

FRIEND,

After such a long time spent in our homes over the last year and a half or more, it can be easy to get a little stir-crazy. It can be jarring to consider how many people either did not have a home to stay safe in or didn't have enough stability to be sure they could remain where they were.

As we ease away from the heat of the summer and into another autumn of

nagging anxiety about global and local health, we must remain mindful of our neighbors experiencing homelessness, transitions from traumatic events, and a struggle to find care for the things we take for granted. In this issue of Blessings, we are humbled to share stories of a few such neighbors who have found a safer path forward while allowing us to help them fulfill their promise and potential.

I hope that, with the departure of summer, you can find calm in the cooler weather and solace in the warmth of home.



William J. McCarthy, Jr.,
Executive Director



FALL 2021

BLESSINGS

CATHOLIC
CHARITIES

CHERISHING THE DIVINE WITHIN ALL

Inspired by the Gospel mandates to LOVE, SERVE and TEACH, Catholic Charities provides care and services to IMPROVE the LIVES of Marylanders in need.

Homelessness & Poverty
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Shelter is just a stop along the way

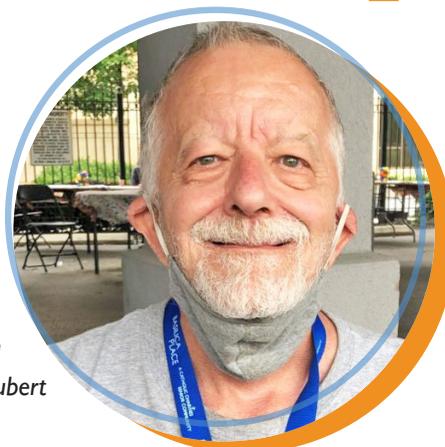
When asked about his new apartment at Basilica Place, a Catholic Charities Senior Community in downtown Baltimore, Paul Schubert's face lit up. "It's like a palace," he said.

The 64-year-old had spent years living in shelters or abandoned spaces before receiving the keys to his new place, largely through his work with the Weinberg Housing and Resource Center.

A New York native, Schubert lived in other parts of the country before coming to Maryland with two cousins. He was working in a liquor store in Jessup, Maryland, when he began experiencing homelessness for the first time. He found his way to Sarah's House, Catholic Charities' supportive housing program in Anne Arundel County, where he stayed as long as he could, but after moving out, he eventually found himself again without a place to live.

In 2019, he developed pneumonia, and doctors found that he needed open-heart surgery for a valve replacement.

"He was living in an abandoned building in Glen Burnie. That's how he got sick – from living in those conditions," said



Paul
Schubert

Teresa Mack, a case manager at the Weinberg Housing and Resource Center, where Schubert came after his surgery. "The doctor who did the surgery at Union Memorial was not happy with me going back to being homeless," Schubert said. "And I've been grateful to have the shelter."

When Schubert arrived at the Weinberg Housing and Resource Center, Teresa began the step-by-step process of determining what supports he might need. Like many people experiencing homelessness, for example, he lacked identification, so Teresa helped him assemble documents – a Social Security card, a birth certificate, a Maryland

identification card – that allowed him to apply for benefits.

("This was back in the day when everything was open!" Teresa said about the government offices, which closed during the COVID-19 pandemic.)

During the pandemic, the Weinberg Housing and Resource Center helped residents move into local hotels. That's where Schubert spent 14 months before finding his new home at Basilica Place in late May.

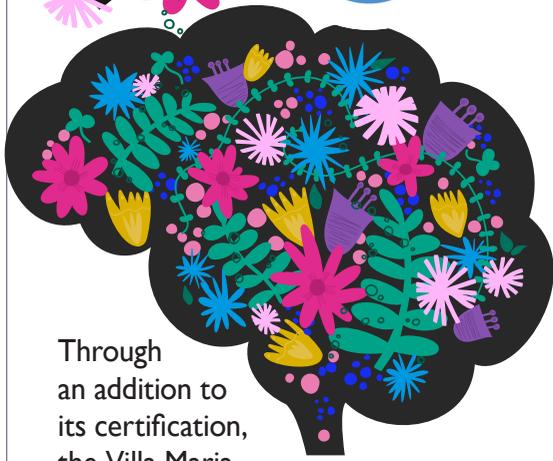
"I'll live there as long as they'll have me," he said of the rent-assisted apartments, which offer a range of amenities. "They've got everything I need."

