CONNECTION

Ending 10-Year Mission Homelessness

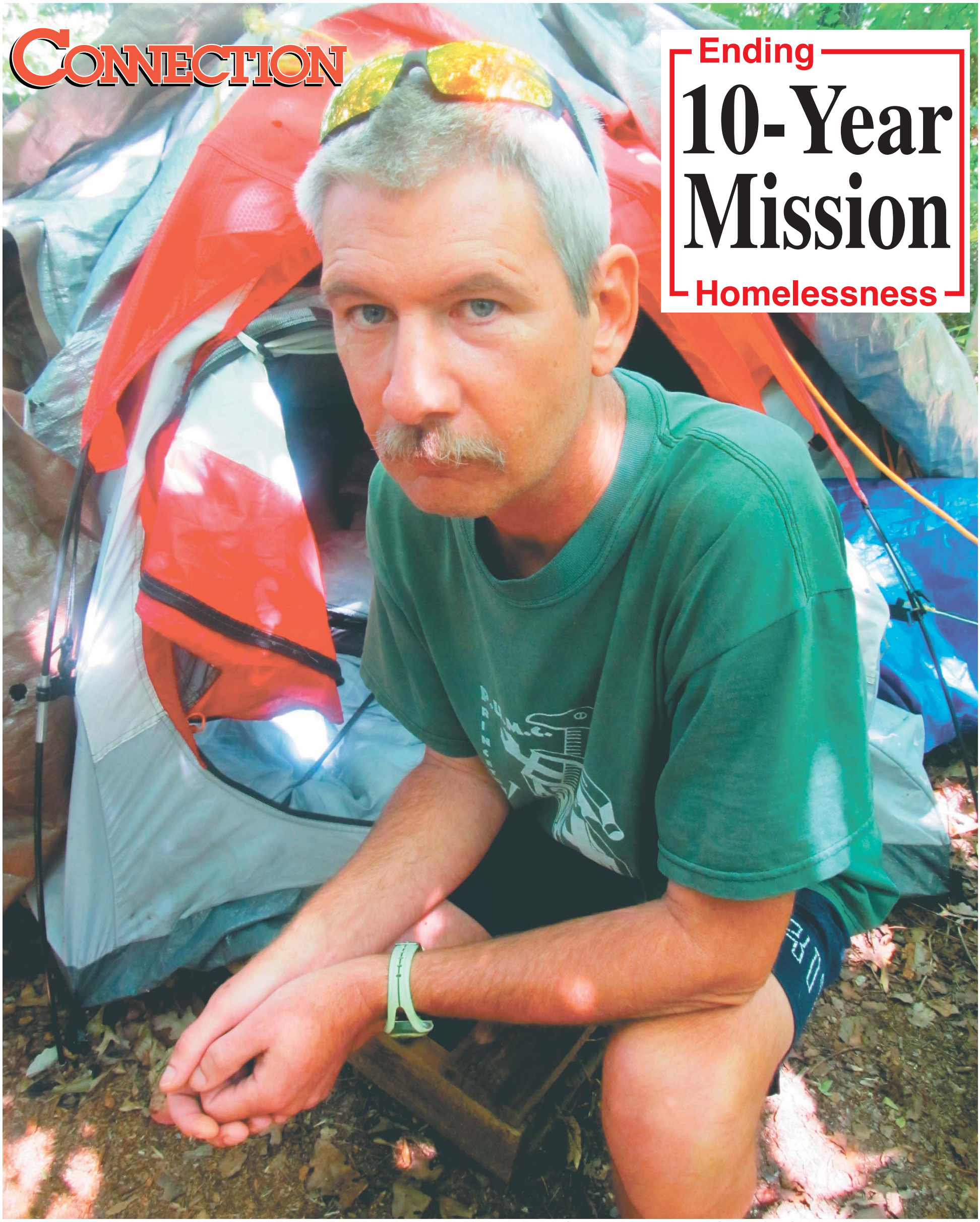

Photo By Victoria Ross/The Connection

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Can Fairfax End Homelessness?

Fairfax County dedicates resources, energy, services to its 10-year mission.

By Victoria Ross
The Connection

In Fairfax County, approximately one in every 700 people is homeless. That's less than 1 percent of the 1 million people who live in a county that is consistently ranked as one of America's richest communities.

Although the 1,549 homeless children and adults who live here is statistically a small number, Fairfax County officials and community leaders want to make that number even smaller. By 2018, they've pledged to change that number to zero.

"It's an achievable goal," said Supervisor Cathy Hudgins (D-Hunter Mill), who was on the Board of Supervisors in 2008 when it officially adopted the 10-year-plan to prevent and homeless.

"We believed the commitment could be made because it's what the community wants and because we have great partnerships with the faith community, nonprofit groups, business leaders and many others," Hudgins said. "I'm always impressed by the number of people who get involved."

"Fairfax County's goal is to end homelessness as we know it," said Chairman Sharon Bulova, (D-at large.) "And that means that we will be able to make sure that people have the opportunity for a roof over their heads, and they also have the opportunity for the supportive services so that they continue to be sheltered."

"There are so many families affected by this," said Dan P. Leaf, a vice president with Northrop Grumman. Leaf sits on the Fairfax-Falls Church Community Partnership Governing Board, a consortium of 20 high-profile business and community leaders, elected officials and faith leaders who provide policy direction, resources and creativity in seeing that the plan works.

"I don't think people realize how many working homeless there are here," Leaf said. "I think it would really surprise people to know how many homeless families are trying to get their kids through school, trying to do all the normal things the rest of us are doing, but without a place to live. It's not just the stereotypical guy in the ragged shirt. It's surprising."

Photos by Deb Cobb/The Connection

Nurse Practitioner Lori McLean, a member of the Fairfax County Health Department, reaches out to the homeless community to get homeless individuals and families connected with Fairfax County's Community Health Care Network. She travels with basic first aid supplies to provide on the spot assistance to anyone who might request services. On Aug. 10, she is searching through her trunk for over the counter pain reliever for one of her clients.

Nurse Practitioner Lori McLean, McLean provides antibiotic ointment packets to a homeless man who requests them for a scrape on his elbow on Aug. 10.

Success Means Business

What may be even more surprising is that Fairfax County has been successful in tackling what many consider an intractable problem. While many communities across the country have seen a slight rise in their homeless population, Fairfax County has managed to reduce the number of homeless by 15.6 percent, from 1,835 people in 2008 to 1,549 in 2011. Instrumental to that success was the Board's decision to establish an Office to Prevent and End Homelessness (OPEH) in 2008, created to manage, coordinate and monitor day-to-day implementation of the 10-year-plan.

"I believe that the establishment of the OPEH created the community focal point that we needed to effectively address the issue of homelessness," said Supervisor Linda Smyth (D-Providence). "For years, we had many advocacy groups and non-profits that tackled homelessness in their own ways with their own limited resources. The Office to Prevent and End Homelessness has been able to pull together all these groups and coherently direct their energies to achieve the successes that we have seen."

Bulova said a disciplined business-like approach, combined with the community's compassion has resulted in reducing the number of homeless.

"Even during the recession years, when we were not creating new things, we created one new thing, and that was the Office to Prevent and End Homelessness, and we hired one person, Dean Klein, as the

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Making A Plan

The Connection examines Fairfax plan to prevent, end homelessness.

It seems like a naïve goal. Poverty has been around forever, and the homeless, no matter how prosperous a nation or a county might be, seem to be omnipresent.

But in 2008, Fairfax County, one of the nation's most affluent localities, committed itself to preventing and ending homelessness in 10 years. That commitment is not just one of money and personnel, but of a partnership that extends throughout the community, from church kitchens that daily prepare meals for people living on the streets, to shelters that aid displaced teens and families, to businesses that raise money and provide volunteers, to social workers and health care providers that assist individuals facing substance abuse and mental health challenges.

The Fairfax County government may have established the initiative, but it's the county's residents who have helped it to achieve success.

In three years, Fairfax County has managed to reduce the number of homeless by 15.6 percent, from 1,835 people in 2008 to 1,549 in 2011.

This special issue of The Connection examines what has led to this achievement, but also what work remains to be done. In these pages and on The Connection website [www.connectionnewspapers.com], readers will meet some of the individuals carrying out the county's 10-year plan and hear from some of the people who have received services.

Also, readers will find resources on how to access some of the county services offered and how to help with the effort.

In researching this story, one comment heard again and again was this: if you meet a homeless person – "up-close and personal," as Fairfax County Board of Supervisors Chairman Sharon Bulova said, you cannot turn your back.

The Connection would like to thank Dean Klein, the director of the Office to Prevent & End Homelessness, and the many other individuals who helped with the research for this project.

— Connection Staff

Guest Editorial

Advocating for The Homeless

FACETS advocates for unsheltered population.

By Amanda Andere
FACETS

Donated Photo

Amanda Andere

FACETS envisions a day when everyone in Fairfax County has access to adequate and affordable housing and nobody is homeless.

I want to be part of ending homelessness in my community.

So much of what I and my staff do, as advocates for people who are homeless and suffering the effects of poverty, is about encouragement, resourcefulness and resiliency.

Living and working in one of the wealthiest communities in the country, poverty in Fairfax County so often goes unnoticed. We help and encourage people to understand the needs of those who live in poverty and the lack of affordable housing. We encourage people to make a difference in the lives of their neighbors, get involved and extend a helping hand up.

At FACETS, our case managers meet regularly with families and individuals who are homeless or on the brink of losing their home. For our clients, it is a time of uncertainty, upheaval, stress, fear and change as they adapt to new social and economic realities, but they are not on their own. Our case managers encourage them to set and achieve goals for stable housing and are just a call away if there are any needs or worries.

We are always looking for innovative ways to collaborate with other agencies, partners and organizations in the community to share resources for the benefit of our clients and provide services more effectively and efficiently.

The program staff at FACETS helps the people we serve connect to resources for housing, clothing, food and other basic needs.

"It's challenging to meet clients and attempt to engage them and be an interpreter of the world of homelessness for them," said Logan, our Family Services team leader.

My staff might meet unsheltered individuals under bridge overpasses or in the woods to help them access needed medical or dental care. Another day, staff might go with clients to a SkillSource Center to help them perform job searches or help them write resumes and prepare for interviews. Every day demands something different.

As advocates, we do face challenges — lack of awareness or funding, overcoming stereotypes and barriers — but I look to and am inspired by the resiliency of my dedicated and professional program staff, more than 3,000 caring volunteers and the people we serve.

