

COMMUNITY BUILDING

FALL 2025

From House Fire to Homelessness to Home A GRANDMOTHER'S TALE OF HOPE

CEO INSIGHTS

Housing First Works!

When it comes to homelessness, Connecticut has been known for being both a center for innovation and home to humane, dignified and compassionate care for our citizens. I've worked in this field long enough to see the evolution of how services are delivered and how providers and leaders have partnered to break down silos and barriers to housing.

Over the years, I have seen the homeless response system transform from one where it was a first-come, first-served system to one where the people who needed the services the most, those that used multiple service systems, were prioritized for housing. Housing first works. Not only do people who are the most in need get access to housing, but it also saves taxpayers a significant amount of money.

A recent study looked at implementation of Housing First for chronically homeless individuals and found that once enrolled in housing, health care costs declined by almost \$10,500 per person per year! The study didn't include other saving that occur from decreased ER visits and hospitalizations, treatment, mental health emergencies, or criminal justice involvement. And those studies show that for every dollar spent on housing, approximately \$2 is saved. I'd call that a good investment in people. Everyday, I see firsthand that housing first



Continued on inside ►

When a sudden fire ripped through Denicka's home, it left more than just ashes behind—it left a family heartbroken and homeless. In a matter of moments, she and her two young grandchildren lost everything: their clothes, their food, their furniture, their cherished keepsakes, and the safety of the place they called home.

With nowhere to turn, Denicka found herself in a crowded shelter, surrounded by dozens of families facing struggles of their own. "I had a boy and a girl in the shelter with me and they each wore different sizes," she shared. "I was struggling. I had no way to make ends meet at all."

Then, hope arrived. **My Sisters' Place** welcomed Denicka and her grandchildren into supportive housing, offering not just a roof, but stability, dignity, and the chance to begin again.



"I have no idea what I would have done without the help of My Sisters' Place," Denicka said. "Until you've been there, you don't know the feeling of having nothing, and then someone stepping in to help you out. It's been amazing for our family."

Thanks to the compassion of our donors, My Sisters' Place was able to do more than provide shelter. We helped Denicka create a safe, nurturing home for her grandchildren, supplying the essentials and surrounding them with resources to grow stronger and more independent each day.

This is the power of community.
This is the hope *you* make possible.



works – through our Rapid Rehousing and Permanent Supportive Housing programs at both Mercy Housing & Shelter and My Sisters' Place. We have seen individuals and whole families thrive, by getting them off of the streets and into permanent supportive housing first. Then, once they are safe and have a roof over their heads, we are able to provide them with a wide range of wrap around services like: case management, mental health and substance use treatment, medical care, employment and job training, financial assistance, and connection to community resources.

Every day, I see firsthand how Housing First changes lives. Through our Rapid Rehousing and Permanent Supporting Housing programs at Mercy Housing & Shelter and My Sisters' Place, we've watched individuals and families thrive once they have a safe place to call home. With that foundation, we can then provide the support they need—case management, health care, job training, and more—to help them rebuild and move forward.

Kara A. Capone
Chief Executive Officer



BOARD spotlight **LISA HOISL**

The vital work we do to support individuals experiencing homelessness is made possible through the dedication of our Community Housing Advocates (CHA) Board of Directors. Each month, we highlight one of these inspiring leaders. This month, we proudly spotlight our incoming Board Chair, Lisa Hoisl.

Lisa recently retired as Vice President of Experience Management and Marketing at Travelers after 18 years and brings four decades of leadership experience from roles at Northeast Utilities, Cigna, and Advo. Beyond her professional expertise, she brings a deep personal commitment to our mission.

Her journey with us began in 2001 at a benefit golf tournament for My Sisters' Place. ***"I thought, 'What an amazing organization. I need to find a way to do more,'"*** Lisa recalls. She soon began volunteering, later joined the Development Committee, and in 2019 was elected to the CHA Board of Directors. Since then, she has served as Vice Chair and Chair of the Development Committee. This September, she will become Board Chair, succeeding Diane Bengston.

