

openhouse

a news update from st. stephen's human services SUMMER 2012

ON SEEING



Mikkel Beckmen, Executive Director

So much of our lives, public and private, is now under surveillance or freely self-reported and posted for the whole world to see. Thanks to technology our basic notions of privacy are being changed fundamentally. Yet with all this viewing going on, we are eroding our

ability to see each other in a way that is real.

Take the case of Anna Brown in St. Louis. The last hours of Anna Brown's life were viewed and captured by the cold machine-eye gaze of video cameras from an emergency room, the back of a police car and finally from the floor of a jail cell.

How is it that a person in physical pain who goes to the logical place to find help ends up dying in a jail cell? What did the hospital staff see over the seven hours she spent in the emergency room? That Anna was homeless. That she was black. They assumed she was "drug-seeking" and when she refused to leave she was dragged out of the hospital in

handcuffs and sent to jail. Thirty minutes later she was dead. An autopsy revealed no drugs in her system and blood clots in her leg that had moved to her lungs.

Earlier in the year, a tornado destroyed Brown's home. Forced to move, she lost her job at a sandwich shop soon afterward. Her utilities were shut off. A child welfare agent who visited the home found burn marks on the floor where she had lit fires to keep warm. Brown was arrested for parental neglect and her children were removed from her custody. Her home was condemned. She ended up on the streets.

In the days leading up to her death, Anna hurt her leg walking in a ditch

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How We **DIDN'T** Become Homeless



Johnnie and Minnie

Johnnie speaking: It was like a double whammy. I lost my job last July. Then in August our daughter came back from Arizona, and, due to some problems, she wasn't able to care for her two sons. We took temporary custody of them and moved into a two bedroom apartment.

We applied for assistance in September to help us pay the rent since I hadn't yet found a new job. Documents were flying back and forth between us and the county. It

was physically and emotionally taxing because we didn't understand the system well.

Our situation was a bit complicated and kept being delayed. In December we were given an eviction notice. We called St. Stephen's Homeless Prevention Program. St. Stephen's went above and beyond. Our Case Manager and our landlord worked out an agreement to give us a little extra time. We went back to the

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St. Stephen's Human Services

Housing

Housing opportunities for individual adults and families, including Kateri Residence for Native American women, our Rapid Exit partnership helping families and singles move quickly out of shelters, supportive housing in our Long-Term Homeless program, and Homeless Prevention for people in danger of losing their housing.

Employment

Employment support for single adults staying in south Minneapolis shelters as well as families leaving the Minnesota Family Investment Program.

Community Engagement & Street Outreach

Educational opportunities for the housed community to promote a greater understanding of homelessness, including through our zAmya Theater Project and A Day in the Life Program. For people living without shelter, and the community members concerned for them, we provide on-the-spot outreach and resources, including The Handbook of the Streets.

Shelter & Emergency Services

Shelter and advocacy for adult men in our Shelter. Additional emergency assistance is available to the community, such as clothing through our Free Store, help obtaining birth certificates, and representative payee service.

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

Margaret Miles
Director of Development
612-870-2276
mmiles@ststephensmpls.org

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



Upcoming Events

Please join us for any or all of these events!

Open House: Visit Our New Home!

Thursday September 6
4:00 to 6:00, program at 5:00
2309 Nicollet Avenue Minneapolis 55404

ZAMYA THEATER PROJECT

Come see a theatrical extravaganza written and performed by homeless and non-homeless actors!

Thursday September 13 | \$10 at door
2309 Nicollet Avenue Minneapolis 55404
Seating is limited! Please RSVP to
mward@ststephensmpls.org

St. Stephen's Institute on Ending Homelessness *Learning Is Service!*

Each Institute event consists of a presentation on a major topic, discussion, and an optional on-site volunteer opportunity. Topics are geared to ages 14 and older. All Institutes take place at St. Stephen's new location at 2309 Nicollet Avenue Minneapolis 55404.

To RSVP please contact Andria at ABrandt@ststephensmpls.org or 612-870-2292.

A Brief History of Homelessness & Current Trends

Monday September 17 *Free, but seating is limited—please RSVP*
5:30-6:30 presentation, discussion
6:30-7:00 optional volunteer activity

Panhandling—To Give or Not to Give?

Monday October 15 *Free, but seating is limited—please RSVP*
5:30-6:30 presentation, discussion
6:30-7:00 optional volunteer activity

See future newsletters or our website for more upcoming
Institute topics www.ststephensmpls.org

WISH LIST

VOLUNTEERS

If you or your business would like to volunteer at St. Stephen's this summer, please contact Michelle at mperrin@ststephensmpls.org or 612-879-7627. Opportunities range from preparing dinner for shelter guests to assisting clients in the Job Room to assembling "Welcome Home" kits at your location. A list of opportunities is posted at www.ststephensmpls.org/joinus.

