

Spring 2009

transforming transitions

The newsletter of the St. Paul's Center for homeless mothers and their children in Rensselaer County
PO Box 589 • Rensselaer, New York 12144 • 518.434.2910 • www.stpaulscenter.com

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

One thing. That can be all that stands between a mother and homelessness. It could be a landlord's code violation, a bad habit that became an addiction, a boyfriend who decided to move on.

The problem with "one things" is that they tend to turn into many things. A job loss means no health insurance, which means medications for a mental illness are discontinued, and then the relatives who took you in aren't willing to do that anymore. A bad decision about drug use leads to an arrest and jail time, then maybe children removed into foster care.

With continued bleak news about the economy, more mothers and their children are one thing away from needing the St. Paul's Center. Most of the families are glad we're here. As one mother said, "You're my family now."

But not all the moms appreciate us and the structure the shelter provides. The shelter has curfews, and rules about child supervision, alcohol and drug use, and unapproved visitors. One mom who had been asked to leave the shelter three times for breaking the rules was back for a fourth stay. Still, she told us in very colorful language what we could do with our rules. Un-phased, Executive Director David R. Rossetti told her, "You want someone to care about you, to let you know you're important, someone who wants you to succeed. We are that someone, and that's why we have the rules." This time, she made it and left with her five-year-old son for new housing after giving a big hug to our director. She stood in the door, waved goodbye, and said, "I love you guys!"

For most of us, if we allow ourselves to think about some of the "one things" that could happen, sending our lives into chaos, we pretty quickly comfort ourselves with the knowledge of how our loved ones would be there to help us get back on our feet. Every mother deserves that caring and comfort, and that's why St. Paul's Center is here. We can't stop all the "ones things" from happening, but we can be there when they do.

Darlene Ward

President
Board of Directors

THANK YOU for MAKING THE HOLIDAYS WONDERFUL!

In October of 2008, St. Paul 's Center sent out a brochure requesting assistance in providing gifts for families living at the shelter and those who had moved to their own apartments for the holiday season. Because of the generous response of 7 individuals and 11 agencies, we were able to assist 22 families. The families were very grateful that even though this past year had brought some hardships for them, they were still able to have a memorable holiday.

One mother broke down in tears after seeing the gifts for her two young children, whom she thought would not have a Christmas this year. Another mother stated: "Every so often we meet people who genuinely mark our hearts. This past year was difficult to face and understand. With Christmas being a holiday of family fun and loving moments, receiving presents makes it a *Merry* Christmas!!! As you read these lines know my family and I would not have been able to have a more meaningful Christmas. Thank you so much and hope your holidays bring you joy as you have brought mine."

If it were not for the thoughtfulness of our community, St. Paul 's Center would not be able to provide such services for our families.

Thank you to: Michelle & Peter Scott; Tim Pierce; Geraldine James; Wanda Chenot; Dianne Ewashko; Maryanne Schrank; Kristen Santos; CWA Local 1118; Daughters of Charity, St. Louise House; Excelsior College; First Lutheran Church of Albany; Northeast Urogynecology; NYS Unified Court System; Perennial Landscaping; Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Clifton Park; Riverfront Insurance Agency; RPI Office of the First Year Experience; St. Michael the Archangel Roman Catholic Church, Troy; SUNY Albany Residential Life; Troy Internal Medicine and everyone else who made this holiday "one to remember" for our families.

Meet the Board

Anzala Alozie, J.D.

Anzala comes to the St. Paul's Board with a history of advocacy and a passion for service. Anzala received her Juris Doctor in May 2001 from Albany Law School and is presently the Director of Services at the New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence in Albany where she has oversight over training, technical assistance, economic justice, technology safety, and the Women of Color Leadership Project. She is responsible for the management of the statewide 24/7 Domestic and Sexual Violence Hotline.

