



Touching Lives

ST. MARY'S CENTER QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2012



Prescription for Change

Eighty-five percent of primary care physicians and pediatricians say unmet social needs are directly leading to worse health for all Americans, a recent survey by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation revealed. "Physicians are frustrated by social issues that affect their patients' health -- so much so, that nearly three of four doctors surveyed said they would write a prescription to cure them if they could."

This back drop of awareness is an odd juxtaposition to the California State budget. While our state is one of the leading economies in the world, it is easy to see what the physicians are talking about as health and human services has suffered \$15 billion in cumulative cuts since 2008.

Adding to the misery, the poorest residents in the state (blind, disabled and seniors over the age of 65 on SSI) have also taken a hit on their monthly benefit. In 2009, SSI recipients received \$907/

month. Now they get \$854/month despite the fact that the cost of living did not go down during this time. All of the essentials - rent, heat, milk, bread, vegetables, gasoline - have all gone up considerably. And California is one of the only states in the nation that does not give food stamps to SSI recipients, further impacting their ability to attain basic human needs.

The news gets worse -

- ▶ With the State abolishing the cities Redevelopment agencies, the largest single source of funding for affordable homes and rental housing has disappeared.
- ▶ A recent survey from AARP found that 9% of seniors struggle with food insecurity ~ an increase of 79% since 2001.
- ▶ A report from Alameda County Public Health Department reports, "A black child in West Oakland is much more likely to be born prematurely and into poverty than a white child in the Oakland hills. In school, he's less likely to read at grade level and more likely to drop out. As an adult, he's more prone to diabetes, heart disease, cancer or stroke. And he can expect to die nearly 15 years earlier."

It is no wonder physicians see the connection between health and social ills. And being homeless exacerbates health and the costs associated with the crisis. In a recently published article, **Older Homeless Adults: Can We Do More?**, Dr. Margot Kushel, Division of General Internal Medicine, University of California, San Francisco notes, "Widespread homelessness has persisted for 3 decades,

but the face of it has changed. If ending homelessness among older adults isn't motivation enough, then perhaps the prospect of rapidly escalating costs will provide the necessary push."

St. Mary's Center stands out in the sea of social services because of its awareness of how change happens. It is a place where getting basic needs (a place to live, groceries, transportation to the doctors, preschool) is only part of the remedy.

The "prescription" for change at St. Mary's is oddly alarming. Consider the overwhelming feeling of being homeless and asked to participate in an art project. It is as if the elder wanted to shout, "Are you listening to me? **I AM HOMELESS!**" Maneuvering through the indignation, the art project continued every week the gentle man was in the shelter and gave a means to experience a fellowship and joy he never imagined.



If doctors could give a prescription like this: 1 dose of affordable and safe housing on a full stomach in a community of care we imagine our health would improve drastically.

Transforming Lives

Recovery and Art Making

By Susan Werner

Finding Common Ground and Greater Power

Recovery from alcohol and drug dependency involves a journey to recover and recreate oneself. The world of addiction is bridled with habits and challenges that can derail and demoralize a person. Seniors at St. Mary's Center rally together to counter the power of addictive habits and to harness ways of living that are empowering and affirming.

Seniors return to meet with one another at Recovery 55 meetings, day after day. Together they assert and preserve ways of living free of alcohol and drugs. Many recount that the downward spiral of addiction, and the storms of life, became the doorways to transforming and reclaiming their birthright of living free.



The seniors have found being part of a group has lessons in common with geese that fly in V formation. As geese fly together, their resistance to air currents increases. Similarly for Recovery 55 members, resistance to addiction is made stronger through moving in a common direction and as a team. And as geese honk to support the bird at the front, the seniors' words of encouragement vitally support each person's journey.

Bill Wigfall, facilitator of the Men's Recovery Group and an accomplished musician, is well aware of this support and how art projects have strengthened his recovery and connection to community. That is why he asked staff member Susan Werner to help bring creativity to the group. At first, some group members saw creating art as foreboding and irrelevant. Gradually group members conceived that recovery includes being open to unfamiliar life experiences, and embarked upon new experiences of making art.