DONATIONS

Reminder: We are not accepting donations in June due to our move to a new location. However, beginning in July, you can drop them off at our new location : 2309 Nicollet Avenue Minneapolis 55404. For more information call Andria at 612-870-2292.

We are in constant need of:

- Bedding (sheets, blankets, etc)
- Towels
- Kitchenware (silverware, pots, pans, dishes)
- Men's socks & t-shirts
- Household cleaning supplies

Volunteering at the Shelter

"The first night that I worked, I just knew that this was a fit for me."

Twice a month, Kendall Choate comes to the shelter with a smile on her face and two action-packed movies for the guests to watch. She has tried to slip in a couple chick flicks, knowing full well that her chances of seeing them that night are slim.

Kendall is a popular overnight volunteer among our guests, which she attributes to her outgoing personality. "I was a shy kid – believe it or not – but I've definitely come out of my shell. Now, I love listening and talking to people about books, movies, and themselves." All her listening and learning has served her

well, as she believes she is better able to talk about homelessness with friends. When friends ask her if she is scared to volunteer in a shelter, she responds with a simple, "Why? They're just people like us who have had an unfortunate setback."

Kendall says it's hard to pick her favorite part of volunteering overnight at St. Stephen's; conversation with the guests, the advocates, and the volunteer meal groups delivering dinner are all great. She says she was surprised when she started volunteering over a year ago at how well everything runs due to the countless dedicated individuals – including volunteers, staff members, and guests who help out with



Kendall Choate lights up the shelter every time she volunteers.

daily tasks.

Kendall lives nearby and enjoys how easy it is to drop in and volunteer. Occasionally she runs into former guests, and likes to catch up with them, saying, "It's nice to be able to see the positive results of their stay at St. Stephen's."

"...Homeless" continued from page 1

extra time. We went back to the county, and this time we told them that we were working with St. Stephen's. Right away, they wrote us a check to pay rent. Our Case Manager also worked out an agreement with our landlord to repay what we owed over the course of a few months so we had a little extra money for necessities. When we left St. Stephen's, we were exhausted, but very thankful.

It's stressful to worry about paying for toilet paper, shampoo, and toothpaste. We are far from living in the best place possible, but we're comfortable. I'm still actively looking for work and hopefully getting close. I like to think that when things are really dark and you can't see, it doesn't mean something isn't developing. You just have to stay focused and keep trying.

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and went to three hospitals complaining of leg pain.

My point is this: Our inability to see each other, especially poor and homeless American citizens, leads to all kinds of false assumptions. It colors our thinking about who deserves help. It creates public policy decisions that devastate people's lives and get in the way of effective intervention.

How can we truly begin to see each other? Here at St. Stephen's we try to meet people with openness. Our values ask us to seek the dignity in

every person and to treat people with respect. Those of us in the helping business can never lose sight of the importance of the individual in front of us. That person is not the person who just left, nor the next person waiting at the door. He or she is an individual with a story, struggles, and dreams just like me.

There are cameras everywhere and they view us, but they do not see us or know us. Let's not view each other through their soulless perspective. Let's see one another with our hearts.

Correction

We apologize for our oversight in failing to acknowledge the following in our Holiday newsletter. Mary Klonoski and Kathy Emershad have coordinated a gift donation from the First Congregational Church of Minnesota for the guests in our shelter for 23 years! Christ the King and its parish school, Carondelet, provided gifts for the Christmas Meal Drop-In as they have done for 20 years! Thank you, long-time partners!

"BEFORE I WAS HOMELESS"

One day a national news station called St. Stephen's Human Services. Could we connect them to someone experiencing homelessness? To get that kind of exposure for this important issue and our work, we said we would help however we could. Then it got difficult. They asked to meet a family...a white family...a white family living in a motel. With each phone call the request got more specific. They wanted a white family living in a motel with two children around ages 6-8 who had become homeless because of the economy.

St. Stephen's works with the press fairly often and we think highly of our local media. They typically don't write the story before they hear the story. The national station wasn't interested in the stories we had available because somehow they'd already written theirs.

We struggle with people's generalizations about people who experience homelessness. Homelessness is an economic condition, but in the broad public imagination the word conjures a very specific image: a disheveled, possibly drunk middle-aged man with a sign or maybe the famous Welfare Queen depicted by one party during the 1980 Presidential Election. "She has eighty names, thirty addresses, twelve Social Security cards and is collecting veteran's benefits on four non-existing deceased husbands.... She is collecting welfare under each of her names. Her tax-free cash income is over \$150,000." (No such woman was ever able to be located.)

