Project HOME's statement on gun violence at bit.ly/Confronting_Violence.

Members of our community benefited from a wonderful collaboration with Jefferson's Department of Occupational Therapy. Working under the supervision of a licensed occupational therapist and instructor from Thomas Jefferson University, two OT students, Jonette Ishmael and Jennifer Merz, offered both group and one-on-one programs at several of our sites. They worked with residents on a range of issues from stress and/or anger management, budgeting, medication management, health education, as well as learning to prepare healthy meals, make friends, and engage in healthy group activities. They also provided specific supports to many residents dealing with physical impairments and pain management. Both their helpful therapeutic skills and their strong bonding and compassion have been a great gift to all of us.

We recently completed production of our inspiring new video, *Coming HOME*, and we invite you to watch it on our website at bit.ly/Video_ComingHOME. We hope it conveys our shared conviction that Philadelphia can be the first major city to end chronic street homelessness and that it serves as a source of inspiration for you. Happy viewing!

Project HOME's Executive Director Sister Mary Scullion was honored to serve as the Grand Marshall of Philadelphia's St. Patrick's Day parade. She was also recognized by both the City of Philadelphia and by State Rep. Brendan Boyle (PA-13) on the floor of the House of Representatives for her work to end homelessness. Rep. Boyle's speech can be found at bit.ly/SMS_HouseRep.



Photo by Mary Pat Gerwin, RSM

Project HOME is inviting high school students to participate in our Summer Service Program focused on learning about issues of poverty and homelessness. The program, sponsored in part by the Maguire Foundation, offers students one- or two-week experiences that allow them to build relationships with others involved in social change, get to know persons who have experienced poverty and homelessness, and engage in service with Project HOME and other agencies fighting poverty, hunger, and homelessness in Philadelphia. If you are interested in what could be a powerful and transformative experience, contact Margie Winters, coordinator of our Service Learning Program, at psummerservice@projecthome.org or 215-232-7272, ext. 3092. You can also apply online at bit.ly/PH-SummerService. The deadline for applications is May 15.

In early March, 17 resident leaders, along with some alumni and residential staff members, headed to the Jersey shore for the annual Resident Advisory Board (RAB) leadership retreat. For two days, the group worked on strengthening personal and collaborative relationships and developing skills in leadership, self-confidence, communication, and facilitation – and had lots of fun. Many of the sessions were led by resident leaders, including creation of personal vision boards. They set goals for the RAB in the coming year, in line with Project HOME's mission.



Juanita Jones and David Brown work on their "vision boards" at the resident leaders retreat.

Help make an impact within the Project HOME community! Come volunteer at our upcoming Summer Street Clean Up on Saturday, July 28 from 9am to 1pm. Visit projecthome.volunteerhub.com to sign up for this and many other special volunteer opportunities. You can also donate sorely needed in-kind items, such as sheets, pillows, and blankets. We invite you or your company to host a donation drive for necessary items. To learn more about volunteering, hosting a donation drive, or donating in-kind, please contact Taylor Chenevert at vcordinator@projecthome.org or 215-232-4786 x 3015.



Photo by Karen Orlick