Our vision for a community where nobody is homeless is an inclusive community that recognizes and values the talents and contributions each member makes. Brooke, one of our case managers working with families, understands that part of her job is to bring together diverse groups of people to dispel stereotypes associated with homelessness; lessening the alienation of people who are homeless is important for their dignity and their ability to be resilient. And while it is difficult to see people struggle, we know that can be followed by seeing them meet their own goals and move into their new home

Amanda Andere is the executive director of FACETS.

The hot meal prep team from Christ Lutheran Church of Fairfax puts together 100 meals to distribute on a hot meals run with FACETS on Aug. 10. From left are Elizabeth Simpson, Phyllis Harrington, Alice Marsolais, Jan Walters, Pat Nau, Kathy Putnam, David Rourk and Allen Griffith.

Phyllis Harrington of Christ Lutheran Church of Fairfax spoons a pasta dish into containers that will be placed in coolers and then in a van that she will drive to four locations in Fairfax and then distributed to homeless individuals and families on the evening of Aug. 10. The volunteers will run out of meals before they run out of hungry people. They return to the kitchen to make sandwiches to feed those who didn't get meals.

Photos & Text
by Deb Cobb

Hot Meals Served Daily

Volunteers prepare, distribute hot food to the homeless.

In Combination with 35 faith communities, FACETS, an outreach organization in Fairfax County, provides 42,000 hot meals to home less individuals and families living in and around four sites along Fairfax Boulevard in Fairfax every year.

On Wednesday, Aug. 10, the members of Christ Lutheran Church of Fairfax were on duty for the FACETS hot meals program, they made 100 meals for the run. Included in the evening's menu was French bread, cookies, a banana, milk or bottled water, a pasta dish with meat sauce or a peanut butter and jelly sandwich for vegetarians. Volunteers ran out of meals by the third stop on the run.

> "This kitchen was built for the sole purpose of feeding the homeless."
> — Allen Griffith

Volunteer Allen Griffith said that the church sees this homeless outreach as a critical mission. "This kitchen was built for the sole purpose of feeding the homeless," he said.

In 2003, the congregation celebrated its 50th anniversary by initiating a $100,000 upgrade to the kitchen to have it meet commercial codes so the congregation could participate in homeless meal outreach.

FACETS provides hot meals to the homeless once every day and twice on Sundays.

Unsheltered Teens Find a Safe Haven

Alternative House provides homeless students shelter, services and support.

By Victoria Ross
The Connection

When Aliyah Jones reunited with her mother a few years ago, she had every hope that their fractured relationship would evolve into a strong mother–daughter bond.

Instead, when Jones turned 18, her mother packed her daughter's bags, dropped them off at school and told her daughter to find another place to live.

"I still love my mom, and I think she loves me, but she picked her husband over me," said the soft-spoken 19-year-old, who graduated from Robert E. Lee High School this past spring. "I keep thinking that I can't believe she picked him over me. It hurts. "

Jones' father and grandparents live in Barbados, where Jones spent most of her youth, but she said she did not want to return to Barbados because few opportunities exist there for teens that come from poor families. "Most of the kids back home get married right out of high school, and then they work at the grocery store or one of the resorts, if they are lucky," she said. "I have other dreams."

Without a place to sleep, Jones, who describes herself as shy student who maintained decent grades, said she told a counselor what happened. The counselor helped her secure a place to live at a group home in Vienna, run by Alternative House, a Dunn Loring-based nonprofit. The home, located on a quiet, leafy street, has room for four girls between the ages of 18-20, as well as a counselor and therapist.

Jones is part of a growing number of teens in Fairfax County who are considered homeless or "unaccompanied" — without parents, guardians or reliable shelter — but remain in the school system. In 2009, according to Alternative House, there were 104 homeless or unaccompanied students; in March 2011, Alternative House counted 225 such students.

> "These teens are very vulnerable in those years between 18 and 20."
>
> **— Judith Dittman, director of Alternative House**

The surge of homeless teens in Fairfax County, one of only two counties in the nation with median household incomes above $100,000, reflects a national trend, spurred by a shaky economy that often undermines families who are already unstable, either financially or because of abuse and neglect.

"These teens are very vulnerable in those years between 18 and 20. It's an age where a little nudge can push them one way or another, " said Judith Dittman, director of Alternative House, adding that adult shelters are not a good option for homeless teens that want to remain in school.

"They are so vulnerable to being preyed upon by older residents, and the atmosphere is not conducive to completing homework assignments and other school activities."

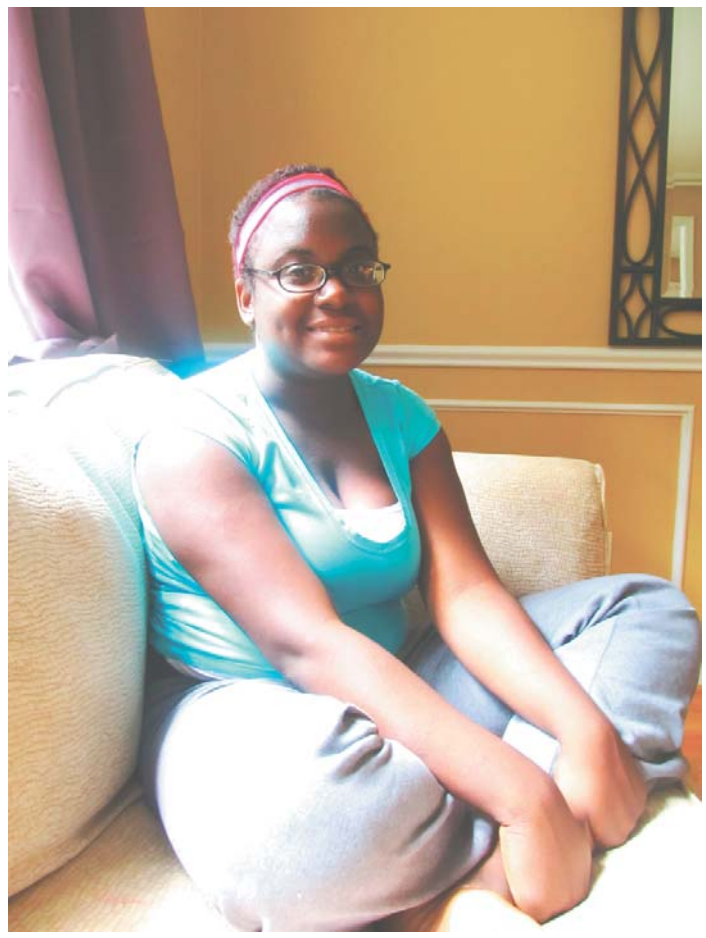

Photo by Victoria Ross/The Connection

Aliyah Jones, 19, sits on the sofa at her group home in Vienna, run by Alternative House, a nonprofit that launched a homeless youth initiative for students between the ages of 18 and 20.

Over the course of the 2009-10 school year, Alternative House worked with 65 students. "No student was housed in an adult homeless shelter, and only one student dropped out of school," said Dittman.

In some ways, Jones was lucky. She found housing right away. But most of the 225 homeless students spend months "couch surfing," according Dittman.

"If they have no stability, if they don't know where they are going to sleep tonight, or they go from friend to friend, sleeping on couches, what we call 'couch-surfing,' then we consider that homeless. Or if they're starting to slip into a pattern where there are 12 people in two-bedroom apartment, and they have to sleep with someone to keep their place, that's not acceptable," Dittman said.

In 2009, using federal stimulus dollars, Alternative House launched its nationally recognized Homeless Youth Initiative. The program grew out of a task force formed around the issue of how to house homeless teens still in high school. Although the stimulus dollars ran out last year, Fairfax County approved a special line-item in its FY2011 budget to provide 50 percent of the program's $235,000 annual

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Program Offers Hope for Homeless Schoolchildren

Project Hope assists Fairfax County schools.

By Meredith Zettlemoyer
The Connection

In Fairfax County, 2,200 students are homeless or in unstable housing conditions. These students live in emergency shelters, motels, parks, hospitals, public stations, abandoned buildings and even cars.

"The economy presents the challenge of finding affordable housing," said Kathi Sheffel, the homeless liaison for Fairfax County Public Schools. Her job is to train community and school personnel to deal with situations at school and make parents aware of their students' rights.

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act requires immediate enrollment in school, even without access to medical or residence documents. The students are to receive transportation and education without a mandatory report to Child Protective Services, so families can make the decision together in safe circumstances.

Any student defined as "homeless," meaning that they are living in an inadequate or temporary setting, has the right to attend school even without a permanent address. They could be living outside the county, but are legally able to remain at the school they started studying at.

"The most important thing is to notify our office," Sheffel said. "[Students] can find care and support even if [parents] are reluctant, and we can reassure the safety of the child."

The county provides services to the students through Project Hope, the state program that provides funding for the education of homeless children. Working with Virginia Department of Education and the College of William and Mary's School of Education, Virginia works to ensure the enrollment, attendance and success of through public awareness efforts and subgrants. The state funds activities such as early childhood education, mentoring and tutoring, parent education, summer enrichment programs, emergency services, health referrals, transportation, supplies, and costs relating to school records.

> "There are a variety of activities and resources we have developed to serve children and youth experiencing homelessness."
>
> **— Patricia Popp, state coordinator of Project Hope-VA**

"There are a variety of activities and resources we have developed to serve children and youth experiencing homelessness," said Patricia Popp, the state coordinator of Project Hope-VA. "Fairfax County Public Schools is one of our subgrants, and they have a very comprehensive program with passionate staff."

Transportation is provided to and from the school, either from a homeless shelter or a chosen location. Last year, 532 were transported from temporary housing to schools. Schools also provide free meals via the Free and Reduced Lunch program, supplies and winter coats, as well as referring students to community programs for other basic needs including food stamps, housing and healthcare. Tutoring is also provided at the

See Schoo-Age, Page 6

Photo by Robbie Hammer/The Connection

Soraya Boria and Mirtha Borja of Alternative House's outreach program, hand out water and pretzels to some children playing soccer in the Seven Corners area and to tell them about their teen center in the Culmore neighborhood in Falls Church.

Helping Out to Teens

Alternative House offers refuge to teens facing tough situations.

By Judith Dittman
Alternative House

Guest Editorial

The first young man who entered our Homeless Youth Initiative has become my "poster child" for telling people about what a difference this program makes in people's lives.