Anzala is an advocate for social justice and change. She is the founder and executive director of Revelations, a company dedicated to the empowerment of women and girls where she provides training, workshops, and lectures on positive self-development for young women on topics such as self-worth, building self-esteem, healthy relationships for Black girls, intimate partner violence, and more. Ms. Alozie has presented youth programs for many national and community based organizations. Previously, she worked at the Empire Justice Center and D.C. Coalition Against Domestic Violence. She is the founder of the Muslim Women's Center of the Capital District and is Vice Chair of the National Muslim Defense and Education Fund. She is a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority and the Black Socialites. She lives in the Albany area with her husband and three sons.

Is it any wonder that the Board of the St. Paul's Center is thrilled to have a woman of such experience and dedication to the empowerment of women bring her myriad talents to the work and mission of the St. Paul's Center.

on the HOUSING FRONT

By Marianne Schrank

Tapped to write a few words about the status of the housing/apartment market in our area, I can approach the subject from several angles: as a former landlord in economically disadvantaged areas of Albany; as a current realtor/property manager; as a long time advocate and volunteer for the homeless; and as a member of the Board of Directors of the St. Paul's Center.

In 1991, I accepted the advice of an older realtor—that I would never earn real money in my profession unless I bought property. Coupling this advice with my bent for “do-goodism” I began to acquire multi-family homes in distressed areas of Albany with the idea of metamorphosing them into palaces for tenants to love and care for as their own. I'd begin to turn my beautiful city around. WRONG on every count! I was seen as a sap—perhaps a rich one at that, because the rent was the last thing paid, if paid. My houses and flats were ruined over and over. Yet I persisted in fixing, improving, giving December rent free so tenants' children could have Christmas and generally being a Pollyanna. By the time I had lost thousands, I sold the last property at a terrible loss.

So, I'm not unsympathetic to landlords... just not the landlords many of our guests at the St. Paul's Center encounter on their tortured path to our door. They are the folk who buy distressed buildings, ignore them, depreciate them until they're worth less and then sell or go into foreclosure.

Often, tenants find themselves homeless because the owner failed to comply with city building codes. With almost no warning, units are shut down...more families are out...their meager possessions on the curb...their clothes in garbage bags on their backs as they show up at social services to be assigned to a rundown motel and hope for placement at our bright haven. So far, if the family includes a mother AND a father, the motel is the final destination because there is no facility that welcomes two-parent families. How bleak and dispiriting!

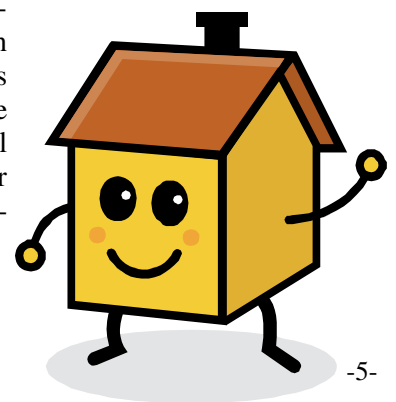
We'll see more homelessness in 2009...whether caused by non-compliant landlords who've let the banks foreclose on their buildings or, I believe to a much less extent, homeowners who are being foreclosed on. As I write this, low income first time homebuyers, with or without government grants, are performing better on their mortgages than many other mortgagees with much bigger loans.

Our goal is to ready our guests for housing—an apartment. Our staff works with the moms while they are with us on some of the basic home-keeping skills and then they are given direction how to look for an apartment. Now the fun begins!

Decent apartments in the price range of the housing allowance for homeless families are few and far between. Many of the apartments would never pass inspection by Section 8 or social services: bare light bulbs hanging from ceilings; ungrounded plugs; unsafe space heaters; dripping faucets; no closets; ineffective locks; moldy basements, more. Plus, because so many of our guests have more than one or two children, there simply are not enough bedrooms to comply with the regulations for regulations for separating boys and girls or numbers of children in a room, etc. Some of the working poor men that I've met through my work on the Homeless Action Committee in Albany have told me that they would rather sleep outside than in the vermin infested rooms they can rent with their meager earnings. I believe them.

