

THE Quarterly

Spring 2022

In this issue, you will hear about some new programs that are providing hope and opportunities for those we serve.

Planning to Pursue a New Direction



Bernard now plans to attend vocational school to get his plumbing certification.

The New Direction Program is a transformative course that was introduced at The Mission to provide individuals in recovery with the opportunity to learn, to be challenged, to reflect, to create a plan for their future, and to see something they may have never seen before – which is their real potential.

“Our premise for this program is that individuals who are in recovery can start to create a new perception of themselves by learning what drives them, connecting with others who have overcome similar challenges, providing them with access to educational and vocational opportunities, developing their own clear career path, and creating a support network of mentors who will assist them afterwards,” said Barrett Young, Chief Executive Officer of The Mission, who designed the course with

“Our goal is to create a life-changing experience that helps participants plan a new direction for their future.”

1 A transformative course to provide individuals in recovery with the ability to create a new direction for their future.

2 A soon-to-be mom shares her story of recovery and discovering a new future with her daughter.

4 Two formerly incarcerated individuals in recovery attend the University of Pennsylvania.

8 A counselor asks some important questions about the trauma faced by those we serve.

Jeff Henderson, an award-winning chef and best-selling author, who discovered his passion and gift for cooking in a most unlikely place: Federal Prison.

“It was in prison, which can be the darkest place on earth, that I made a choice to change,” said Chef Jeff, who, at

the age of 24, was facing 10 years-to-life in prison on federal charges – after making \$35,000 a week selling crack cocaine on the streets of Southeast San Diego. “I have a prison high school diploma,” he added. “I met wise and unexpected mentors when I was there. Still, I had to find my own way.”

In the program’s opening, with dynamic energy, Chef Jeff emphasized the importance of developing trust, creating relationships, pushing through adversity and practicing self-control.

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A Soon-To-Be Mom Recovering from Addiction

Carol knew no other way out.

So, several months pregnant with her daughter Kimonia, Carol told her abusive partner that she needed to go to the hospital.

When she got to Capital Health, Carol confided, "I told them my situation and said I wanted to stay there until I was safe."

"That's when I met Thomasine," she added. Thomasine Gaines is a certified peer recovery specialist at The Mission, who has lived experience in overcoming poverty and addiction that she draws upon daily to connect with, support and, at times, challenge women who are pregnant, experiencing addiction, and seeking help.

Carol is now staying at HomeFront where she said, "Thomasine, Connie (*HomeFront's Founder and CEO*) and everyone here never gave up on me. I had lost my way for a long time. And they helped me find my way back – with compassion and love."

Before going to the hospital as a last resort, Carol said, "I would wake up every day crying. I was using drugs to try to cover up the pain that had become my life. I saw no way out." She paused, then added, "Now I am learning to forgive myself. So I can let go of that pain. And I've learned here that I don't have to stay stuck in the past. I don't have to go backwards. Now, I have a future with my daughter. And she deserves to be loved."

Carol added, "In my sessions with Thomasine, she helps me see what my future could be. She believes in me. And because I know she has been in my position, I feel hopeful."

Thomasine's belief and hope in others comes from a very deep place inside of her. She knows what life is like on the streets.

"I have a deep hole in my arm from



Carol went to the hospital and asked if she could stay until she was safe.

shooting heroin," Thomasine shared. "It is an insidious drug that will capture you and change everything about you. The craving has your mind all the time. And you'll do all kind of lowdown stuff just to have that drug inside of you," she said.

Then Thomasine added, "So, I come from a place of knowing. And of understanding. And the women know that I am only there for one reason – to help them and their baby." She paused, then said, "I tell them, 'Wherever you go, you're still going to take you with you.' Then I add, 'You don't live outside.

You live inside. So, that's where you have to work. On the inside.'"

"I would wake up every day crying. I was using drugs to try to cover up the pain that had become my life. I saw no way out." She paused, then added, "Now, I have a future with my daughter. And she deserves to be loved."

How Will We Know When Our New Food Pantry Is Succeeding?

Imagine a young mother with a baby on her hip, holding a three-year old's hand.

After sorting through clothes in The Mission's Thrift Store, she finds some new jeans, shirts and shoes for her children.

Then, before heading home, she and her children walk into our new Food Pantry where she is greeted and able to fill a shopping cart with nutritious food for the rest of the week, including meals that have been prepared for later that night.

Together, then, she and her children walk home where they will fill their refrigerator, try on new clothes, and enjoy the rest of their day together.

That is when we will know that we are succeeding.

By speaking to her family's needs, with respect and with ease, she and her children will let us know that we are on the right track.

At the very least, we will have brought ease, comfort and compassion to what would otherwise be a challenging day.

Since the middle of last September, when we opened our new Food Pantry, thanks to your donations, we have served over 5,000 individual family members.



