

COMMUNITY BUILDING

FALL 2024

Mercy Housing & My Sisters' Place Exceed Industry Standards

CEO INSIGHTS



The Criminalization of Homelessness: Grants Pass vs. Johnson

The Supreme Court recently ruled that local governments can enforce anti-camping laws with homeless folks living outdoors, even if there is no shelter available. What this means is that local governments can enact and enforce criminal penalties, like fines and jail time for simply being poor and homeless.

On the one hand, I truly understand the need to keep public places safe and usable for all citizens. Encampments, a grouping of people living in tents in the woods or in parks, are truly places that are not meant for human habitation. On the other hand, it is incredibly wrong to arrest someone simply because they cannot afford a place to live when the diminished number of shelters we have are at or over capacity. Having a criminal record and fines to pay makes it that much harder to find and afford housing. And it also shifts the blame on the homeless people themselves versus the systems in place that keep perpetuating the cycle of homelessness. It is not right. It is not fair. And it is not just.

We learned years ago that criminalization of homelessness does not solve it. But housing does. Not only is it humane to house homeless individuals and families, it is also much more cost effective. In CT, it costs over \$100,000 per year to incarcerate a person. In comparison, permanent supportive Housing (subsidized,

Continued on inside ►

WE ARE PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE that both Mercy Housing and Shelter Corporation & My Sisters' Place have once again received top ratings by Charity Navigator, with both agencies receiving four-star ratings.

*Mercy Housing scored an incredible **98%** out of 100%, the highest percentage of any other housing organization in the region. My Sister's Place also scored well, receiving **94%**.*



"We are not surprised at our outstanding ratings, as we know how hard we work and how committed we are to our mission to end homelessness," commented Kara Capone, CEO of Community Housing Advocates the administrative umbrella overseeing both My Sisters' Place and Mercy Housing. "I couldn't be prouder of our dedicated teams and the very real impact that we are making on lives in our community."

Charity Navigator is a website that ranks hundreds of thousands of non-profits on a zero-to-four scale. It provides insights into a nonprofit's financial stability, adherence to best practices for both accountability and transparency, and results reporting. It is the largest and most-utilized evaluator of charities in the United States. It does not accept any advertising or donations from the organizations it evaluates.

Using a combination of research, analysis, and constituent feedback, Charity Navigator rates organizations on up to four stars based on about 50 metrics, including accountability and finance, impact and measurement, leadership and adaptability, and culture and community. The goal is to evaluate a group's impact and determine which organizations do the most good for the dollar.

Higher ratings increase the donor's confidence that their donations are being utilized properly and making a true impact.



Our team – the ones behind the success and excellence of Mercy Housing and My Sisters' Place.



Continued from first page ♥

affordable housing with case management support) costs on average \$23,000. Through both Mercy and MSP, we created and provide approximately 250 units of supportive housing in Hartford and Middlesex counties. People get to live in their own apartment, where they can grow roots, be active members in their communities, and have an opportunity to rebuild their lives. And the vast majority (over 90%) do just that. This is an essential tool in our toolbox when it comes to solving homelessness.

We need to start thinking of the policy implications that this new ruling means for the citizens of CT and how we can take a kind, civilized, and common-sense approach to solving homelessness. As the number of homeless people continues to increase (4,800 people were homeless in CT in July alone), we cannot shift an urgent and growing problem into an already overburdened, costly criminal justice system. We have to do better. We know how to do better. And with the right support and policies in place, we can do better.

Kara A. Capone
Chief Executive Officer

THE FRIENDSHIP CENTER

A Place of Hope

I would have died had it not been for coming to the Friendship Center.

– GUEST OF MERCY HOUSING’S FRIENDSHIP CENTER

That is a recurring sentiment frequently heard by Natalie Cooke, Director of Client Services and her team working at St. Elizabeth House, home to Mercy Housing’s Friendship Center.

Located on the first floor of 118 Main Street in Hartford, the Friendship Center is a day shelter and soup kitchen and more. It is also a safe haven of hope, providing nourishment, understanding, guidance, connection and invaluable resources for those who are experiencing homelessness or in need of a hot meal.

Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, the center serves breakfast at 8 a.m. and lunch at noon – typically serving about 3,300 meals a month. In addition to receiving a nutritious meal, visitors have access to so much more including: donated toiletries and extra clothing, a food pantry, WiFi and charging stations to be able to use their phones to check their housing status and call potential employers, as well as free health care screenings once a month with a team from Hartford Healthcare. The Friendship center is also a place where they can connect with the Mercy Housing staff.

“They can come in and talk with a case worker who can help them navigate the housing process and answer questions,” explained Cooke. “We try to help them with whatever they are dealing with, and if we are unable to help, we will definitely share any resource information that we have with them.”



DONOR spotlight

Lincoln Financial Designates \$35K for Rapid Rehousing

We are extraordinarily grateful to the Lincoln Financial Foundation for awarding a \$35,000 grant to support Mercy Housing’s Rapid Rehousing Program.

The Rapid Rehousing Program uses targeted financial assistance and short-term services to quickly return individuals and families who have slipped into homelessness back into housing and stability. It is one of Mercy’s most effective programs to combat homelessness.



Thank you Lincoln Financial for helping us to help more people in greater Hartford to find housing!

Crowdfunding: An Easy Way to Raise Funds for



Did you know that you can raise money for us in time for Giving Tuesday without touching your own wallet? It’s easy to do using our new Crowdfunding platform.

If you visit our Mercy or MSP Giving Tuesday campaign links below, you will be given the ability to easily create your own fundraising page for either Mercy Housing or My Sisters’ Place (MSP), which you can then share with your network of friends and family – asking **THEM** to

support your efforts to raise money to help the homeless in our community. Any funds that you raise go directly into Mercy’s or MSP’s accounts, and you will be listed as our fundraiser. It’s as simple as that. You would not only be raising funds for us, but you would also be spreading awareness about the work that we do.

You can use the existing text that we have created on the page or add your own message and photos to inspire your friends to donate by Giving Tuesday. Giving Tuesday, known as the worldwide day of giving, is always the Tuesday after Thanksgiving. This year it is on December 3rd. We have set Giving Tuesday fundraising goals of \$5,000 for Mercy and \$5,000 for My Sisters’ Place. In order to hit those goals, we are asking you to make your donations or create your own fundraising page early, to help us reach our fundraising goal by December 3rd using the links or QR codes below. Thank you so much for your wonderful support.



bit.ly/3YMFuN4 <https://bit.ly/3YMFuN4>



bit.ly/4dkW9qF

Community Housing Advocates: *A Non-Profit Trendsetter*

AS A REGULAR READER OF OUR NEWSLETTER, you are likely familiar with Mercy Housing & Shelter Corporation and My Sisters' Place (MSP). But have you noticed the "Community Housing Advocates" (CHA) logo in our materials and wondered about its role? What exactly does Community Housing Advocates do, and how does it influence the work of the other two organizations you already know well?

In 2018, both Mercy Housing & Shelter Corporation and My Sisters' Place were experiencing major changes, including leadership transitions. Because of their shared programs, funding, missions, and client care philosophies, the organizations saw an opportunity to collaborate more effectively. This led to the formation of Community Housing Advocates, a unified effort to combine their strengths and resources.

The formation of Community Housing Advocates (CHA) is particularly clever because, rather than merging Mercy Housing & Shelter Corporation and My Sisters' Place into a single entity, it creates a strategic affiliation that significantly reduces costs while preserving each organization's unique identity. Here's how it works: Community Housing Advocates serves as the administrative umbrella for both Mercy and MSP. It centralizes key administrative functions—such as leadership (CEO, COO, CFO), Human Resources, IT, Finance, Development, and Quality Assurance—while allowing Mercy and MSP to continue running their programs and services independently.

Kara Capone, CEO of CHA, explains, "What's ingenious about CHA is that it delivers essential cost savings on administrative expenses, which is crucial given that our state and federal contracts haven't kept up with inflation since the 2008 economic crisis." She notes that, compared to 2008, both Mercy and MSP are receiving approximately 35% less in funding due to inflation, yet they are still expected to meet the same contractual outcomes.