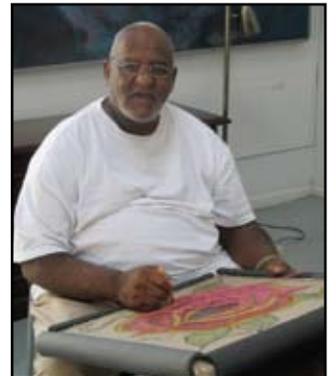
Bennie Whitfield is an active member of the Men's Recovery Group and a joyful artist. His comments help to make the point. "I found a safe place to experience something. I don't know it all, there's something new everyday. I found a new kid in myself; I didn't know I could find pleasure in dots and colors. Pleasure reveals God's greatness and goodness. By stepping out of myself, instead of focusing on the creation, God is allowing me to step into his love.

Every time I'm surprised. I may think I know something, and yet something is being revealed. I think that's the ultimate - a joyful feeling. The creator keeps his promise to never figure him out. Don't clog your brain, just stay on the journey. I know something is coming - that joy of knowing - can't stop it - it's all good.

When I came to SMC, I had only my own direction, which was none. At SMC, change started with Recovery, Wellness, Hope and Justice, Art. When good things happen I'm obligated to shine my life. My light is bright and I will not let it go dim."



Bill initiated the drum making project which was facilitated by local artist and St. Mary's Center volunteer, Gina Truex.

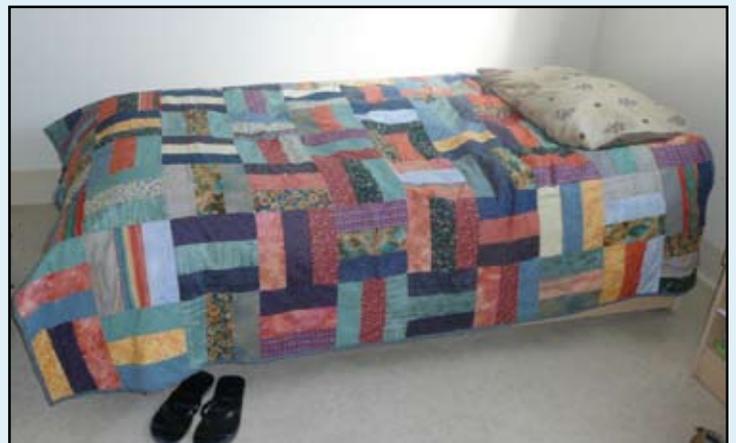


Bennie Whitfield creating a rose punch hook wall hanging.

Piecing Lives Together

Seniors at St. Mary's Center know about piecing lives together. Yet the recent gift of a quilt for their beds, reminds them of the community of support who care about their journey.

Thanks to the generosity of the Piecemakers Quilt Guild of Southern Alameda County, residents of Closer to Home, (our transitional housing program) got a beautiful gift from the quilters. The guild gave fifteen quilts to St. Mary's Center thanks to the recommendation of board member Gail Greenberg who happens to be a quilter. Last year, the guild gave away nearly 200 quilts. Thank you Piecemakers for your craft and your thoughtfulness.



International Day for the Eradication of Poverty

By Paige Husted

Even as protesters from Occupy Oakland were marching through the streets downtown, another wing of the anti-poverty movement had gathered to take a stand against economic injustices. But instead of marching, they were drumming.

The community room at St. Mary's Center vibrated with the pulsing beat of homemade drums. The loud, passionate voices of seniors from the center's Recovery 55 support group resounded off the walls. Audience members clapped and stomped along with the beat. The energy was palpable.

This was a day of celebration, not only of the strides made to combat poverty, but also the fact that, in the words of one speaker, "we keep making it despite the hardships. If you here, you goin' through."