Sandra, with her son Lucas, selecting food they need for the week.

Donating 100 Coats to Remember a Colleague

"We are so very grateful to the employees at Caliber Collision who purchased over 100 winter coats, then donated them to help keep those who are experiencing homelessness warm this winter," said Keisha Lewis, Executive Assistant to the Chief Executive Officer of The Mission.

Keith Hansen, Regional Manager from Caliber Collision at 65 NJ-31 North in Pennington, came to The Mission with all the coats, and shared with Keisha that he and his colleagues created this winter coat drive to honor Michael Minuto, their General Manager who recently passed away.

Keisha added, "It was clear from the way that Keith spoke that Michael was very dear to everyone at Caliber Collision."

Keith said, "We had just put Michael to rest. It was a tough day for all of us. So, we wanted to do something special to honor him. That was how we came

up with this winter coat drive – to show our love and respect for Michael, and to

share our appreciation for all that you do at The Mission to help those in need."



"It was clear from the way Keith spoke that Michael was very dear to everyone at Caliber Collision," said Keisha Lewis, Executive Assistant to the CEO of The Mission.

Going from The Mission to the University of Pennsylvania

Two formerly incarcerated individuals who are in recovery, receiving counseling in The Mission's Behavioral Health Program, have been accepted into an innovative ten-week course at the University of Pennsylvania where they are guided by graduate students and professors, with the goal of developing their own business plan, which they will present to a panel that includes possible investors.

To qualify for this groundbreaking intensive experience, Barrett Young, Chief Executive Officer of The Mission, who co-founded the program, said that participants are selected based on several criteria, including the depth of their commitment to recovering, their belief in themselves, and their entrepreneurial passion.

One of the earliest graduates from the program was Curtis Kitchen, who, with his wife Brandy, who is also in recovery, was able to write a business plan to get a loan, which allowed them to become owners of their own auto repair shop. "Five years before this, I was sleeping under a bridge, wishing I would never wake up the next morning," Curtis said. "And now we've hired a full-time employee who is also in recovery."

This year, Ryan and Simone are on campus at Penn, developing plans which could open up new doors for them, as well.

Upon meeting Ryan, you might first notice his constant smile, the way he leans into a conversation, and his engaging personality.

While he was able to work as a technician in heating, ventilation and air conditioning, still, as he said, "For almost

half my life, I've been a functioning addict."

"I could succeed at work," he said, "so I thought my addiction wasn't getting in the way. I could pretend (at least to myself) that I was doing alright. But I was just lying to myself about what I was doing. Everybody could see it but me."

His problems, he said, started 15 years ago when, after a motorcycle accident, he was prescribed oxycodone for the pain, then "I used it a lot more and a lot

"Walking onto the campus is a completely different world than where I came from. Still, the students and faculty are all treating us as though we belong there."

longer than I needed to."

Fast forward, and Ryan's addiction led to his being incarcerated, then, through Recovery Court, being offered the opportunity to come to The Mission for counseling.

Pausing, he added, "What I've learned at The Mission is that I should have been talking to a counselor a long time ago. Growing up as I did, me and other young men were never taught to express – let alone to understand – our feelings. We were taught to be strong, to be in control, to put a lid on our emo-



Ryan is looking to create an offloading cargo company.

tions. So, talking with the counselors here has been whole a new experience. I'm understanding some things I never realized about myself."

What he'd like to do next, he said, is invest in creating an offloading cargo company with his brothers – where they will move cargo from ports in Newark, Elizabeth and Jersey City.

When he walks on the campus at the University of Pennsylvania, Ryan said, "It's like taking in fresh air. We've each been assigned two graduate students and we are learning from professors." He added, "When I look around the classroom, I just keep smiling because this is the chance of a lifetime. And I am so grateful."

Meanwhile, when Simone was younger, he dreamt day and night of playing professional football. But in his last high school game, all he remembers was reaching up to catch a pass when a defender clipped him, and he heard a pop. Tucking the ball under his arm, he tried to run, but the pain stopped him. His collar bone was fractured.

That was when he was introduced to Percocet. "It didn't take long for me to

start using it heavy," he said. "Then instead of playing sports, I started hanging out with the wrong crowd. And I didn't graduate."

A few years later, Simone did get his GED, but he said he was "still using Percocet constantly." From time to time, he would work in a warehouse. Then he got "locked up for possession."

That was when he started cutting hair for his fellow inmates. Simone said he learned how to cut hair from his dad, who was a barber. "When nothing else in your life is going your way, at least having your hair cut can make you feel good," he said.

Fast forward, and he was offered the opportunity to be in Recovery Court and go through The Mission's counseling program. That led to his being selected for the entrepreneurial program at Penn, where the esteemed faculty and graduate students are helping him develop a business plan for what he calls a Mobile Barber Shop.

