



The State of the Heart

Spiritus Christi Prison Outreach ♦ Fall/Winter 2019

A Fresh Start on the Square

Eleven SCPO Alums Live In Brand-New East End Apartments

By Chip Partner

Smiles were wide and enthusiasm flowed freely as former residents of Jennifer House and Nielsen House visited their almost-finished new apartments at Charlotte Square on the Loop, during a “hard-hat tour” in August.

Located in Rochester’s East End neighborhood, Charlotte Square has 50 brand-new studio, one-bedroom, and two-bedroom apartments. The project was built by Home Leasing, which reserves eight of the units to provide permanent housing and case management support for former residents of SCPO programs. Three other former residents who now work for SCPO also rent apartments at Charlotte Square, with all 11 moving in earlier this fall.



“Our goal is to create a diverse, mixed-income community,” Home Leasing project manager Josh Harley said at the beginning of the hard-hat tour. “We have an outstanding relationship with the prison outreach, and it’s our pleasure to welcome your residents to their new homes.”

A large community room is the first thing visitors see when entering the complex from Charlotte Street. Harley explained it’s available at no charge for residents to host birthday parties or other events.

See more Charlotte Square photos on page six.

During the hard-hat tour, the room hosted a check presentation by Mark Rosica of the William G. McGowan Foundation, which gave a generous donation to support SCPO’s work to help residents attain their educational and vocational goals.

Skylights and modern light fixtures create a bright atmosphere in the atrium adjacent

to the community room. There is an art wall that adds color, and an office where community leader April Horsey, who manages the property for Home Leasing, invites residents to visit her for a cup of coffee any time. Spiritus Christi Prison Outreach also has an office at Charlotte Square, where Executive Director Jim Smith can meet regularly with our residents.

“We are so grateful to Home Leasing, along with the public officials and private donors who made this project possible,” Smith said. “Being able to offer our residents a permanent home where they can feel safe and supported is a powerful, positive, and beautiful gift.”



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Please Save The Date!

SCPO Spring Gala
Saturday, March 28th, 2020

Mark your calendar to join us for the annual evening of food, fun, and fellowship that supports our ministry. Check our website or our next newsletter in March for event details and sponsorship opportunities.
www.spirituschristiprisonoutreach.org



Achieving Our Dream to Do More

Executive Director's Update

By Jim Smith

In 2007, the Spiritus Christi Prison Outreach advisory board spent a year developing a strategic plan for our future. Several board members engaged in a benchmarking effort, learning about some of the top re-entry programs in the country. Two nationally known initiatives that taught us a great deal are programs run by Delancey Street Foundation in San Francisco, and the Fortune Society in New York City.

What impressed us about these organizations was the comprehensive services they offer to men and women while they are incarcerated and after they are released. Both programs empower the men and women they serve, and often hire program staff who were once incarcerated or homeless themselves. I believe this approach is one of the great strengths of our prison outreach, where the majority of staff have also been incarcerated and homeless.

The Delancey Street and Fortune Society programs inspired Spiritus Christi Prison Outreach to dream about what more we could offer our men, women, and their children. Today, our multi-faceted program has expanded well beyond our 2007 planning to create vibrant communities of safety and support.

Jail and Prison Outreach

We have six groups that help incarcerated men and women develop a plan to be successful once they are released. Volunteers and staff members travel to the jail and area prisons and jails to facilitate conversation with incarcerated men and women.

Community Groups

We facilitate two groups in the community for men and women in transition from incarceration, and homelessness, at Jennifer House and Nielsen House. Residents, alumni, volunteers, and community members share a meal followed by in-depth "state of the heart" sharing and

support. We also offer a group for individuals in human trafficking court, offering them support and alternative living options.

Jennifer House and Nielsen House

Our two houses provide emergency and transitional housing support to men and women when first released from jail or prison. Initial support is focused on stabilization. Each resident participates in a chemical dependency and mental health evaluation provided by community agencies. They are embraced in a warm and caring family atmosphere within a structured environment that allows them to engage in the courageous process of facing personal issues that have led to incarceration. Using an empowering, evidence-based cognitive behavioral approach, residents are encouraged to take ownership of their behaviors and to maintain sobriety without minimizing or justifying.