Lisa's passion for our work also reflects her late mother's steadfast support of Mercy Housing. In her honor, Lisa donated a cherished wall hanging that now graces the Chapel at St. Elizabeth House. We are grateful to have Lisa as our new Board Chair and for the energy, wisdom, and compassion she brings to the cause of housing and hope.

Thank you, Lisa, for your inspiring leadership.

Planned Dementia Screenings Aim to Improve Care for Aging Homeless

Did you know that people experiencing homelessness are almost twice as likely to develop dementia as the general population—and often at much younger ages? The reasons are complex. Dementia can increase someone's risk of becoming homeless, while the trauma and harsh realities of living on the streets can speed up aging and cognitive decline.

At Mercy's Friendship Center, we're beginning to see the impact of dementia on the aging population we serve, and we are asking important questions: How many of our guests are affected? And how do we adapt our services to meet their changing needs?

To help find answers, Mercy is partnering with **Hartford HealthCare** and the **University of St. Joseph Graduate School of Nursing** to begin offering voluntary dementia screenings. These screenings will be available to visitors 55 and older at the Friendship Center and to residents of St. Elizabeth House's residential programs.

The need has never been greater. In 1990, the average age of a chronically homeless American was just 30 years old. Today, that average age has risen to 62.

"We are hoping the data we gather through this project will help demonstrate that homeless services in Greater Hartford must evolve to meet the needs of a growing number of older adults facing cognitive challenges," said Kara Capone, CEO of Community Housing Advocates, the parent organization of Mercy Housing & Shelter Corporation.

Plans are underway to begin the dementia screenings next year—an important step toward providing compassionate, responsive care for some of our most vulnerable neighbors.





HOPE AND HOME

An Evening to Remember. A cause worth supporting.

PRESENTED BY **TRAVELERS**



We are pleased to announce that Travelers, a leading provider of property casualty insurance, will serve as the Presenting Sponsor of our **7th Annual Hope & Home Celebration**, taking place **Friday, Oct. 17**, at the Bristol Event Center. This partnership demonstrates Travelers' longstanding commitment to community impact.

"We are deeply grateful to Travelers for believing in our mission and standing with us as true partners in the fight to end homelessness," said Kara Capone, CEO of Community Housing Advocates. "The work of moving individuals and families from homelessness into safe, affordable housing would not be possible without the generosity and leadership of corporate partners like Travelers."

Travelers' sponsorship of the *Hope & Home Celebration* will help Mercy Housing and My Sisters' Place expand their reach of critical services such as supportive housing, residential programs, day shelters, a soup kitchen, shelter diversion, rapid rehousing and more to some of the most vulnerable individuals and families in Greater Hartford and Middlesex counties.

HOPE & HOME TO HONOR DIANE BENGSTON

This year's *Hope & Home Celebration* promises to be an unforgettable evening, beginning with a cocktail reception featuring live music and an array of silent auction items, followed by a gourmet dinner, a high-energy live auction, and an inspiring program that includes the signature "Help for Housing" moment.



We will also be paying a special tribute to our former Board Chair, retired Travelers CHRO and tireless advocate, Diane Bengston, for her extraordinary commitment to our mission.

"Diane's enthusiasm, graciousness and support means more to us than she may ever realize," commented Kara Capone, CHA CEO. "I can't think of a better person for us to pay tribute to."

We encourage you to be part of this special night—by attending the event, making a donation, or participating in the auction online.

BIDDING OPENS OCTOBER 3 – YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE THERE TO WIN!

Can't make it to this year's *Hope & Home Celebration* on October 17? You can still join in the excitement and make a difference through our online Silent Auction, opening October 3. Whether you attend the event or not, you'll have the chance to bid on incredible items—all while helping to support individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

SILENT AUCTION HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE:

- Overnight in the Hamptons with breakfast
- 4 tickets to the NY Giants vs. Washington Commanders
- \$300 & \$200 Amazon Gift Cards
- Overnight and dinner on the Boston Seaport
- Shark Detect Pro Self-Empty Robot Vacuum
- Ninja Creami Soft Serve Ice Cream Maker
- Premium Bourbon and smoker kit
- ...and much more!