"John" was 18 and a junior in high school when his father kicked him out of the house. His Dad had a substance abuse problem and often acted erratically. John went from friend to friend, "couch surfing" until he ran out of friends in late August; just before the start of his senior year. A social worker placed him in a small adult homeless shelter.

His very first night there John was propositioned by his roommate. The next morning, he fled the shelter and was sleeping in the bleachers of his high school football stadium because that was where he felt safest.

Alternative House has an emergency shelter for teenagers that provides a safe haven to runaway, homeless and abused young people 13-17-years old, but John was 18. We were able to get a waiver of the rules and brought John in to safety.

Working with the faith community, we located a woman who would rent a room to John. It was close to his high school, his girlfriend and his job, but John couldn't make enough money to cover the rent and continue to attend school. Through Alternative House's Homeless Youth Initiative, we were able to pay $325 a month towards his $500 rent. John paid the rest.

Photo by Robbie Hammer/The Connection

Judith Dittman, executive director of Alternative House

John stayed in school and graduated on time. He is working full-time as a car salesman and his employers love him. He's also going to community college. The small investment this community made in John has resulted in a young man with a future versus a homeless high school drop-out. It also means we have a successful citizen not someone in our shelters or jail. Everyone wins here.

Judith Dittman is executive director of Alternative House, the abused and homeless children's refuge.

CSB Is Breaking Down Barriers To Serve Clients

Community Services Board provides mental health, substance abuse services to homeless.

By Victoria Ross
The Connection

Many Fairfax County agencies provide services that help the homeless population. The Fairfax-Falls Church Community Services Board, established in 1969 by state mandate, is one agency that tackles the subset of the homeless population that has multiple issues, such as substance and alcohol abuse and mental health and intellectual disabilities.

"The primary emphasis is those individuals who are the most disabled which includes people who are homeless or challenged to find adequate housing," said George Braunstein, executive director of the CSB.

With nearly 1,200 staff members, the CSB provides a full range of community and clinic-based services at various outreach locations. Services include psychiatric evaluations and medications, case management, community supports to help individuals live effectively in the community, job training and support and housing support.

"The CSB is major partner and an important piece of the puzzle, because they deal with the needs of the chronic homeless," said Dean Klein, director of the Office to Prevent & End Homelessness.

"We also provide emergency and crisis services as needed. We serve over 20,000 people annually, most of whom are not homeless, but may be in danger of becoming homeless. About 1,000 of our clients are homeless," Braunstein said.

The CSB works closely with the Office to Prevent and End Homelessness to address the housing and service needs of people who are homeless who have mental health and substance use problems.

"One example of that is the development of our Intensive Case Management Teams that work with people currently living in the Homeless Shelters. Our teams provide services and assist with finding adequate housing," Braunstein said.

Braunstein, who has worked with homeless clients since the 1970s said the clients that the CSB sees now have an increasing amount of complex problems.

"It's very rare that we see someone who has simple diagnosis or single problem. We are doing a variety of things to integrate more health care into our services, because many of our clients have serious chronic problems. It's like peeling away the layers of an onion. Once you solve one problem, there's another problem just underneath it," Braunstein said.

"I've seen some improvement in dealing with people in a way that's more medical instead of punitive. Substance abuse is an illness, but the stigma is still very great," he said. Braunstein said his experience has taught him that no one is hopeless. "I treated this one man who was considered hopeless. He now runs a group home. Stories like that inspire me, and show that there's always hope."

Braunstein said it's important that the community is aware of the challenges faced by the homeless.

"An adequate place to live that provides clean and safe shelter is essential to all human beings. We have an obligation remove unnecessary barriers so that people can address that basic need. No one chooses to be homeless. They didn't choose to have an illness that takes away their ability to problem-solve, and they need our help."

> "An adequate place to live that provides clean and safe shelter is essential to all human beings. We have an obligation remove unnecessary barriers so that people can address that basic need."
>
> **— George Braunstein, executive director of the CSB**

Learn More

- ❖ CSB Entry and Referral Services – available Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. This is the starting point for accessing intellectual disability, mental health or substance abuse services through the CSB. Staff can take calls in English and Spanish and can access other languages when needed. 703-383-8500 | TTY: 711
- ❖ CSB Emergency Services - available 24 hours a day. 703-573-5679 | TTY: 703-207-7737
- ❖ Fairfax Detoxification Center - available 24 hours a day. 703-502-7000 | TTY: 703-322-9080
- ❖ Alcohol & Drug Assessment and Referral Center - 703-359-7040 | TTY: 711
- ❖ Infant & Toddler Connection - 703-246-7121 | TTY: 703-324-4495
- ❖ Intellectual Disability Services - 703-324-4400 | TTY: 703-324-4495
- ❖ Central Services Administrative Unit - 703-324-7000 | TTY: 711

Reaching Out To Teens

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cost. The rest is raised through various partnerships with community and faith-based organizations and individual donations.

"We don't receive any federal funding. Fairfax County really stepped up to the plate for us. I'm not sure we could manage if we had to raise the entire amount through donations," Dittman said.

Students are housed through three programs. In addition to the group home in Vienna, four host homes accept students at no charge, similar to a family housing an exchange student, and rent vouchers assist working students to pay for an apartment or a room in a home.

During the 2009-10 school year, seven young women were housed in the group home, three students were in host homes and 26 received rent vouchers. Another 29 students received case management and mental health assistance, but did not require a housing subsidy.

"In the past school year, we housed 45 students, and none dropped out of school," Dittman said, adding that the program collaborates with Fairfax County Public Schools to provide tutoring and other educational services.

"Part of our mission is transforming the lives of at-risk youth and children, and we feel that many of our partners have gathered around these kids to get them to the next step. Everyone wants to see these kids graduate and have a chance in life. Some of these teens would be sleeping on a bench if it weren't for places like Alternative House, and we're thankful for the community's support," she said.

Of those 45 students helped by Alternative House in 2010-11, 27 students were on track to attend college full-time in the fall.

Jones is one of those students. She is attending a four-year college in West Virginia this fall. She said she wants to major in business administration, so she can own a hair salon someday and bring her siblings from Barbados to the area.

"My mother's husband, he didn't even think I would graduate. I always had someone around me telling me I wasn't going to make it," she said. Jones said she tried last month to get her mother to take a trip with her to West Virginia, to see the college. "She just didn't show up."

"She's a very strong girl, who has to make decisions that no child should have to make. These are the students who we help, and who will become successful citizens giving back to our community," Dittman said.

Alternative House

Alternative House:
Founded in 1972, Alternative House provides support to at-risk children, youth and families through counseling, shelter, crisis intervention and neighborhood outreach. AH focuses on giving shelter and aid to children and teenagers who are living on the streets. Its Assisting Young Mothers (AYM) program, started in 2002, helps teen mothers through counseling, shelter and education. The Homeless Youth Initiative, launched in 2009, provides safe transitional housing to homeless students attending Fairfax County Public Schools.

Currently, AH is asking the community to support its "back-to-school" wish list. Without support from the community, young people who participate in AH's community outreach programs — Culmore Teen Center, Annandale Safe Youth Project and Culmore Safe youth Project — will go back to school without supplies. AH is accepting the following donations: lined paper, spiral notebooks, color markers, glue sticks, copy paper, flash cards, calculators and backpacks. For more information, contact Gina Cocomello at 703-506-9191 or gina_cocomello@thealternativehouse.org.

School-age Children

From Page 4

shelters to ensure that students receive basic schooling.

No agency actively seeks out homeless children. People contact the Homeless Liaison Office by phone at 571-423-4332 if they see students out of school. "We then follow up on the call and reach out to the parents," said Sheffel. Any contact in order to access the programs are done by e-mail to Kathi.Sheffel@fcps.edu, providing a name and ID number, the name and address of the school, an address where the student wants to be picked up, and a parent emergency contact.

Fairfax County provides the resources necessary to obtain a successful education. Their staff is responsible for ensuring that all children, regardless of income or address, are enrolled and receive equal access to education and support services.

Housing complements the efforts of education, increasing achievement and reducing absenteeism. Fewer moves between schools lessen the disruptions to education, leading to fewer negative spillovers on the students and their classmates. Housing and support leads to higher test scores, completion of high school, and even university enrollment because they reduce concentrated poverty and help students and their families access neighborhood opportunities.

Community Service Groups

Numerous government, non-profit agencies available to help unsheltered individuals.

According to the 2011 Point in Time Count, which took place on Jan. 26, 1,549 people were considered homeless in the Fairfax-Falls Church Community. Of those, 666 were single individuals and 883 were people in families. While the county's initiative to prevent and end homelessness in the next 10 years is ongoing, agencies and non-profit organizations all around the area focus on helping homeless families and children with remaining in their homes thus preventing homelessness, and also help others to find housing when they become homeless as well as offer food and other services to some of our most vulnerable citizens. Local non-profit organizations are in need of more volunteers to assist those in need.

FACETS: www.facetscares.org FACETS began as a meal distribution outreach effort in 1988, today is an established non-profit organization with programs to provide shelter, food, and medical attention for those unable to provide for themselves. It is the only organization that gives supporting services to families on the waitlist to enter a Fairfax County homeless shelter.

Alternative House: www.thealternativehouse.org AH focuses on giving shelter and aid to children and teenagers that are living on the streets. Its Assisting Young Mothers (AYM) program, begun in 2002, helps parenting teens through counseling, shelter and teaching. The Homeless Youth Initiative began in 2009 in cooperation with FCPS, and provides safe transitional housing to homeless students.

Reston Interfaith: www.restoninterfaith.org Founded in 1970, Reston Interfaith runs multiple housing and community outreach programs to help those that are homeless and struggling in Northern Virginia. Among its housing programs is Housing Counseling/Foreclosure Mitigation and Prevention, which helps prevent families from losing their homes. The Emergency and Self-Sufficiency Services Program distributes emergency food and hygiene supplies to families that need them, as well as backpacks and school supplies in the fall.

New Hope Housing: www.newhopehousing.org According to its website, New Hope Housing is the oldest and largest provider of shelter to the homeless of Northern Virginia. Its mission is to provide both shelter and the tools to build a better life. New Hope Housing has other community programs, but its main focus is on housing. It offers shelters, transitional housing and supportive housing for those with disability needs.

Carpenter's Shelter: www.carpentersshelter.org Carpenter's Shelter focuses on giving homeless families a place to rest and rehabilitate, while teaching them how to transition into a stable home. The organization provides three different shelters, one of them specifically for the winter season, which serve over 400 families and people a year. Carpenter's Shelter focuses on the transitional period between homelessness and having a home, as well as homelessness prevention through a program called Aftercare.