"The pandemic has, understandably,

made many people afraid of coming together," he said. "Yet barber shops have traditionally been a center of community activity. So that connection is being lost. That is the need I want to fill. I want to bring that community atmosphere back to getting your haircut."

His initial ideas include bringing his traveling barber shop to senior citizen centers and halfway houses. He also wants 'giving back' to be part of his brand – giving free haircuts to children as well as to people experiencing homelessness.

For now, as Simone said, "Walking onto the campus is a completely different world than where I came from. Everybody looks ambitious, focused, and driven to succeed. But the students and



Simone is hoping to own a mobile barber shop.

faculty are all treating us as though we belong there. It's amazing."

Barrett underscored, "Thinking about their futures, working with students and professors to refine their plans, then formally presenting their plans can be transformational for Ryan and Simone. It can change their perception of themselves – as they show themselves and others what they can do."

High School Students Raise Funds to Help Those Experiencing Homelessness

After raising funds for two years, Surya Thurumella and Arin Aggarwal, both juniors at West Windsor-Plainsboro High School North, came to The Mission with \$1,400 worth of clothing and hygiene supplies they purchased wholesale online, along with a check for \$800.

"When we became aware of the devastating effects the pandemic was having on those who are experiencing homelessness," said Surya, "we both felt we had to do something."

"That feeling led us to creating a GoFundMe page, where our family, friends and neighbors donated to this cause," added Arin.

"Just 15 minutes away, there are too many people who are hungry and homeless."

"We are very fortunate to be receiving a wonderful education and not to want for anything," said Surya. "And just 15 minutes away," added Arin, "there are too many people who are hungry and homeless."

"The impact Surya and Arin are having is inspiring," said Barrett Young, Chief Executive Officer of The Mission. "During these challenging times, their compassion and generosity shines through."



Surya Thurumella and Arin Aggarwal raised \$2,200 to help those who are hungry and homeless.

We are looking forward to continuing to work with Surya, Arin, and other young people like them on future projects."

Planning to Pursue a New Direction

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To succeed, you need to start trusting the right people. It all starts – or stops – with the power of your relationships. We all come from the streets, from a world where if you didn't read somebody right, it could mean life and death," he said. "You need to learn how to use those same instincts to believe in yourself. And to trust the right people. Your relationships can lead to opportunities." He underscored, "I can't emphasize the importance of relationships enough. Nobody makes it on their own."

At another point, Chef Jeff stressed, "Everyone has their own reaction to criticism, slights and bad news. In the old days, we would have put hands on somebody who offended us. So, for you guys that presents challenges. It is a sign of growth when you can talk yourself down – because we understand that each of us is one pullover from going back to jail."

In addition to Chef Jeff and Barrett, the program was taught by a talented faculty of 16 experts – including business and nonprofit leaders, academi-

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cians, key Rescue Mission staff, a Wall Street trader, a yoga teacher, experts in the field of recovery, and individuals who are also in recovery and have gone on to succeed.

One of the key requirements to be accepted into this program was a firm resolve to change. Before even starting the class, participants had to create a three-dimensional representation of their past. "Our message was: this is who you were," said Barrett. "Share it, be open and honest about it, then let it go. The rest of this class is about creating a new future, believing in possibilities, and knowing how to make it happen."

"Jersey" Jeff, a member of the class, created a montage with "a tornado



Barrett and Chef Jeff, discussing The New Direction Program.

Photo: Michael Mancuso – NJ Advance Media for NJ.com

of hurt and destruction," as he said. "It is a whirlwind of bad choices. I kept losing. I've got so many fences to mend. I've been looking inward, outward and forward. Change is now knocking on my door. And I need to answer." He paused, then added, "A change of words is easy. A change of heart is hard. Before this opportunity, my soul did not want to change. Now it does."

Another individual who went through a transformational change during the program was Bernard, who said that for more than half his life, he had been in and out of jail, recovering, then relapsing from his addiction.

A few years before coming to The

Interested in Donating Your Gently-Used Clothing to The Mission's Thrift Store?

Our Thrift Store is a vibrant part of our community, where your donation provides a very affordable way for our patrons to find great values.

We gratefully accept donations of adult and children's clothing. We also make it convenient to donate clothing at our drop-off boxes.

How can you help?

You can see a map to our Clothing Box Locations on our website: **RescueMissionOfTrenton.org**

Another way you can support The Mission is by hosting a clothing drive through your company, business, school, faith-based organization, or civic group.

For more information, **call Niki at 609.695.1436 ext.129.**



Lesly and her daughter Linda were finding some great values recently at the Thrift Store.