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Parenting in Recovery Program

As the men and women we serve grow toward self-sufficiency, family reunification work begins. These activities include parent education, with supervised visits to each house by children of our residents. For parents who need more intensive assistance, a focused program is available



on-site at Jennifer House. This parenting program's curriculum was developed by our consultant, Patricia M. Hart, who brings over 32 years as an educator in Connecticut and locally at Mercy High School and the Rochester City School District. Her specialized training and experience with young parents at the Rochester City School District made it possible for her to tailor this seven-session educational program to address the special needs of parents who are in recovery from substance abuse.

Recreation Therapy

Our activity program promotes newfound friendships among residents and provides a non-threatening and therapeutic environment for fostering group problem-solving, learning to trust others, asking for help and confronting problem behavior. A part-time recreation therapist, Betty Monahan, volunteers her time at our houses. Under her leadership, residents have positive experiences that introduce a new world of "sober fun" to residents with each other and their children. These experiences include plays at Geva Theatre, Garth Fagan Dance performances, the Rochester Museum & Science Center, Memorial Art Gallery, arts & craft projects at the houses, and recreational activities such as bowling, attending sports events, and outings to local parks.

Wellness Education

Thanks to University of Rochester School of Nursing students, our residents receive individualized wellness education. The program begins with a welcome and introduction at our regular Tuesday night group

meetings, where participants explore options for education sessions. Education is based on the individualized needs of the residents and include topics such as breast cancer, sexually transmitted diseases, practicing safe sex, fitness and nutrition, drugs of abuse and their effect on the body, hepatitis C, diabetes, pre-natal care, high blood pressure, and birth control. During one semester of their training, nursing students come once a week and present wellness education programs on the topics selected by the residents. For our residents who have histories of homelessness, substance abuse and mental health issues, this is often a first opportunity to learn how they can prevent and treat their illnesses. They receive information they need to develop a commitment to healthy living as part of their recovery.

Fitness and Exercise

Studies suggest a strong link between exercise and successful recovery from substance abuse. Exercise reduces drug craving and helps to replace the high from drug use. It reduces sensitivity to stress, offering those in recovery alternate ways to stave off boredom. Exercise also boosts mood, which further combats boredom and depression. Given these benefits, Jennifer House and Nielsen House each have a group gym membership that allows them to participate in exercise programs at local fitness centers. Staff also organize exercise activities such as group walks, weather permitting, and group exercise at each house.

A New Beginning! Permanent Homes For Our Graduates

Our New Beginnings Housing Program means most residents who graduate from Jennifer House and Nielsen House will move to their own permanent apartment, with their children and with continued support as needed. In collaboration with Home Leasing, Inc., and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, we developed a permanent housing project at Voters Block Apartments, and Fredrick Douglass Apartments that included 12 units set aside for SCPO graduates. This is permanent, not transitional, housing. Residents live in their very own home, receive continued case management support and rental assistance based on income. With Home Leasing as our partner, increased support from New York State and HUD, plus investment by foundation partnerships, we will more than quadruple our ca-

capacity from 12 units in 2012 to a total of 62 apartments by June 2020.

Vocation and Education Support

In the same way SCPO has enhanced its housing support over the years, we are working to further develop our vocational and education supportive services. This began thanks to the dedicated work of two volunteers and SCPO advisory board members: Eleanor Coleman, who was an employment specialist at OACES, and Alan Monahan, a retired senior executive from Xerox. They knew from professional experience that creating a vision of what is possible is an essential part of vocational development, especially for people with histories of homelessness and substance abuse. Our "New Beginnings: Finding your Vocation" program outlines choices and resources available to assist the people we serve in obtaining a job. For residents who are ready, the program provides a step-by-step road map to obtaining needed certifications or more advanced education that can lead to a life-fulfilling career.

