

# openhouse

a news update from st. stephen's human services SUMMER 2010

## ON DECENCY

Decent people have a hard time in this world because so much of the world runs on greed and selfishness. If they are lucky though, decent people thrive and add to the beauty of the species simply by doing what they do best: living a decent and dignified life.

You can find decent people everywhere. The streets are filled with them. Many decent people are born poor and some stay poor and die poor.

Public relations firms prosper by helping celebrities, candidates, and corporations present themselves as decent, upstanding members of the community. I sometimes think that if poor



Mikkel Beckmen, Executive Director

people without homes had the chance to hire a public relations firm they could let their decency and the reality

of their situation be understood by the community. They don't of course, so their basic decency remains obscured by assumptions and flawed stereotypes.

St. Stephen's is not a PR firm. We remain, however, committed to bringing the voices and experiences of folks who are homeless directly in contact with as many people in the community as possible.

One recent example of this, for which St. Stephen's won an award, was the way we helped organize and facilitate meetings between homeless vets and others with the elected representatives who make decisions that affect their lives.

A new project here at St. Stephen's is the Oral History of Homelessness

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## A Sense of Belonging

*The Oral History of Homelessness Project collects stories and portraits of people who are experiencing homelessness. To date we have collected over 300 stories. An exhibit, featuring beautiful portraits and audio interviews will be hosted by St. Stephen's this fall. Watch your mail for an invitation.*

My name is Rita and I'm 61 years old. I worked as a mail clerk at a hospital for about 23 years. There were a lot of cutbacks so I was kind of pushed into early retirement. So I only receive partial benefits and I have to wait until I'm

62 to apply for social security.

I've been in shelters, I've been with friends, I've been with family. I've had apartments, but when you don't have enough money you have to reprioritize.

My dream would be to be in a permanent house of my own where my grandchildren could come and play without having a neighbor complain about children in the vicinity. A lot of senior people that are homeless or on the verge of being homeless are part of child-rearing families. We're seniors taking care of our grandchildren, trying to help our

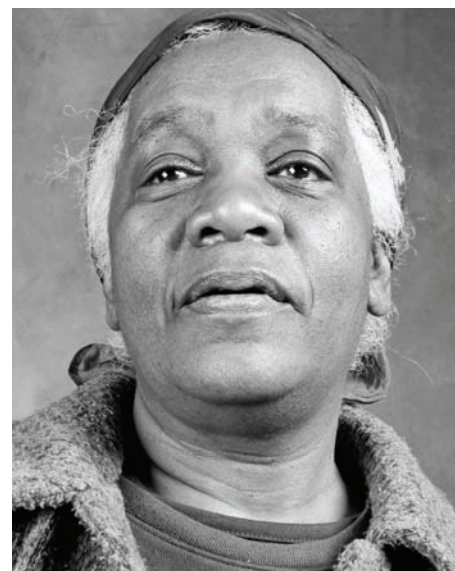


Photo by Larry LaBonte

Rita, from the Oral History of Homelessness Project

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## St. Stephen's Human Services

### Our Programs

**Alliance of the Streets** providing essential resources, including the *Handbook of the Streets*, for people experiencing homelessness

**Emergency Shelter** providing safe & sober harbor, advocacy, housing & employment support for adult men

**Employment & Family Services** assisting parents transitioning from welfare to permanent employment

**Free Store** offering clothing and small household goods

**Housing Services** securing permanent housing for homeless families & adults

**Human Rights Program** engaging people experiencing homelessness and their supporters in systemic change

**Kateri Residence** housing & supporting American Indian women recovering from chemical dependency

**Programs to End Long-term Homelessness** working intensively with individuals or families who have been homeless long-term

**Street Outreach** securing housing and other services for individuals living without shelter

**zAmya Theater Project** offering people the opportunity to share experiences of home and homelessness through theater

For questions about this newsletter or St. Stephen's Human Services, please contact:

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St. Stephen's never sells or shares the contact information of its supporters.



## Currie Avenue

Currie Avenue on downtown's north-west side is only a block long, but it is home to a world of hurt. On the 1000 block of Currie, in the shadow of Target Field, over 700 people sleep each night at the Salvation Army and Catholic Charities shelters. In the morning those people disperse for the day. Some head out to look for work and housing. Some panhandle. Some find a place to go back to sleep the deadweight slumber of depression and hopelessness.

