Northwest Corner Homeless Find their Gathering Place

Amid the historic buildings, antique colonial and comfortable contemporary homes that dapple the rolling hills of the Northwest Corner, are less visible “homes,” makeshift residences and sleeping nooks where members of our community—those living in a state of homelessness—are away from the cold and the wind. Some are homeless as a result of a struggle with opioid addiction, some with untreated mental or physical medical conditions, many because they cannot afford to pay for housing, food, and medication on a minimum-wage salary.

No Place to Go

In 2011, there were 156 homeless people in Litchfield County, 30 percent of them chronically homeless, meaning they had experienced homelessness four or more times in three years. These members of our community, including veterans, and single-parents with young children, hunkered down in tents in the woods close to town or “couch surfed,” staying with friends for a night and then moving on. With no place to go during the day to escape the elements, they gathered at libraries, coffee shops, and businesses to stay warm.

“There was no central daytime location to find homeless individuals and families and no central location for them to get help,” said Nancy Cannavo, of Charlotte Hungerford Hospital and New Beginnings of Northwest Hills Litchfield County.

“Once the local shelters were closed each morning, those who had stayed there the night before had no place to go, and it was not feasible for service providers to work nights when those needing shelter returned.”

Services providers, including social services, mental and physical health services, job placement and housing-assistance programs that helped to house the homeless, were spread throughout Northwest Corner towns. Many experiencing or at risk for homelessness did not know where to look for help, and service providers often had difficulty finding and keeping in touch with those who could benefit from their services.

Ruth and John August, along with the T. and Jane August Wiederhold Foundation, have provided a vital resource to the homeless in the Northwest Corner through the Northwest Corner Homeless Coalition (NCHC).

Ruth and John August’s longstanding generosity has benefited the Northwest Corner in many ways throughout their 40-year marriage, but one project that has directly impacted the community where they live and raise their family over the years is the Northwest Corner Homeless Coalition.

In 2011, John August, president of the T. and Jane August Wiederhold Foundation, was asked by the Northwest Corner Homeless Coalition to help them create a homeless service network that would help connect Northwest Corner residents who need help with the people and resources who can assist them. The coalitions service area includes Torrington, Litchfield, Thrall, and Winsted.

“John August is the face of the August Family Foundation,” said George Moskal, executive director of the Northwest Corner Homeless Coalition.

Mr. August “has been involved in every aspect of the coalition over the last 10 years,” Ms. Moskal said.

In 2018, the August Family Foundation donated $250,000 to the Northwest Corner Homeless Coalition to establish an Endowed Field-of-Interest Fund, called the Roberta Lee August Fund. The fund is dedicated to support homeless services and programs across the Northwest Corner.

The fund’s first grant cycle of $125,000 was awarded to seven Northwest Corner agencies.

The Northwest Corner Homeless Coalition’s New Cohort Begins Leadership Enrichment for Advancing Professionals (LEAP) 2017 Spring LEAP is an intensive leadership program designed toward building skills in all areas of nonprofit leadership. Presented by Danosky & Associates, LLC, LEAP builds a foundation of skills and awareness for nonprofit professionals. Facilitators share their expertise, insights and insights while engaging participants in presentations, group discussions, research and case study analysis, hands-on practice assignments, and action planning activities that explore leadership, board governance, financial management, human resources, fundraising and budgeting.

Read more at northwestcf.org/newchair

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Also online...

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The Community Foundation recently launched an online grant application process, a searchable online nonprofit database, and a flexible donation page that empowers donors to make donations to multiple funds with one transaction or set up recurring donation accounts.

Read more at northwestcf.org/improvement

Grants Awarded in the Northwest Corner

More than 20 area nonprofits were awarded $84,400 in the most recent grant cycle. Grantees include the Hitchcock Library of Sharon, the Torrington Police Activities League and many more Northwest Corner nonprofits.

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Fish Tales Offers a Swimming Welcome to the Riverwalk

“Project FishTales echoes all the energy and good-will of a town-wide event, it is a symbol of our community banding together. The mural is a visual testimony of celebration and pride-of-place.”

Over a 12-month period community members from all over the Northwest Corner met in studio space adjacent to KidPlay Children’s Museum to paint the 400 pieces that comprise the mural, which now stands as a colorful welcoming entrance to the 44-mile Naugatuck Riverwalk.

“Not only did the Community Foundation provide financial support, but staff member participated in the actual painting process,” said Danielle. “I am grateful for all the volunteers that made this extraordinary project possible. The mural is an organization that recognizes the value of the arts as a way to strengthen and revitalize our communities.”

The Gathering Place in Torrington provides one-stop access to service providers, where individuals and families learn what services they qualify for, and depending on their needs, find shelter at FISH/Friends in Service to Humanity of Northwest Connecticut or the Northwest Connecticut YMCA Winchester Services at the Gathering Place.