Homestretch: www.homestretch-inc.org Created in 1990, Homestretch is the largest provider of transitional housing in Fairfax County, and offers a wide variety of services that are focused on helping the homeless better their lives through education. Homestretch's Employment Center deals primarily with training adults with job placement and job readiness skills, and teaches essentials in ESL, GED and computer skills classes. Psychotherapy, substance abuse counseling and domestic violence support are also available at Homestretch's Falls Church location.

Shelter House, Inc: www.shelterhouse.org A community-based non-profit, Shelter House follows the Housing First model, with the main priority to re-house every family that begins one of their six unique housing programs. Shelter House was selected as the 2011 Outstanding Corporate Citizenship "Non-profit of the Year" by the Fairfax County Chamber of Commerce. Through its Community Case Management programs, they also follow up with families in-transition, providing services like debt reduction and employment training to prevent return to homelessness.

United Community Ministries: www.ucmagency.org UCM is a social service agency that provides four different housing programs for people in need, as well as a Workforce Development Center to help prepare people for moving forward with their jobs. Offered Emergency Assistance Programs include a food pantry, one-time grants/loans for rent or mortgage, financial support for medical purposes and budget counseling.

Pathway Homes: www.pathwayhomes.org Pathway Homes focuses on providing housing and support services to individuals with mental illnesses, with the mission to help these individuals reach their full potential and lead stable lives. They offer both in-home programs, semi-indepdent houses and assisted living facilities.

Northern Virginia Family Services: www.nvfs.org NVFS provides multiple specialized services, including special foster care and multicultural human services. They have transitional housing services, as well SERVE, a 60-bed emergency shelter and the largest food distribution center in the county.

Good Shepherd Housing and Family Services: www.goodhousing.org
The goal of GSH, created in 1974, is to help bring an end to homelessness while promoting the self-sufficiency of homeless individuals. Their programs include apartment budgeting counseling, emergency grant servces, and housing locating. GSH manages 70 housing units.

Volunteers of America Chesapeake (operate Baileys Shelter): http://www.voaches.org
With a history spanning over a century, the Volunteers of America Chesapeake operates the Bailey's Crossroads Community Shelter, and provides assistance through medical care, counseling, education and training for homeless individuals that stay at the shelter.

Our Daily Bread: www.our-daily-bread.org A volunteer based organization, ODB focuses on food outreach to aid the homeless, with bi-weekly delivery of food and supplies to 60 qualified families and a food pantry for emergency services. ODB also provides financial assistance and runs a back-to-school program to help give school supplies to children in need.

The Lamb Center: www.thelambcenter.org A Christian day-time drop-in center for the homeless, the Lamb Center provides facilities, medical referrals, transportation assistance and Alcoholics Anonymous meetings to guests, for free.

One of the Lamb Center's goals is to prepare visitors with employment skills so that they can become self-sustaining citizens.

A Man with a Mission

Q&A with Dean Klein, director of the Office to Prevent & End Homelessness

In 2009, Fairfax County hired Dean Klein to oversee its newly created Office to Prevent and End Homeless (OPEH), a critical piece of its 10-year mission to prevent and end homelessness by 2018.

In the past two years, Klein has managed to navigate through an unsteady and insecure economy, as well as a trend toward the suburbanization of homelessness, to reduce the county's homeless population by 15.6 percent. In December, 2008, Fairfax County counted 1,835 people who were homeless; in Jan. 2011, that number was 1,549.

The OPEH has also garnered national attention for its success, as well as its strategies to more accurately measure the homeless population. Klein previously worked at the Freddie Mac Foundation, where he oversaw corporate philanthropic investments to 100 local and national homelessness/housing nonprofits.

"I knew we were going to make progress when Dean Klein brought to a governing board meeting an extremely well-orchestrated business plan," said Fairfax County Board of Supervisors Chairman Sharon Bulova (D-At-Large). "He did a triage, so to speak. We all felt pretty comforted that we were going about this in a way that was incremental, measurable, transparent and businesslike."

— Victoria Ross

What are the key ingredients to your success as the Director of the County's Office to Prevent & End Homelessness (OPEH)?

One of the keys to my success is integrating myself with others who are also committed to our important mission of ending homelessness in 10 years. I have been very fortunate to be able to work with such a talented staff at OPEH, who are all seasoned leaders who understand the complex issues facing the homeless in our community and are willing to explore and implement new and different approaches that are challenging but bring strong results. Engaging the nonprofit, business, faith and government sectors fully has been extremely significant. I am so appreciative of the strong nonprofit partners who really believe in our goals and have been willing to honestly and wholeheartedly commit daily to changing lives and for our most vulnerable citizens. This certainly includes enormous changes to service delivery and priorities with limited resources but has brought increased impact on the lives of homeless in our community. Data and Outcomes are important elements that I prioritize and that our community has committed to really focus on which provides all of us with transparency, more clarity and opportunities to make the changes necessary for us to prevent and end homelessness in our community. I cannot stress how important my family is to my success at work- their support and belief in me and our work helps me to strive for excellence.

You chose to go to Howard University, a predominately African-American school. Why?

Howard School of Social Work was the only graduate program that I applied to. The Howard School of Social Work has such an amazing history of preparing professionals to be successful social workers, change agents and leaders in our local community and all over the world. Attending the master's in social work program provided me with a unique opportunity to experience being a minority as a Caucasian. I feel it is an important perspective as a social worker, when serving minority populations,and important

Dean Klein talks with Michael Vizzuto, a social worker at the Embry Rucker Community Shelter in Reston.

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Why Are People Homeless?

Many factors can leave individuals without a place to live.

By Victoria Ross
The Connection

Two trends are largely responsible for the rise in homelessness in the past 25 years, according to local homeless advocates: a growing shortage of affordable rental housing and a simultaneous increase in poverty.

"No one chooses to be homeless," said George Braunstein, director of Fairfax County's Community Services Board, a state-mandated agency that provides services for those with mental health, substance abuse and disability needs in the county.

"People, for a variety of reasons, who never imagined being homeless, are often faced with an illness, or a substance abuse problem, or domestic violence situation, and it becomes so challenging that it affects their ability to problem-solve, and, in some cases, homelessness is the end result," Braunstein said.

Michael Vizzuto, a case worker for the Embry Rucker Shelter in Reston, said that lack of social supports — friends, family or religious and community groups — is a common thread in many of the homeless individuals he encounters doing shelter and outreach work.

"That support system is critical in helping people with other issues, such as substance abuse, which may lead to homelessness," Vizzuto said.

A 2010 policy study released by The National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH), an advocacy and education organization based in Washington, D.C., outlined the top reasons why people become homeless.

❖ Foreclosure

Recently, foreclosures have increased the number of people who experience homelessness. The National Coalition for the Homeless released an entire report discussing the relationship between foreclosure and homelessness. The report found that there was a 32 percent jump in the number of foreclosures between April 2008 and April 2009. Since the start of the recession, six million jobs have been lost. In May 2009, the official unemployment rate was 9.4 percent. The National Low Income Housing Coalition estimates that 40 percent of families facing eviction due to foreclosure are renters and 7 million households living on very low incomes (31 - 50 percent of Area Median Income) are at risk of foreclosure.

❖ Poverty

Homelessness and poverty are inextricably linked. Poor people are frequently unable to pay for housing, food, childcare, health care, and education. Difficult choices must be made when limited resources cover only some of these necessities.

"Often it is housing, which absorbs a high proportion of income that must be dropped. If you are poor, you are essentially an illness, an accident, or a paycheck away from living on the streets," said Nan Roman, president and CEO of the NHC.

In 2008, 12.5 percent of the U.S. population, or 37 million people, lived in poverty. Children are overrepresented, composing 35.7 percent of people in poverty while only being 24.8 percent of the total population.

Two factors help account for increasing poverty: eroding employment opportunities for large segments of the workforce and the declining value and availability of public assistance.

❖ Eroding Work Opportunities

Reasons why homelessness persists include stagnant or falling incomes and less secure jobs which offer fewer benefits. While the employment picture is better in Fairfax County than in many regions of the country, the wage for workers who provide critical services — teachers, police, firefighters and social service workers — continue to lose ground financially in a faltering economy.

Low-wage workers have been particularly have been left behind as the disparity between rich and poor has mushroomed. According to The Economic Policy Institute, the real value of the minimum wage in 2004 was 26 percent less than in 1979.

Declining wages, in turn, have put housing out-of-reach for many workers: in every state, more than the minimum wage is required to afford a one- or two-bedroom apartment at Fair Market Rent. In Fairfax County, a one-bedroom apartment is typically about $1,200 a month.

"You would have to work two jobs at minimum wage, and maybe you could afford a one-bedroom apartment here," said Dan Pizzo, a social worker with Reston Interfaith.

A recent U.S. Conference of Mayors report stated that in every state more than the minimum-wage is required to afford a one or two-bedroom apartment at 30 percent of his or her income, which is the federal definition of affordable housing. Unfortunately, for 12 million Americans, more than 50 percent of their salaries go towards renting or housing costs, resulting in sacrifices in other essential areas like health care and savings.

❖ Other Factors

Particularly within the context of poverty and the lack of affordable housing, certain additional factors may push people into

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Community Partnership

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director. And it's a small office that makes a huge difference, because it's leveraged by a governing board that consists of corporate leaders and nonprofits," Bulova said.

"I knew we were going to make progress when Dean Klein brought to a governing board meeting an extremely well-orchestrated business plan, … He did a triage, so to speak. We all felt pretty comforted that we were going about this in a way that was incremental, measurable, transparent and businesslike," Bulova said.

An analysis of trends from 2008-11presented by the OPEH to the governing board in June showed the following results:

❖ Homeless families decreased by nearly 15 percent, from 311 in 2008 to 265 in 2011.

❖ The number of homeless children under 18 decreased by 20 percent, from 673 in 2008 to 539 in 2011.

❖ Single individuals decreased by 10.5 percent, from 744 in 2008 to 666 in 2011.

❖ HOST, a housing first initiative, prevented nearly 900 persons from becoming homeless during 2010.

"The partnerships we have with nonprofits, faith and corporate communities are an example of everybody at the table wanting to address this issue. And in Fairfax County, let me say we are a community that enjoys solving problems. We address the issues when something is troubling us," Bulova said.