EXCLUSIVE LIVE AUCTION (EVENT ATTENDEES ONLY):

- 7-days in stunning Southern VT for up to 12 people
- Private gourmet dinner for 8 prepared in your home by Chef Laurie Erickson
- Corporate Suite for 24 at a Hartford Yard Goats game (courtesy of M&T Bank)
- Golf Foursome at the award winning TPC River Highlands

Start your Silent Auction bidding October 3 and help transform lives—whether you're in the room on October 17 or cheering us on from home.

2025 HOPE & HOME CELEBRATION –
REGISTER, DONATE AND BID AT:

onecau.se/hopehome2025

or scan the QR code



For more information, please contact **Annette Scheidecker** at ascheidecker@mercyhousingct.org or **860-808-2044**.

TRANSFORMING LIVES THROUGH RESIDENTIAL PROGRAMS

At **Mercy Housing and Shelter Corporation**, we believe everyone deserves not just a roof over their head, but the chance to heal, grow, and rebuild their lives with dignity. Homelessness is rarely the result of one event—it's often the outcome of complex challenges like health issues, trauma, and lack of support. Through your generosity, we're able to offer housing and wraparound services that provide stability, hope, and a path forward.

Here are some of the ways Mercy's residential programs change lives every day:

■ **COMMUNITY RESPITE PROGRAM** ▶ A safe haven for adults in the midst of a mental health crisis. Instead of facing hospitalization or the streets, participants receive short-term housing, nourishing meals, and intensive case management to help them regain stability and return to independent living.

■ **MERCY HOUSE PROGRAM** ▶ A compassionate home for individuals living with HIV/AIDS and other serious health conditions, where they find not only shelter but also the medical and emotional support they need to live healthier, more hopeful lives.

■ **WOMEN'S PROGRAM** ▶ A 90-day residential program for women in recovery, helping them bridge the gap between treatment and independence. With support, encouragement, and care, women begin to thrive again as they transition back into the community.

■ **THE RESIDENCE AT ST. MARY'S** ▶ A nurturing, supportive home for 12 adults with mental and physical disabilities. Each person has their own apartment while benefiting from 24-hour staff assistance, home-cooked meals, and personalized case management—all designed to foster independence with the comfort of community.

■ **THE HAVEN AT CHARTER OAK** ▶ A lifeline for young adults ages 18–25 who are leaving state care or other transitional housing. With around-the-clock staff support, The Haven provides skills training, recovery resources, and guidance so young adults can build the confidence and stability they need for independent, successful living.

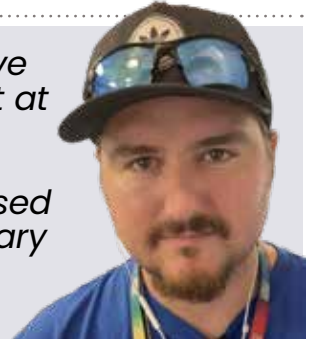
Every day, these programs make a profound difference. For many participants, Mercy's housing and services are not just helpful—they are lifesaving. Thanks to your support, people who once felt hopeless are now discovering stability, purpose, and a brighter future.

IMPACTING LIVES

Affecting Change

I definitely would have been dead if I wasn't at Mercy. I could very easily have been murdered or overdosed on drugs. It's very scary living on the streets.

– DEAN



When Dean talks about his past, the pain and danger of life on the streets are clear. For years, addiction and homelessness consumed his life. He had no safe place to sleep, no regular meals, and no family support. Each night brought fear—fear of the cold, fear of violence, fear of not surviving to see the morning.

But today, Dean is five months sober and rebuilding his life through Mercy Housing's residential program.

"Before I came to Mercy, my life was in shambles," he explained. "Now, my life is 100 percent better. I've seen a lot of changes in myself, and it's all because of this place."

After a hospital stay, Dean was referred to Mercy Housing, where he received not only a safe room of his own, but also stability, structure, and support for his recovery. Living with Bipolar Disorder, consistent access to his medication is critical—something he simply couldn't maintain while homeless.

At Mercy, that changed.