Donors Put Education Within Reach for Hundreds of Northwest Corner Students

More than 180 students from our Northwest Corner were awarded scholarships for the 2016-2017 academic year.

Students received $133,225 in scholarships through Community Funded scholarship funds. Students are awarded based on parameters set by donors and, for most scholarships, by financial need, academic excellence, extracurricular accomplishments, work experience, and application essays.

“I am honored to have been chosen to receive tuition assistance from the Khurshed Bhumagara Fund. The award will be put to excellent use as I continue my education and work toward my goal of becoming a neuropsychologist,” said Nicholas LaRothe, Connecticut Children’s Medical Center's neuropsychology intern.

“I would like to send my sincerest gratitude for offering me the Russell Anderson, Carmen Brooks Anderson, and Henry Vail Brooks Scholarship Fund,” said Bang Lam, biomedical engineering student at the University of Connecticut.

“It is truly an honor to know someone out there is helping me towards my future.”

View awarded students by scholarship fund at northwestcf.org/scholarship-recipients.

Local artist Danielle Mailer inspired more than 100 community members to work toward her goal of becoming a neurosurgery intern.

“Gladys never met a stray animal she didn’t love,” said Sheryl. “She even went to the cemetery with her children and allowed them to scatter her ashes there.”

“Gladys Finger brings comfort and joy to the Northwest Corner”

Gladys Finger of Torrington worked in housekeeping for many years at Highland Acres, a nursing home in Winsted. She enjoyed flower gardening and sewing, including making all of her own work smocks, but Gladys was most known for her enthusiastic kindness for others, evident through her many gifts to charitable organizations and her love of animals.

Gladys gave to the Calvary Baptist Church, Connecticut Children’s Medical Center, LARC, The Little Guild of St. Frances, and the North Shore Animal League.

She especially loved the holidays as evidenced through her collection of festive sweaters and her holiday baking. Every Christmas for years she would collect the wish lists of the residents of the Southbury Training School, sometimes 20 or 30 residents, and purchase every item on their lists.

When the Make-A-Wish Foundation was seeking donors to send a local boy on a trip to Florida, her only question was, “How much do you need?” She then paid for the whole trip.

“Gladys was very generous,” said Sheryl Undar, a close friend of more than 30 years. “She loved helping others. She loved to make people happy.”

Gladys could not pass up a bargain. She enjoyed shopping and would often purchase gifts for her friends and neighbors that she would leave on their doorsteps, ringing the doorbell and running away.

Neighbors and friends were not the only recipients of Gladys’ generous spirit. She adopted numerous stray dogs and cats, sometimes delivering them to The Little Guild of St. Francis, often taking them to her home and caring for them.

“Gladys never met a stray animal she didn’t love,” said Sheryl. “She even went to the cemetery weekly to feed the squirrels.”

Gladys passed away in the Fall of 2015, but her care for others and her love of animals continues. In true form, she left surprise gifts to the people and animals of the Northwest Corner.

Through her estate planning, Gladys made gifts to the Northwest Connecticut Philanthropy Fund, the Community Foundation of Northwest Connecticut Fund to support holiday-related grants in the Northwest Corner and to the Critter Fund, a fund that assists with shelter, rescue, and adoption, training, prevention of cruelty, spaying and neutering, elderly companionship, services for disabled individuals and wildlife preservation.

Northwest Corner Homeless Find their Gathering Place

New Beginnings of Northwest Hills Litchfield County requested a grant to purchase and renovate a building in Torrington to serve as a hub for individuals and families experiencing or at risk of homelessness, a one-stop shop, where residents could find services or at any time could connect with all of the service providers that could help them.

Through a $185,000 grant from the Draper Foundation Fund, New Beginnings purchased and renovated a building on South Street in A. Torrington. With additional grants from the Draper Foundation Fund, the Marion Wm. and Alice Edwards Fund and the Northwest Connecticut Philanthropy Fund that supported operational costs and addressed the Healing Center was up and running.

Since opening on April 29, 2015, service providers have helped hundreds of individuals receive the services they need and transition into permanent housing, including 12 individuals who had been living in tents in the woods near Main St. in Torrington.

The Plan to End Homelessness in Northwest Connecticut

In 2013 the Community Foundation of Northwest Hills Litchfield County, that joined services for people who have been chronically homeless, and those who have been continuously homeless for a year or more are experiencing at least four episode of homelessness in these three years.

The Plan is an approach for an integrated and strategic approach to ending homelessness systematically by creating a series of goals and objectives that address prevention, housing, services and employment.

The plan was largely a collaborative project,” said Guy Reventlow, Northwest Connecticut Community Foundation president. “More than 70 nonprofits, municipal organizations, local businesses and community members came together to create a plan to end homelessness in our Northwest Corner, a goal that we continue to work toward.