One senior, 61 year old John B, is all too familiar with "goin' through". He struggles to make ends meet each month; his meager income from SSI is scarcely enough to cover his food, housing, and prescription medication costs.

One year shy of the "62 and older" requirement for most senior subsidized buildings, it is up to John to be creative with his resources in order to keep himself housed, fed, and healthy.

John's story is more common than not. The harsh reality of poverty and lack of affordable housing, health care, and resources for those in need affect more and more people each day.

The observance of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty can be traced back to October 17, 1987. On that day, over a hundred thousand people gathered in Paris (where the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was signed in 1948) to honor the victims of extreme poverty, violence, and hunger. They proclaimed that poverty is "a violation of human rights and affirmed the need to come together to ensure that these rights are respected".

We are the 99%. Today, all over the country and world we work in the same spirit and with the same hope of creating social change and echo the United Nations Secretary General's proclamation, "investing in people is the smartest way to eradicate poverty".



The Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 25.

(1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

(2) Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.

Become a Friendly Visitor!

St. Mary's Center has a Friendly Visitor Program that provides one-on-one companionship to frail and homebound seniors in Oakland. Seniors are matched with trained volunteers who offer friendship, caring hearts, and a broader experience of community.

Volunteers are responsible for:

- Visiting an Oakland senior for one or two hours every week.
- Sharing common interests, reminiscing, chatting, listening to stories, etc.
- Arranging their own transportation to and from the senior's residence.
- Communicating regularly with the Program Coordinator at St. Mary's.

To learn more

contact Anne Pauw, Friendly Visitor Coordinator

(510) 923-9600 x 209 or

email:jvcintern@stmaryscenter.org



Save The Date

October 13, 2012

St. Mary's Center knows how to celebrate! Our Gala in the fall raised a record \$106,000 to support services for elders and children in Oakland.

Thanks to all of our guests, donors and honorees - we had a grand time. Pictured here is Sir Richard Feechem and Lady Neelum.

Mark your calendar for this year's event ... Saturday, October 13, 2012.

And if you have an item you want to donate - call Amy at (510) 923-9600 x 222.

Building Community

Holidays Are Happy At St. Mary's Center

By Paige Husted



Visit our website . . . www.stmaryscenter.org to see what the children and elders of St. Mary's sang to legislators as they slashed the budget on the poorest in California.

Thanks to:

- ♥ St. Agnes parish for bringing a Christmas Party to the seniors complete with Santa, carols and gift cards for all attending the special meal they made and served.
- ♥ St. Bonaventure, St. Joan of Arc & St. Philip Neri/St Albert churches for gifts and sweets to seniors.
- ♥ St. Joan of Arc parish for adopting 150 families - providing gifts and food.
- ♥ St. Mary Magdalen for adopting 25 families.
- ♥ St. Philip Neri/St Albert for adopting 15 families.
- ♥ St. Bonaventure for purchasing gifts for 200 children.
- ♥ Individuals, clubs and churches (like Santa Maria) for adopting 88 families.

Thanks to the generosity of many and the orchestration of Sister Marilyn, Kim Marsh and a host of elves, 313 families and dozens of seniors had a gift under the tree at Christmas.

A shout out to all those who helped make it a wonderful season. With special thanks to the churches and individuals who purchased gifts and gave contributions for food so seniors and families had a little extra during the holidays.

Why St. Mary's Center is so Important

- Oakland has over 43,500 seniors who are 65 or older.
- Oakland is home to the largest number of impoverished seniors in California.
- One in three Oakland seniors has fair to poor health status.
- One in five Oakland seniors is food insecure.
- Four in ten Oakland seniors have a condition that limits basic activities of daily living.

