

THE Quarterly

Autumn 2022

Reaching Out, Offering Hope To People Living On The Streets



Beverly recognizes part of herself in each person she meets who is struggling with addiction.

Sliding into the driver's seat of the Rescue Mission of Trenton's new mobile van, Beverly Dash adjusts her eyes to the sunrise, and thinks back to when she was a college student and started experimenting with street drugs. "I thought I was just being social," she recalled. "Little did I know it was going to take me on a long, traumatic road of recovery."

Shaking her head, she added, "Drugs became my life for about a dozen years. I did weed, crack, pills, acid, alcohol, anything but heroin. Some people I knew did a lot less than I did, and they are no

longer here. For whatever reason, God was looking out for me. When I finally made the decision to get sober, I was looking in the mirror and not wanting to see what was reflecting back at me. My life kept going downhill. I was on welfare, unemployable, and my son was 18 months old. I wanted to be a good mother. But I did not know how. On the first of the month, I would say to myself, 'OK. This time you're going to do it different. You're going to take that check and buy Pampers and baby food.' But it didn't happen. It was like – today's the first. Tomorrow, I'm broke."

Beverly, who is now a Certified Peer

Recovery Specialist, has been sober for over 35 years, or, as she says, since June 14, 1987. After working at The College of New Jersey and Thomas Edison College, she retired in 2020, then started working at The Mission.

She was the first person to sign up for a new Mobile Outreach Project where she and other Peer Recovery Specialists are traveling in an easily recognizable van to places throughout Mercer County, focusing on high-risk areas where people who are struggling with addiction congregate.

The goal is to offer hope and help.

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In this issue, you will discover some of the new ways our essential workers are responding to the needs of those we serve.

1 Our new Mobile Outreach Project's mission is to be there in the moment of someone's need.

4 Niel Siekerka was honored at The Governor's Jefferson Awards Ceremony for volunteer leadership.

6 25 people staying at The Mission received free eye exams and glasses from Helen Keller International.

8 To succeed, to have that freedom, you need to know what is motivating you – something you believe in.

As a Peer Recovery Specialist, in addition to lived experience, Beverly has successfully gone through a recovery program, and completed extensive training, with course work in recovery, communication, values, ethics, motivation, co-occurring disorders, trauma-informed care and wellness. So, she readily identifies with people in earlier stages of recovery. Knowing what someone who is struggling with addiction is going through, she can connect with them in the moment, often in ways that can make a real and meaningful difference.

When first meeting someone who is struggling in their addiction, Beverly often thinks, "I am struck by the feeling that someone is lost. And knowing that's how I felt. And I remember feeling that I could not divulge that to anybody. I knew it. But I was too embarrassed, too humiliated, too ashamed. So, it is recognizing that part of me in each person I meet who is struggling."

She adds, "It is about being there when someone is ready, while, of course, not knowing when that will be. So, it starts with trying to connect. Sharing my story. And letting them know that the person they are seeing today is not the person I was 35 years ago. Don't think I judge you. I'm letting you know I have a history too. I am no better than you. I'm no worse than you. I am you. And I will go to the ends of the earth to help you, if that is what you want."

Beverly describes the conversations as open, yet starting out cautiously. "You can see the need, but until they can see the need, all you can do is plant the seed. I want to deliver a message of hope. To let them know there is a better way. But the conversation has to be completely on their terms, addressing what they feel are their needs at that moment. There can be a lot of denial with people taking drugs or having behavioral health issues. So, you just make eye contact, then start a conversation, letting them know that you care. You



Beverly with the Mission Outreach van in front of the Trenton Transit Center.

smile and say, 'Good morning.' Some will pause. Then glance at the side of the van and ask, 'What are you offering? What do you do?' Then you ask if they'd like a sandwich or a cup of coffee. And we start from there. If you try to force feed it, they will run away."

Beverly pauses, then adds, "To want

"We will go out in the morning, when those we are trying to help are waking up and may be thinking to themselves: I cannot do this anymore. I've got to change. I need help."

to recover, it has to be in your soul. You need to want to change. To not just want to drift away."

This new Mobile Outreach Project, known as Mission Outreach, is the creation of a unique partnership between Catholic Charities, Henry J. Austin Health Center, Iron Recovery & Wellness Center, and The Mission, made possible by a generous grant awarded to The Mission

by the Mercer County Office on Addiction Services.