Some of these folks have been staying in the shelters—these and others—for years. They are stuck, unable to find a landlord to rent to them, an employer to hire them, an advocate to help them navigate complicated systems, or the healthiness of mind to seek out these things and people.

Last winter when the shelters became intensely overcrowded, leaders in the homeless/housing field had a choice: open more shelters or move more quickly than ever to help people get un-stuck and into housing.

Cathy ten Broeke, Coordinator to End Homelessness for Minneapolis/Hennepin County, approached the downtown business community and faith communities with a plan: raise enough money to hire people to help 150 people move out of Currie Avenue shelters within six months. In what Jim Gertmenien, Pastor of Plymouth Congregational Church, called 'a spontaneous eruption of decency', the business and faith communities rose to the challenge. The Currie Avenue Partnership was launched with the goal of raising \$350,000. With generous gifts from Wells Fargo, Thrivent

Financial, US Bank, Westminster Presbyterian Church, Plymouth Congregational Church, the Minneapolis Downtown Council, the Nancy Jacobs & Mark Sandercott family, and many others, the goal was met in just a few months. St. Stephen's



Steve Horsfield of the Salvation Army describes to a group how high demand for shelter forces people to sleep on mats right next to one another

was one of a half-dozen grantees to hire Housing Case Managers dedicated to Currie Avenue. Each staff will be funded for the first six months of employment, as they locate fifteen individuals to work with. At that point, a state fund-

ing stream kicks in to support the costs of the staff salary and a rental subsidy for the individual. At this writing, just six months after the fundraising effort for the Currie Avenue Partnership was launched, St. Stephen's team has found housing for twenty people. 150 people will move off of Currie Avenue for homes by this fall.

Contrast an over-crowded, impersonal Currie Avenue with this image: A landlord reported to us that one of St. Stephen's clients was doing fine, but for some reason wasn't sleeping in his bed. The Housing Case Manager told him that it takes time for people to get comfortable living in a home and not to worry. The next week the landlord reported that his tenant was sleeping on top of his bed in his clothes. The next week he reported that the man was sleeping under the covers in his bed now, but keeping his street clothes on. The next week the landlord reported that he'd gone out and bought his tenant a pair of pajamas as a gift. Now his tenant was sleeping in his bed, under the covers, in pajamas.

## GAMC Reconfigured

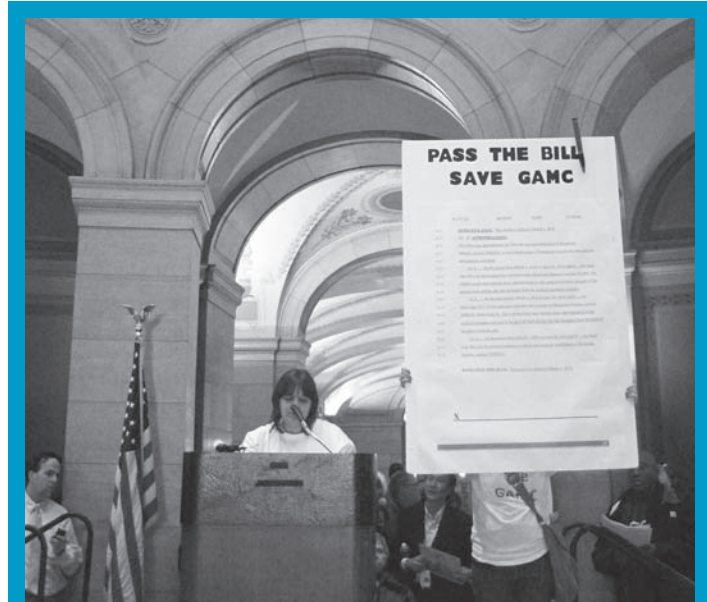
General Assistance Medical Care (GAMC) is the state's healthcare plan for single adults who earn less than \$7,800 per year. The overwhelming majority of the clients are chronically ill, chemically dependent and/or homeless. Many work with St. Stephen's.