"Oakland's aging residents rely on multiple supportive services that help them live safe and dignified lives in the community. Transportation, local community-based programs, senior centers... all are links in a life line of services. California Budget cuts have left Oakland's most vulnerable seniors with few options. To protect the health and safety of our seniors, the City must maintain services." - Wendy Peterson - Chair of the Senior Services Coalition

Statistics from Senior Services Coalition of Alameda County



Contribute to a Bike Fund

"Hefty bikes for preschoolers can last up to 10 years which makes them worth the investment," says Preschool Director Lorita Riga. That's why Executive Director Carol Johnson gave the go ahead to ask donors if they wanted to contribute to a bike fund. If you want to donate, please make your check payable to St. Mary's Center and note bike fund on the memo line. The children will be delighted!

Saving a Community Asset

Stephen O'Melveny, an Asset worker at St. Mary's Center is aware of what it feels like "to be put out to pasture." The struggle to stay alive got too hard when at the age of 63 there was no promise of work on the horizon, Stephen says he was lucky to find the Assets program, a federal employment training program for seniors. With skills as a craftsman and in industry, Stephen answered he wanted to be a receptionist when asked what he wanted to do. His training prepared him well to be "front man" at St. Mary's, greeting callers and seniors five days each week.

Aware of how the program changed the course of his life, is why Stephen was at the City Council meeting to address the projected cuts to the program due to elimination of Redevelopment funds.

As the second speaker addressed the importance of this critical program, Oakland Mayor Jean Quan announced that the Assets program would not be cut. Such news is a relief to the dozens of low income seniors who benefit from being useful. "People are getting older, living longer and our brain will continue to grow if it is stimulated," remarked Stephen.

St. Mary's and a host of other local nonprofit organizations, benefit from the wisdom and work of Asset employees. We are happy to hear of the Mayor's commitment as the city gets 1 million dollars from the federal government for its investment of \$100,000. Such return is obvious - especially if you have a chance to meet Stephen!

Poor Women Will Be First Victims of State Cutbacks

By Ellen Danchik

On November 15, a demonstration was held at the State Building in Oakland to protest impending “trigger cuts” in the California legislature that will cut hundreds of millions of dollars from essential services. The rally was organized by the California Partnership, along with Parent Voices, BOSS, St. Mary’s Center, and the Center for Independent Living.

The state budget has a shortfall of \$1.5 billion, a far cry from the \$4 billion in additional revenue required to avoid the trigger cuts. While some of the cuts have been postponed due to lawsuits many have already gone into affect.

Women, well aware of what such cuts will mean, took the microphone.

“There is no sunshine in the California budget. There is no sunshine in the homes of people whose services have been cut. There is no sunshine in the homes of folks who have lost their jobs. All across the country, we call that balancing the budget. We don’t call that destroying lives. We are hurting children. We are having to look into refrigerators that have no food in them. This absolutely cannot continue. Join with me in saying, ‘Taxes, not triggers.’ We are part of bringing the sunshine back with our courage — by showing up.” **Boona Cheema, Executive Director of BOSS (Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency)**

“With my In Home Health Services, I have a caregiver that comes into my home to provide care for me, and this means she’ll be in my home 20 percent less often. For me, that means I will possibly end up in a nursing home.” **Michelle Rousey, a disabled woman in a wheelchair**

“The situation we are in is immoral, when the wealthy are the wealthiest in history and have everything — more than they need. They want to balance the budget on us, on children, on disabled people, on the elderly. People who have nothing left to give and they want to take more from us. If they did a fair tax, there would be enough revenue to take care of everyone’s needs. What kind of a society are we living in where people can suffer and other people just ignore that and refuse to pay their fair share of taxes? It’s not right. It’s scary. We need to make sure it doesn’t happen.” **Karen Smulevitz from United Seniors of Oakland**

“In June of this year, I lost my childcare due to budget cuts. Limiting access to childcare for working families is not a way to stabilize our economy or create a better California. By cutting childcare, everyone loses. We are sending the wrong message when our government provides subsidies and tax breaks for corporations, yet cannot educate and care for our most vulnerable.” **Clarissa Doutherd mother of a four-year-old/member of Parent Voices**

“This affects everybody. We need to keep talking and chanting and keep marching. Even if we have to come out in our wheelchairs, even if we have to come out with our guide dogs, even if we have to bring our children, even if we have to come out limping, we will be heard!”