Read The Plan To End Homelessness in Northwest Connecticut at northwestcf.org/publications.
Fish Tales Offers a Swimming Welcome to the Riverwalk

“Project: Fish Tales echoes all the energy and good-will of a town-wide event– it is a symbol of our community coming together. The mural is a visual testimony of celebration and pride-of-place.”


The Mural Project

Local artist Danielle Maler inspired more than 100 community members to help create Project: Fish Tales, a 186 ft by 22 fish mural on the back of the Staples building in Torrington. The mural was inspired by the revitalization of a once highly polluted Naugatuck River that is now home to many fish species.

“A grant from the Carlton D. Fyler and Jenny R. Fyler Fund supported the first phase of the mural’s initiative,” said Danielle Maler.

Volunteers from across the Northwest Corner worked on Project: Fish Tales on evenings and weekends.

The Community Foundation makes available $40,000 in critical-needs grants every year to support the mission of Northwest Connecticut’s local service agencies. This year, “Northwest Corner Homeless Find their Gathering Place” received a grant from the Marion Wm. and Alice Edwards Fund and the Draper Foundation Fund.

Be What’s Possible…

You know what’s important to you, but did you know you can continue to support that work in your Northwest Corner that share your goals and dreams– forever? You can continue to champion the causes you care about by establishing a field-of-interest fund; support specific nonprofits through a designated fund, or support the Community Foundation, your local philanthropic organization.

The Plan to End Homelessness in Northwest Connecticut

In 2013 the Community Foundation of Northwest Connecticut, the Northwest Connecticut Philanthropy Fund and partners worked closely with Frank Douglas Stephens, who became homeless after suffering a traumatic brain injury.

Northwest Corner Homeless Find their Gathering Place

Networked Services

New Beginnings of Northwest Hills Litchfield County, a collaborative of more than 30 local service agencies, set out to change that.

In September 2013, after having collaborated with the Community Foundation to research and write The Plan to End Homelessness in Northwest Connecticut, it was reported that a $165,000 grant from the Draper Foundation Fund, New Beginnings of Northwest Hills, Litchfield County, and the Northwest Connecticut Philanthropy Fund that supported operational costs and addressed the codes, the Gathering Place was up and running.

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The Way Home

The Gathering Place provides one-stop access to service providers, where individuals and families learn what services they qualify for, and depending on their needs, find shelter at Faith’s Friends in Service to Humanity of Northwest Connecticut or the Northwest Connecticut YMCA Winchester Emergency Shelter, apply for housing assistance, and SNAP benefits and/or receive services to help them moved and adapted to a new environment.

They can also work on resumes, shower, wash clothes, get a haircut and receive legal advice. Some service providers coordinate meetings at the facility and are able to meet with clients in a central location such as this.

“We see a lot of people who are working and just can’t afford to pay rent,” said Nancy.

According to Frank, those who seek help at the Gathering Place often have suffered financial losses. They have been laid off from their jobs or are working, but earning far less than they had been. They are struggling to provide a home, medical care and food for themselves and their children. Some are wrestling with addiction. Some are leaving abusive relationships. Others are aging out of care with no family support. More often than not, they are working, but unable to afford a place to live.

That was the case for a woman who recently came to the Gathering Place for help. She was working but struggling to pay rent and purchase food for her and her children. After making several late rent payments, she was evicted from her apartment. She set up a tent in the woods, the only place she could stay that would be close enough for her to walk to work. Gathering Place staff worked with her to gather enough resources to put together a security deposit for an apartment near her employer.

“She and her children are now doing very well,” said Nancy. “She is working full time at Charlotte Hungerford Hospital, able to afford her apartment and care for her children.”

Another recent client became homeless after suffering a traumatic brain injury as a result of falling into an elevator shaft. A gentle soft-spoken man, Frank Douglas Stephens came to the Gathering Place to wash his clothes and shower. A talented artist, he often sketched pictures while he waited for his clothes to dry. Over several months, service providers worked closely with Frank, helping him obtain permanent housing.

Many of those who now have a home because of the services provided through the Gathering Place return to volunteer.

“They [volunteers] received help through the Gathering Place. They are thankful, and self-sufficient, and they want to give back,” said Nancy.

“There are many reasons people experience homelessness,” she said. “With coordinated support, people can get housed. Once housed, they do well.”

“The Gathering Place plays a critical role in helping homeless people and families get into safe and stable homes, something we would not be able to do without the support of the Northwest Connecticut Community Foundation.”

What matters to you? Tell us at northwestcf.org/contact

Contribute to your favorite fund online at northwestcf.org

Donors Bridge Gaps with Critical Needs Support

Through the Draper Foundation Fund, the Robert V. Carr Fund and the Marion Wm. and Alice Edwards Fund, the Community Foundation makes available $40,000 in critical-needs grants every year for nonprofits serving some of the area’s most economically distressed residents and providing the most basic necessities: food, warm clothing, fuel and assistance.