A Safety Net of Continuing Care

A unique aspect of SCPO programs is creating a continuum of care, a sense of belonging to a community that lasts a lifetime. Residents build relationships with staff members that begin in a group counseling meetings in jail, then continue at Nielsen House or Jennifer House. They meet staff from the permanent housing program who are always in and out of the houses as part of planning for transitions with residents moving on and bringing graduates to participate in group activities. Trust builds with all staff at dinner, on recreational adventures that everyone participates in (often with their children), and at the regular Tuesday night gatherings. A sense of belonging to a family, where people know each other and share their struggles, is as healing as the services our residents receive. The men and women are continually inspired by successful former residents who return for events and dinner.

We are so happy to be able to continue to expand the services that we offer to the men, women and children of the Spiritus Christi Prison Outreach. It is truly a privilege to be a part of their lives and journey. We are continuously inspired by their strength and courage.

Gratitude for Grants:

The Prison Outreach is grateful for the following gifts received or awarded since publication of the Spring/Summer 2019 newsletter:

Public

City of Rochester
Emergency Food and Shelter
National Board Program
Finger Lakes Performing Provider System
Monroe County
New York State Office of Temporary
and Disability Assistance
U.S. Department of Housing
and Urban Development

Private

Alstom Signaling Foundation
Charles & Millicent Brown Foundation
ESL Charitable Foundation
Excellus BlueCross BlueShield
Community Health Awards
Max & Marian Farash Charitable Foundation
Feinbloom Supporting Foundation
Gilbert Spirit Fund
Greater Rochester Community
Transportation Foundation
William G. McGowan Charitable Fund
Mary Mulligan Charitable Trust
M&T Bank Foundation
Laura J. Niles Foundation
Guido and Ellen Palma Foundation
Paychex Charitable Foundation
Rochester Women's Giving Circle
United Way of Greater Rochester
Donor Designation Program
Waldron Rise Foundation
Fred & Floy Willmott Foundation
Women's Club of Pittsford
Women's Foundation of Genesee Valley



Summer Fun and a Spooky Start to Fall

Jennifer House News

By Sarah Lee, Director

This summer has been nothing short of eventful, with our women enjoying the sun and spending time with Nielsen House gentlemen at various events.

Our first adventure this summer was at Adirondack River Outfitters, where 28 men, women and staff members teamed up to white-water-raft down the Black River. This awesome adventure was a great way to bring the two houses together and build skills related to teamwork.

A second adventure was at the Dancing Rabbit Ranch, where all the residents from both houses were able to enjoy food, fun, fishing, boating, and zip-lining. It was a beautiful sunny day, and all the residents really enjoyed themselves. It was nice to take a break from all our worries



and cares, and just be able to relax in the sun. Thanks so much to Nelson Leenhouts for hosting us!

As for Jennifer House, we are operating at full capacity with 10 women currently in the home, and we are moving forward in many ways. Over the summer we have been able to accomplish many goals and look forward to a bright future fulfilled with love, laughter and housing for everyone. We are extremely excited about all the various types of permanent housing we can offer women as they graduate from Jennifer House.

As the holiday season approaches, we kicked it off with a fearful night at the "Dark Matter Scream Works" haunted house in Greece. The women thoroughly



enjoyed themselves, with a great time had by all. We also hosted an alumna Halloween party, in which Jennifer House graduates participated in a costume contest and spent time with their children in a safe party environment.

The staff at Jennifer House is also doing well. We are currently seeking a new House Manager, as Ki'Atta Whipset has left to pursue new career opportunities. Many women are volunteering for overnight stays—monitoring the house and providing support to our residents, if needed, outside regular staff hours. They are extremely proud to be part of the Jennifer House team in this role. Lastly, we are excited to be headed into the holiday season with joy and gratitude.

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A Year of Fun and Fellowship

Nielsen House News

By Robert Lee, House Manager

Nielsen House has had a very busy year, with many events and opportunities to interact within our community. The men of Nielsen House have shared their gratitude for being able to participate in many of these great functions with Spiritus Christi Prison Outreach staff. Through these community activities, the men have been encouraged to live better lives and overcome barriers to their success and productivity.