She added that a grassroots movement to face the challenge of ending homelessness began in 2005 when churches, synagogues and mosques began hosting people during the winter to prevent hypothermia deaths.

"That was a significant starting point," Bulova said. "Volunteers in those faith communities had a chance to meet homeless people up-close and personal, and they understood that this was something that was not OK in their affluent community, and they were the ones who began demanding that Fairfax County do something other than just manage the homeless. They wanted to prevent and end it."

Bulova added that many of the faith volunteers also held high-profile positions at powerful corporations such as Northrop Grumman, Freddie Mac and SAIC, and they got their companies to become engaged in the effort.

Leaf said that from a business perspective, it makes sense for corporations to do as much as possible to help prevent and end homelessness.

"The presence of a large homeless population has a negative impact not just on the desirability of the community, but the overall climate," Leaf said. "If the community addresses the problem aggressively, it becomes a better place to live and work, and a much more pleasant place for children to grow up. That all combines to make it a better place to have a business. We just moved a large part of Northrop Grumman here, to Herndon in the Dulles corridor, and we want to make this area the best we can."

Last December, Northrop Grumman hosted a large event for other businesses in the region, to discuss the importance of being involved in the partnership and other efforts to help end homelessness.

David Bowers, vice president of Enterprise Community Partners (ECP), applauded Fairfax County's business-like approach during his speech at the Faith Engagement Initiative, hosted by the OPEH in May.

ECP is a nationally recognized organization with a mission to give people living in poverty an opportunity to move up and out. Bowers said ECP has raised and invested more than $11 billion in equity, grants and loans to help build or preserve more than 280,000 affordable rental and for-sale homes to create vital communities.

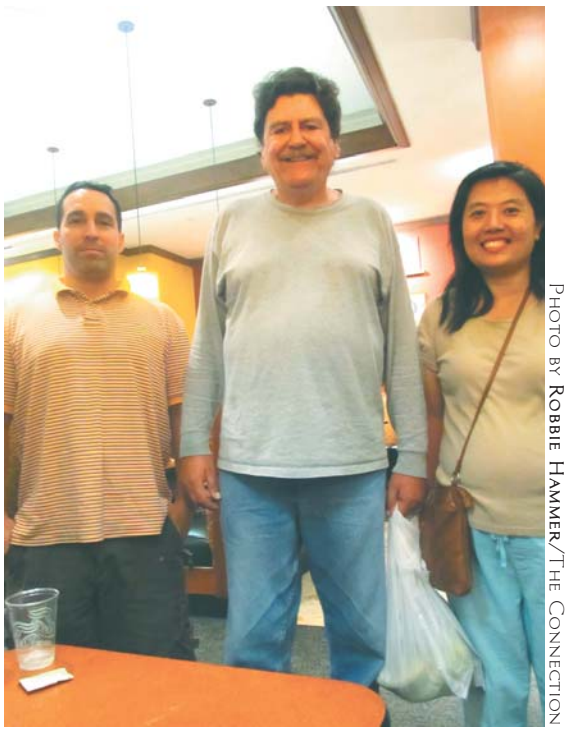

Photo by Robbie Hammer/The Connection

Michael Vizzuto, a social worker with Reston Interfaith, meets up with former homeless client, Roger Sitek and friend Yang Lee, at the Panera Bread in Reston Town Center. Sitek, who has multiple physical disabilities and used to sleep in his truck, now has an apartment in Reston and receives regular disability checks.

"There are a couple of elements in Fairfax County that are very encouraging. Number one is that the county has not only provided a 10-year-plan, but put the resources behind it, both financial and intellectual resources," Bowers said.

"When you look at who is on the governing board, it's a very impressive array of folks with diverse backgrounds, and that speaks volumes. … Fairfax County goes a step further by being very transparent with measurable results."

Klein said that in addition to engaging the traditional partners, such as the service and advocacy community, the partnership is very aware of how crucial the support of the business community is in succeeding.

"We always reach out and welcome new partners in this effort," Klein said. "This past year, many organizations including Google, Northrop Grumman, Target, Deltek and the Freddie Mac Foundation, helped raise awareness and donated time, talents and funds."

Affordable Housing

It may seem obvious, but to end homelessness, people need affordable homes.

"Housing has to be the primary focus," Hudgins said. "I think the change that has allowed us to be successful is our emphasis on rapid re-housing and wrap-around services. It's not about judging people who are homeless. It's about getting them housing, and then addressing some of the issues that led to

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homelessness. Other major factors, which can contribute to homelessness, include the following:

❖ **Lack of Affordable Health Care**: For families and individuals struggling to pay the rent, a serious illness or disability can start a downward spiral into homelessness, beginning with a lost job, depletion of savings to pay for care, and eventual eviction. One in three Americans, or 86.7 million people, is uninsured. Of those uninsured, 30.7 percent are under 18. In 2007-08, four out of five people that were uninsured were working families. According to a trend report released by Fairfax County in 2011, 108,605 persons — or 10.6 percent of the population — lack health insurance.

❖ **Domestic Violence**: Battered women who live in poverty are often forced to choose between abusive relationships and homelessness. In addition, 50 percent of the cities surveyed by the U.S. Conference of Mayors identified domestic violence as a primary cause of homelessness (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2009). According to a study released by the Office to Prevent and End Homelessness (OPEH), approximately 30 percent of the 892 homeless persons in families have been victims of domestic violence.

❖ **Mental Illness and Addiction Disorders**: Mental illness, substance abuse or both afflict approximately 60 percent of the total number of single individuals, about 667, in Fairfax County, according to the OPEH. Braunstein and other service providers say that mental health support services most needed include case management, housing, and treatment.

While rates of alcohol and drug abuse are disproportionately high among the homeless population, the increase in homelessness over the past two decades cannot be explained by addiction alone, according to the NHC. Many people who are addicted to alcohol and drugs never become homeless, but people who are poor and addicted are clearly at increased risk of homelessness. "Addiction does increase the risk of displacement for the precariously housed; in the absence of appropriate treatment, it may seriously impact one's chances of getting housing. Homeless people often face insurmountable barriers to obtaining health care, including addictive disorder treatment services and recovery supports," Braunstein said.

Supervisor Hudgins Asks Public To Donate 2 Cents

Supervisor Cathy Hudgins (D-Hunter Mill) is asking Fairfax County residents to step up and help the community. At a May summit meeting on homelessness, the supervisor challenged taxpayers to donate the difference between Fiscal Year 2011 and Fiscal Year 2012's tax rates to aid the homeless.

"This is a year in which we reduced the tax rate from $1.09 to $1.07, and in order to realize that goal, many things were put on hold, including the homeless initiative," Hudgins said. "The pledge is a way for us to continue supporting a cause for our community."

The proposed donation comes out to around $10 for every $50,000 of a homeowner's property value. For a home valued at $500,000, Hudgins is asking the homeowner to donate $100.

With this 2-cent tax-rate reduction, the county lost almost $40 million for programs such as the Fairfax County Office to Prevent and End Homelessness (OPEH).

A December 2006 plan outlines the OPEH's vision to end homelessness in Fairfax County by 2016.

"The fact of the matter is that we aren't all OK, even with this reduction, and we all need to think about what more

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Q&A: Dean Klein

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in living and working in our diverse community. That experience clearly helped to shape my outlook, perspective and priorities personally and professionally. I also feel as though it has made me a more effective social worker and leader.

What in your background makes you uniquely qualified to tackle what many see as an intractable problem?

My professional experience over the past 20 years directly assisting homeless children, youth and families, directing various nonprofit organizations focused on homelessness as well as overseeing grants and funding for local and national nonprofit organizations, many of whom are focused on preventing and ending homelessness has prepared me well for my current leadership position. I have worked in Fairfax County and with most of the nonprofit organizations who serve the homeless throughout the past 20 years. I strongly believe that being an effective manager, director or leader in the human service field that you need direct experience working and helping others. This is something I have intentionally stressed as I moved through my career and those experiences continue to help me in being an effective director. I have worked to support a true open environment for collaboration and partnership that is welcoming enough to provide opportunities for people from the business, faith, government sectors to be part of the complex solutions needed for our community.

> "We must ... build momentum, drive to strong results while sharing regularly our challenges and outcomes and do so with compassion and humor."
>
> — Dean Klein

What is the question you get asked the most about the OPEH and/or homelessness in general?

When I speak in the community, people always want to know how is it possible that we have such an affluent community with so many in our community prospering at the same time we have people living in tents in the woods.

What does preventing and ending homelessness mean to you?

Preventing and ending homelessness to me is about together as a community changing the odds for those who are homeless, changing their odds for success to achievable, to probable and ultimate success to be independent in our community. No small challenge there. Ultimately, it is about making sure that every person who is homeless and or at-risk of homelessness can access housing that is affordable with necessary services and supports needed for them to be independent in our community.

Do you have a motto?

"We must collectively build momentum, drive to strong results while sharing regularly our challenges and outcomes and do so with compassion and humor."

Who are your heroes in real life?

Martin Luther King Jr., my grandfather who showed me how to be a good person and my parents and family, where I learned and about the importance of helping others.

10-Year Mission

Prevention Is First Step

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homelessness. If we don't do that, we're constantly chasing our tails."

In the past decade, the basic philosophy of how to address the homeless problem has undergone a progressive shift. Instead of "managing" the homeless population, the emphasis is on preventing and ending homelessness through rapid re-housing.

"If you are going to be successful in meeting the goals of preventing and ending homelessness, rapid re-housing solves one huge underlying problem, which is ensuring an individual or family has a place to live," said Paul Sampson, director of the Fairfax County Department of Housing and Community Development. "But homelessness is often accompanied by other chronic problems that can range from unemployment, substance abuse, domestic violence or health problems. To face these issues without a roof over your head is extremely difficult and makes rapid re-housing critical. But the end goal is a long term and stable housing situation for the household, and we need support for services that address these other chronic problems."

Sampson said a new program, Bridging Affordability, is an integral part of the county's Housing Blueprint, and will provide long-term rental subsidies to 72 homeless individuals and families, and an additional 303 households on the county's affordable housing waiting lists.

The program, which is just getting underway, is operated under a $3.8 million, three-year contract with Northern Virginia Family Services.

As of March, most of those on the housing waiting list are not homeless, but individuals or families who fall into the low-income category. When housing does become available, Sampson said, those who are homeless move to the top of the list.

"Housing is the critical piece we need to move forward with the core element of Fairfax County's 10-year-plan to prevent and end homelessness in the Fairfax-Falls Church community by 2018. Our strategy now is rapid re-housing, developing ways to quickly move people who are homeless, or in threat of becoming homeless, to permanent, safe and affordable housing," Klein said.

