

Plymouth Taskforce for the Homeless
President's Report
2009

Overnights of Hospitality Program

We ended our fifth season of providing emergency sheltering in April, 2009. Over the 2008-09 season, we provided a total of 1,876 beds for 56 different individuals, averaging 11.7 guests per night, an increase in all categories from the previous season. One night, we had as many as eighteen guests. There were 310 volunteers from sixteen different congregations and from the community at large who served as hosts and meal providers.

In late winter, we received notice that our Overnights of Hospitality program was in danger of being shut down due to the fact that the congregations did not have sprinkler systems as required by state regulations that were accepted by Town Meeting in 2006. In October we had a meeting with representatives from Sen. Murray's Office, Fire Marshall, State Board of Health and others to try to resolve this issue. The good news is that we were able to get permission to run the Overnights for one more season without sprinklers if all other safety regulations were followed. The bad news is that we have to either get the Fire Marshall to continue to exempt us from the sprinkler regulation or we will have to find another solution. The Board has considered and researched finding a site for a permanent shelter. Thus far, no suitable site has been found. The Board is reluctant to establish a permanent shelter as that goes against the current wisdom of homeless advocates.

Concurrently, we ran up against the Board of Inspectional services which asserted that the congregations were not zoned for sheltering. We were forced to apply for special permits for each of the sites which were denied. In November, we went before the Zoning Board of Appeals which fortunately granted approved our applications. The good news is that we just need to apply for a special seasonal permit each year which will be approved. Thanks to Attorney Ed Angley who represented the Taskforce pro bono before the Zoning Board of appeals.

We were required to follow some additional guidelines with respect to the fire safety and health codes. All the sites were inspected. Most sites had some issues that needed to be resolved before they could receive a seasonal permit. Fortunately, all sites were able to comply.

Finally, we were able to begin the fifth season on November 19, 2009, two and a half weeks later than usual. By the end of December we were seeing an average of 11.2 men per night, with most nights reaching double digits. On Christmas Eve, the Taskforce put up twelve men at the Radisson. During the season, in emergency situations, we also put up several single homeless women, each for a night in a hotel.

Our weekly shower program was cut back to two days per week using the shower facility at Christ Church Food Pantry due to the loss of Fran Obin. Thanks to John Malloy and David Tassinari, for supervising this activity.

Six congregations continue to provide their space for the Overnights: Christ Church Parish, Zion Lutheran, St. Mary's, First Parish Unitarian, Church of the Pilgrimage, and the First Baptist. Although Congregation Beth Jacob was not able to offer their space in 2009, they staffed one of the weeks at Christ Church.

Next Step House

Five men are currently living in the Step House., One of the residents continues to serve as house manager, thus providing a consistent presence in the house.

Government Housing Support

With various government housing subsidies (Home and Healthy for Good, HUD, Section 8, and Federal Stimulus funding) and other means, twenty individuals have been placed in housing. Thirteen have permanent subsidies, two received Section 8's, one was moved to the Chilton House and one received a shallow (temporary) subsidy. Three others are supported by the Taskforce at the Next Step House. Four more are in line to be placed in 2010. The funding is administered through Fr. Bill's/Mainspring but the Taskforce works with that agency to identify suitable candidates from the Overnights for housing.

It is hoped that more funded units will be coming to Plymouth in the next grant cycle. Since the Overnights program began, many others have been able to secure their own housing.

Homeless Count

During the annual homeless count on January 28th 2009, we were able to identify twenty-four single individuals, most of whom were frequent or occasional guests at the shelter during the season. We continue to enter our data into the HMIS system as needed.

Grants/Fundraising

We had several successful fundraisers in 2009. Our fourth annual golf tournament raised over \$10,000. Thanks to Doris Johnson and John Malloy for their hard work in running this event. The fifth annual Crop Walk brought in \$600, less than last year. Thanks to Rich Pecorella for his leadership.

The Kayak Raffle raised over \$1,700. The winning ticket was sold by Judy Erikson. Thanks to Judy and Rich Pecorella for organizing this event.

Through the Scrip Gift Card program, folks are offered the opportunity to buy gift cards from hundreds of companies. PTH earns a varying percentage of the sales. We hope that this program will continue to grow. Thanks to Rich Pecorella for chairing this effort.

PTH continues to garner donations from individuals and organizations. Mahlon Walker at the Church of the Pilgrimage set up a \$5,000 fund for the Homeless. Unfortunately, just days after the fund was established, Mr. Walker passed away. The Taskforce has received \$2,000 from this fund so far to support the Overnights program.

Project Development

The Taskforce identified a property in North Plymouth for purchase. We went before the Community Preservation Committee and won approval for the project. We proceeded successfully to gain the approvals of the Planning Board, Finance Committee, and Board of Selectmen. Before going to Town Meeting, we had a meeting with the neighborhood and were met with resistance. Due to this and the fact that zoning for multi-family status fell through, the project was withdrawn.

A second property for possible purchase was identified, but was lost because the owner needed to sell before we could begin the lengthy process with the CPC. As the CPC is still supportive of our goal to purchase property for affordable housing, we will continue to look for a suitable property.

Volunteer Appreciation Breakfast

Our annual volunteer breakfast was held in April.

Goals for 2010

- Services and/or obtain housing through independent funding
- Seek and apply for additional grants

- Seek new fundraising avenues
- Increase membership and/or to do a general fundraising campaign
- Recruit more congregations to offer their space
- Develop a website
- Refine the organization of the Board

In closing, I would like to personally thank all of our board members – Judy Erikson for managing our funds, Jan Palmer-Tarbox for taking the minutes, Amy Palmer for writing thank you notes, Doris Johnson for producing publicity and attending meetings of the PCHA and other groups, and David Tassinari, John Malloy, Jack Ryan, Don DiDomenico, Pamela Daikh for their valuable insight and willingness to help with fundraising. Thanks also to Helen Evans, co-coordinator of nightly screening process and thanks to Linda Tassinari, Judy Erikson, and Rich Pecorella, for providing back-up driving when needed. Finally, the success of the Overnight program was due to the many people who volunteered their time to host or to prepare a meal.

It is with regret that we received the resignation of Doris Johnson from the Board. Doris, a founding member of the Taskforce, has provided invaluable service to the Taskforce in so many ways. Her advice and hard work will be greatly missed. David Tassinari and Don DiDomenico are also stepping off the Board but will remain involved in the organization.

Respectfully submitted,

Constance Melahoures
President