Nielsen House joined with Jennifer House this summer at the Dancing Rabbit Ranch. Residents of both programs, staff, and alumni were invited out by Nelson Leen-



Jon Olsen, Sarah Lee, and Judge Jack Elliott



great food, and networking within our recovery community. This show of support allowed us to see the hope in living a healthy lifestyle. Residents and staff members were invited to break out their instruments and join the band. There was a bouncy house donated to the event for the children, along with games and activities for us "older kids."

One of our most recent events was the annual trip to Darien Lake for "Fright Fest." Nielsen House staff, residents, and their children enjoyed the amusement park and spooky Halloween-themed activities. The trip allowed some of the men to be fathers and share a day with their children dedicated to quality time and reunification. The children rode on every ride possible and we shared lunch together.

We have had a wonderful year and attended many other events, including: the Monroe County airshow in August, featuring the U.S. Navy's Blue Angels; the Rochester Lilac Festival in May; Bands on the Bricks at the Rochester Public Market; and the "Rock for Recovery" music event in March at Artisan Works, sponsored by Helio Health. These activities and more have served to show men we work with that there is life, fun, and fellowship within our recovery community.



hours for a day of fishing, swimming, zip-lining, games, music, and an amazing barbecue dinner. As we enjoyed fellowship together, the bond between both houses was strengthened. The event was just what we needed to unwind and take in the serenity of the great outdoors.

For the second year in a row, our entire Spiritus Christi Prison Outreach community attended the SOARS Overdose Awareness Day event with Becky Baker, who organizes this amazing and eye-opening annual event. We were able to help build awareness of the overwhelming opioid crisis our community faces today. SCPO set up tables with information about the programs and resources we offer, while networking with other agencies to learn what they are

doing to address the impacts of opioid addiction and contribute to awareness.

One of the biggest events this year would have to be our Friends and Family Day, attended by nearly 150 supporters, residents, alumni, staff members, family, and friends. Judge

John E. "Jack" Elliott of Monroe County Drug Court and Dr. Tisha Smith, director of inmate drug and alcohol programs in the Monroe County Jail Bureau, were two of our honored guests. They joined the entire Jennifer House and Nielsen House team, residents of both programs and their family and friends for live music,



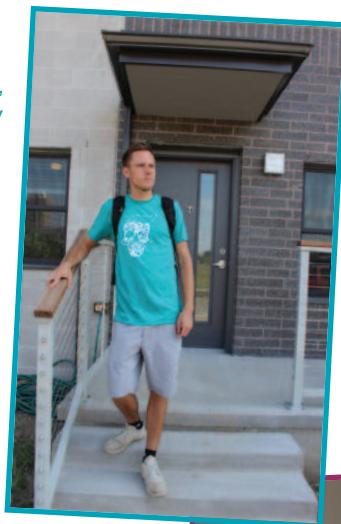
'I Can't Wait to Start Unpacking'

It was an honor to be present as men and women served by SCPO saw their new apartments during a hard-hat tour in August, a month before moving in.

"The apartment is great ... very sturdy floors, spacious bedroom, the kitchen is all set up... it's a very elegant-looking kitchen. The Little Theater is nearby, and you're able to walk to so many things to do." - Tim



"This is absolutely beautiful, and it's right up my alley. I'm a princess! I worked hard to become one too. I came from the bottom and worked hard to get where I am... Everything I have is in totes. I can't wait to start unpacking and decorating, to make it home." - Lisa B



"I can't believe it. It's probably the nicest place I've ever lived... We've been from hotel to hotel. To give (my son) Dean a home again, it's a miracle." - Angel



"From where I've been two years ago, to where I am today - it's unbelievable. I'm so grateful to Jim and Sharon and everyone at Jennifer House. They tell us we can do it... and we can." - Helene



"I loved it. I lit up when I walked in. I love all the natural light. I love the islands. (At Jennifer House and the YWCA) I've always had to share a bathroom. It will be so great to have my own bathroom." - Alfonsina

Welcome Eileen Hurley!