"In the past, we've been able to provide shelter, but without the ability to move people into affordable and appropriate housing, it's difficult to really start lowering the number of homeless," Klein said.

During the past year, Klein said OPEH has piloted some new initiatives to more quickly secure housing for people, including the establishment of the Housing Locator network operating countywide that works with landlords and provides training and coordination to housing locators and provides social workers the tools to become housing locators. In 2010, housing locaters worked with an average of 20 households per month.

"Housing locators provide services such as application assistance, landlord negotiation and training to prepare people either rent or own a home," Klein said.

According to Michael O'Reilly, chairman of the Governing Board of the Fairfax-Falls Church Partnership to Prevent and End Homeless, 482 people have moved into permanent housing from emergency shelters and transitional housing programs in FY 2010.

"The 10-year plan calls for 2,650 housing units to be made available over the 10-year-period in order to achieve our goals," O'Reilly said.

Creating affordable housing is key, homeless advocates insist, but it takes a sustained community effort.

According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), federal support for low-income housing has fallen 49 percent from 1980 to 2005.

In 2009, a worker would need to earn $14.97 an hour to afford a one-bedroom apartment and $17.84 to afford a two-bedroom apartment, according to the National Low Income Housing Coalition.

The lack of affordable housing has led to high rent burdens, which absorb a high proportion of income, overcrowding, and substandard housing. These problems have not only forced many people to become homeless; they have put a large and growing number of people at risk of becoming homeless.

"Whenever Fairfax County is touted as a wealthy county by its median household income, we need to remember that half of the households make less than the median, often a great deal less, so putting county resources toward housing, in effect, improves the housing standards for everyone," said Supervisor Penny Gross (D-Mason).

"Fairfax County's 10-Year Commitment to End Homelessness seemed like a daunting task when we adopted the concept two years ago. But the new program, combined with the previous success of the Board's commitment to preserve 1,000 affordable units in 1,000 days, means that more housing choices are available for more people who need them," Gross said.

Bulova said the "housing first" approach is a formula that makes sense, and is working.

"Previously, the approach was if someone was a drug addict or substance abuser, the rule was you have to clean up before we help you have a roof over your head. Think about how hard that is for someone, so housing first approach is to stabilize that person in a safe environment and then work with them to try to help them address the reasons for them losing their home, "Bulova said.

Looking Ahead

Bulova stressed that the 10-year-plan is supported by the entire Board of Supervisors, and that, for the most part, it is a non-partisan issue.

"As a board, we thought it was the right thing to do, and the community clearly thinks it's the right thing to do."

"Many of our homeless are disabled or suffer from mental illness and are unable to fully take care of themselves. They deserve our help as caring, engaged citizens," Supervisor John Cook (R-Springfield) said. "I will continue to push to direct a larger percentage of our human services dollars toward those most in need. In a county as wealthy as Fairfax, we should not have homeless neighbors, and we must continue our efforts until all have housing."

"By providing a range of services and supports, we have been able to prevent deaths from hypothermia, increase people's incomes, stabilize children in the school system, and place families in permanent housing," said Supervisor John Foust (D-Dranesville). "There is still much that needs to be done, but the county's program to prevent and end homelessness is working,"

"We have a small population of homeless, so it's something we should be able to get our arms around," Bulova said.

Amber Healy contributed to the reporting in this story.

Hiding in Plain Sight

Embry Rucker Shelter offers help and hope to man living in tent.

By Victoria Ross
The Connection

At 8 a.m. on a Friday in August, the temperature is already 87-degrees when Jimmy Cole wakes up. "The heat comes right through the tent. That and the traffic usually wake me up," Cole said.

Rugged and tan, the 48-year-old Cole said he likes being outdoors. But his tent in the woods is not pitched at one of the county's recreational campsites. It's in a wooded patch in the Reston-Herndon area, and Cole sleeps there because he is homeless.

He is one of Fairfax County's approximately 650 single homeless individuals, who for a variety of reasons — lack of credit, transportation and income — don't have permanent housing. Some sleep at one of the county's emergency or transitional shelters, others "couch surf" at the homes of friends or relatives. Some, ashamed to admit they are homeless, sleep in their cars or cheap motels, while they try to keep their jobs. Nearly 200 homeless individuals live in makeshift tents throughout the county.

Cole's tent, about 5-feet wide, has just enough space to crawl into and curl up at night. It has several brown tarps over it. "I don't like snakes, so that's really the one thing that bothers me at night," he said. Cole has been sleeping there for the past year, where his tent is camouflaged in the summer by tall pine trees. The area is near a busy intersection, and the roar of the traffic is non-stop.

Cole said he wakes up some mornings still surprised at his situation.

"I always worked somewhere. I held good factory jobs in Ohio, where I grew up, but then I lost that in 2008 when the economy turned sour," he said.

DIVORCED AND WITHOUT CHILDREN or other family, Cole said he decided to head to the Washington, D.C., area, where he thought there would be plenty of opportunities for work. In addition to factory work, Cole has experience as a landscaper and groundskeeper for golf courses.

When he first came to the area, he had a truck, and enough money saved to pay for a campsite at Burke Lake Park. He looked for work in construction and landscaping, and often drove into Washington, D.C., to see the sites.

"When my money ran out, I started to panic and everything came to a screeching halt. I tried to get construction jobs, whatever I could find. I looked through the telephone book for temp agencies, and got a job through Labor Ready in Tysons," he said.

For two years, Cole worked at Adesa, an auto action company in Sterling. He was paid minimum wage: $7.50 an hour, which is not enough to afford the fair-market rent of $1,200 for a one- bedroom apartment in the community. For two years, he essentially lived in his truck, going to the shelter during the winter months or when the heat was unbearable in the summer months. He said

Dean Klein, Fairfax County's director of the Office to Prevent and End Homelessness (OPEH), talks with Jimmy Cole about his plans for getting permanent housing.

he couldn't save any money, and barely managed living in his truck, but he liked having a steady job, and thought it would lead to something better.

Last year, during the worsening economy, he lost that job when the company cut its staff.

Like falling dominoes, Cole's life started to unravel. He sold his truck to make ends meet. He got a bike but someone stole it. He lost his birth certificate in the woods one night, so it's difficult for him to get official documentation, such as a Social Security card, that is required to get a driver's license, credit cards and other paperwork needed to get a job.

"I get depressed sometimes, but these guys help me out. They're helping me get my paperwork together so I can get a job again," Cole said, referring to social workers Dan Pizzo and Michael Vizzuto, who are two of the 20 full-time staff members at the Embry Rucker Community Shelter (ERCS) in Reston helping Coles.

THE ERCS is a 70-bed residential shelter that provides healthy, safe, emergency housing for families and single men and women, helping them to overcome barriers and transition to stable housing. The shelter provides drop-in services for the unsheltered homeless, those who, for lack of shelter space, live outdoors, in cars, or in other unsafe places. Drop in services includes hot meals, laundry and shower facilities, and a place where the homeless can meet with a case manager and access medical and mental health services. The shelter operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

"Jimmy's a great guy," Pizzo said. "When we do outreach, we build relationships with individuals, slowly gaining their trust and confidence because they don't have to come to us."

Pizzo said Coles is like a lot of single homeless adults in the county who don't have family or other support to help them through life's rough patches.

"I think that's the thread that runs through almost all of our homeless clients, the lack of a support system. In many cases, they don't want to be a burden, or they are immigrants and don't have friends and family nearby, or they have broken relationship because of a mental health or substance abuse issue," Pizzo said. "There's a plethora of reasons why they don't have family or friends they can turn to quickly. Some are too ashamed to tell their families they are in this situation."

The caseworkers try to be that support system, helping clients like Coles navigate the bureaucracy of the Department of Motor Vehicles and other government agencies that hold the keys to the documentation necessary for employment and housing.

"Documentation is a huge barrier," Pizzo said. "It can take months to gather all the required documents that you need to obtain a photo ID, which is often essential for finding work."

"I'm trying to help myself. I want to get out and better myself," Cole said. He said he has a high school diploma, but "I know I have to go back to school and learn a trade."

Cole said he wants to remain in the area. In addition to the connections he's made with the staff of Reston Interfaith, he said he has made good friends in the area. "Sometime we meet up at Panera in Reston Town Center to swap tips about jobs, and just talk," he said.

HIS TENT is near the Embry Rucker Shelter, so on "drop-in days," he can walk there to take a shower, do laundry, eat a hot meal or talk with caseworkers and get medical services from a nurse practitioner. In the summer, if the temperature hits the "red zone" of 93 degrees Fahrenheit or above, Coles can spend the day or night at the shelter, where clients might have to sleep on the floor.

During the day, Cole often spends time at Barnes & Noble or Starbucks, to read and get out of the heat.

"I like to read astronomy and sports magazines. I'm not a problem, so no one really notices me," he said.

"You would not know he is homeless, because he's out of context here. Fairfax County is not like D.C. or other large cities, where you see panhandlers or people sleeping on benches," said Pizzo.

ON FRIDAY afternoon, Aug. 12, Pizzo and Vizzuto are helping Cole with his tent, which has partially collapsed. Cole's tent is the only one currently in this patch of woods. Pizzo tells Cole that they have a donated mountain bike for him and that it just needs a new chain.

"It will be put to good use," Cole said. "I like to bike, and it's a better way to get around."

When asked where he thinks he will be a year from now, Cole doesn't hesitate. "I'd like to have a job, an apartment, and a girlfriend," he said. "This isn't a lifestyle for me. I'm a good worker. I know things will get better," he said.

"I'm a good worker. I know things will get better."
— Jimmy Cole

Photos by Victoria Ross/The Connection

Dan Pizzo, a social worker for Embry Rucker Community Shelter, helps Jimmy Cole with his tent that partially collapsed after a heavy rain. 'The weather is a huge factor in the day of the life of an unsheltered homeless person,' Pizzo said.

The Face of Homelessness

Woman with law degree finds help for her family at Katherine Hanley Shelter.

By Bonnie Hobbs
The Connection

Tennie Fails, 43, is not the kind of person one would expect to find in a homeless shelter. She's well-educated and has a law degree — yet that's where she and her three youngest children recently found themselves.

"I need a job and housing," she said during her stay there. "And I need to work every day. If not, that's a day that, without the Katherine Hanley Family Shelter, the kids wouldn't have food or a roof over their heads."

