

Community Healthlink - Making a Difference in Someone's Life...Every Day!

Home Again delivering on promise to curb homelessness in Worcester

Raymond Reece stood before an audience of legislators and housing advocates and proclaimed "having a home of our own has changed our whole outlook on life."

The Worcester native had experienced first-hand, and for an extended period, a life dominated by homelessness. "I made all the wrong choices and it had a domino effect on my life," he told an attentive and supportive audience.

His journey from Worcester delivered him to Florida, where he spent years sleeping in the woods or shelters. His subsequent return to Massachusetts included numerous nights spent at the People In Peril shelter. It was there that Ray and his wife became acquainted with the Home Again program.

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Brooke Doyle, Healthlink's Vice President for homeless services, was among the speakers to share information about the Home Again program at a State House briefing on April 7th. Raymond Reece, a Home Again resident, also spoke at the briefing.

Children's Mental Health Week began with a splash

National Mental Health Month began in 1949 to raise public awareness of the goals and services of the nation's mental health programs.

In recent years Community Healthlink, which provides services annually to 17,000 adults and youth, has celebrated the achievements of many of its adult clients. This year a special emphasis was given to our children's services, whose clients span ages 18 months to 18 years. More than 4000 children and adolescents receive services through a myriad of community-based programs based in Worcester, Clinton, Leominster, Fitchburg and Gardner.

Community Healthlink recently celebrated the start of Children's Mental Health Week with a family-friendly event at the CoCo Key Water Resort in Fitchburg.

A sell-out crowd of 800 children and parents attended the afternoon fundraiser, whose proceeds will benefit Healthlink's children's services.



CoCo Key Water Resort was the place to be on Sunday, May 2, as Community Healthlink marked the start of Children's Mental Health Week with a "family-friendly" fundraiser.

See page 3 for more event photos

Young, homeless adults is new focus for HOAP

Fans of Central Massachusetts high school baseball are well familiar with the family name DeLosSantos. They know of brothers Alex, Joel and Rob and the high-profile reputations each earned as stellar athletes at Worcester's Burncoat High School. Two of the brothers were drafted by major league teams.

What people likely do not know is that since departing high school and college each brother has gradually retreated from the baseball field and stepped into the field of human services.

For a decade Rob worked for the Department of Youth Services, where his brothers are both employed. But Rob yearned for a different challenge, one that would yield a greater and more permanent impact on the lives of at-risk young adults. The "young adult outreach case manager" job that was recently created by Community Healthlink seems tailored to Rob.

"When I was a kid I went through a lot. I became a young father, and really I was a kid taking care of a kid," Rob says candidly. He credits many of his baseball coaches and teachers for demonstrating confidence in him. Now he wants to "pay that trust forward" by trying to be a positive influence on other young adults.

"It feels like something I was born to do" Rob says both of his previous role as a youth counselor and now as an outreach case worker who is trying to connect with the many young adults in Worcester who are homeless or at-risk of becoming homeless.

In his first weeks in his new role in Healthlink's Homeless Outreach & Advocacy Project (HOAP), Rob has met numerous young men and women whose tendency to "couch surf" casts them in a profile different from older adults whose experiences with homelessness have ranged from periodic to chronic.

His manner of outreach has been casual because "trying to gain the trust of someone who has recently aged out of DYS or been shunned by family takes time." He notes that the young adults he encounters are mostly 18 to 24 years of age and the majority lack the education and job skills to be self-sufficient.

"Many have no diploma or no GED. Many of them are scared and they gravitate into relationships with people with similar experiences," he says.

Much of Rob's outreach time has been spent in malls, skateboard parks, playgrounds and basketball courts, and in the vicinity of Worcester City Hall. He does "a lot of walking" and will venture just about anywhere where idle and troubled young men and women congregate.

"I met one guy near an abandoned tunnel in Main South where they're building their own skateboard park," he



From baseball field to human services field

Rob DeLosSantos has already logged many miles on foot while outreaching to homeless young men and women.

reveals. Within minutes the man opened up about his problems and worries and asked to be connected to mental health services.

"I'm just glad I'm in a position where I can try to help. I just wish we had more housing available for young adults. To see someone sleeping on the streets hurts," Rob declares.

'Intervene before homelessness becomes long-term problem'

Brooke Doyle, Community Healthlink's Vice President for homeless services, is unequivocal when assessing the potential impact of the young adult outreach case manager.

"The goal is to intervene and have a positive impact on young adults who are homeless before they enter into a state of long-term homelessness," she states emphatically.

The outreach performed by the outreach case manager will also help pinpoint and assess current housing circumstances and establish a baseline need for residential support services and housing for young adults.

