

Plymouth Taskforce to end Homelessness
President's Report
2020

Overnights of Hospitality Program

Our sixteenth season of providing emergency sheltering began in the fall of 2019 and continued uneventfully up through the beginning of March, 2020. Then the pandemic hit. We finished up our stay at First Baptist on April 4th. Because businesses and public facilities were being shut down, we were concerned that our homeless folk would have no place during the day to get in out of the weather, to use restrooms, and to eat lunch.

Before the ending of the program, the Taskforce very quickly began investigating ways of extending the program. After unsuccessfully considering several low-cost alternatives, the Taskforce made the decision to rent 15 rooms (two people per room) at the Pilgrim Sands Motel. The challenge was obtaining the funding to cover the cost of the rental. Thankfully, we were able to do so to extend the season for two additional months through the receipt of several major grants and generous donations from various institutions, organizations, and individuals.

While renting the hotel, we had some challenges with managing the folks. However, we were happy to report that there were no COVID-19 infections among the guests.

Statistics

Regular Season	# of days	# of beds	Avg. / night	Different
	125	1,922	15.4	62
Extended	55	1,569	28.5	48
Totals	180	3,491	19.4	

Note that there was a higher average per night during the extended season. Once in the hotel, folks tended to stay. Among that group there was a family of five and a family of three.

In planning for the 2020-2021 season, we were faced with finding an alternative to the church model which has been in place since 2004. Due to CDC guidelines, there would not be enough space to shelter up to 25 individuals (our previous limit) per night at either of the two church sites. So, once again, the Taskforce in conjunction with FBMS, decided to rent rooms at the Pilgrim Sands. Due to limitations of staffing and the fact that we were putting only one person in each room for health and safety reasons, there was a cap of twenty homeless individuals per night. Stricter guidelines were put into place to govern behavior and to ensure CDC guidelines were followed. All guests were screened prior to being given a room. A waiting list was created once capacity was reached.

FBMS provided a staff person for three shifts to cover the supervision while the Taskforce provided a volunteer chaperone for the night shift.

Meal Train Plus continued to be a valuable tool for recruiting individuals to chaperone and prepare and serve meals.

Preventing Homelessness

For the past seven years, the Taskforce has been providing rental assistance to folks in danger of losing their housing. For 2020, eighteen such individuals received help. We also provided gas cards and funds for securing ID's and prescriptions.

Laundry and Shower Programs

Due to COVID 19 the operation of our laundry and shower programs were inconsistent at best.

Next Step House – 368-370 Court St.

The Next Step was fully occupied with eight permanent residents and two house managers.

Next Step II – 366 Court St.

There are five formerly homeless women in residence with newly hired Riley McGrath as house manager.

Sad News

We were saddened by the passing of Bill Davenport, the long-time house manager at 368 Court. St. in February. Hank Wynands was recruited as his replacement.

Government Housing Support

To date, over seventy individuals have been moved from homelessness into supportive permanent housing via state funded subsidies provided by FBMS. Many of these individuals continue to reside in our Next Step properties or in scattered site apartments throughout town while others have attained Sec. 8 subsidies or have been able to move out their own.

Housing Solutions

The Taskforce continued its search to buy a piece of land of about 1-3 acres, centrally located, on which to erect a building which would contain 12-15 studios, some commercial space for offices and a backdoor emergency shelter.

Point in Time Homeless Count

During the annual homeless count on January 29, 2020 we were able to identify eighteen individuals who were in the shelter. Seven (7) were known to be on the streets, - staying in tents, in the hospital or staying elsewhere for that night. The Point in Time count only captures what we know to be true for that one night only. It does not accurately reflect the total number of homeless in the Plymouth area.

Grants/Fundraising

Due to the COVID 19 pandemic we had to cancel our golf fundraiser for 2020. We hope to reschedule for 2021.

As noted above, the Taskforce needed to raise some serious money to cover the cost of renting rooms at the Sands. The Taskforce solicited and received grants from South Coast Community Foundation, Community Development Block grant program, and FBMS, among others, totaling several thousands of dollars. Many donations were received via FaceBook, MealTrain, our website or personal check with a few who gave \$500 or more. A more complete list may be found on our website.

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

Since 2005, the Taskforce has been collaborating with FBMS on an informal basis. Areas of collaboration included the identification homeless individuals to qualify for subsidized housing, and the providing of support for our Overnights of Hospitality in the form of one paid staff person. As its involvement grew, FBMS suggested that a more formal arrangement be developed in the form of Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). To that end, a joint committee with FBMS staff and PETH representatives was created. After several meetings over a few months, a draft agreement was drawn up for approval in 2021.

Key points include the following:

FBMS will:

- continue to provide general management and shift support for the Overnights of Hospitality in the form one paid staff person.
- provide one case manager to assist persons living in subsidized units.
- consider possible service expansion in the form of a part-time outreach worker PTEH will
- provide one volunteer chaperone for the Overnights.
- assist with identifying and referring individuals in need of outreach services.
- be responsible for maintaining its properties.

FBMS and PTEH will:

- commit to raising additional resources to support FBMS costs associated with running the winter shelter program
- meet annually with Plymouth delegation to the State legislature to educate them about homelessness and the PTEH-FBMS partnership

Goals for 2021

- Continue to explore property for purchase.
- Redesign our website
- Incorporate a new donor base platform to increase our fundraising capabilities
- Expand board membership to include people who have skills in fundraising, communications, grant writing, advocacy and who have connections to community resources.
- Work on developing a strategic plan

Thank You

In closing, I would like to personally thank all of our board members who, in addition to attending monthly board meetings, also assisted in other ways:

- Alan Schwartz or overseeing our finances and for chaperoning above and beyond
- Jack Ryan for serving as Property Manager of the Next Step Houses
- Barbara Wojtkiewicz, for clerking, and supporting the Overnights in many ways, and
- Rick Edwards and Jewel Gilbert for securing grants
- Nancy Carini and Frank Mand for assisting with communications and website redesign
- Bob Hughes for helping with lunches at the Sands
- Teri Reid for serving as a connection to the Board of Health

Also, I would like to thank the 19-20 site coordinators – Ray Tompkins at First Baptist and Lisa Meserve at Christ Church and, of course, thanks to First Baptist and Christ Church for serving as host sites!

I would like to thank all of our donors , both large and small.

Finally, the success of the Overnight program was due to the many, many other people who volunteered their time to chaperone, to prepare a meal, or to assist in any other way.

Respectfully submitted,

Constance Melahoures
President