LaTanya Wolf, a Senior Advocate for Hope and Justice at St. Mary’s Center

“We have a childcare system right now in California that is more fragile than I’ve ever known it in the 40 years that I have worked in the childcare arena. The people who are the most affected are primarily very low-income women — either working parents, childcare providers, In Home Support Service workers. It’s sad to me that when the decisions were made about who would be affected in the first level of cuts, it’s women and children.” **Patty Siegel, Executive Director of California Child Care Research and Referral Network**

Can You Cook A Meal?

The Winter Shelter at St. Mary’s Center is open and at capacity. If you are able to make and serve an evening meal, please call Sister Marilyn to get a date (510) 923-9600 x 220.

St. Mary’s is known as the Mercedes Benz of shelters. It is no wonder given the concern and quality of service provided by staff and volunteers. Together we make a world of difference for seniors happy to have a place out of the cold, hearty meals and such a wonderful community.

Many of the evening volunteers also take the opportunity to eat with our shelter guests. The conversations and camaraderie helps mirror the spirit of St. Mary’s. Special thanks to all who give their time, talent and treasure!



Listening to the Wisdom of Seniors

Many thanks to the Scotland Youth & Family Center for producing a video focusing attention on the elder voices of St. Mary’s Center and their view of housing, food, education, healthcare and community. For clips of the video - visit our website at www.stmaryscenter.org. If you want access to a copy of the video for an event or meeting, please contact Elena Berman to make arrangements, (510) 923-9600 x 211.

Creating Change

Monitoring Medications ~ *New Pilot Program Helping Elders*

Most seniors take six to eight medications each day so keeping track of what pills to take on an empty stomach, which ones with food can be a bit overwhelming. Add in a forgetful mind and lack of awareness about the medications and the confusion is oddly clear. Which is why elders like Freddie are happy St. Mary's Center has teamed up with the Nursing Program at California State University - East Bay for a Medication Monitoring & Safety Program.

Freddie is one of the many seniors who has been participating in St. Mary's Center's Medication Management and Safety Pilot Program. Case manager Paige Husted, accompanied by Alicia, a nurse from Cal State East Bay, went to visit Freddie in his home to assess his medication situation.

In his Quality of Life Survey, Freddie reported dizziness, headaches, aches and pains, and trouble sleeping. His legs were swollen and his blood pressure was at an unhealthy level. Freddie admitted that he often forgot to take his medications; furthermore, medication compliance was not a priority because he "feels bad whether or not I take my medicines."

Freddie's multiple prescriptions were confusing and he often forgot which medicines were for the morning and which were for the evening. Freddie was also unable to correctly identify which



Our partnership with the School of Nursing at California State University/East Bay is pivotal to the care we provide elders. We are most grateful for collaborating with them on behalf of a population sorely underserved.

medicines treated which symptoms. When asked if a Mediset would be helpful for organizing his pills, Freddie said, "Medisets? I have some of those!" and reached into the depths of his dresser drawer to withdraw two fully filled (but very neglected) medication pill boxes. All of these factors were indications of Freddie's needs for medication education and assistance.

The nurse visited once a week for the next ten weeks and worked with Freddie surrounding his medicine issues. She assisted him with disposing all expired medications. She also made a large chart which included the names

of all medications, the time of day when he should be taking them, and the reason he is taking them. She even taped an actual pill next to each description so that Freddie would be able to recognize each pill and connect it with its purpose. She also taught Freddie how to fill his Mediset by himself and then followed through each week to ensure that he had taken all of the pills.

By the end of ten weeks, Freddie's physical symptoms had declined. His legs were less swollen and his blood pressure was lower than it's been in years. Freddie reports a decline in other symptoms as well; he told the nurse, "I feel so much better; I am even thinking more clearly!" This simple program demonstrates that a little extra attention linked with medication education can be life-changing for a senior in need.