The affiliation model allows each organization under the CHA umbrella to retain its own 501(c)(3) status and identity—a benefit that isn't typically preserved in a merger or acquisition.

"This model works exceptionally well for us because it enables us to continue offering innovative and high-quality programs to those in need, whereas other organizations may struggle just to maintain basic operations," Capone adds. "We are truly partners in this effort."



❄️ *Making Holiday Wishes* ❄️

COME TRUE

While working to end homelessness by connecting those in need with housing and services is our primary function, we also recognize the importance of providing support and TLC in other ways.

Our Holiday Wishes Program is an opportunity to reach out to our residents and show them additional kindness and care by providing them with holiday gifts each December.

If you would like to participate by purchasing a gift for our residents for the upcoming holiday season, please scan the QR code below or use the link to access the Amazon Wish List. (Note: We will be adding more items to the list as the season draws nearer.)

Any questions can be directed to
Leah Reyes
lreyes@mercyhousingct.org

To access the Holiday Wish List, please visit
<https://amzn.to/461qM73>
or scan the code.



CVS Health Foundation Awards \$50k to Mercy Housing

THANKS TO THE CVS Health Foundation's Hometown Fund Grant, Mercy Housing & Shelter Corporation now has \$50,000 to help offset costs at the agency's Friendship Center.

Funded almost completely through donations, the Friendship Center has been serving the hungry and homeless at 118 Main Street in Hartford since Mercy was founded in 1983.

"The fact that the Friendship Center relies almost solely on monetary donations to stay in operation makes it a constant challenge for us to keep the doors open," explained Mercy Housing CEO Kara Capone. "Receiving this very generous \$50k grant from the CVS Health Foundation is just an incredible help to us and the individuals we serve. We couldn't be more grateful."



Mercy Housing is one of 15 nonprofit organizations in Connecticut to receive funding from the 2024 CVS Health Foundation Hometown Fund Grant. The funding was allocated to nonprofits located within a 20-mile radius of Hartford.

what's happening

OCTOBER

25

HOPE & HOME CELEBRATION
BOND BALLROOM | 6:00 - 10:00 P.M.

NOVEMBER

7

JOB FAIR, 76 PLINY STREET, HARTFORD
10:00 A.M. - 1:00 P.M.

NOVEMBER
THROUGH
DECEMBER

HOLIDAY APPEAL YEAR END
FUND DRIVE

DECEMBER

3

GIVING TUESDAY

IMPACTING LIVES

Affecting Change



He was homeless when he came to us, now he is a bank manager.

-MARQUITA PONDER, MERCY HOUSING
COMMUNITY SOCIAL WORKER



Do you know how difficult it is to have and keep a job when you are homeless? It's incredibly challenging, yet there are many people who work but simply do not earn enough money to be able to keep a roof over their heads.

That's "Tony's" story. Tony came to Mercy Housing in the winter of 2022 - an intelligent, young man in his late twenties, who had nowhere to lay his head at night after a hard day's work.

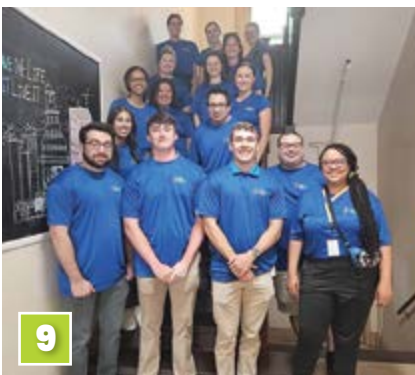
Housing is very hard to come by, but after a few months of diligent effort Mercy's Housing Specialist and a Community Housing Social Worker were able to find permanent housing for Tony.

The result? Tony became employed by a local bank branch as a teller - a job that he has so excelled at that he is now the Branch Manager! Even more exciting - Tony recently found his own apartment outside of Mercy's program, which he can now afford on his own. As a result, he will be graduating from Mercy's program after completing the necessary three-month follow-up process in October.