Fails was named after her father, Tennessee, who died in a car accident in November 1967. She was born four months later. Raised in Greensburg, La., she obtained her law degree from Southern University Law Center in May 1996.

When she moved to Virginia in 1997, she was a single mother, sharing custody of her two daughters, then 1 and 3, with their father. While working at a law firm in Washington, D.C., in 1998, she met and fell in love with a lawyer there. They married and had three children, now 9, 7 and 5.

In March 2006, they moved back to Louisiana so Fails could be closer to her ailing, paternal grandmother. She died that December, but Fails' family remained in Louisiana until her husband's firm sent him back to this area in October 2010.

"We were living in Fair Oaks," she said. "His firm put us up in a hotel while we looked for a place to live. Two of the three youngest children were in school, and the two older girls were with their biological father in Ohio."

Then came the end of the world, as Fails knew it. On March 23, her husband was arrested. He was charged in Louisiana and Virginia with molesting a child. "He's in the Fairfax County Adult Detention Center, but his case hasn't come to court, yet, and he's awaiting extradition to Louisiana."

Since Fails had been staying at home, taking care of their youngest son, her husband was the family's only source of income. So once he was arrested, her financial problems spiraled out of control.

"His company had only paid for two weeks in the hotel, and my savings had paid for the rest and were depleted," she said. "I had to find a job and somewhere else to live."

Between 1998 and 2006, she'd worked as a substitute teacher in FCPS; so from April until school ended, June 21, she did that again. But now school's out and Fails doesn't have a car or a job.

"I can't go a day without earning money," she said. "I'll work as a receptionist, a waitress, whatever generosity anyone can extend to my family would be greatly appreciated."

Fails has experience as a paralegal, law clerk, legal research assistant and contract analyst, but can't practice law in Virginia until this state licenses her. "I need to take the bar exam here," she said. "But the prep course for Virginia's exam is $2,000 and the exam, itself, is about $800."

Photo by Bonnie Hobbs/The Connection

Tennie Fails snuggles with her children, from left, Erin, 7, Roman, 5, and Harrison, 9.

First, though, she needs to get on her feet, and that's not easy to do in Fairfax County. "I think the work the people at the Katherine Hanley Shelter do is so critical," said Fails. "But with the homelessness in this area, they have other clients to help. And once we leave here, the cost of living in this county is exponentially too much for someone in my situation."

She said there's "not nearly enough" low-income housing here. "The people at the Hanley Shelter are amazing. They do yeoman's work," said Fails. "But the need is so much greater than their resources. I don't know where we would have been, if not for the love, caring and help of the Hanley Shelter. They granted us safe passage through a turbulent time in our lives."

Fails and her children arrived at the shelter April 8, and she couldn't believe such a thing was happening to her. "It was raining when we drove up in a cab," she said. "And I was thinking, 'Once you graduate from law school and marry a lawyer, you don't expect to end up in a homeless shelter.'"

Still, Fails won't allow herself to wallow in self-pity. "I can't get distracted by that," she said. "I have to focus on getting a job and sustaining our home. It's my goal to be self-sufficient. I want to be able to support my children by myself."

At the shelter, the family shared one room with four bunk beds. But on July 19, Fails and her children moved into transitional housing via Homestretch Inc. However, Fails would love to be eventually referred to Habitat for Humanity for a home.

"Santa brought the children a puppy at Christmas, but he had to be fostered while we were at the shelter," she said. "They're so sad to have to leave him behind, and pets aren't allowed in our new place."

But she has even more important things on her mind. The children need clothing, their condo could use some furniture and Fails needs a car so that, when school begins again, she could get to and from substitute-teaching jobs.

She also needs legal help with regard to her husband. "I need pro-bono legal services to deal with a protective order, a divorce and custody issues," said Fails.

Meanwhile, her children are too young for her to explain exactly why their father isn't with them, so they don't fully understand why their lives have changed so drastically. But Fails tries to keep things as normal for them as possible.

Roman, 5, wants to be a builder when he grows up. He attended Providence Elementary's Head Start program and likes playing video games, especially Lego Star Wars.

Erin, 7, graduated from second grade at Eagle View Elementary. She likes camping and, in school, she enjoyed math and reading, mainly Ramona and Harry Potter books. She'd like to someday be a scientist and an explorer.

Harrison, 9, graduated from fourth grade at Eagle View and played violin in the school orchestra. "I liked it there; I had friends," he said. He also likes reading Star Wars and Harry Potter books. At the shelter, said Harrison, "We got Easter baskets. And they have a birthday party every month for all the kids."

"The shelter's been gracious and generous to my family, and the work it does is so critical," said Fails.

That's why, she said, "I'm hoping the county executive's office will be more mindful of the needs of the homeless in the county. There aren't a lot of opportunities out there for us, but we all have a story and we all have a lot to offer."

Donated Photo

As part of its Jeans Days, Deltek employees took part in a bowl-a-thon.

Dressed Down Doing Good

Herndon software company raises money for the homeless through Jeans Day program.

By Amber Healy
The Connection

Helping out the homeless and staying comfortable, proved an easy task for Deltek, a software company with an office in Herndon.

The company has done a number of "Jeans Days," where employees contribute $2 each for the ability to wear jeans to work for a day.

"We thought the idea was god for three reasons," said Patrick Smith, vice president of corporate marketing and communication with Deltek.

"It raises money for worthy causes, it allows our employees to 'dress down' at work, and it is an easy and great way to get all of our employees energized about helping others. We encourage other local businesses to embrace creative ideas like this as well."

This wasn't the first time Deltek tried to be a good neighbor and help out the community. The company hosts an annual Helps for the Holidays event where the money that would have been spent on a holiday party is instead used for charitable purposes like purchasing bikes for disadvantage children, building pet beds for animal shelters or delivering baskets of food for food banks. However, Jeans Day seems to be a favorite among employees.

"Hundreds of people participated from across the company," Smith said. "We did several Jeans Days, and in one case a Jeans Week, because it was so successful. We will continue to come up with creative ideas like Jeans Days as part of our corporate philanthropic mission."

It was a success in terms of fund-raising as well, with more than $3,000 raised.

Giving back is an important part of Deltek's philosophy, Smith said.

"We realize that part of our mission is to help one of our important stakeholders — the community — since it has given back to us by providing a great pool of talent and great locations from which to operate our business. Our philanthropy goals provide charitable contributions, through corporate donations, matching associate donations and volunteer activities to organization that are important to our overlying causes."

Helping raise funds to use for organizations battling homelessness is a priority for Deltek, Smith said.

"We chose to focus on helping the homeless because it continues to be a major issue in our community, which is especially troubling considering the wealth that exists in the greater D.C. region."

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>
> — Patrick Smith

FACETS at Work

On Aug. 10, a line of homeless people wait patiently for hot meals distributed by Christ Lutheran Church through the FACETS hot meals program. FACETS works with 35 faith communities on a rotating basis to provide hot meals nightly at four locations in Fairfax. More than 1,000 volunteers participate in the effort and over 42,000 meals are distributed in a year.

Photos by Deb Cobb/The Connection

Phyllis Harrington of Christ Lutheran Church of Fairfax provides a homeless woman with meals for her and her family on August 10th as part of the Facets hot meals program. Facets works with 35 faith communities to deliver hot meals for homeless individuals and families in four locations in Fairfax daily.

Partners in Ending Homelessness

Government can lead fight to end homelessness, but success achieved with community partners.

By U.S. Rep. Gerry Connolly
D-11

Guest Editorial

As the nation's economy continues to struggle, we should find hope in one recent bit of news reported by Fairfax County: The local homeless population declined 15.6 percent during the last four years despite the worst economic recession since the 1930s.

While the growth in the homeless population has slowed nationally, Fairfax County is one of the few localities to actually reduce the rate of homelessness, and this success is the product of a years-long effort by Fairfax County and its community partners.

When I was first elected chairman of the Board of Supervisors in 2003, there was growing concern about the increase in the local homeless population. Particularly alarming was the fact that 60 percent of homeless adults in families already were employed. It highlighted the need to address the shrinking number of affordable housing units.

Knowing government could not tackle these challenges alone, we convened separate community summits to devise action plans to preserve affordable housing and to prevent homelessness. The results were innovative partnerships with the non-profit, faith and business communities that yielded positive results, among them the preservation of more than 2,200 affordable housing units, which doubled our initial goal.

Given the success of this program and the benefits it has provided to Fairfax families and our entire community, I believe the county should reconsider its decision to scale it back.

File Photo

Connolly

Another part of that success story is the 10-year plan we adopted to prevent and end homelessness and the hiring of a coordinator to oversee all local efforts to assist the homeless. One important element of that plan is the annual hypothermia program, in partnership with local churches, which provides warm meals and temporary shelter for those most at-risk. It also helps provide vital medical and mental health support services in a stable environment, supplementing the mobile medical outreach we initiated to reach the chronically homeless.

Last year alone, the county's Housing Opportunities Support Teams helped prevent nearly 900 people from becoming homeless. These efforts keep families off the street and they are cost-effective. At the federal level, I've sponsored legislation in the U.S. of Representatives to replicate the Fairfax model with the aim of preventing homelessness for all Americans.

Even in a region as fortunate as Northern Virginia, which has weathered the recession better than most metropolitan areas, there continue to be tremendous needs.

I wish I could bring some of my colleagues from Congress to Fairfax to witness the value of these investments firsthand. As you know, we are in the midst of an important national debate about how much the federal government ought to be supporting such community efforts. There are some in Congress, who have proposed eliminating funding for a program that provides assistance to homeless veterans. I have fought this proposal on the House floor and will continue to do so because our veterans deserve better.

As we learned in Fairfax, government alone cannot solve the problem, but it can play a critical role in convening the private sector, nonprofits, educators and other community partners to address the serious challenges we face. And as the recent data on homelessness shows, those efforts are making real progress and benefiting our entire community.

Gerald E. Connolly represents the 11th Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives and served 14 years on the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, including five as chairman.

Road to Advocacy

Reston Interfaith CEO shares his journey back from homelessness.

By Greg White
Reston Interfaith

Guest Editorial

Donated Photo

Reston Interfaith CEO Greg White has firsthand experience of being homeless.

Several years ago after graduating from college, I found myself without a place to live after my two college roommates both returned to their out-of-state homes. I did not have full-time employment and could not afford the full rent and had to move out of the apartment. I very quickly ran out of what little funds I had left from the college semester and began living in my car, an old Ford Maverick which was parked in the rear of the apartments.

