



ST. MARY'S CENTER
Everybody needs a place

Summer 2015 Newsletter



CELEBRATING RECOVERY

Every year at the beginning of June, the St. Mary's Center community comes together to rally around those in Recovery 55 to celebrate their journey in overcoming addiction, coping with mental illness, and moving beyond negative patterns. Each participant is acknowledged and celebrated for their work on their recovery.

Participants are seniors aged 55 and older who are homeless, at risk of homelessness, or formerly homeless. In this program, seniors learn strategies to help them reduce and eliminate drug and alcohol use and how to cope with mental illness in order to help them stabilize their lives.

During the celebration, members of the St. Mary's Center community who are a part of Recovery 55 symbolically unshackled themselves from their addictions and illnesses by tearing papers with their respective issues. Issues like: Depression, Prison, Alcohol, Cocaine, and Heroin. (Continued on Page 3)

Letter from the Director

Dear Friends,

Our seniors continue to be an inspiration to me. Whether they are walking through our doors for the first time, or have been part of our community for many years, their fierce courage and desire for a better future give me great hope.

Our Resources for the Third Age provides a community that so many of our participants long for – a welcoming community center, shared meals, opportunities for friendships, and special programs such as medication monitoring and home visits to help participants stay housed longer. Your gifts help to support this unique program, a haven for low-income seniors.

Many people find St. Mary's Center through our Winter Emergency Shelter. Each year, nearly 100 homeless men and women come through the shelter. For many, they find that St. Mary's Center offers the right combination of structure, support, and independence that works for them. We truly teach people "to fish" – to access and use effective programs, develop beneficial self-care practices, and cultivate their own support structure – all of which helps our seniors create new paths for themselves.

Thank you for your support which makes the Winter Shelter possible. From the beginning of December through the end of April, each night shelter guests receive dinner home-cooked by volunteers. And while we do receive some support from local government for our shelter, financial donations from individuals and foundations make up a large gap in funding.

While we continue to confront many challenges, most notably, the high cost of housing, please be assured that the St. Mary's Center community is alive and well in Oakland! Thank you for being a part of it.

Peace,



Carol Johnson, MSW
Executive Director

PS: Please save the date, April 2, 2016, for the next Spring Gala.



CELEBRATING RECOVERY (Continued from Page 1)

Following this, members were individually celebrated by their case managers and given a coin to commemorate their journey reading “Today I will do just one thing to help my recovery progress”.

But the day was more than just a celebration of participants working to break free from their pasts. As St. Mary’s Center case manager, Claudette Mestayer likes to describe, Recovery 55 is “about celebrating life and overcoming its obstacles.” Through Recovery 55 participants learn to reframe their struggles while finding strength from their past with the support of others who have shared similar experiences.

SCHWAB VOLUNTEER WEEK AT ST. MARY’S CENTER



On May 21st, St. Mary’s Center hosted a group of Schwab employees for the 12th annual Schwab Volunteer Week. The day started off with a BBQ where Schwab employees served our seniors lunch. And after cleanup, the volunteers worked to beautify the center by repainting our social workers’ offices and giving the community center a deep cleaning.

Their day at St. Mary’s Center made a lasting impact and has helped our clients feel more comfortable meeting with case workers, and has made our community center feel brand new. St. Mary’s Center case manager, Michelle Roberts explains, “I really appreciated watching the genuine human touch the Schwab employees had while they were serving lunch and eating with our clients.” She continues “Thanks to the Schwab volunteers, our clients experience the dignity of being in a newly painted space, and they deserve that.”

All around, it was a great day for everyone! Thank you, Schwab employees, we look forward to seeing you again next year!

If you are interested in learning more about setting up a volunteer event for your company, contact Development Associate, Tomas Moreno at 510-923-9600 x229 or tmoreno@stmaryscenter.org.

LIFE AFTER THE SHELTER

From December through April, St. Mary's Center hosts a winter shelter. Those staying in the shelter not only find a place to stay, but also receive extensive case management, health assessments, are required to stay sober, and attend recovery meetings five times a week.

Like many who come to the St. Mary's Center Winter Shelter, Kenny was not only homeless but suffered from addiction. Kenny was looking for a way out and found it at St. Mary's Center. "I was crying almost every day when I first came here. I just couldn't believe this. This is beautiful. It's just what I needed." With case management and perseverance, Kenny has been drug, alcohol, and nicotine free for more than 7 months, joined a church, and is now living at Closer to Home, one of St. Mary's Center's supportive housing sites.



After coming to St. Mary's Center, Kenny has a new lease on life and just celebrated his 60th birthday the best way he can think of: clean and sober! And he plans on sticking to it, "I ain't looking back. I've been there, done that; that's a road to nowhere."

Kenny now fills his time recycling in order to save money so he can find housing and watching movies he borrows from the library including Charade, The Maltese Falcon, and anything with Cary Grant. But, he says the biggest benefit he's received since coming to St. Mary's Center is that "I've got faith in me now."

This year, the St. Mary's Center Winter Shelter provided temporary shelter and warm meals to 101 seniors - many like Kenny - and found housing for 59.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY



In March, the St. Mary's Center community joined organizations around the world in celebrating International Women's Day by facilitating a morning of events recognizing and celebrating the contributions of women both globally and locally while creating space to empower women. This year's theme of "Make It Happen" was at the forefront of the day's events.

Following a silent peace walk through the neighborhood, attendees gathered in the community center. There, poets and speakers from across generations and cultures spoke on the interconnected themes of community, justice, hope, and peace while keeping the achievements of women front and center.