It was a frantic legislative session as legislators tried to hammer out a compromise with the Governor over healthcare for these folks. Governor Pawlenty sought to de-fund the program entirely. St. Stephen's joined with a broad coalition of social services, healthcare providers, elected officials, and others to argue that GAMC is critical for the poorest Minnesotans.

Ultimately, the program was cut by about 75 percent. The vision behind the compromise legislation was that seventeen hospitals across the state would work with GAMC patients. All but four hospitals refused to participate. Those four are in Hennepin & Ramsey Counties.

Changes went into effect June 1st and there remains a great deal of confusion among GAMC enrollees about where to go for healthcare.

GAMC patients who join a coordinated care plan offered by one of the four hospitals will get a primary-care doctor in a clinic operated by the hospital. Some individuals can enroll in MinnesotaCare, a less than ideal option due to caps on



Cathy Haying of St. Stephen's Human Rights Program asks legislators to sign the bill reinstating GAMC

co-pays and hospital costs. For all others, most health care will likely come from emergency rooms.

Many on GAMC have complex medical and mental-health conditions and most live on \$203 a month in state assistance.

## St. Stephen's Recognized

"Each of these men is on GAMC," St. Stephen's Monica Nilsson told State Senators as four men stood behind her. "Each of these men is currently homeless. And each of these men protected us and served our country; Marine, Navy, Army and Coast Guard."

St. Stephen's Human Rights Program was honored for its GAMC work by the Joint Religious Legislative Coalition (JRLC). The Interfaith Social Justice Community Award is given annually for interfaith social justice work that includes people affected by the problem in the policy work. St. Stephen's work emphasizes the voices of people experiencing poverty and homelessness, making connections for authentic dialogue to take place. St. Stephen's routinely invited GAMC enrollees to visit with legislators at the capital. If people felt intimidated by the capitol, then we videotaped their testimony. If they didn't like cameras, then we wrote their words on signs for someone else to hold.

At one point, Monica Nilsson escorted forty veterans enrolled in GAMC to the capitol. The veterans were singled out by legislators as critical to the vote by both



Forty veterans who have experienced homelessness and are enrolled in GAMC testified at the capitol

the house and senate to maintain GAMC. That legislation was quickly vetoed by Governor Pawlenty.

In its nomination, the JRLC wrote, *Through impassioned testimony, personal stories, media work, committee testimony, strategy meetings, participation in rallies and press conferences, direct contact with lawmakers, and through their tireless advocacy and inspiring presence, St. Stephen's made a real difference in the hallways of the Capitol and in the lives of tens of thousands of people who rely on GAMC.*

# BROTHER, CAN YOU SPARE

## Making the Math Work

You earn \$8.50 an hour doing assembly. This gets you \$1,360 each month. Your rent is \$725 for a one-bedroom apartment. You have one child. Daycare is \$100/week. By using food stamps, food shelves and clipping coupons you are able to keep groceries down to \$200/month. A bus pass to get to and from work costs \$20/month. You're living within your means!

Congratulations! But clothing for your growing child is expensive—make sure you visit the Free Store every week and hope to find something the right size. Are you exhausted yet? Fretful? But wait: it gets interesting. You twist your ankle and need two weeks off work. Your boss says, 'No problem...as long as you take it unpaid.'

The one thing—the only thing—that all homeless people have in common is this: they lack the money to afford housing. St. Stephen's can shelter people and we are adept at finding housing

for people, but if the income equation isn't addressed, we'll be seeing those people in the shelters again.

St. Stephen's has two programs for people who need to improve their employability. Our ultimate goal for all participants is that they earn not just a wage, but a living wage that will sustain them in increasing self-sufficiency.

## Families

St. Stephen's is a Hennepin County administrator of the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) created in response to President Clinton's 1996 welfare reform. Families have a 60-month lifetime maximum that they may receive government assistance. During that time they must demonstrate that they are taking steps toward employment. The majority of people with whom St. Stephen's works have challenges that include incompleteness of high school, history of homelessness, or

criminal history. Employment counselors work with them on resumes, soft skills, and getting training or GED.