"We couldn't be happier for him," commented Marquita Ponder, who took over as Tony's Community Social Worker when she began working for Mercy in March of this year. "I am glad that he is able to be productive and independent and no longer in need of help. This is why we do what we do."

As Tony graduates from Mercy's Housing Program, that will open the door for another "Tony" or "Peggy" who needs a hand-up and help finding stability and a place to call home.



- 1** LAZ Parking spent the day at St. Elizabeth House painting patio furniture and organizing the food and clothing pantries.
- 2** Volunteers from M&T Bank helped set up My Sisters' Place's Back to School Event.
- 3** Eversource volunteers held their annual cookout for residents of St. Elizabeth House, as well as opened the food pantry, organized donations, and prepared grocery kits.
- 4** Volunteers from Robinson + Cole organized donations and opened the St. Elizabeth House food pantry to the community as part of their Summer of Service initiative.
- 5** ICON donated hygiene products, household goods, air mattresses and clothing to benefit the people we serve.
- 6** CVS Aetna created 250 summer care packages for visitors to the Friendship Center.
- 7** Otis Elevator Corp's statewide summer intern cohort completed major landscaping projects at St. Elizabeth House and our 117 Main Street and 211 Wethersfield Avenue sites
- 8** The United Congregational Church of Tolland created laundry kits for the newest residents of the Beaumont Lofts.
- 9** CohnReznick LLP opened the food and clothing pantry at St. Elizabeth House to the community as part of their annual Week of Caring.
- 10** KPMG continued their annual tradition of opening the food pantry to the community. They also organized food donations and restocked the pantry shelves.
- 11** The Metropolitan District Commission's summer intern cohort spent their annual volunteer day at St. Elizabeth House organizing donations and landscaping. They also ran a bake sale which raised over \$1,500 for the Holiday Wish program.
- 12** Amazon volunteers organized donations for Mercy Housing and My Sisters' Place.

CONTACT INFORMATION

development@mercyhousingct.org
860.808.2044

For more information visit
www.ctcha.org
www.mercyhousingct.org
www.sistersplacect.org

CONNECT WITH US!

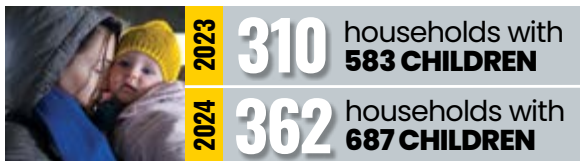


Due to space limitations we are unable to include photos of all the great support we receive. However, we are grateful to you all nonetheless.

Non-Profit
US Postage
PAID
Hartford, CT
Permit No 672

Homelessness in Connecticut Rises 13%. We Need Your Help.

Current data reveals a troubling trend: homelessness in Connecticut has surged by 13% from January 2023 to January 2024, marking the third consecutive year of increases. The state's annual point-in-time count shows the number of homeless individuals has grown from 3,015 to 3,410 over the past year.



This rise includes a significant increase in families with children. About one-third of those experiencing homelessness report

having at least one disabling condition, and more than two-thirds are identified as people of color. The shortage of affordable housing is a key factor contributing to this crisis, with Connecticut being one of the most expensive states in the nation to live in. This discouraging news makes the need all the greater, and your support all the more crucial.

We need your help now more than ever if we are to continue to provide housing resources for a growing number of people in our community who are desperate to obtain a basic human need – a place to call home. As the calendar year winds down we ask you to consider making your end-of-year donation to our Holiday Appeal Campaign by scanning a QR code or visiting the links below. We appreciate your support more than we can express.



Donate to Mercy

bit.ly/4dY0roz



Donate to MSP

bit.ly/3V1XmeR

Don't Miss the Event of the Season!



HOPE AND HOME
CELEBRATION 2024
To benefit Mercy Housing & My Sisters' Place

Friday, October 25

NEW Venue
The Bond Ballroom



Live Music - Open Bar
Auctions - Dinner Stations

Register to join us for an exciting evening as we come together to celebrate the work of two outstanding organizations and raise funds for those experiencing homelessness in our community. [Learn More](#)



SCAN ME

Visit [BIT.LY/HopeHome24](https://bit.ly/HopeHome24) or call 860.808.2044