The need for decent affordable housing is critical in the tri-city area and in the country. The St. Paul's Center is working to determine how we might best meet this need. Transitional housing, a bridge between sheltered and independent living, where our dedicated and experienced staff could continue to help our moms learn skills to propel them forward on the road to success, seemed the logical next move. However, the tsunami of joblessness, homelessness, and the nation's economic collapse indicates that, in addition to a transitional facility, we must also look at the possibility of another safe haven for the homeless, this one for two parent families.

We have a big task ahead. The need is growing exponentially. Those of us on the board of the St. Paul's Center are honored to be able to serve and grateful for the help of our friends—present and future!



DIRECTOR'S CORNER

DAVID R. ROSSETTI, LCSW-R

As 2008 drew to an end and the St. Paul's Center was heading into its third year of operation, I was able to take time to reflect on some of the mothers and children who were served by the St. Paul's Center and who are now living in their own apartments. It always warms my heart to see a child walk into an apartment after being homeless and living in a shelter. It is one of the precious moments in my life.

The staff at the St. Paul's Center works side by side with our mothers to find appropriate affordable housing, and then continues to work with them once they are in their own apartments. But we do not do this alone. In addition to the material and financial support we receive from individuals, we also receive the help and services of many community organizations. It is through this collaborative effort that we are all able to support, encourage, empower and teach the mothers how to be self sufficient.

For example, Unified Services works closely with the mothers and children to provide a full continuum of mental health and substance abuse services. They truly are only a phone call away; willing and able to help in any way they can. We also work closely with the Roarke Center which provides assistance with apartment searches and some financial assistance for the mothers to bridge a gap in resources. The Unity House CHAP (Community Housing Assistance Program) has worked closely with our residents that have mental health needs. Their case management services help mothers make a seamless transition from shelter to apartment living. Our local Commission on Economic Opportunity (CEO) provides Head Start and day care programs. These benefit both mothers and their children as they provide an opportunity for the children to socialize with other children as well as give mothers the time necessary to search for apartments and employment.

At present, the St. Paul's Center has over 15 agreements with community agencies. It is only through this cooperative effort that I get to "warm my heart" when I visit a mother and her children thriving in their new home. For that, I thank you all.

2008 STATS

RENSELAER COUNTY HOMELESSNESS

320 Incidents of homelessness involving 293 families
17 Families had multiple incidents of homelessness (some more than two)

REASONS FOR HOMELESSNESS

- 19 Code violations closed homes
- 18 Asked to leave shared residence
- 20 Evictions
- 10 Relocations to other areas
- 2 Rental property foreclosures
- 3 Chronic homelessness

ST. PAUL'S SPECIFICS

We served 85 mothers in 2008

Ages:

- 18-24 29.50%
- 25-30 27.20%
- 31-49 27.70%
- 41-59 15.50%

We also served one woman 83 years of age

Children: We served 86 girls and 86 boys

- Under 1 year 14
- 1-5 67
- 6-12 55
- 13-17 36

Discharge Reason:

- 39 Women completed the program
- 8 Women were asked to leave because there was disagreement with rules or persons
- 11 Left for housing opportunity before completing the program
- 10 Were asked to leave because of non-compliance with program

Employed: 12 **Unemployed:** 73

Marital Status: Married—12 Divorced—3
Widow—1 Separated—5 Single—64

Pregnant: No—73 Yes—12

Race: American Indian or Alaskan—1
Black/African American—36
Multi Racial—1
Native Hawaii or Pacific Islander—12
White—35

The St. Paul's Center serves mothers and their children regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, country of origin, or sexual orientation.

Save the

St. Paul's Summer Fundraiser

mURDER MYsTERY

Dinner and intrigue!

Wednesday, July 22,

Woolfert's Roost

Wish List

The needs of the families we serve go beyond the shelter walls. Once they move into their new apartments, they need to furnish them. It is most helpful if you call the shelter to let them know when you are coming to drop off items. Thanks for your generosity and consideration.

NOTE: So many people ask if we need toys and clothes. While we do from time to time ask for these items for special occasions, we have found that the volume that comes in is quite overwhelming. We do not have the capacity to sort, clean and store these items. We hope you will understand and donate these items to other local agencies. Thank you.