Now that he's a resident at Basilica Place, Schubert joins neighbors who have a personal emergency response system to help each resident feel more secure in case of a health problem. He can take advantage of services like help with laundry, meals and housekeeping while he regains his full health. On-site referral services, educational and wellness programs can support his needs—all so he can take that next step on his journey to healing.

To learn more about the Weinberg Housing and Resource Center, join our lunch-and-learn on Oct. 27 at 12 p.m. Registration is available here: <https://www.catholiccharities-md.org/lunch-and-learn-registration/>



Adding to the one-stop nature of support at Villa Maria clinics



Through an addition to its certification, the Villa Maria Behavioral Health Clinic in Dundalk will be able to treat substance use disorders as a primary diagnosis, allowing clinicians to serve people for a greater range of reasons.

Until now, the clinic could not treat patients with substance use disorders without first diagnosing another mental health condition. Someone addicted to

heroin, for example, could not come in for suboxone – used to treat opioid dependence – unless they had received a co-occurring mental health diagnosis.

Under the change, the Dundalk clinic will be the first within the Catholic Charities system to be able to draw clients looking for a substance use disorder treatment program. However, Karen Haughey, administrator of the Villa Maria Behavioral Health Clinics, said her team has already applied for similar changes in other clinics.

The clinics have always taken a welcoming, person-centric approach, Haughey said, but this change allows them to reach out to people in a different way.

“We’re eliminating barriers to allow people to get the help that they need,” she said. “When people reach out for help, they’re usually in crisis. We want to be available to them and make sure we’re inclusive and non-judgmental.”

THE NEED WAS ALWAYS PRESENT

A few years ago, the Villa Maria clinics trained all staff to recognize co-occurring substance use disorders among clients. Before that training, the clinics estimated 8 percent of clients had substance use disorders; after, they found it was closer to 40 percent, and higher when including nicotine use disorder. Once staff could identify the need, they could treat it, helping to reduce any stigma around seeking support.

This is particularly important in places, like Dundalk, where substance use disorders may be inter-generational, Haughey said.

“Kids are impacted by parents’ substance use issues so we also try to do preventative work in the schools,” she explained. “It’s a really big deal that we can treat people who just identify with substance use disorders.”



The healing power of nature in Harford County

Earlier this summer, Erin Quinley was leading a small group from Anna’s House into the woods behind the facility when two boys lost interest, wandered away and began throwing sticks into a nearby stream. Their mother was disappointed that they wouldn’t participate in the group’s activities, but Quinley, the director of partnerships with Nature Worx, saw an opportunity.

She told the participants about an exercise she had done in other settings. She would ask each person to pick up a leaf, imbue it with their worries or concerns and set it down on the water to drift away. But with this group, she suggested a different approach.

“You guys have big problems,” she said, turning to the two boys. Instead of letting those worries drift away on a leaf, “let’s huck them into a stream!”

The participants began following the boys’ lead, throwing sticks and rocks into the water, and “we got to reinforce that the kids are just right, where they are,” Quinley said.

This experience was part of one of at least a dozen sessions that Nature Worx will lead at Anna’s House in 2021. The nonprofit organization launched in 2017 works to help participants connect



to the natural world in ways that support their mental, physical and spiritual health.

DEEP HISTORY, NEW PARTNERSHIP

The founder of Nature Worx, Philip Hosmer, had volunteered at Anna’s House for more than a decade before the idea of partnering with his nonprofit arose. He had served as a mentor to children – part of “Anna’s Guys” who took kids on recreational field trips – as a fundraiser and as the master of ceremonies for the annual donor breakfast. With

an appreciation for the work of the program, which provides an array of services to people experiencing homelessness in Harford County, he offered to bring Nature Worx to Anna’s House residents.

Nature Worx applied for and secured a grant from the Greater Bel Air Community Foundation to



support the partnership and started providing every-other-week sessions at the facility in March.