Mission, Bernard, who said he “grew up in a loving, middle-class family,” robbed the same bank four times. One time, he rushed back to his apartment, which was across the street from the bank, changed his clothes, put his head down and walked right by several police officers who were still outside the bank, investigating. “It was the fastest way to get to my dealer,” he explained. “I had the money in my pockets, and I was scared out of my mind. I couldn’t think straight if I tried. That time it worked. The next time, it didn’t, and I was arrested.”

Fast forward to last summer when Bernard found himself in the back of a van, wearing an orange jump suit, hands cuffed behind his back. When the back door of the sheriff’s van opened, Bernard slowly stepped out and saw The Mission for the first time.

“That’s when I just shook my head and finally surrendered,” he said, “I called my mom, and she suggested that I take in everything The Mission had to offer. And I’m glad I did.”

Bernard added, “During this program, I finally – and I stress finally – got the focus, determination and motivation to create real goals for myself. Now I know the steps I need to take to achieve those goals. I am going to a vocational school to obtain a plumbing certification, then I’ll apply and get accepted into the Plumbers Union (which is an opportunity that was brought to us during this program’s Career Day.) At the same time, I am going to stay focused on my recovery. I am forever indebted for this opportunity.”

He added, “Before becoming part of this program, I used to tell people what I thought they wanted to hear so they’d leave me alone. I always wore a mask to hide myself. Now I can take off that mask and live my life. To me, that’s the meaning of life. To be myself. To believe in myself.”



Charles practices his speech for the Commencement of the Inaugural Class of The New Direction Project with his classmate “Jersey” Jeff.

Photo: Michael Mancuso – NJ Advance Media for NJ.com

At the Commencement, Bernard’s mother said, “I finally feel hope because of this program. I’m very excited for him and very happy.” Wiping away a tear, she added, “I’m very proud of him.”

“To help each participant succeed, they are each matched with mentors who will help them after the program to stay focused on their goals, while overcoming any barriers or self-limiting beliefs. Having this strong foundation and a solid support network are key,” said Barrett.

“Our goal is to create a life-changing experience, which can become a model for the future, helping individuals in recovery to see themselves in a positive new light, to stay connected with mentors who believe in them, to create a plan, and to pursue opportunities that lead to their success,” he concluded.

The Questions That Linger

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people is living below the poverty line, our counselors are constantly reminded that the traumas our clients are facing need to be addressed on a personal as well as a systemic level.

Paget asks all of us to consider: How can we make sure that history does not continue to repeat itself? How can we collaborate and apply our leverage to address the intergenerational effects perpetuated by these systemic problems? How can we stop ostracizing and blaming those who grow up with such daily trauma? And how can we best help a child who is now growing up in these conditions?

What can we do to be part of the solution?

These questions deserve answers. Let’s open the dialogue.

Feeding those who are hungry, housing those who are homeless, and providing opportunities for all.

The Questions That Linger

At the end of each very long day, when our counselors reflect on the individuals they tried to help, there are often many questions that linger.

Paget Berger, a Co-Occurring Counselor specializing in trauma and addiction services in our Behavioral Health Center, recently presented to her Social Justice alumni group at Harvard, sharing some of those questions, along with the often-daunting challenges, and the intermittent successes that uplift her and her colleagues – and drive them to carry on in this noble, over a hundred-year experiment that we call the Rescue Mission of Trenton.

The Mission's guiding principle, as she noted, is: "Look into the eyes of someone who is struggling. See their pain. And we ask that you also see their potential."

In response to the pain, Paget, who is a Licensed Professional Counselor, added, "Voiced from a trauma-informed care perspective, the question is not: What's wrong with you? Rather, the question is: What healing do you need to find the meaning and purpose you seek?"

Deep inside of that healing is where someone can start to find their potential.

So, first and foremost, our counselors are immersed in trying to help each individual overcome deep personal losses including: the enduring effects of traumas, attachment issues, mental health problems, medical concerns, and destructive behaviors resulting from their addictions.

As our counselors delve into each individual's personal adversities, patterns emerge which are undeniable.

From early childhood, as Paget noted, far too many of the individuals we serve grew up in households where there was domestic violence, parents in the throes of addiction and incarceration, persistent unemployment, medical concerns going untreated, food often not on the dinner table, and housing being unstable.

In the throes of this constant uncertainty, hope all but vanishes.



Look into the eyes of someone who is struggling. See their pain. And we ask that you also see their potential.

"These cumulative experiences foster intergenerational effects," Paget explained, "because children who grow up under such circumstances are statistically more likely to repeat them."

From a social justice perspective, she added, "We are immersed in an environment where mental health and addiction issues, systemic racism, the school-to-prison pipeline, and public health breakdowns intertwine to create a devastating impact on individuals and families – and this crisis has been exacerbated by the pandemic."

Particularly in cities like Trenton, where nearly one out of every three