The van is arriving consistently and predictably at designated areas where those struggling with addiction are known to congregate in Trenton and Hamilton Township. The primary locations were selected from the Trenton Health Team's most recent report on Mercer County Overdose Fatalities, citing 118 individuals who overdosed and passed away in 2020. Of those fatalities, 56% were in Trenton and 23% were in Hamilton. So, while the van will travel throughout Mercer County, for the first year, the efforts will be concentrated in Trenton and Hamilton. In addition to these under-resourced and high-risk areas, advice is being sought from community representatives, places of worship, local health departments, law enforcement, emergency medical services, and mental health and substance abuse partners to make sure the areas covered are as thorough and comprehensive as possible.

The van is on the road four hours in the morning, six days a week, with a bilingual specialist on board when

traveling to areas where Spanish is the predominant language.

Based on our experience, the van will go out in the early morning hours, rather than evenings. That's because during the evenings, those we are struggling with addiction will likely be intoxicated, so less open to a conversation. Instead, the Peer Recovery Specialists arrive in the morning, when those they are seeking to help are waking up and may be thinking to themselves, "I cannot do this anymore. I've got to change. I need help."

As Curtis Kitchen, a former resident at The Mission who is now a successful entrepreneur, says, "When I was sleeping under a bridge, I didn't want to wake up in the morning. I was so disappointed in myself. I didn't want my life to go on anymore. I was surrounded by about thirty other homeless people. Each of us had our little area. So, I learned to sleep with one eye open. I would just kind of nod off every now and then, clutching my few belongings, with my hands tucked deep inside my pockets."

He adds, "For a long time, I was lost. But I wasn't uncomfortable enough to want to change. Then, eventually, the pain I was feeling took over. That pain was constant. And it became too unbearable. I knew I couldn't live that way anymore. I had to change. I had to."

The initial goal is to have Peer Recovery Specialists engage with individuals who are living on the streets struggling with addiction, establishing trust, encouraging further conversations, and meeting their immediate needs, including food, clothing, a place to sleep, and introducing harm reduction interventions, including Narcan education and free kits.

Then, in time, as Curtis says, when the pain becomes too unbearable, the Peer Recovery Specialists will be there to introduce treatment options within the system of care – including access to medical care, help with identification, income development, access to medication-assisted treatment, behavioral

"I'm letting you know I have a history too. I am no better than you. I'm no worse than you. I am you. And I will go to the ends of the earth to help you, if that is what you want."

health counseling, and the possibility of obtaining housing.

It is also anticipated that family members and friends of individuals struggling with addiction will seek information and support – including free Narcan kits and training.

Barrett Young, Chief Executive Officer of The Mission, notes, "With the vast capabilities of our unique partnerships, this outreach program is allowing us to provide what is needed, when it is needed, for individuals struggling with addiction – engaging them in their healing process."

A Case Management Team at The Mission will monitor the progress of each individual seeking assistance – so that the first year will provide a baseline to measure our successes and learn how to improve as we keep track of the people who:

- *visit the van and request information;*
- *receive free Narcan kits after experiencing training from a Peer Recovery Specialist;*
- *came to The Mission's Shelter, receiving warm meals and a safe place to sleep, along with access to case management services;*
- *request medication-assisted treatment at Iron Recovery and Wellness Center;*
- *go to Henry J. Austin Health Center for medical services;*
- *ask to go to Catholic Charities to receive behavioral health treatment; and*
- *are family members and friends seeking information and support.*

"Our mission," Barrett says, "is to be there in the moment of someone's need,

offering something to eat, someone to listen, establishing trust, and maybe, just maybe, being there when someone is ready to say, 'This pain is unbearable I need to change. Can you help me?'"

Barrett adds, "From experience, we know that each of these steps takes commitment, persistence, and time. It takes building trust, which starts with the right team being on the van. That is why the Peer Recovery Specialists are the heart of this initiative."

As Beverly relates, "My message is: 'I want you to know that I am here whenever you decide you are ready.' I remember how hard it was for me to ask for help. So, I am patient. I remember having a sense of dread, going to my first meeting and feeling scared, ashamed, humiliated. My first thought was, 'What if I see someone here who knows me?' I wasn't thinking that if we were both in the same place trying to get help, that was a good thing. It took me a while to realize that."

