



FRIENDSHIP CENTER NEWS

November 2008

Our Work is Love Made Visible

From Monsignor Farrell walking the streets of New Britain in 1968, collecting donations for his new ministry, to September 29, 2008 and Amber telling her story to donors from the Community Foundation of Greater New Britain, the Friendship Center has witnessed many miracles.

From a storefront location in 1968 to developing 21 units of permanent supportive housing in 2008, it has been our privilege to reach out to so many of “God’s neglected, rejected” and we have been blessed in the process.

40 Years of Miracles!

the Friendship Center has grown into a dynamic organization.

From the group of friends that gathered around Monsignor Farrell in 1968 to the Friends of the Friendship Center in 2008, we have never been alone in our effort to reach out to “the least of God’s children.”

As we celebrate 40 years of “Love Made Visible” through our work, we are proud of our past and confident about our future. We owe thanks to so many who have supported us along the way: the faith community; the local, state and federal political entities; the thousands of individuals, foundations and corporations who have provided volunteer time and financial support; the committed men and women who have served on our Boards; dedicated staff; and to all those in need who have come through our doors in these forty years. We are all better people because of their courage in times of extreme adversity.

From “a hot with no cot” in 1968 to a continuum of programs, ranging from outreach to those still living on the streets to permanent supportive housing in 2008,

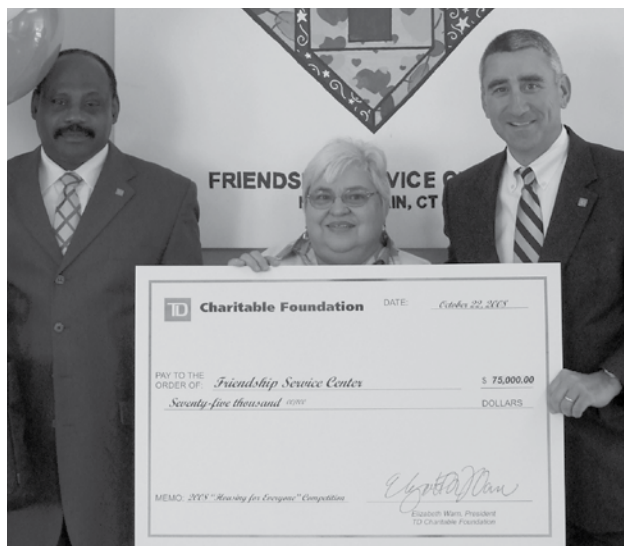
A Bold Vision—Where Are We?

In 2005, the Friendship Center started a journey called “A Bold Vision ... Ending Homelessness in Greater New Britain.” A feasibility study was conducted and a capital campaign started. Now the community is anxious to know what’s happening—a fair concern.

- The Capital Campaign raised just short of \$2,000,000.
- Government grants total \$7,465,395, which includes over \$6,000,000 from the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority (CHFA).
- Plans have been completed for a new building at 85 Arch Street and a renovated building at 59 Arch Street (the Vega Building).
- Demolition of 85 Arch Street will take place this fall.
- Friendship Center staff and consultants are working diligently with CHFA to get to a place where the actual renovation/construction can begin. This will most likely occur next spring.

Private development projects can happen much faster because there is only one relationship to manage—that between the developer and the architect/general contractor. This development project has an additional relationship to manage—that between the developer (the Friendship Center) and CHFA. The good news is CHFA loves our Project and is excited to get started as well.

Continued inside, right.



News Flash . . .

On Tuesday, October 21, 2008 Ellen Perkins Simpson was called to the Tomasso Family Community Dining Room where she was greeted by Carl Hinds, left, and Michael Schweighoffer of TD Banknorth. Simpson stood shocked as they held up a check for \$75,000 – a donation to assist in the building project that will provide the 21 new units of permanent supportive housing. Truly a remarkable gift!

A Friendship Center Miracle

Amber's Story

Amber is an alcoholic. She also is a woman with a strong work ethic and more courage than most. Having gone through a difficult divorce, Amber turned to the bottle for comfort. We first got to know her through our soup kitchen where she came to eat—usually already drunk by noontime. Through working with our staff, we convinced Amber to stop living on the streets and to come inside. She would and then she would arrive so impaired from alcohol that we would have to call an ambulance for her.