A Point In Time Survey conducted last year by the Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance determined that 168 young adults between the ages of 18 and 24 in Worcester were homeless.

Kids of all ages made a splash at CoCo Key

Fundraiser for Children's Services proved immensely popular

Eight hundred friends and patrons of all ages flocked to the CoCo Key Water Resort in Fitchburg on May 2nd as Community Healthlink hosted its first "Make a SPLASH for Kids" fundraiser.

With the generous support of presenting sponsor **Fidelity Bank**, Community Healthlink was able to offer "family-friendly" prices. Other sponsors of the event were the Worcester Telegram & Gazette, WLXO 104.5 FM radio, Fallon Community Health Plan, and Fraticelli Oil of Leominster.

"Make a SPLASH for Kids" proved so popular plans are already underway to reprise and expand the event in 2011.



Nashoba Valley early childcare centers to receive TFK services

Thanks to a combined \$20,000 grant from the Community Foundation of North Central Massachusetts and the Greater Lowell Community Foundation, Together For Kids will soon become available to early childcare centers in the Nashoba Valley communities of Groton, Harvard, Lancaster, Littleton, Lunenburg and Townsend.

Together For Kids was first established as a pilot program in 2001 to address the challenging and disruptive behaviors manifest in an unusually high percentage of pre-school age children in Central Massachusetts. These behaviors were leading to classroom anxieties for staff and other students and causing the expulsion of a high number of children - as high as 33% in some centers.

In the nine years since its creation TFK has provided timely interventions for hundreds of preschool age children by engaging children, parents and childcare providers in a



team approach to assure that disciplines are being applied at home and at school on a consistent basis for the benefit of all involved parties.

TFK's accomplishments since 2001 have been notable. In just the past year its services reached 600 targeted children and families, 50 childcare agencies, 200 classrooms, 400 teachers, and influenced the classroom learning environment for more than 4000 young children. And expulsion rates that were once so alarmingly high have been reduced to near zero.

Ray Reece proves you can come 'Home Again'

Continued from front page

Numerous other people became more fully acquainted with Home Again and its achievements at the State House briefing, which was hosted by Representatives Jim O'Day (14th Worcester District) and Byron Rushing (9th Suffolk).

Home Again is a housing first model that provides chronically homeless adults with access to permanent housing. It also features case management and support services that are vital to helping them maintain housing.

Home Again was designed three years ago and is administered by Community Healthlink in partnership with the Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance, Dismas House, Henry Lee Willis Community Center, Jeremiah's, and the Worcester Housing Connection. In 18 months Home Again has already housed 49 of 125 adults who were identified as chronically homeless in Worcester.

"What we intuitively thought - only a home ends homelessness - has been scientifically documented," said Dr. Jan Yost, President and CEO of The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts. The foundation has been a major funder of the Home Again program.



They gave jeans a chance

This past November and December, California-based clothing manufacturer Volcom partnered with the National Council for the Homeless to help clothe people through the "Give Jeans A Chance" program. Eastern Boarder on Shrewsbury Street, Worcester, placed a donation bin in its store and collected 200 pair of jeans that were then donated to Healthlink's HOAP for distribution to the program's clients.



Brooke Doyle shares information with Thomas Brigham (left), of the Massachusetts Shelter Alliance, and HOAP housing coordinator Gary Comeau (second from right) and Home Again resident Ray Reece (far right).

A 21-month outcome evaluation of Home Again, conducted by the Boston University School of Public Health, assessed Home Again participants and a random group of control subjects who received more traditional support services.

The study concluded:

- Home Again participants were two and one-half times more likely to achieve and maintain housing over a period of six months (97% versus 38%).
- Hospital emergency room services used by Home Again clients decreased by more than one visit every three months.
- The mental health of Home Again participants improved and they were nearly twice as likely as participants receiving standard care to have good social support.

"The Home Again program was successful in achieving its goals, particularly in terms of enabling clients to achieve and maintain housing," reported lead researcher Dr. Emily Rothman, associate professor at the Boston University School of Public Health.

Ray Reece is evidence of the success that Home Again has spawned. "When you have nothing, you have nothing to lose," he told the State House audience. "Since we have a home we're not the same people any more. Our attitude has changed and we don't want to go back to that culture," he stated with conviction and gratitude.



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Fallon Clinic grant promotes healthy lifestyles

"People with major mental illness and addiction are a healthcare disparities population," says Dr. Marie Hobart, Healthlink's Chief Medical Officer.