"I have a more structured life now," Dean shared. "I eat healthy meals, I take my medications, and I have more peace."

Dean knows his journey isn't finished. His next goal is to secure permanent housing and continue the progress he's worked so hard to achieve. But for now, he has something he once thought impossible: stability, health, and hope for the future.

Bring Joy to Families This Holiday Season

The holidays should be a time of warmth, joy, and togetherness—but for many families and individuals experiencing homelessness, this season can be especially difficult.

At My Sisters' Place and Mercy Housing, we are committed to making sure no one feels forgotten during this special time of year.

Each December, thanks to the generosity of our supporters, we provide festive holiday meals and distribute gifts to every child and adult in our programs. These simple acts of kindness bring comfort, dignity, and hope to people who are working hard to rebuild their lives.

YOU CAN HELP MAKE HOLIDAY WISHES COME TRUE. By purchasing a gift from our **Amazon Wish List** (link below or accessible through the QR code), you'll bring joy and light to someone who needs it most. Together, we can make this season truly special.

Thank you for helping us share the spirit of the holidays.



<https://bit.ly/462Rp8m>



- 1** Employees from the Connecticut Judicial Branch organized the food and clothing pantries at St. Elizabeth House.
- 2** 180 Life Church cooked and served lunch for visitors to the Friendship Center and residents of St. Elizabeth House.
- 3** Freedom City Church held a diaper drive to benefit the families of My Sisters' Place.
- 4** The Larson Family cooked and served a special breakfast for the St. Elizabeth House residents in honor of their father, Ray.
- 5** Interns from The Hartford coordinated a Field Day for My Sisters' Place's Youth Program as part of their Day of Service.

- 6** Eversource held their annual cookout for visitors to the Friendship Center and residents of St. Elizabeth House.
- 7** Heads Up Hartford completed a variety of cleaning projects at My Sisters' Place's Youth Room.
- 8** Volunteers from Key Bank organized the food and clothing pantries and held a clothing giveaway event at St. Elizabeth House.
- 9** Volunteers from Andersen Tax sorted books and refreshed the libraries throughout St. Elizabeth House.
- 10** Volunteers from Laz Parking organized the food and clothing pantries as part of their Day of Giving.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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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.



More Families Turning to Mercy for Food

Mercy Housing's Friendship Center is seeing a sharp increase in families with children seeking meals from the soup kitchen and groceries from the food pantry—highlighting the growing food insecurity in our state.

"In August, we served four times as many families as we did a year ago," said Kathy Shaw, COO of Community Housing Advocates. "We noticed the trend in June and have seen a steady increase in need ever since. **One mom even came from Bristol with her hungry little one because there was no food left at soup kitchens near her. Families are struggling with food insecurity more than ever.**"

Rising food costs, reduced federal nutrition support, and greater demand are all contributing to this surge. Unfortunately, the situation may worsen. A federal law taking effect on December 31, 2026, will significantly cut SNAP benefits, leaving some seniors with as little as \$65 a month. The federal cut will force Connecticut to take on a larger share of the program's costs, costing the state millions in additional annual expenses.

To cover the higher costs, the state may have to lower the monthly benefit amounts for families, potentially forcing them to receive far less than what is need to feed their children.

HOW YOU CAN HELP ▶ Stay informed and raise your concerns with state and federal representatives.



Use this link to find your representatives:

<https://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/menu/cgafindleg.asp>

DONOR spotlight

Thank You, Starbucks, for Supporting Our Mission

We are deeply grateful to Starbucks and its employees for once again recognizing and uplifting the mission of Mercy Housing. Through the Starbucks Foundation Neighborhood Grants Fund, we were honored with a generous donation that directly supports the vital services we provide to individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

This marks the second consecutive year that Starbucks has chosen to stand beside us in this work—and their generosity has extended to My Sisters' Place as well. Their continued commitment shows not only corporate responsibility, but also the compassion of the people behind the brand who believe in building stronger, more caring communities.

From all of us at Mercy Housing, thank you, Starbucks, for believing in our work and helping us create brighter futures for those we serve.