Beverly quickly adds, "To seek recovery, you have to be so soul-sick that you have no choice but to say, 'I need to change. I'm willing to give this a try.'" Nodding her head, as if in agreement, she says, "What draws me to this work is my personal experience. I am here to let someone who is struggling know that if recovery can happen to me, it can happen to you."

The first day the van took to the streets, Beverly and her colleague gave out 17 lunches, along with clothes and hygiene kits. One person asked to be taken to Catholic Charities for a mental health evaluation, and one person received healthcare assistance from the Henry J. Austin Health Center. Beverly also saw a woman she knew who "was not doing well. She wasn't ready to accept help. But I could tell she was on the verge of asking. So, I gave her my phone number again. And I said, 'Whenever you decide today is the day, just get in touch with me. Even come to The Shelter and ask for me. And I will get you the help you need.'" *continued on page 4*

Reaching Out, Offering Hope To People Living On The Streets

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As Beverley pulls the van into The Mission's parking lot at the end of a long morning, from time to time, she thinks about her grandfather. When she was in the throes of her addiction, Beverley would pray to her grandfather, who was a pastor, hoping he would get in touch with God for her. "And he did," she says. "And whenever things were really bad, when I was way down on my luck

and saw no way out, I would call my grandfather and ask if I could come and stay with him and my grandmother, and he would always say, 'Of course.'"

She pauses, then adds, "That's love. He never said, 'No.' Never. And I knew that if he said 'No' just one time, I would have been homeless. So, in my own way, I am here offering what my grandfather offered to me."

"What draws me to this work is my personal experience. I am here to let someone who is struggling know that if recovery can happen to me, it can happen to you. I am here whenever you decide you are ready."

Niel Siekerka Is Honored At The Governor's Jefferson Awards Ceremony

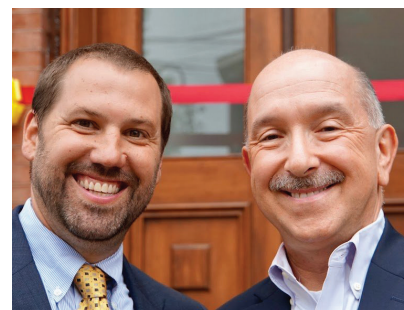
Niel Siekerka, Chair of The Mission's Board of Directors, was an honoree at the prestigious New Jersey Governor's Jefferson Award Ceremony, which celebrates volunteerism.

As a 2022 honoree for the Volunteer Leadership Award, Niel was recognized for "demonstrating unique vision, dedication and tenacity of heroic proportion and serving as an inspiration for others."

Honorees of the New Jersey State Governor's Jefferson Award achieve measurable community impact and represent outstanding acts of public service, without the expectation of recognition or compen-

sation – inspiring and recruiting others to become actively involved in volunteerism and community service.

Barrett Young, Chief Executive Officer of The Mission, said, "As we have navigated together some of The Mission's most challenging times, Niel has been a North Star – with his values always solid, and his advice always wise. I am so grateful, and continually astounded, by his generosity with his time – whether it is about an immediate, pressing concern or helping to create a vision for the future. Niel deserves this honor. And so many more."



Niel Siekerka, Chair of The Mission's Board of Directors (shown with Barrett Young, CEO of The Mission), was an honoree for the Governor's Volunteer Leadership Award.

The Mission Receives The Candid Platinum Seal Of Transparency

The Mission has, once again, received the Candid Platinum Seal of Transparency – the highest level of transparency awarded to any nonprofit.

Formerly known as GuideStar, the Candid Platinum Seal of Transparency evaluates and provides transparent information about nonprofit organizations so that supporters can donate with trust. Also included are goals and strategies, along with quantitative measures of progress and results to

demonstrate the impact made by the organization.

Barrett Young, Chief Executive Officer of The Mission, said, "The Candid Seal of Transparency demonstrates our ongoing commitment to feeding those in our community who are hungry, housing those who are homeless, counseling those seeking recovery, and providing life-changing opportunities – while continuing to be extremely vigilant financially.

**Platinum
Transparency
2022**

Candid.

Daniel Afrifa Joins The Mission's Board Of Directors

"I am very pleased to share that Daniel Afrifa, a Management Consultant at PwC, has joined the Board of Directors of the Rescue Mission of Trenton," said Barrett Young, Chief Executive Officer of The Mission.