After a week or so the apartment management demanded that I leave. I began working as a day laborer, earning enough money to put gas in my car to drive to a rest stop on the outskirts of town where I spent the night in my car, cleaning up in the bathrooms and driving back to the day labor site in the morning.

I made several attempts to seek support from some local social service agencies for food, food stamps, rental assistance and gas. The experience of standing in lines and the service I received while seeking assistance was de-humanizing and something I have never forgotten. The staff at the agencies was rude, judgmental and non-responsive.

If not for the hunger and desperation I felt I would have walked out. I did endure the treatment at one of the agencies long enough to receive a voucher for a motel stay and food that allowed me to save one week of pay. I then found a landlord who agreed to rent a small apartment to a starving student for a very reasonable weekly fee that I could afford.

Over the next few weeks, I secured a full-time job as a residential counselor in a juvenile facility and started my career in social services.

I never forgot the feeling of powerlessness that I felt as a customer in those agencies and that memory has served me well. I have walked in the shoes of the hundreds of people who seek assistance in our emergency homeless shelter, food, rental and utility assistance and it has made me a better advocate for their needs. More importantly it has reinforced the need for me to be affiliated with organizations that practice "customer intimacy."

No one should be treated unfairly because of their economic or social condition, and I have dedicated my social service career to ensure that I uphold personal values and organizational values that allow people who are in crisis to still maintain their dignity.

Greg White is the CEO of Reston Interfaith.

Pledge 2 Pennies

From Page 8

we can share," Hudgins said. "We need services that will help establish homeless individuals and families into permanent housing situations where they can begin stable lives."

Using a housing-first approach, OPEH focuses on giving homeless individuals and families the services and resources they need to get back on their feet, as opposed to keeping them in shelters. According to Fairfax County's website, it costs around $13,500 per year for a bed in a shelter, compared to $10,500 a year for a house voucher for a two- or three-bedroom apartment.

The pledge is a way for us to continue supporting a cause for our community."
— Cathy Hudgins

Hudgins said that in order for OPEH to succeed at its mission, it would take an effort from county residents as a whole. "When it comes to our community, we all share some responsibility in that investment, and I feel that we can accomplish much more through shared responsibility." she said.

While her challenge hasn't received as much support as it needs, Hudgins said that it has raised awareness for OPEH and that more people would be willing to pitch in.

"I think people have really stopped to think 'You know, if that's all it really takes, why not?'" Hudgins said. "They've become much more cognizant about what some people in the community are going through, and they want to be able to be a part of the solution."

— Noah Yoo

10-Year Mission

Giving Back to Community Benefits All

Herndon CEO shares her story of being a homeless teen.

By Kathy Albarado
Helios HR

Guest Editorial

Most people would be surprised to discover the Fairfax-Falls Church community, one of the most affluent communities in our nation, has an alarmingly large homeless population. When envisioning these counties, many think of government contractors, professional services firms and business leaders, but rarely think of the homeless population — more than 1,500 men, women and children. As a member of the Governing Board to Prevent and End Homelessness, I work together with local nonprofits, businesses, faith-based communities and county agencies to reach our 10-year goal — ending homelessness by 2018.

I first realized that I had been homeless as a teen when I saw a poster about homelessness on the wall of my daughter's elementary school. Homelessness is not all about tent communities and people living on the streets, but includes transitional housing and shelters as well. In fact, people living on the street compose just a small portion of our community's homeless population. Homelessness is simply children or adults who no longer have a permanent home.

As an adolescent, my family stayed in transitional housing to escape my mother's abusive husband at that time. Ensuring my sister and I could continue to go to school each day while she worked two jobs was not taken for granted. Surrounded with a strong support system, I never felt homeless.

I share that story to show homelessness is a community issue. The business community and its leaders can make an incredible impact on eliminating homelessness and so many other challenges. I am fortunate to now be in a position to support and give back to my community and I view it a privilege to do so.

Community outreach can and should become part of an organization's culture. People want to be a part of something larger than themselves and giving employees the opportunity to impact their community is a top motivator in identifying with an employer. Community involvement benefits everyone.

My company, Helios HR, which is celebrating its 10th year in business, provides human capital management solutions to a variety of organizations. With community impact as one of our corporate goals, we measure how effectively we make a difference and enjoy connecting our clients and colleagues in the community.

Donated Photo

Kathy Albarado, CEO of Helios HR

Helios' efforts include conducting workshops for local skill source centers for unemployed and underemployed, making bagged lunches for a local homeless shelter and Helios' annual coat drive, which supports the Hunter Mill District coat closet in partnership with Reston Interfaith. As a team, we've donated more than 5,000 coats, with such abundance we've spread donations to neighboring counties.

Businesses reap the benefits of allowing their people to get involved in a close-to-home cause. Supporting community allows the Helios team to build camaraderie, collaboration and leadership skills, a wonderful bonus to such meaningful work.

It really does take a village. Every individual and business can make a difference and have an impact. Together we can reach our 10-year goals and prevent and end homelessness.

Kathy Albarado is the CEO of Helios HR (www.helioshr.com)

Ways To Help the Homeless

One of the most important things that a person can do is know how to contact Fairfax County's homeless shelters. Fairfax County has six emergency shelters for individuals and families who are homeless. These shelters are operated by community nonprofit organizations under a contract with the county. The shelters have additional capacity during winter months to take in people overnight who are at risk of hypothermia.

In addition, a hypothermia prevention program operates throughout the county during the winter to provide additional safe, warm space for homeless individuals at night. If you see someone at night that is unsheltered and think he or she could be at risk of hypothermia, call the county's non-emergency phone line at 703-691-2131, TTY 711.

Following is a list of shelters in Fairfax County

During business hours (8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.), contact:

Human Services Coordinated Services Planning at 703-222-0880; TTY 703-803-7914.

A CSP representative will conduct an interview with the family to determine eligibility for shelter or other emergency services and make the necessary referrals.

After business hours: If the situation involves the safety of children, call: Child Protective Services Hotline at 703-324-7400; TTY 703-222-9452.

If the family needs shelter only, call the following shelters directly:

Katherine K. Hanley Family Shelter (Fairfax)

13000 Lee Highway, Fairfax, VA 22030
571-522-6800; Fax 703-988-0251; TTY 703-988-0256

A shelter for families with children. Accommodates up to 20 families. Full service program: case management, mental health counseling, health care services. Opened in 2007. Operated by Shelter House, Inc.

Embry Rucker Community Shelter (Reston)

11975 Bowman Towne Drive, Reston, VA 20190
703-437-1975; Fax 703-481-1406

A shelter for families with children and adults without children. Forty-two beds (10 rooms) for families. Twenty-eight beds for unaccompanied adults (20 men and eight women). Ten beds for cold weather overflow (Nov. 1 through March 31). Full service program: case management, health care with on-site mental health substance abuse counseling. Opened in 1987. Operated by Reston Interfaith, Inc.

Mondloch House (Richmond Highway, Alexandria)

3516 Lockheed Blvd., Alexandria, VA 22306
703-768-3400; Fax 703-768-3405

Fifty-three-bed shelter primarily for families with children. Forty-five beds for families; eight beds for chronically homeless adults. Full service program: case management, mental health counseling, health care services. No walk-ins. Opened in 1978. Operated by New Hope Housing, Inc.

Shelter House (Falls Church)

3080 Patrick Henry Drive, Falls Church, VA 22044; 703-536-2155; Fax 703-534-0736

Forty-two-bed shelter for families only. No walk-ins. Full service program: case management, health care services and life skills training. Opened in 1982. Operated by Shelter House, Inc.

Making a Difference

Making a difference can be easy if you know whom to contact. The following links and resources are invaluable if you want to donate or volunteer to help the homeless provided by the Fairfax-Falls Church Community Partnership to Prevent and End Homelessness.

1. Know where to refer people who are homeless for services. During regular business hours, call the Fairfax County Coordinated Services Planning (CSP) at 703-222-0880. After hours and weekends, call homeless shelters directly. Homeless information and referral is available 24-hours-a-day, seven-days a week by dialing 211 or 1-800-230-6977. Bilingual staff and/or interpreters for languages other than English are available. A list of all shelters can be found at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dfs/factsheets/emershelter.

2. Keep a list of the county's six homeless shelters handy. Access the information online at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dfs/factsheets/emershelter.

3. Secure a copy of the Northern Virginia Regional Commission (NVRC) Quick Guide. This pocket-size booklet lists public and private agencies serving all of Northern Virginia. Call 703-642-0700 for a copy of the guide.

4. Keep a File. During the holidays, many organizations seek donations and volunteers. Local newspapers offer a slew of articles about groups, large and small, that are making a difference.

5. Volunteer or donate time, food, clothing, household goods or other resources to shelters. A list of shelters, homeless provider agencies and community-based food and financial assistance organizations are found in the Fairfax County Human Resource Guide at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/rim. Type in "homeless," "emergency food," "housing," etc. to identify specific public and private agencies.

6. Donate money. The most direct way to aid people who are homeless is to give money. Donations to nonprofits go a long way. Visit the Fairfax County Human Resource Guide at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/rim to find a list of public and private agencies, and how to donate money.

7. Donate Clothing. During spring or fall cleaning, gather clothes and donate them to organizations that provide housing for people who are homeless. Many consignment stores give clothes that don't sell to homeless shelters. Call a local consignment store and ask what they do with unsold clothes.

8. Donate a bag of groceries. Load up a bag full of non-perishable groceries and donate it to a food pantry.

9. Volunteer to serve food. Homeless shelters and other local non-profits provide nourishing meals for those who are homeless.

10. Educate your children. Volunteer as a family at a shelter or housing program. Suggest that your children sort through their toys books and clothes they no longer use and donate them to organizations that assist people who are poor or homeless.

11. Volunteer your professional services. You can help people who are homeless with your on-the-job talents and skills. Those with office skills can volunteer to provide training. Doctors, psychiatrists, counselors, dentists and lawyers can make an enormous difference with the variety of problems and concerns homeless individuals face by doing pro-bono work, either through their faith organization or professional organizations.

12. Sign up your company or school. Ask your company or school to host fund-raising or awareness events. Ask that your proceeds be matched to help those who are homeless.

13. Advocate for the civil rights of the homeless. In recent elections, for example, volunteers at shelters and other homeless advocates helped homeless people register to vote. It's an empowering feeling and a way for homeless people to feel connected to their community.

— Victoria Ross