So for many months Amber came and went, we accommodating her when we could, she continuing to drink excessively. One day she arrived drunker than usual, even for her. Donna Bergin, Director of Programs, brought her into her office and said, “Amber, we can no longer go on like this. Either you accept treatment now for your disease or we will have to ask you to stay away.”

It was a risk Donna knew she had to take. And it worked! Amber, afraid of dying on the streets, opted for treatment. Somehow this time she was able to hear Donna and believe what she said. Amber went into treatment and when she came out, signed up for outpatient treatment that very day. Now, many months later, Amber resides in our transitional living program, has a job where she's received promotions, has bought a car and looks forward to the time when she will move into her own apartment. As for us, we sit back and marvel at yet another miracle while Amber will tell anyone who asks that Donna saved her life. Good stuff!

New Staff Perspective

The Friendship Center is fortunate to have two new case managers. Carol Duffy, RSM, MSW has 20 years experience working with our population with particular expertise working with the prison population. Lakeisha Dove has 10 years experience, with particular experience working with those with mental illness and/or substance abuse.

When asked why they wanted to work at the Friendship Center, Lakeisha quickly responded, “I knew I would get personal fulfillment from sustaining families and individuals in need and providing support and guidance as they face their issues.” Carol's response to the same question, “I've known about the Friendship Center for many years and when I moved to New Britain I hoped to find a place here some day. I've done lots of administrative work and I wanted to get back to direct service. I like the array of services offered here.”

When asked what we might do better Carol responded, “Recruit staff from a



Carol Duffy, left, and Lakeisha Dove bring new ideas and energy to the Center.

broader cultural background, particularly more Spanish speaking staff.” Asked if they had witnessed any miracles in their short time at the Center, Lakeisha quickly responded, “Yes, Gail. She came to us suffering from a life threatening illness. With no family support, she has managed to advocate for herself. Perhaps the miracle is watching her, a very private person, open up to her fellow residents and begin to accept the support and comfort they are willing to provide.”

Finally asked what they might envision 40 years out, Carol responded, “that we go out of business” while Lakeisha wants to see “many more affordable housing programs.”

Need for Community a Priority

“It Takes a Village—Not Only for Children”

It used to be that once an individual or family moved into an apartment, a goal was reached and our work was done. We realized, however, these individuals and families often reentered the shelter system. They were isolated in their homes without a support system and were unable to meet the demands of independent living alone. We came to realize the need for supportive housing and the Friendship Center's Outreach Program was developed.

I've also learned that independent living is not the answer for everyone. Over the years I have seen how the community found in our shelter and transitional settings replaces the absence of family. The sense of community is obvious to me when adults living at the Friendship Center show their interest in the children by asking what kinds of provisions for Halloween or other special occasions are being made—or when residents come together to cook special weekend meals for each other. For some, a group setting is the desired living arrangement.

I eagerly anticipate the twenty-one units of housing that will soon be available through our Arch Street Development Project. In this housing, tenants will have neighbors they can count on, space within the buildings to come together to socialize and be within easy walking distance of the family they found in the Virginia Davis Friendship Center building – the place where they started the journey of turning their lives around.

Donna Bergin
Director of Programs

From the Director's Perspective

In my years at the Friendship Center I've seen the U.S. economy in good times and bad. I've been to Hartford to advocate that funding not be cut and marched at the governor's mansion trying to raise awareness of the plight of Connecticut's poor citizens.

I've learned that programs for the elderly, the disabled, the poor, the homeless, children and education seem always to be the first hurt by bad economic times and the last to benefit from a turnaround. Why is this?

I don't believe we don't care—I just think we forget. As our own fear takes over we forget about others. But make no mistake. These economic times will hit us and hit us hard. More people will be coming through our doors seeking help at the same time as our funding will be cut. When you receive our fall fundraising campaign material in the next month, please be as generous as these hard times will allow. And thanks.

Ellen Perkins Simpson
Executive Director

Higher Gas Prices Increase Food Costs

The higher price of fuel has led to suppliers either adding a fuel charge or increasing their fuel charge on deliveries.

The price of food has also increased because of higher shipping costs. A case of dry milk was \$89.68 in 2007 and is now \$125.68. Sugar was \$19.91 per case and is now \$22.33.