"Daniel's talents are extensive. He will add deep financial acumen to the Board as an Asset Management analyst with a demonstrated history in quantitative analysis. And he has a profound commitment to serving our neighbors who are experiencing homelessness," Barrett added.

While obtaining his degree in 2020 from Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, he felt passionate about volunteering. He volunteered at Grace Café, where a restaurant style community dinner is served at Arch Street United Methodist Church in Philadelphia to 200 or more neighbors experiencing homelessness and struggling with

food insecurity. He also led a team who volunteered at Anchor House, helping homeless teens.

Daniel, who just attended his first meeting as a full-fledged member of the Board, will be serving on the Finance and Human Resources Committees.

Being on the younger side of the Board, he said he is "looking forward to gaining from the experience and bringing new ideas to a group that is intensely wise and thoughtful."

In addition to lending his financial expertise, Daniel said, "I have been particularly impressed by the commitment,

"I have been particularly impressed by the commitment, optimism, care, sense of community and hope that The Mission's staff brings to those they serve."



Daniel Afrifa, a Management Consultant at PwC, will add deep financial acumen to the Board.

optimism, care, sense of community and hope that The Mission's staff brings to those they serve. For all they have done and continue to do throughout these most challenging times, I want to make sure they are rewarded, provided for and in a good place."

Want to work someplace where you can make a real difference?

Rescue  Mission
of Trenton

Call 609.396.2183



The Mission is looking to expand our team of committed staff members who are dedicated to creating an environment where those who have nowhere else to turn can live with dignity, experience hope and see new opportunities.

We are currently seeking candidates for full and part-time

positions in our Shelter and Behavioral Health Center, as well as in Administration, Finance and Maintenance.

To find out more, click on Job Openings on our website: **RescueMissionOfTrenton.org**

25 People Receive Free Eye Exams And Glasses

Mac was among 25 individuals staying in The Mission's Shelter and our Residential Behavioral Health Program who received a free eye exam and a free pair of glasses from Helen Keller International.

Mac, who was staying in The Shelter until he moved to one of The Mission's efficiency apartments at 505 Perry Street, says he can hardly see out of his right eye.

Dr. Sara Erlich, who strengthened Mac's prescription, has been performing eye exams with Helen Keller for over a decade because, as she said, "I get to help people who otherwise would be going through life without being able to see clearly." She added, "It is very rewarding. I come home feeling good every night."

"We are so very grateful to the dedicated and talented team at Helen Keller International for their enormous

generosity," said Barrett Young, Chief Executive Officer of The Mission.

Kindal Adams, New Jersey Program Manager for Helen Keller International, assured everyone that they would get their new glasses in three-to-four weeks.

When asked "What draws you to

"While our vision is so important, it can be easily overlooked. Often, if it is the difference between putting food on the table and vision – vision loses out."

doing this?" Kindal, who has been doing this important work for 21 years, said, "I consider myself a public health advocate. I am passionate about connecting people to resources they may not



Dr. Sara Erlich said, "It is very rewarding. I get to help people who otherwise would be going through life without being able to see clearly."

know they have available to them. And while our vision is so important, it can be easily overlooked. Often, if it is the difference between putting food on the table and vision – vision loses out." She paused, then added, "And seeing clearly can help someone to see themselves."

Restaurants Are Helped, Once Again, To Feed Those Who Are Hungry

"We are very grateful to, once again, be among the organizations that received funding from the New Jersey Economic Development Authority's 'Sustain and Serve NJ' program, which is providing The Mission with a very generous grant to help cure pandemic-related hunger," said Barrett Young, CEO of The Mission.

He added, "This innovative project, known as Sustain and Serve NJ, provides The Mission (and 29 other organizations throughout the State) with funds to purchase meals from local restaurants. It is an inspiring way to build upon Governor Murphy's commitment to help feed

individuals and families in our community who are struggling to put food on their tables, while also helping local restaurants who have been challenged throughout this pandemic and supporting our vital nonprofit community with resources to nourish our neighbors."

In addition to providing high-quality meals that those who are staying at The Mission would not usually receive, this program has also been a lifeline for many restaurants in our community.