Joining SCPO to Continue a Lifetime of Service

By Kathleen Tranelli



Eileen Hurley has a long history of supporting people who have been incarcerated as they return to the community. We are thrilled to welcome Eileen to her new position

directing case management for SCPO residents at the Voters Block and Frederick Douglass communities.

These apartments provide permanent supportive housing to people with a history of homelessness who have been involved with the criminal justice system, and who have a disabling condition such as mental health issues or addiction that impedes their ability to maintain stable housing.

Eileen's background as a nurse, family therapist, social worker and counselor has prepared her to offer a holistic approach to meeting the physical, mental and social needs of her clients. She also brings a keen knowledge of community resources. As case manager, Eileen will support graduates of Jennifer House and Nielsen House in achieving their personal, educational and job goals. Graduates of these programs at Voters Block and Frederick Douglass pay a portion of their monthly rent on their own and receive a rent subsidy through SCPO.

Eileen served as program director for the Spiritus Christi Urban Youth Outreach since 2006. In that role she provided counseling to 16- and 17-year-olds who were incarcerated at Monroe County Jail, as well as their families, and maintained contact post-release. Under a new state law that took effect this summer, these young people no longer are prosecuted as adults. New courts, facilities and programming have been established for them.

Along with her new role, Eileen will continue supporting about a dozen youth who have faced incarceration. When she gives her business card to new clients, she always tells them, "My card never expires." Many clients continue to call her years after their involvement with the Urban Youth Outreach. Coincidentally, a 20 year old client she met through the urban outreach program in 2016 is now a resident at Frederick Douglass apartments.

Eileen's involvement with the Prison Outreach began in 1989 as a volunteer server at Roger's House restaurant, which provided jobs for ex-offenders. In 1999 she launched Women of Conviction, a qualitative research project to explore accelerating rates of incarceration and recidivism among women. She and two others interviewed hundreds of women in jails, prisons, and the community. Research findings led to the proposal, planning and launching of Spiritus Christi Mental Health Center and Jennifer House, SCPO's transitional house for women leaving prison or jail and their children.

She served as director of the Mental Health Center from its founding in 2000 until 2006. From 2007 to 2017, while running the Urban Youth Program, she also worked at St. Joseph's Neighborhood Center as a counselor, and then at the University of Rochester Medical Center as a social worker.

Eileen's roots in the criminal justice system began with her father. As a business owner, he hired a parolee from Attica who ended up embezzling funds. Yet years later he donated the family van to Roger's House, because he still believed in giving people second chances. His daughter continues that legacy. While SCPO realizes they have a gem in Eileen, she sees the case management role as a gift to her: "I am so grateful for the opportunity to play a part in work that benefits so many lives... a part in healing this world."

Twenty More Apartments Coming in 2020



A few days before the hard-hat tour at Charlotte Square in August, Home Leasing hosted a "renovation party" at another apartment complex it is developing in Rochester's 19th Ward. Mayor Lovely Warren took part with Home Leasing Chairman Nelson Leenhouts and many representatives of community organizations, including SCPO.

This project will completely modernize 53 one-bedroom and 10 studio apartments at 447 Thurston Road and 967 Chili Avenue. Twenty of the renovated apartments will be reserved for graduates of SCPO programs.

When these apartments become available in 2020, the prison outreach will be able to offer permanent housing and case management support to more than 60 former residents of Jennifer House and Nielsen House, at four different communities—Voter's Block apartments, Frederick Douglass apartments, Charlotte Square on the Loop, and Thurston Road.



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Check out: www.facebook.com/SpiritusChristiPrisonOutreach
where you can find links to recent media coverage and
favorite reflections of residents and staff.



We have dynamic speakers who are anxious to tell the community about the great work the Outreach is doing to help ex-offenders transform their lives. The stories are compelling and the reduced recidivism statistics are impressive.

All we need is a name and contact information; we'll handle the rest.
Contact Jim Smith at 288-0504 for details or to schedule a speaker.