

Mercy Miracle

Gina Survived a Homeless Summer and Now Thrives at St. Elizabeth House

When it's hot and humid, more people who are homeless seek refuge in air-conditioned shelters, which quickly fill up. When shelters are full, people sleep in parks and in other outdoor spaces, exposing them to the elements, making them susceptible to rat bites, pleurisy, colds and other debilitating ailments.

Water is scarce. Gina (her name is changed to protect her anonymity), now lives in one of Mercy's transitional housing programs, but lived on the streets in summer and winter for nearly a year. In summer, she often visited McDonald's to wash up in the restroom and plead for a free cup of water. She also turned to mobile health units, which offer food and liquids in the summer. She learned of those through word-of-mouth.

Gina, who had been working as a certified nurse's aide until she lost her job, and then her apartment, said she slept on park benches and occasionally on a friend's couch. She scavenged for copper and sold it for cash. When she had money, she'd stay in a motel.

"Mostly, I walked the street and prayed," she said. When her clothes became worn, she sought donations from shelters and programs like Mercy's Friendship Center at St. Elizabeth House in Hartford. She said she often visited public libraries to use the internet to look for jobs and get out of the heat. One day, someone told Gina about Mercy's Catherine's Place, a short-term housing program for women who are homeless and suffer from a disability.

Her stay at Catherine's Place was for three months, so her search for a more permanent home began almost as soon as she arrived. Two days before her stay was up, Gina was accepted into Mercy's St. Elizabeth House, where she has lived for six months. She is addiction-free, has a part-time job that Mercy got for her through our Jump Start program, and has a key to her own room. No longer does she have to wonder where she is going to sleep, get a glass of water or her next meal. She is focusing on her goals. One of which is to get her degree as a registered nurse. How does she feel about not living on the street and having a place to call her own for two years? Relieved.

"It's the scariest thing to know that time is up and it is time to leave," she said.

Help us get through this economic crunch without having to cut services that help people like Gina. Help us maintain the critical and successful services we offer to end homelessness. This year, Mercy has placed 168 formerly homeless adults and families. We want to continue sending people home and we can't do it without you.

[Donate here.](#)

Man on a Mission



After two years on Hartford Streets, Gary Cain is getting his life back. Cain, one of 118 adults living in Mercy transitional housing, was a college football player. The divorced father of three grew up in Fairfield County, but became ensnarled in addiction and lost it all.

Thanks to donations and grants, Mercy is able to provide Cain a warm meal, roof over his head, recovery counseling and guidance toward independence. We also are able to obtain free dental work and knee surgery for him. Cain, who turned 43 in February, is looking for work. In the meantime, he coaches Special Olympics, volunteers at a soup kitchen and provides security for his church. To donate to help people like Gary, [click here](#).

Family Friendship



Jose Oritz, 4, enjoys lunch with his mother and grandmother in the family room of the Friendship Center of St. Elizabeth House.

With the cost of electricity, oil and gasoline skyrocketing, more and more families are relying on the Friendship Center, which serves two free meals a day, Monday through Friday, to scrape by. The Center features a family room that is separate from the main dining room. On any weekday at lunchtime, you will find several families eating together in the room, which also has a small play area for children.

A recent survey conducted by Mercy Housing and Shelter Corp., the agency that operates the Friendship Center, showed that about 40 percent of the people who take free meals at the Friendship Center, are working families. Not having to pay for two meals a day helps them stretch their limited dollars to pay for other essentials, such as rent, electricity and gasoline.

To VOLUNTEER at the Friendship Center [click here](#).