BABY ITEMS

- Bottle nipples
- Sippy cups
- Diapers (sizes 3,4,5)
- Wipes
- Cribs (National Safety Standards—spaces between slats should be no more than 2 3/8 inches apart)

HOUSEHOLD ITEMS

- Pots and pans (sets)
- Plates, bowls, glasses, etc. (full sets)
- Silverware (full sets)
- Can openers
- Knife sets
- Cutting boards
- Coffee pots
- Curtains, rods, brackets
- Oven mitts, dish towels
- Cooking utensils
- Shower curtains and hooks
- Mixing bowls
- Vacuums
- Cleaning products
- Mops/brooms
- Clocks
- Toasters
- Microwaves
- Twin sized bed sheets
- Washers/dryers

MISCELLANEOUS

- Used cell phones
- Furniture: beds, couches, shelving units, tables & chairs, dressers, desks, etc.

GIFT CARDS—Target, Wal Mart, supermarkets

CASH DONATIONS

STAFF profile

ERICA GOSH is our Transitional Client Advocate and has been with us since February 2008. She came to us as an intern while working on her MSW from SUNY Albany. David, our Executive Director, was so impressed with her work and her care for our families that he offered her a permanent position. We were so fortunate that she said YES!

In her year at the Center, Erica had developed the Bridges Program which provides advocacy and eviction prevention services to families who have moved out of the shelter. She also supervises the donation and volunteer programs and creates a quarterly newsletter for all previous residents to help them keep in touch with the services and educational offerings of the shelter. She is both a mentor and a role model for our mothers.

Before coming to the St. Paul's Center, Erica was a child/adolescent counselor for sexual assault and crime victims and spent much of her time as a young woman working with children. She did two internships in Costa Rica and hopes to return their someday as a social worker.

Erica became the mother of her beautiful son, Dominick, in July of 2008. She enjoys being a new mom and says she couldn't imagine having a better baby. She enjoys painting and playing the guitar and piano.

Erica says: "Working at the St. Paul's Center has been a wonderful experience. My mother always told me, challenges make you discover things about yourself that you never really knew. While working at St. Paul's Center has presented its challenges, each woman that I have helped to become a strong and independent mother has made a tremendously positive impact on my life."





DAVID R. ROSSETTI, LCSW-R
Executive Director

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

DARLENE WARD

President

SR. MARY ANN RODGERS, CSJ

Vice President

MARSHA DAUGHERTY

Treasurer

RACHEL BARRANCA

Secretary

Anzala Alozie, JD

Sharon DeMartini

Marilyn M. Dyer

Dianne Ewashko

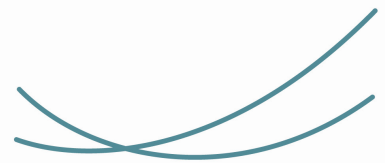
Shirley Leahy

Sr. Mary Rose McGeady, DC

Tim Pierce

Maryanne Schrank

The St. Paul's Center
BUILDING BRIDGES TO A BRIGHTER FUTURE
PO Box 589 Rensselaer NY 12144
www.stpaulscenter.com



OUR MISSION STATEMENT

WITH THE STRONG BELIEF IN THE DIGNITY AND VALUE OF EVERY HUMAN LIFE, THE MISSION AND PURPOSE OF THE ST. PAUL'S CENTER IS TO PROVIDE A WARM, NURTURING, HOME-LIKE ENVIRONMENT WHERE EACH MOTHER WILL HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO BECOME BETTER EQUIPPED AND EMPOWERED TO MAKE A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION TO INDEPENDENT LIVING AND TO A BETTER LIFE FOR HERSELF AND HER CHILDREN.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

DONATE

items from our wish list

PARTICIPATE

in our fundraising events

VOLUNTEER

to provide child care, organize, drive mothers to appointments

SPREAD THE WORD

about the great work we do and encourage your family and friends to help

Visit us at www.stpaulscenter.com