“We hope this will last indefinitely,” said Hosmer of the partnership. “We really enjoy the work that we’re doing, and we think we’re making a positive impact.”



A SINGLE FATHER ON STAYING THE COURSE AND TRUSTING THE PROCESS



Andrew Holland has experienced homelessness for more than half of his life. Growing up in the Maryland Department of Human Services, commonly known as foster care, the 37-year-old says he has never been able to establish himself in long-term and secure stable housing.

“Every time I had a good thing going with a job or training, something would happen,” said Holland. “It was like the rug was always being pulled from underneath my feet.”

Having attended trade school for HVAC installation, and working various jobs in the service industry, Holland says he enjoys working and is most comfortable using his hands. Prior to the start of the pandemic, he worked at a restaurant at BWI Marshall Airport for three years. However, like millions across the country, the father of one with another on the way found himself unemployed as businesses began to shutter.

“I couldn’t believe how COVID-19 affected everything,” said Holland. “I was solely focused on providing for my family and being a role model for my son; then I suddenly lose my job. I didn’t know where to turn for support for my family, but thankfully a friend told me about Sarah’s House and here we are. It’s not ideal but we are safe and in a supportive environment, planning our next steps forward.”

Sarah’s House offers emergency shelter and project-based supportive housing with an array of other services for families experiencing homelessness in Anne Arundel County. Holland says he’s making use of the on-site therapist to cope with the many changes in his life, while also meeting with the financial advisor.

“The first time I met with Mr. Andrew one on one, I was impressed with his willingness to do anything he needed to do to take care of his family,” said Sarah’s House Program Director Kelly Anderson. “It was instantly apparent that they were his priority, and nothing was going to stand in his way.”

Anderson believes Holland’s openness to receiving services, accepting guidance, and following through with recommendations are going to be what leads him and his family to a life of self-sufficiency.

“When I look at my son I take a moment to breathe, relax and focus on what is necessary,” said Holland. “I came here because being on the street with him is not an option. He is my world, my motivation, he is why I work so hard in my job.”



Time to “open up” again at the Esperanza Center’s dental clinic



Two and a half years ago, after fire in a neighboring building devastated the Esperanza Center, Catholic Charities scrambled to relocate many of its services. The program found space for its medical clinic while the center underwent remediation and renovations, but the dental clinic was forced to close – until now.

This spring and summer, Esperanza began seeing dental patients again, testing out newly renovated space and upgraded equipment assembled through grants and donations. The goal, said Katie Phillips, the center’s health services manager, is to “work out the kinks,” then recruit a cadre of volunteer dentists who can help respond to a backlog of needs within the population that Esperanza serves – uninsured immigrants who do not qualify for government-sponsored health insurance.

“The vast majority of our patients have never seen a dentist in their entire lives, so the needs are huge,” she said. “We’re doing a lot of extractions, a lot of implants and a lot of dentures.”

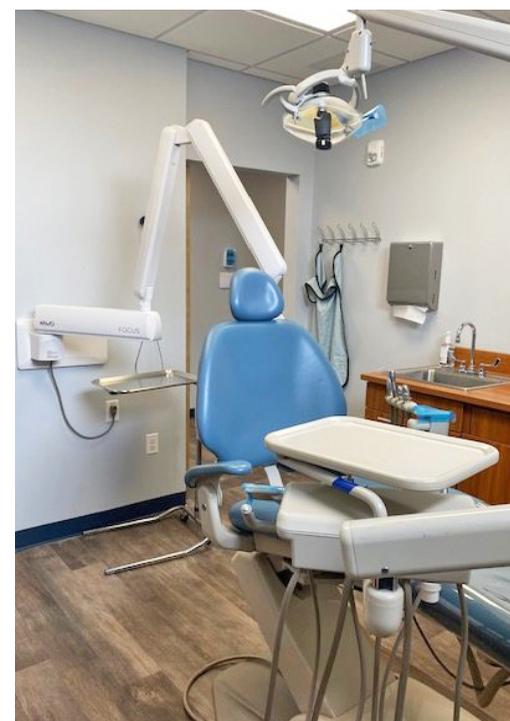
CLINIC UPGRADES

Before September 2018, the clinic ran on “ancient” devices, such as a donated X-ray machine that used film that had to be developed in a dark room, Phillips said. When the fire destroyed the clinic – including tens of thousands of dollars of specialty dental equipment – staff saw an opportunity to modernize.