The Power of Women

By Jeannie Kim

The Women's Group, held every Thursday, is an evolving body of dedicated women who are curious about obtaining a greater understanding of themselves through honest discourse and unconditional support.

We explore life issues, including alcohol and drug addictions, relationships, and personal healing. Women rely on each other and the facilitators to generate core issues to be discussed and to follow an established but flexible group process format.

Sometimes we receive services from a community resource, and one such benefactor has been Interplay, an organization specializing in the use of body wisdom for awareness, connectivity, and healing.

Interplay provided an 8-week workshop to Women's Group, introducing the members to the use of the body for expression and transformation. In one such group, the women first participated in a reading on love and pain, followed by a deeply moving and honest sharing of their experiences of these two powerful emotions. One woman said that she had held herself "hostage" to her love and pain, and that recently she had learned to break the bonds. This led to a further discourse and realizations on the fears and joys of breaking out of our self-imposed bondage.

We then turned to Interplay to help us use our bodies to reflect and express what resonated with each person. To beautiful and soothing piano music, we used our hands in a one-hand dance, followed by a whole-body dance, to honor what had passed among us. Holding hands, we closed with a chant, "there's a love holding all that we love. We rest in this love."



All I want for Christmas ...

The typical jingle had a different ring this year as children wanted jobs for their burdened parents rather than presents. While each of the 38 children enrolled at St. Mary's Center Preschool got special stockings and goodies thanks to AT & T Pioneers and Elf Earlene Dutton, the tough economic times affect the children. In addition, to issues at home, the State is projecting a 21% cut in funding for their preschool this fiscal year, as well.

Preschool Director Lorita Riga notes, "Across the county behavioral issues are a concern among child care providers. Many contribute it to the stress parents are under and children are exposed to. We are implementing new techniques in the classroom that have reduced the disruptive behavior and our new classroom arrangement also has improved the learning environment.

Such realities are suspended as Santa bears gifts, families enjoy a hot chocolate and cookies party and Sister Marilyn coordinates the family gift giving program to ensure all of the Preschool children have gifts under the tree on Christmas morning.

Help during the holidays is a welcomed gift to parents wanting the best for their children.

At St. Mary's the focus on children is evident from many angles. Teachers work with parents to help children be more successful in school. Lorita explains, "*Homework is linked to building understanding. In our case, we teach parents how to do assessments on their children. Their findings, coupled with the staff assessments, helped us prioritize that Language and Literacy Development will be our concentration - especially comprehension of meaning and phonological awareness. Parents recognize that the work children are doing at home addresses these needs.*"



Santa Ron Lomorri and Elf Earlene Dutton find countless ways to help the elders and children of St. Mary's Center.



"The work I do at St. Mary's is not so much about doing things for our clients that they can't do by themselves as it is about being with them while they fight their way through a confusing, frightening and sometimes humiliating bureaucracy."

Anne Pauw, JVC Intern

Reflection from a Jesuit Volunteer

By Anne Pauw

When I arrived in Oakland last August I was expecting to help people. I came here as a Jesuit Volunteer assigned to work as a case manager at St. Mary's Center. Jesuit Volunteer Corps places volunteers in non-profit organizations, where they serve for a year. How they serve depends on the volunteer. I had difficulty at first figuring out how I was supposed to serve the population at St. Mary's Center. I had never worked full time at a non-profit, and I had no experience, no idea what I was supposed to do.

One day I was standing in line with a client at Social Services, which I found out is like the DMV except more horrible, when I started to figure out my role at St. Mary's. Said client was there to apply for General Assistance and I was there to help, which was problematic considering I didn't completely understand what General Assistance even was at that point. We were waiting in line and I was trying to figure out how I could help my client, what I had to offer him. To be honest, all I had to offer was my presence. I couldn't tell him the difference between SSI and SSA or if he was going to get food stamps. It was all very awkward.