Jenny Leon, Owner of Trentini's at 635 South Clinton Avenue in Trenton, said in an article in The New York Times,

"in the early days of the pandemic, I was working by myself. In the front, the back, taking calls, cleaning, doing everything because I couldn't pay anyone. My kids came and helped me." With the money the restaurant earned through the initial round of the meals program, Jenny said she was able to bring back twelve employees – who were all anxiously waiting for her call.

Jenny added, "Still, I knew that while we were having a hard time, there were many more people in our community who did not have enough to eat. Thank God we are working with The Mission

Mary Gay Abbott-Young Receives Leadership Award

The New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies presented the *Leadership in Changing the Lives of Vulnerable Individuals Award* to Mary Gay Abbott-Young, President of The Mission.

In announcing the award, Debra Wentz, Ph.D., President and Chief Executive Officer of NJAMHAA, said, “When you go to the Mission and see Mary Gay with staff and clients – and some staff are former clients – you feel the compassion she has for every individual and appreciate the importance of how she cares for and connects with each of them.”

She added that Mary Gay and the team at The Mission “inspire hope and confidence in those who are at the lowest point in their life.”

For more than four decades, Debra said, Mary Gay has been “literally taking people right off the streets, giving them

“You feel the compassion she has for every individual and appreciate the importance of how she cares for and connects with each of them.”

a sense of purpose, linking them to other services, and nurturing them back to health, so they can live much healthier lives.”

She noted that in addition to focusing personally on people in need, Mary Gay is “a strong advocate and incredibly impactful,” adding that Mary Gay has served on the NJAMHAA Board since July 2013 and was appointed to the New Jersey Mental Health Institute Board in October 2020.

“Mary Gay makes me want to get up and cheer, I am thrilled to present



Mary Gay Abbott-Young, President of The Mission, received a Leadership Award.

her with the *Leadership in Changing the Lives of Vulnerable Individuals Award*,” Debra concluded.

“I knew that while we were having a hard time, there were many more people in our community who did not have enough to eat.”

and that, together, we are helping people who do not have enough to eat.”

Governor Phil Murphy said, “The overwhelming and heartfelt response from organizations stepping up to support their local restaurants and their neighbors truly embodies the Jersey spirit. Having so many entities leverage Sustain and Serve NJ funds to not only inject cash into restaurants but also partner with those restaurants to feed members of their community is an absolute grand slam.”



Jenny Leon, Owner of Trentini's, said, “Together, we are helping people who do not have enough to eat.”



Feeding those who are hungry, housing those who are homeless, counseling those seeking recovery, and providing life-changing opportunities.

Succeeding Here Is About Your Freedom

When Vida Wright, Vocational Development Coordinator at The Mission, talks with someone starting in our Behavioral Health Program who has been incarcerated and is still striving to recover, the first thing she says is: "Succeeding here is about your freedom."

She quickly adds, "Once you succeed in this program, you will have many freedoms. It can be as simple as leaving this program with a job, a place to live, and having the freedom to decide what you are going to have for breakfast. It is also having the freedom of going about your day not needing to look over your shoulder, wondering who might be following you."

Her message is: "To succeed, to have that freedom, you need to know what is motivating you. Your motivation has to be clear – and something you believe in wholeheartedly."

Vida adds, "I tell each individual starting in our recovery program, we have a talented and committed team here who will help prepare you to get a job. That is the part we can do to help you become self-sufficient and independent. If you need to get your birth certificate, your state identification, your social security



Vida's message is: "To succeed, to have that freedom, you need to know what is motivating you. Your motivation has to be clear – and something you believe in wholeheartedly."

card, to apply for financial assistance – we can make sure you have everything you need to get those credentials so you can go to work. We can also provide you with work experience inside The Mission, help you complete our job prep course, prepare a resume, practice interviewing, be on time, be reliable, dependable, accountable, resourceful, a team player and teach you how to manage your money."

Then she says, "We can provide you with all that support – and more. But we cannot give you the motivation. That motivation needs to come from deep within you. That is why I start by empha-

sizing your freedom. Being free can be your inspiration – your motivation – your focus and your purpose. That freedom is what will allow you to think about your life differently."

Vida, who has a law degree, says she has "always been an advocate for those who don't know how to advocate for themselves. I have a passion for social justice. And my drive is to teach someone who is ready how to create a new way of life. I'm a boots-on-the-ground kind of person. I like to walk side-by-side with those I am serving – so I know what is really going on, and how to help."