A PROFILE OF KENNY

After almost two years of loneliness and homelessness, Kenny came to St. Mary's Center and finally started caring for the things he'd neglected: his health and his relationships. Now, after four months of coming to St. Mary's Center and the community center almost every day, he feels like he's getting a fresh start.

With the help he's found at St. Mary's Center, Kenny is taking care of himself again. He's taking medication to keep his diabetes and depression in check. But most importantly, he's found a place where he belongs.

In his own words, Kenny says, "St. Mary's Center really helped me to get back my confidence, my dignity, and my hope. Most importantly though, now I have friends. That's really helpful."



HUGH & PRESENTATION HOUSE



After finding out about St. Mary's Center, Hugh knew it was exactly what he needed. With no history of substance abuse or mental health issues, Hugh – unfortunately – is the type of person who would normally fall between the cracks of social services.

Now, Hugh lives at Presentation House, St. Mary's Center's newest supportive housing site ensuring an additional 6 homeless seniors transition from homelessness to more independent housing. Located less than 3 blocks from St. Mary's Center, residents take part in St. Mary's programs and services and work with case managers on personalized pathways to permanent housing.

Since joining the community here, Hugh has thrived and is looking forward to getting his own home in the near future.

PEER ELDERS: FIGHTING ISOLATION THROUGH FRIENDSHIPS

Isolation is detrimental to seniors; studies have shown it leads to negative physical and mental health, cognitive decline, long-term illness, high blood pressure, and a higher risk for elder abuse. That's why St. Mary's Center launched its Peer Elder Program (PEP). Helmed by St. Mary's Center staff members Janny Castillo, Aleta Manuel, and Sr. Eva Lumas, the Peer Elder Program fights isolation by fostering friendships among participants.

Potential participants are identified by their case managers and paired with a trained Senior Peer who has committed to contact them at least once a week. How they contact and interact with the participants is to be mutually agreed upon but usually takes the form of either a phone call or a visit.

These contacts above all else are about social engagement. Participants talk about their lives, their struggles, what shows they're watching on TV, anything. What matters most is that they talk, and feel comfortable sharing and talking with each other. We've seen that by creating space for these relationships to form, they've blossomed.



A perfect example is a participant who, when the program started, only wanted to receive text messages from their Peer. Slowly, this evolved to feeling comfortable with phone calls, and then visits. Eventually the participant started to initiate contact with their Peer including meeting up for lunch at St. Mary's Center. Now, they want to help to create a glee club at St. Mary's Center!

Overall, the program has been a huge success, with both Peers and Participants alike reporting increased confidence and motivation to do life tasks. Participants have also reported being more compliant with their health plans, taking better care of themselves, engaging with others more often, and even coming to St. Mary's Center more. **At the same time our Senior Peers have learned how to reframe their own struggles and realize that they have something to give.** With the pilot coming to a close, all of our participants have said they want to continue their relationships because they've made true friends.



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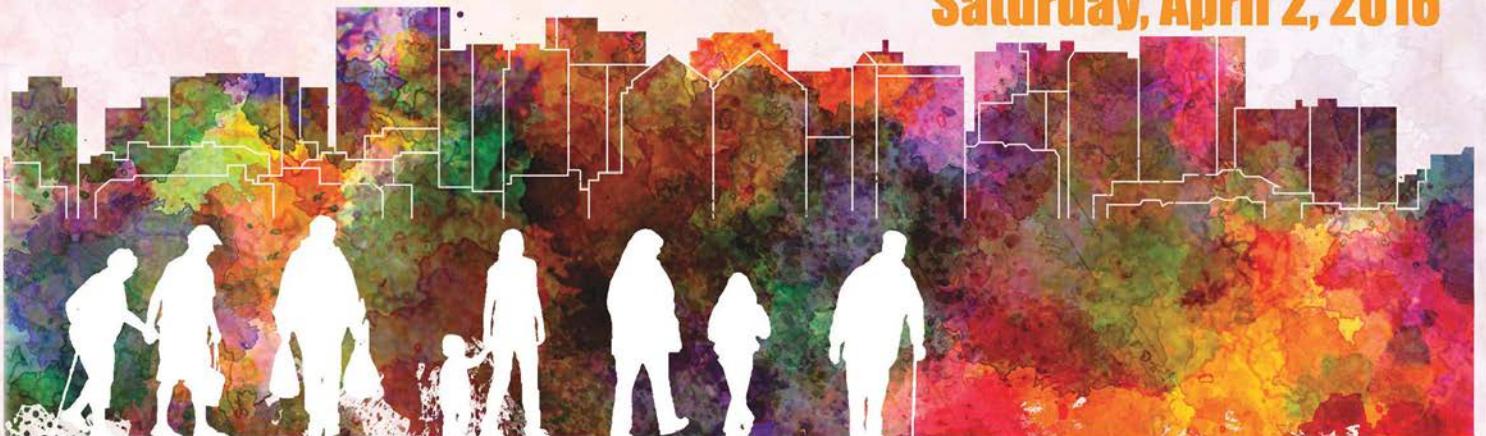
For more information about St. Mary's Center visit www.stmaryscenter.org or contact Regan Murphy at 510-923-9600 x236 or rmurphy@stmaryscenter.org



St. Mary's Center has received Charity Navigator's highest recognition. Charity Navigator is America's leading independent charity evaluator and assesses the Financial Health and Accountability and Transparency of nonprofit organizations.

SPRING GALA

Saturday, April 2, 2016



It's not too early. If you would like to host a table, donate an auction item, or underwrite the evening, please contact Tomas Moreno at 510.923.9600 x229 or tmoreno@stmaryscenter.org.



A BENEFIT FOR
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