The recession has slowed hiring down. "Our folks have had it tough," says Employment & Family Services Program Director Cynthia Bobo. "All of a sudden you have college graduates and elderly retirees wanting those entry level jobs."

## Single Homeless Adults

St. Stephen's Shelter Employment Program is available to people staying in three south Minneapolis shelters. These folks typically face significant barriers—the most common being felonies, long-term homelessness, and sporadic work histories. Some also have addiction and mental health concerns. Basic things like transportation can also be insurmountable. Job Counselor Lynn Lash says, "A fellow might get an offer for third-shift warehouse in the suburbs, but busses don't run all night,

## Extraordinary Joe

Some of our MFIP parents have many barriers and need time-intensive work with employment counselors. Others have skills, but simply lack recent experience. For these people St. Stephen's started a program to help them get some on-the-job experience. Through a partnership with another nonprofit who pays workers, St. Stephen's Supported Worker Program hires our MFIP participants in on-site positions: maintenance, Free Store assistant, and Reception.

If you've visited St. Stephen's lately, you've had the good fortune of meeting Joe DePratto.

Joe spent three months working with our reception area team. Joe had



Joe with Lisa and Sandra who staff St. Stephen's reception area

some college and administrative experience. He was in school when his child was born. He says, "I quit school because I can't feed my baby books." He worked instead, but when his partner left him to raise the baby on his own, he wound up on MFIP. He came to St. Stephen's to start the process of finding work, now as a single parent. "MFIP worked for me

because I saw it as an opportunity to get up and go, instead of a free check every month. When my job counselor noticed I was in the Job Resource Room every single day she offered me the Supported Worker position."

The program helped Joe get a solid three months of recent experience on his resume, and a lot of admiring references at St. Stephen's. "It's down the road, but I'd like to get a house to raise my daughter in. That goal keeps me focused."

Joe begins his new part-time job in administration with a nonprofit next week.

# A LIVING WAGE?

so getting out there is challenging.”

Once someone lands a job, St. Stephen's is able to help out with work clothing costs and bus fare until a first paycheck comes in. Sometimes people who can't find work have to get creative. One man got licensed to shine

shoes at the airport while he looked for full-time work. Another advertises his lawn mowing services while he looks for a more stable income.

## Good Morning, Mr. Minton

Who among us, in our early careers, couldn't have benefitted from some job-coaching from an corporate executive? Pat Minton, retired President of CMS Corporation, visits St. Stephen's each week to do just that for the people in our Shelter Employment Resource Room.

Most days he's just "Pat", the friendly, Irish-looking guy in a t-shirt helping one person after another with job searches and online applications. Every so often, though, he becomes "Mr. Minton" and arrives at St. Stephen's in a suit and tie to perform mock-interviews with job-seekers. "We do the interview and then talk about the importance of body language, eye contact, saying 'good morning' and 'thank you', and dressing appropriately. People who have not done much of this are really intimidated. Going through the motions and getting feedback relaxes them and takes away some of 'the unknown'."

A major barrier facing a lot of the people he works with is a criminal record. Most don't want to talk about it, but doing so is critical, Pat tells them. "Address it with confidence: I did my time and I have moved on."

Technology is another barrier for homeless people without access to computers. Yet, Pat says, 95% of the kinds of jobs that participants are applying for require on-line applications. Basic



**Pat Minton and fellow volunteer Mantu Craven discuss a client's resume**

computer-use is a skill that everyone should feel comfortable with. That's one of the reasons that Pat facilitated a computer donation from his former company. CMS, an informational technology company, replaced all of the Shelter Employment Room's faltering computers.

"We have a lot of success stories," Pat says, "though you don't always hear them all because people go out on interviews and you don't hear from them again. We take that as a pretty good sign, though."

Pat notes that as a corporate executive working closely with these individuals has made him think more flexibly about hiring people with criminal records. "There are so many positions they could be hired for without worry. They're decent guys and they want to work."

*Interested in this type of volunteer opportunity? Please call our Volunteer Coordinator at 612-879-7627 to learn more.*

## List of Jobs

These are examples of employers & jobs obtained by participants in our employment programs. They also serve as a reminder that people who have experienced homelessness are all around us: our bus drivers, cashiers, security guards, builders of homes and offices, and our neighbors.