If the image in our minds accurately reflected the reality of homelessness

in Minnesota it would look like this:

The fastest growing demographic of homeless individuals in Minnesota are children under seventeen years old.

No two people's stories, backgrounds, or dreams for the future are the same. That is why staff at St. Stephen's meet each person they work with as a whole, unique, and complex individual, not as an economic diagnosis. Staff work very creatively with people to find housing or employment that fits their needs.

- A woman who struggles with a phobia of crossing bridges is shown apartments on the side of the river where she works and her children attend school.
- A man who'd previously made a decent living breeding lizards for sale to pet stores needs a landlord who will tolerate three extra-large aquariums and one doting lizard-owner.
- A woman who wants to be far away from her former drinking buddies gets help finding a suburban apartment; a man who says he's afraid of the loneliness of an apartment is helped to move into a boarding house.



And then it gets really interesting: what else might help a person feel supported in all they want to achieve? St. Stephen's offers a variety of ways to support people on their individual journeys. These

include helping people enroll in school or community education classes, finding a faith community where they feel comfortable, and helping parents find free or cheap activities for children. We offer an advocacy group for people who have experienced homelessness and would like to work on public policy. We host support groups to promote sobriety, and yoga, cooking, and parenting classes for better health. Our book clubs, community garden plots, and visits to museums and ball games are all popular.

Like anyone, the people in our programs want to be known for what they are proud of. For who they were before they were "a homeless person" and who they are becoming in spite of it.



The program Urban Ventures brings business people to services like our shelter to hear the stories of people experiencing homelessness.

I WAS SOMEBODY"



St. Stephen's offers a number of activities for people we are working with who would like additional activities to maintain their stability. Activities include (left to right) a Sobriety Support Group, an outing to the Science Museum, and participation in Homeless Against Homelessness to work on policy issues.

FERN'S STORY

I say I was on a spiritual journey while I was on the streets for three years with post-traumatic stress disorder. I had a grocery cart that carried my belongings. It held my blankets and plastic. I had a camp stove I made from a V8 can. I'd grease up my hair and throat with Vicks and put a plastic bag over it and two hats even in the summer; this was so I didn't get sick or lice. I wasn't the cleanest and I wasn't the best smelling and part of that was my protection from assaults. I stayed everywhere—a niche or some cement steps where I could sleep sitting up. I used the shelters just twice. Plastic was my savior except for the last time. I was so tired that day I



Fern last year while she was homeless.

thought I would rest for five minutes, but I fell asleep so my feet got frozen.

I'd worked for a company for about ten years as a cashier and I was robbed twice and physically assaulted the last time. I was able to I.D. the person and they caught him. He'd done a lot of robberies in South Minneapolis. I had been working with a touch screen as my register, you know, when he assaulted me. And technology, like that screen, became an adversary for me because I thought it had let me down, if that makes any sense. I became wary of technology of any kind, connecting it in my mind somehow with the assault. I also thought that society let me down because I received a letter from the Department of Corrections that my perpetrator was being released after a small sentence. I said to myself, "I don't have my life back the way it was, why does he get to have his life back?" I was still having terrible post-traumatic stress disorder. So I just walked away from everything and went to the streets.

To me, I was doing what my ancestors did. I was camping out, a



Street Outreach worker, Joseph Desenclos, and Fern

free spirit. I knew I was on a journey.

Street Outreach started coming by and engaging in small talk. Joseph and I would talk about recipes and cooking. Of course I made them step fifty feet away from me to talk on their cell phones because it was technology and I was afraid of that.

They were tenacious, but not pushy. They were kind and loving and it was the small things they gave me like toothpaste and warm socks that made me feel cared for. One time I found a plastic bag that had a pair of pink panties and green knee-highs.

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RECENT DOINGS AT ST. STEPHEN'S...



Rev. Mike Tegeder of Gichitwaa Kateri Church gave a blessing of burning sage at the annual Open House at St. Stephen's Kateri Residence.



Students from Sojourner Truth Academy donated three boxes of oral hygiene kits and took an educational tour of our shelter.



Three members of St. Stephen's *Homeless Against Homelessness* advocacy group attended a housing rally at the State Capitol.



St. Stephen's accepted an enormous donation of bedding and coffeemakers from Catholic United Financial Foundation!



Marcus Klimenko, Housing Program Manager for Hennepin County, spoke to landlords and prospective landlords about working with formerly homeless tenants and how St. Stephen's helps facilitate the rental process.



The wonderful staff at the Minneapolis Westin Hotel adopted St. Stephen's for a year, doing fundraisers and donating bedding and clothing!