But what's worse, trying to help someone and finding out how difficult and confusing it is, or that someone trying to help themselves by themselves, even when it seems impossible? If I felt awkward, I could only imagine what my client was feeling. I didn't like the thought of my client staring down the surly clerks at Social Services alone, given a number and told to wait here, to stand there, to come back later. If he was going to feel dehumanized or defeated, then at the very least I could ensure he wouldn't be doing that alone. The work I do at St. Mary's is not so much about doing things for our clients that they can't do by themselves as it is about being with them while they fight their way through a confusing, frightening and sometimes humiliating bureaucracy.

St. Mary's Center is an open and inviting community. Never before have I been so encouraged to be truly with the people I hope to serve, even if all I can do is sit with them and listen to and share what they're feeling. When people ask me what I do for a living, I tell them it's my job to be awkward, and that I can't imagine anything better. In fact, I'll feel blessed if I can spend the rest of my life feeling as awkward as I have at St. Mary's.



St. Mary's Center
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Wish List

- Eco- Friendly Dish Detergent
- Small Paper Cups
- Hot Cereal for Winter Shelter Guests
- Clear 30 gallon plastic bags for Composting
- Laminator
- Packages of Sponges

Editor/Writer: Katrina Brekke-Miesner

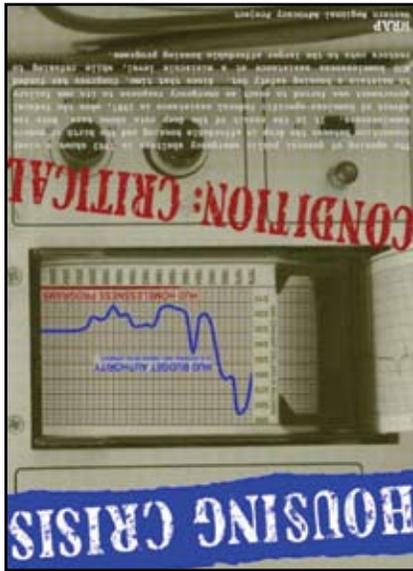
Writers: Ellen Danchik, Paige Husted,
 Jeannie Kim, Susan Werner, Anne Pauw

Photographers: Jon-Mychal Cox, Paige Husted,
 Lorita Riga, Gina Truex, Susan Werner

Design/Layout: Innovative Images



Charity Navigator, America's leading independent charity evaluator, works to advance a more efficient and responsive philanthropic marketplace by evaluating the Financial Health and Accountability and Transparency of America's largest charities. St. Mary's Center has received its highest recognition. According to their website - Only 50 human service organizations in the state of California have received a four star rating.



Ten white doves to honor those who have died and petition peace for all present. The doves flew back and forth around the courtyard, as if by their flight they were able to uplift the weary spirits of those who watched them fly.

Jesus was homeless! Let us remember to live in light of his story and to remember his command to care for the least of these among us."

Carol Johnson, Executive Director proclaimed, "Today we pause to remember all those who have died outside without the access to the care they deserve. We remember them as we continue to fight for affordable housing and equal rights for all people."

Playing his saxophone, Arthur Alexander helped set the tone for releasing



Senior Gilbert Johnson shared, "I had to go through homelessness twice to finally get serious about housing. Being homeless is a danger to self; you have to be careful on these streets in Oakland, and especially as a senior. Today we remember our stories, and the stories of those who did not make it out of homelessness alive. Being homeless is a memorial in itself; there is power in the stories of people who have gone before and died on the streets."

Memorial participants called out the names of people they wished to remember and a small bell chimes for each one. Gregory Branch reminded the crowd, "Even

The hardships of life on the streets have caused illness, poverty, and even premature death for many who find themselves homeless. On December 8, 2011 dozens of people gathered to remember those who have died in homelessness by participating in the annual Homeless Memorial at St. Mary's Center.

By Paige Husted