- Target Field
- Hotel housekeeping
- Building Security
- Assembly
- Bus driver
- Home Depot
- Construction
- Telemarketing
- Public Library
- Star Tribune
- Landscaping
- Mall of America
- Roofing
- Cooking
- Nursing Assistant



**Lynn Lash, Shelter Employment Room Supervisor, with a participant. Each star represents a job obtained.**

# SPRING AT ST. STEPHEN'S



The Alliance of the Streets hosted its annual Italian Dinner Fundraiser, with meals served by staff and clients.



St. Stephen's co-hosted a Gubernatorial Candidate Forum on Jobs, Housing, and Health Care



Reverend Marlene Whiterabbit Helgemo, Pastor of All Nations Indian Church, blessed the Kateri Residence Open House for supporters, residents, staff and program alumnae.



Senator Mark Dayton, candidate for governor, dropped by St. Stephen's to discuss strategies for ending homelessness.



zAmya Theater Project performed for 250 attendees at the St. Stephen's fundraising luncheon.



70 bands participated in the three-day "Hooliefest" hosted by Shuga Records and benefitting St. Stephen's.

*"On Decency" continued from page 1*

Project. We believe we are heading for a day when homelessness will no longer exist and people will wonder why so many became homeless. We are preserving the stories and portraits of several hundred decent Minnesotans who had the great misfortune of being poor and homeless. The chance for people to hear these narratives will cut to the truth of who people really are and what they have endured.

In a world that is increasingly combative and strident and self-absorbed, decency persists. It persists and it is our way forward together.

*"A Sense of Belonging" continued from page 1*

extended family survive. It's a problem that so much senior housing doesn't permit children.

I'd like people to know that we don't choose to be homeless. The majority of us have jobs or have had a long history of employment. We have the same basic needs that everyone has. Even though we have difficulties, that doesn't mean that we don't want to fit in with the rest of the community. We all want that sense of belonging.

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# WISH LIST!

## → URGENT NEEDS: ←

### STREET OUTREACH VAN

Our trusty van has finally given up the ghost. Donated to St. Stephen's in 1998, this van has been invaluable for moving people and their belongings into new housing and most recently for seeking out people living outside and helping them into warm shelter. Are there any angels out there with a van or SUV to donate to a good cause?

Contact: Mikkel Beckmen 612-870-2278  
if you can help.

### PROGRAM NEEDS

*Please bring to 2211 Clinton Ave,  
front door  
8:30 to 5:30 M-F*

Towels, pillows, sheets, blankets

Diapers & baby wipes

Alarm clocks

Dishes, silverware, pots & pans

Microwaves

Fans

### FREE STORE

*Please bring to the rear of 2211 Clinton Ave  
8:30 to 11:30 on Tue-Wed-Thu or  
call 612-767-4751 to make  
other arrangements.*

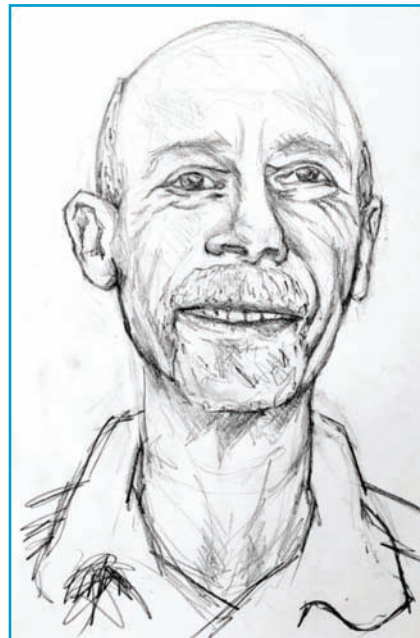
The Free Store accepts gently used clothing and small household items and gives them free to people in need. Casual, in-season clothing is preferred. Children's clothing is especially needed!

ending homelessness

st. stephen's HUMAN SERVICES

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St. Stephen's benefitted from a nine-month Community Partnership with the Minneapolis College of Art & Design (MCAD). MCAD loaned St. Stephen's grad-student, Galen McDonald, to work on a number of on-site art projects, including these portraits he drew of program participants.