THE RIGHT TO VOTE

This November, Minnesotans will vote on amending the Minnesota constitution to require a valid photo ID in order to vote. In partnership with many other nonprofits St. Stephen's Human Services has been working to educate people about how this would harm those with whom we work.

If the proposed amendment passes, we know that:

- Vouching as a form of identification would be eliminated. For years, St. Stephen's staff has been able to vouch for residents of the shelter to confirm (under oath) that these men are currently living at the shelter and therefore eligible to vote in this precinct.
- Voters who go to the polls to vote on this issue will not know what kinds of ID will be permitted because that will be determined by the 2013 legislature. In past versions of this legislation, the only three forms of ID allowed were: state issued ID or driver's license or the "free" ID issued for voting purposes only. Military IDs, tribal IDs, or IDs with a noncurrent address would not be accepted. This means that people experiencing homelessness would likely not have a valid ID



St. Stephen's Cathy Heying has been working with people experiencing homelessness and many other organizations to educate about the proposed amendment.

on election day if their ID address was not the same as the place (relative's couch, shelter) they stayed the night before.

- Voter fraud would not be solved. The only type of voter fraud that an ID would prevent is voter impersonation. There has been no documented case of voter impersonation in Minnesota.

Requiring a valid photo ID to vote would have many negative implications for people living in homelessness while attempting to solve a problem that does not exist.

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Alena from Street Outreach had left it for me. I got all choked up because even though I didn't wear them they meant something to me. Street Outreach planted the seed with patience and respect for who I was and never diminished me one iota.

I ended up in the hospital and in therapy I was able to see why I did certain things. It has been a journey of anguish and anger and the other negative emotions that I had to let go. The first thing I had to work on was the issue of race. Both of my perpetrators were black men and I was afraid of them the way I was afraid of technology. At the hospital I asked a black man if he would talk to me and hold my hand and I told him my story. He said, "Fern, just remember, one bad apple doesn't make the rest of them bad." It had to be a person of color who would show me another way than what I was doing.

St. Stephen's saved my life. I want people to know that I was a sixty-four-year-old woman who lived on the streets, without drugs, without alcohol, without prostitution, and my life was saved.

My apartment is light and airy and it's cozy. There were nights that I would go by houses and I'd see the lights on in there and I'd say to myself, "People in there are warm and cozy." And then I'd tell myself, "I can't have that yet."

I never felt invisible because I always felt like someone was looking out for me. People would bring me soup, a bottle of water, a piece of fruit, so I knew that people cared. Others would sit and visit. Some would even let their children hug me because they knew I needed love.

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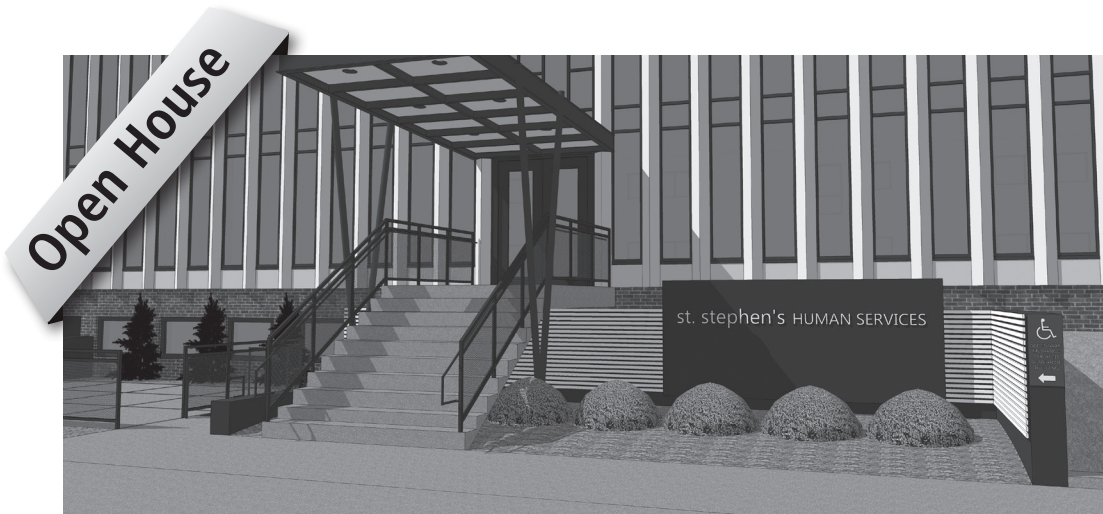
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Please Visit Our New Location!

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4:00 to 6:00, program at 5:00

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All Welcome!



Executive Director
Mikkell Beckmen
and our amazing
Move Coordinator,
Beth Schneider,
look over plans in
our new space.
Thank you, Beth,
for getting us
home!