"The average lifespan for someone with major mental illness is 25 years less than the general population," she points out, noting that many adults suffer from metabolic syndrome. The factors that cause people to suffer from metabolic syndrome include "genetics, mental illness, obesity, medication side effects, poor nutrition."

A grant from the Fallon Clinic Foundation will enable Healthlink to purchase such devices as blood pressure monitors and weight scales that the outpatient mental health medical staff will use to track clients' vital signs. Select clients will also be issued pedometers so they can personally calculate distances walked daily and calories burned from this activity.

Dr. Hobart says "This is an attempt to cause a lifestyle change for clients who want to function better in their day-to-day living. We have an opportunity to help our clients improve their physical health as well as their mental health."

Verizon, Webster Five grants, pave way for yoga therapy

One in four women has experienced domestic violence in her lifetime according to a survey conducted by The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. And over one million women are stalked annually in the United States.

These alarming and sobering statistics reveal themselves nearly each and every day in the form of people in our community who turn to Community Healthlink's Victim Services for counseling, advocacy and support as they try mightily to overcome the trauma and tragedy that have befallen them.

Community Healthlink established its Victim Services program 19 years ago to provide therapeutic support to people who have been victims of, or witnesses to, acts of violence. An essential aspect of recovering from trauma is learning ways to calm down or self-regulate. For years yoga has been practiced to help a person calm the mind and body. Healthlink's Victim Services will soon introduce a series of 10-week yoga and mindfulness groups that will specifically welcome girls between the ages of 12 and 17, and women ages 18 years and older who have been traumatized by acts of domestic abuse or violence.

The programs will be funded with recent grants received from Verizon Wireless, the Webster Five Foundation, and the Harvard Pilgrim Health Care Foundation.

If you are interested in learning more about the yoga and mindfulness programs you are invited to call Community Healthlink at 508-791-3261.



Poignant reminders



Maranda's House, one of the programs that comprise Healthlink's Women's Recovery Continuum, displayed its Clothesline Project on April 14th to remember victims and survivors of sexual abuse and violence. The Clothesline Project started on Cape Cod in 1990 to address violence against women. It is a vehicle for women affected by violence to express their emotions by decorating a shirt. They then hang the shirt on a clothesline to be viewed by others as testimony to the problem of violence against women.

Trio of Healthlink doctors are among the best in their field

Community Healthlink is proud to announce that Doctors Marie Hobart, Deb Field, and W. Peter Metz, were recently recognized by Best Doctors as among the best professionals in their respective fields.

Dr. Hobart has served as Community Healthlink's Chief Medical Officer for the past decade and Dr. Metz, medical director for the Families & Communities Together Collaborative, is highly regarded for his work with children. Dr. Field serves as Director of Homeless Psychiatry Services at Community Healthlink's Homeless Outreach & Advocacy Project (HOAP). All three are on the faculty of the University of Massachusetts Medical School.

Dr. Field spoke recently of her career at Community Healthlink. "I try to bring my best self to my work, from the first person I see every day to the last person I see every day," she said recently. That she treats as many as 100 clients per week poses a stiff challenge to that motto.

"I rely on peer support and yoga and a healthy sense of humor," is the self-proclaimed formula upon which she has relied throughout her 15-year career at Community Healthlink. "I don't need to solve everyone's problems. I need to help them to solve their problems. It's a collaboration with my clients," she says.

Dr. Field arrived at Community Healthlink as a resident in 1995 fresh from the UMass Medical School. She first treated clients through the outpatient mental health clinic, and then as a member of the Latino mental health team. Soon she became an integral part of the HOAP medical team.

"What I quickly discovered is once I had the privilege of working with people who were homeless, nothing else compared," she revealed, adding that she is fully committed to helping underserved populations. Her clients present with numerous challenges and illnesses often not understood or



Best Doctors was founded in 1989 by two Harvard Medical School physicians who developed a patented InterConsultation process and proprietary database to identify the most respected doctors in each of the specialties of medicine. Less than 5 percent of doctors in the U.S. are named to the list.



Named best doctors in their field were Dr. Deb Field (top left photo), Dr. Marie Hobart (top right), and Dr. W. Peter Metz.

accepted by the general population. These illnesses include thought disorders, personality disorders, and addiction. Her clients also hail from many different cultures and backgrounds. "That's what makes my work so exciting. I've learned to appreciate people's differences," says Dr. Field. "I don't see their differences as a burden," she says poignantly.

Interestingly, she had aspirations as a high school student of someday becoming an architect. Perhaps it was fate then, that led her instead to a healthcare profession that helps pave the way for the reconstruction of tattered and fragile lives. "The best remedy for anyone who is homeless is a home," Dr. Field concludes simply.

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