But, we are truly blessed at the Friendship Center. Donations from our community help us fulfill our mission. Church groups, schools, businesses and individuals help in many different ways. Some help prepare meals, others have food drives or make monetary donations. All of this helps to offset the increased prices of food.

Gerry Waldo
Kitchen Director

Friends of the Friendship Center Deliver Holiday Cheer

Donations and Volunteers Needed

The Holidays are a special time at the Friendship Center. But for Santa to appear at the Center requires the concern and generosity of the community. To provide a bit of holiday magic depends on coordinated effort, and the Friends of the Friendship Center enjoy its role in making that happen.

We rely on contributions from many segments of the community: retailers, the faith community, civic groups, and caring

individuals such as you. As gifts arrive at the Center, they are spirited away to be temporarily "hidden". This year, the Friends are concerned that because of the financial upheaval, donations may not meet client needs, and we hope people will make a special effort to bring some joy to the most needy among us.

Friends' members will gather in December for a Santa's workshop session. Donated gifts are sorted and organized. Then the wrapping begins and colorful gifts pile up. When wrapping is complete, workers from the Center appear and fill holiday bags tagged for each individual client. The bags are brought to the Center for Christmas morning distribution. Times will be merry for a while, and love, once again, will be made visible on Arch Street.

Get the holiday spirit! Anyone wishing to join the Friends in this time of holiday giving can call the Center (860-225-0211) and speak with Donna Bergin. She will provide details of time and place.

A Bold Vision

Continued from front.

"Stick with us," says Christine Traczyk, Friendship Center Board President. "It won't be long before you will receive an invitation in the mail for our grand opening. Think of this project as a fabulous soufflé; if you don't cook it just right it will fall flat. Patience, the end result is worth the wait, I promise."

The Financial Perspective

1968 to 2008

"Forty years ago," says Donna Blakey Director of Finance and Operations, "the Friendship Center had a budget of just over \$7,000. Today our budget is in excess of \$1,600,000. While numbers don't tell the whole story, they can give us a picture from a different perspective."

Asked what seemed the same and what different from forty years ago Donna responded, "Monsignor Farrell had friends that gathered around him to support his work and we have the Friends of the Friendship Center that provide things for our residents our budget cannot. Then they were adamant about not accepting public funding and today 41% of our budget comes from the state or federal government. Back then they served 30–50 people per year and today we serve 2000–3000. Then they kept no records and today we have statistics to show the success of the work we do."

On Monsignor Farrell's dreams for the Friendship Center Donna reflected, "Monsignor Farrell dreamed of providing financial conservators for the people. Today we are representative payee for many of our clients. The finance staff and I keep our client's money in a savings account and also, at the request of their case managers, distribute funds to them."

Asked about her role, Donna explained that her main responsibility is making sure funds are accurately accounted for and spent for what they are intended. Finally, asked what she likes most about her job she ended by saying, "For me, it's about the people and making sure that when they come to me, I stop what I'm doing and don't fluff them off, because they are more important than the numbers."

Donations Wish List

For the Soup Kitchen

- Coffee, tea and sugar
- Dried herbs and spices
- Paper napkins, plastic knives, forks and spoons
- Styrofoam coffee cups
- Salt and pepper
- Non-perishable foods



For the Outreach Programs

- Disposable diapers, baby wipes
- Cleaning products
- Bus tokens
- Sturdy bureaus and dressers
- Kitchen tables and chairs
- Walmart, PriceRite or gasoline gift cards

For the Shelter

- Deodorants, disposable shavers
- Toothpaste, toothbrushes
- Sample sized toiletries
- Feminine products
- Shaving cream
- Twin-size bedding, pillows
- Bath towels

Donations Gratefully Accepted
Monday–Friday, 8:30 AM to 3:45 PM

Friendship Service Center, Inc.
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Phone 860-225-0211

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Our Mission

The mission of the Friendship Service Center of New Britain is to provide friendship and direct service to the poor and needy of Central Connecticut, including the ownership and operation of housing for the poor.

We accomplish this through a continuum of care approach—from services for those still living on the streets to jobs and training for those who are ready to work.

We believe in viewing each individual as a special and unique child of God, meeting each where he or she is, and challenging that child to become the best person he or she can be.

www.friendshipservicecenter.org

The Friendship Center → 40 Years of Miracles