They turned to Dental Director Kevin Murphy, a local dentist who had just begun volunteering his time, for guidance on the type of equipment needed, and to donors and supporters to fill those needs. CareFirst provided a grant that enabled the purchase of digital panoramic and bitewing X-ray equipment. Johns Hopkins donated an autoclave to sterilize tools and advised on extra precautions necessary in the clinic because of COVID-19.

The upgrades are not only good for patients. They may also help recruit volunteer dentists, allowing the clinic to respond to more local need.

“It will make the dentists feel more comfortable because it will really resemble what they are used to in private practice,” said Murphy, who started at Esperanza after hearing about the clinic through friends who had volunteered there in the past. “We are really blessed because the equipment is very up to date. ... This is really a top notch dental clinic now.”



Safe Streets giveaway draws lines, shows love

The basketball court at the Brooklyn Homes community was nearly unrecognizable. Tables covered with essential items lined the perimeter of the outdoor court. Groceries, toiletries, cleaning supplies, clothes, jackets, shoes and toys—every item was free to any family with a child present. Baltimore City Mayor Brandon Scott was giving out shirts and shoes.

“This event means a lot,” said LaToya Brodie. “I’m a single mother doing the best I can, so it’s great to see someone giving back to our community and making sure we have things we really need for our homes. It’s really nice seeing everyone come together.”

The group that organized the event is usually better known for interrupting violence on the streets—particularly to prevent shootings. These types of interventions are a central part of Scott’s crime-reduction strategy. But Catholic Charities’ Safe Streets programs also hold these giveaways to build community.

Longtime Brooklyn Homes resident Pat Branch attended the event with her 3-year-old granddaughter.

“People need to know somebody cares,” she said. “It’s not all about being seen on TV and what can be said, but more about what can be done.”

Safe Streets is based on the premise that violence is a public health issue. By linking individuals and their families with educational opportunities, employment training and assistance, along with other crucial services, Safe Streets Brooklyn-Curtis Bay Program Director Corey Winfield believes it could mean one less senseless death for a family.

“But every mother I see that has lost their child to gun violence has a familiar pain in their eyes, and it’s a look I don’t want to see again,” said Winfield. “So having events like this is my way of saying, ‘I know I can’t bring your child back but I swear by my life, I’ll try my best to save the next one.’”



Baltimore City Mayor Brandon Scott giving out shirts and shoes.

To learn more about Safe Streets, join our lunch-and-learn, Sept. 17 at 12 p.m. Registration is available here: <https://www.catholiccharities-md.org/lunch-and-learn-registration/>

A roof over their heads – and quickly



When Elizabeth Guercio’s children first heard about their new home, she said, “they thought it was a lie.”

“I had to take pictures and show them: this is your bed. This is your room,” she explained about the house that is almost exactly between where her fiancé’s mother lives and her younger children’s school.

“It feels great.”

With support from Catholic Charities, Guercio found her family’s home through a rapid rehousing initiative launched by Baltimore City in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The program aims to move people out of shelters or other temporary environments where close living quarters and shared spaces can facilitate the spread of the coronavirus. Catholic Charities was one of the organizations selected to support the effort,

committing to find housing and providing other supports for 30 individuals and 20 families.

The goal, said Chris Kelly, Catholic Charities’ administrator of Community Services, “is getting folks in a place where, when all this ends, they’re able to continue without any subsidy, or we’ve identified a subsidy that they’re able to transition into.”

Before she found the program, Guercio had experienced three years of periodic homelessness, navigating shelters and abandoned houses. She was often separated from her five children, ages 8 to 21.

Two weeks after she signed her current lease, two of her children moved home.

“They’re happy to be back together,” she said. “At the end of the day, I have a roof over my head and over my children’s heads, and we’re not outside in the crazy world.”

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