Organizations apply for grants through a streamlined online application in the Fall. Grants are awarded by December in 2015, 52 organizations received a critical needs grant.

View 2015 critical needs grant recipients at northwestcf.org/2015criticalneeds
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Roberta Lee August

Her many friends joked that she worked just as hard or harder in retirement than she had in her career as a banker. This certainly rings true of her dedication to the Northwest Corner Community Foundation.

Roberta played a vital role in the success of the Community Foundation. She was a founding volunteer. In the early years, before the community foundation had staff members, Roberta worked as a banking trust officer, shepherding the Community Foundation's modest initial resources.

For more than four decades, she dedicated herself to the Community Foundation, serving as board of directors recording secretary, member of the governance and scholarship committees and Community Foundation ambassador, as well as trustee to the John T. and Jane A. Wiederhold Foundation.

Roberta was a Junior League Volunteer, and generosity did not end with the Community Foundation. She volunteered and served on the boards of counties nonprofits serving the Northwest Corner.

In addition to giving key roles in the success of programs to improve lives and strengthen communities, Roberta volunteered as conservator for many elderly and mentally ill community members. Over the decades, Roberta's dedication was recognized in many ways. She was named a Paul Harris fellow by the Rotary. She was awarded the YMCA Legacy Award, the Wisdom House Award and the Northwest Connecticut Chamber Community Leader Award. Prime Time House named a building in her honor, and Cazenovia College awarded her an honorary doctorate in the humanities.

Roberta was an active member of her community, family and friends, and graces its in our hearts as we honor her life by continuing to steward the many causes she championed.

Also online…

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More than 20 area nonprofits were awarded $84,400 in the most recent grant cycle. Grants include the Hotchkiss Library of Sharon, the Torrington Police Activities League and many more Northwest Corner nonprofits.

Read more at northwestcf.org/grants

Draper Foundation Fund donations $651,025 to area nonprofits

Designated nonprofits were awarded $445,625, with $225,400 in donor-advised grants awarded to nonprofits that provide essential programs and services for residents of Northwest Connecticut.

Read more at northwestcf.org/2016summer

Board Chair Events educate, Encourage Networking

Throughout the year, the Community Foundation partners with the Connecticut Community Foundation to bring together nonprofit board chairs for educational sessions and learning.

Read more at northwestcf.org/boardchair

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CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

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Northwest Corner Kids Outpace Obesity

Elementary school students from 15 schools across the Northwest Corner crossed the finish line at Torrington High School to complete the final mile of a 26.2-mile marathon they began as kids weeks earlier as part of Road Dog’s KidsMarathon Connecticut through Partners for Sustainable Healthy Communities.

Bill Burgess of Litchfield, chairman of the board of directors of the KidsMarathon Foundation, president and executive director of Partners for Sustainable Healthy Communities worked with the Connecticut Association of Schools and the Connecticut Intercollegiate Athletic Conference to bring the KidsMarathon across Connecticut and to the Northwest Corner.

A grant from the Carlton D. Fyler and Jenny R. Fyler Fund enabled 600 Torrington students to participate in the in-school program that empowers children to complete a full marathon by running an average of 3 miles per week, while learning the value of exercise and healthy nutrition habits. Northwest Corner children completed their last mile on the running track of the Robert H. Frost Sports Complex at Torrington High School to the cheers of hundreds of supporters.

"KidsMarathon increases the physical activity level of children during the school day with realistic goal setting and inspires students to make lifelong healthy choices,” said Donna Labbe of Torrington Public Schools.

"The program is designed for kids who did not participate in physical activity in the past are encouraged to participate, to have fun and develop the skills to pursue a healthy lifestyle," said Stacie Dube of New Brookfield.

"KidsMarathon enables 600 students to participate in a program that yields long-term benefits," said Jenna Davis of the Northwest Connecticut Foundation.

"Roberta knew what mattered in life and lived life to the fullest, sharing her talents, time and treasures,” said JoAnn Ryan, president and CEO of Northwestern Connecticut’s Chamber of Commerce.

Roberta was born in Torrington and raised in Litchfield. She earned an associate’s degree from Cazenovia Junior College for Women, studied the humanities at the University of Connecticut, and graduated from the Williams School of Banking in Washington, Miss.

She began her banking career as an administrative assistant in the trust department of the United National Bank Company. Over the course of her 30-year career, she rose to vice president of the Private Client Group of Connecticut National Bank, retiring in 2001.

Roberta was often tasked about her boundaries the enthusiasm and seemingly endless care for others.

Please visit us online at northwestcf.org/kidsmarathon

Watch the KidsMarathon video at northwestcf.org/kidsmarathon

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4