

Plymouth Taskforce for the Homeless
President's Report
October 2004 -December, 2005

Recognizing that Plymouth had a homeless problem, three members of Christ Church with the support of the Plymouth Area Interfaith Clergy Council called together a taskforce of lay people October 19, 2004. Five people attended that first meeting. Meeting weekly, its first task was to grow the group and to develop a plan to provide emergency sheltering. Week by week more people came on board until we had several congregations and organizations represented.

Existing sheltering programs were researched. Alan Burt, the coordinator of the Cape program, was invited to meet with us. Some of us visited the program in one of the Cape churches. The Taskforce decided to model its program after the Cape's Overnight of Hospitality program with some modifications. Our program would rotate week by week from site to site and we would provide an evening meal. Since we had limited resources (sheltering locations and volunteers), our program initially would be limited to single homeless men. In addition, the program would run through the winter months only.

The Taskforce investigated several possibilities for a permanent site located in a town or community owned building. Commercial space was also explored. None were available so the Taskforce continued with the idea of using congregational sites. The next task, therefore, was to recruit congregations for this purpose. Eventually, five congregations volunteered space for varying number of weeks -Christ Church Episcopal, First Parish Unitarian, Zion Lutheran, Congregation Beth Jacob, and First Church of Christ, Scientist.

Christ Church agreed to be a conduit Taskforce funds.

A publicity campaign was initiated to educate the public and to solicit donations and volunteers. This included news releases, appearances on PAC TV and before the Board of Selectmen. Two sizable donations were received from Gary Liddell and the Polly Main Foundation.

A handbook was developed which described the program and included Guidelines for Volunteers and Guidelines for the Guests. St. Peter's offered its church as a nightly screening and pickup spot. I visited the Salvation Army several times to meet with the homeless who were being served meals and to talk with Captain Dan Brunnell regarding the individuals whom we might be receiving at the shelters. Posters were produced for distribution

Coordinators for each site were recruited. Training programs were held for potential volunteers. Supplies were purchased, including air mattresses for the guests. Other items such as blankets, sheets, and pillows arrived through donations.

Judy Best, a nurse practitioner at E.P. Duffy, volunteered to meet the men on Sunday afternoons at St. Peter's Parish Center to screen them for health issues and needed social services.

The Overnights of Hospitality program opened on Dec. 19th at Christ Church with 3 guests. (See attached statistics.) The program from its beginning operated smoothly with few bumps along the way. The measure of its success – there was no loss of life on the streets because of the weather. Our guests expressed appreciation many times. There were no incidents requiring police contact. There

were no neighbor complaints. No volunteers stated they would not return but instead expressed having had a positive experience.

In January of 2005, the Taskforce learned that Dr. Robert Nahill was willing to loan us his four-bedroom rental unit on Court St. for our program. After some discussion, the Taskforce decided to use his offer as a place for those who were sober and to continue the faith-based program as it was currently operating. Guidelines were established and men from the Overnights were screened and recruited. Six men were brought to the Next Step house beginning in February. The house was operated with overnight paid staff for two months, shifting to volunteers when funding became an issue.

As Dr. Nahill was interested in selling this house, the Taskforce began to think about the more long-term goal of ending homelessness. Doris Johnson and myself began to attend meetings of the Plymouth County Housing Alliance with the hope of securing grant funding. Before we could proceed in this direction, we had to consider becoming a 501c3 organization.

The Taskforce voted to begin the process of incorporation. Steve Valero offered the services of his firm pro bono to accomplish this. By-laws were drafted and then approved on March 22, 2005. An initial Board of Directors was elected - Constance Melahoures, as President, Greta Couter as Treasurer, Jan Palmer-Tarbox as Clerk. Directors elected were Paul Ryll, JoAnn Levy, Meg Bross, Helen Evans, Judy Erikson, David Tassinari, Amy Palmer, and Doris Johnson. The Taskforce was officially incorporated as the Plymouth Taskforce for the Homeless in April, 2005. The IRS approved non-profit status in August, 2005. Taskforce monies were moved to its own account at Rockland Trust, March 2005. Membership forms were created and sent out to all our volunteers and supporters.

Once the Overnights of Hospitality Program ended in April, the Taskforce focused its energies on how to purchase and whether or not to purchase the Next Step house. The Taskforce gained the services (40 free hours) of Emily Rothschild, a technical assistant, from Mass Housing and Shelter Alliance.

The Taskforce was saddened by the death of board member, Paul Ryll who was a dedicated worker for the homeless.

A Volunteer Breakfast to celebrate our success was held on May 7th at Zion Lutheran with 45 in attendance. In October, the Taskforce sponsored the annual Crop Walk for which effort we were able to share in the profit, raising \$800 for our program.

In October, the Taskforce began discussing the possibility of partnering with another agency. Fr. Bill's Place in Quincy was suggested. John Yazwinski, executive director, came to our Nov 8th meeting. Some visited the Quincy facility. The Board voted to support the development of a partnership with Fr. Bill's and Fr. Bill's indicated its strong interest. Discussion continued and will continue in 2006 regarding the feasibility of long-term leasing or buying this facility or looking at alternatives.

The Overnights of Hospitality Program began its second season on October 31st, 2005, with the same five congregations participating. Congregation Beth Jacob and First Church of Christ each agreed to do one additional week.

The goals for 2006 are to grow the number of congregations offering sheltering space, recruit more volunteer chaperones, and grow our membership base for the Overnights program. Our most important goal will be to develop a plan for

permanent housing, hopefully in partnership Fr. Bill's which will require major fundraising through events and grant writing.

In sixteen months, the Taskforce has made amazing progress. Our Overnights program is running successfully. The community is becoming aware that Plymouth has a homeless problem and that there is another organization devoted to dealing with the issue. Support from the wider community, as well as from congregations, has come in the form of volunteers and donations.

In closing, I would like to personally thank all of our board members – Greta Couter for managing our funds, Jan Palmer-Tarbox for most often taking the minutes, Doris Johnson for producing publicity and attending meetings of the PCHA and other groups, Meg Bross for writing innumerable thank you notes, doing laundry and chairing the Crop Walk with David Tassinari, John Malloy, Amy Palmer, and Judy Erikson, all for their valuable insight and willingness to help with any thing that needed doing. Finally the success of the Overnight program was due to the many people who volunteered their time to chaperone or to prepare a meal. Truly, God's work is being done!

Respectfully submitted,

Constance Melahoures
President