



Shelter of Flint Springs Forward:

A message from our CEO

Greetings Friends and Supporters of Shelter of Flint,

As spring unfolds, a fresh sense of hope permeates Shelter of Flint. This season marks a time of renewal in nature and in our mission to combat homelessness in our community.

In this edition of our newsletter we are proud to be featuring stories from our Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH) street outreach team, recognizing the critical work they do, especially as warmer weather prompts more individuals experiencing homelessness to seek refuge outside with temporary winter options waning.

We are also including our annual Impact Report as an insert. In addition to offering a glimpse into Shelter of Flint's impact in 2023, it showcases success stories of clients who have had their lives transformed by the vital programs made possible by our supporters.



Thank you for your ongoing dedication to our mission of providing safe housing, independence, and stability to those in need.

Linda Bielskis, MA, MBA
President and CEO
Shelter of Flint

Chilling Success: Reflecting on the Coldest Night of the Year

Shelter of Flint's annual Coldest Night of the Year walk heated up the Mott Community College campus this year on Saturday, February 24th. Thanks to our incredible supporters, board members, community partners, and volunteers we were able to surpass our fundraising goal by 12%! We are overwhelmed by the support we've received as this event has grown over the years.



We'd like to extend an extra special thank you to our sponsors, HAP CareSource and Pioneer Mutual Insurance, our community partners, Mid-Michigan NOW, Timothy's Pub, and Starbucks, to Mister Tim for providing tunes during and after the walk, and to Mike Naddeo for volunteering his photography skills.

Save the date to join us next year, Saturday, February 22, 2025!

Inquiries? Reach out to sof@shelterofflint.org or call Development Associate Darcy Skaggs at (810) 715-9201 ext. 305

a day in the life PATH street outreach

Join us on a journey with Emily, our Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH) street outreach manager, and Robert, a PATH homeless outreach specialist, as they embark on their mission to provide support and resources to individuals currently living outside.

The first stop took them to Chris, whom the team first encountered barefoot outside of an abandoned video store last week. Chris is not yet enrolled in the PATH program. The team provided him with shoes and a bus pass, then encouraged him to consider enrolling in the program, recognizing the importance of building trust with individuals like Chris, who have experienced trauma.

Next, they met Alison, who, despite winning her battle with addiction and surviving domestic violence, found herself sleeping on the porch of an abandoned house in a dangerous neighborhood. They assisted her in enrolling in the PATH program, emphasizing their commitment to understanding the underlying stories of those they help. Emily helped her make calls to local shelters to get her on their wait lists but, unfortunately, the wait times can be long as many shelters are at capacity due to the housing crisis.

The team then ventured to the south side to locate John, a homeless individual who recently survived a violent assault, an all-too-common occurrence for those living outside. Despite their efforts, John was not found, but they encountered Joe and provided him with information about the PATH program. Emily has encountered Joe before and acknowledged that his substance use disorder was likely keeping him from reaching out for the help he desperately needs.

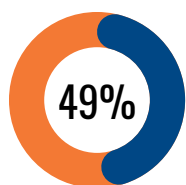


The porch of an abandoned home serving as storage and living space

While on the south side, they explored an area with abandoned trailers and a garage filled with discarded food and drinks, books, and makeshift mattresses, signs that they are being used as shelter by individuals experiencing homelessness. Emily distributed information about the PATH program in these areas. During this stop, they came across a bird tangled in string, its leg tied to a branch. Robert intervened and successfully freed the bird, allowing it to fly away. The team explained that they often encounter and help animals in need while doing their rounds.

This is just a glimpse into the daily challenges faced by our PATH team as they strive to offer support to and build trust with those living outside. In the words of Emily, “the need is just so great...we could be out here all day, everyday and still not be able to reach everyone.”

DATA DIGEST



49% of unhoused individuals report being the victims of violence, harassment, and discrimination



The poverty rate in Flint is 35.5%, higher than the state average of 13.3% and the national average of 11.5%



Outreach staff report that 2 out of every 3 individuals they encounter living outside lack vital documents required to access government benefits, healthcare, and housing



Genesee County is short 7000 affordable homes for very low income buyers. At our current rate it will take 35 years to eliminate the housing shortage.

SHELTER SHOUTOUT

AN INTERVIEW WITH SOAR CASEWORKER ZUZANNA GOS-HENDERSON

One of the individuals at the forefront of Shelter of Flint's mission is Zuzanna Gos-Henderson, the Supplemental Security Income (SSI)/Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) caseworker for the Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH) street outreach program. We asked Zuzanna to delve into the challenges and triumphs of assisting homeless clients in applying for Social Security disability benefits.

"Clients often become very open and trusting with our PATH team since we become so involved with their journey," Zuzanna said, highlighting the unique bond formed between caseworkers and those they serve. "This is great for SOAR purposes because I can better depict their struggles, symptoms, and how their functioning is affected."

Even when a rapport is developed, the process is not without hurdles. Zuzanna explained, "Sometimes they are not as comfortable with their treatment providers and will not divulge as much detail to them. This makes it tricky for me to convince the Social Security Administration (SSA) of the severity of their conditions because what I see and write does not match what the treatment providers noted."

Zuzanna shed light on the difficult journey homeless individuals must tread to access mental health treatment, a crucial component in reinforcing their disability claims. "Clients usually wish to get that support, but the process can be quite challenging – especially for someone experiencing homelessness and having no phone. How does someone, who can barely sleep because they have to protect themselves and their belongings at night, wake up early – especially if they have no alarm clock?"

Navigating the convoluted paperwork required for disability applications poses yet another formidable obstacle. "The Supplemental Security Income/Social Security Disability Income (SSI/SSDI) documents ask many questions that require a lot of detail," Zuzanna emphasized. "This process can be quite overwhelming for even the average individual in a stable living situation."

To mitigate these challenges, Zuzanna adopts a hands-on approach. "I try to give my clients as little 'work' in the process as possible. With their permission, I fill out all the paperwork as they provide the information."

Income enables clients to actually feel like they have a home, not just a roof over their heads.

Despite an application process fraught with uncertainties, Zuzanna's efforts lead to profound transformations in the lives of her clients. Beyond financial support, income provides a sense of empowerment and security. "It can change their whole life!" she exclaims. "Income enables individuals to buy band-aids, garbage bags, toilet paper, furniture – the list goes on."

The efforts of Zuzanna and the entire PATH team can result in profound transformations in the lives of her clients. "Income enables clients to actually feel like they have a home, not just a blank roof over their heads."

Zuzanna's respect for and dedication to her clients shines through. "Most individuals genuinely wish to work, utilize their talents, and contribute to society," she stated. "SSI/SSDI can be that vital key to receiving and maintaining housing."



Zuzanna receiving the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services Wayne Kennerly SOAR Excellence Award for 2023



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Shelter of Flint Awarded Flint ReCast MiniGrant

We are excited to announce that Shelter of Flint has been chosen as an awardee of a Flint ReCast Mini Grant. In 2024, Flint ReCAST Mini Grants are being awarded to organizations seeking to implement youth programming, empower residents, and build capacity to increase community-wide use of trauma-informed skills. Shelter of Flint's proposal was among the top 6 of 53 proposals, allowing us to move past the community-wide competition. We were awarded \$15,041 in partnership with the Crim Mindful Flint Initiative to host a series of wellness events designed to reduce stress, anxiety, and depression in women and children experiencing the trauma of homelessness in Flint and Genesee County. Below are some features of this proposed community initiative.



Individual yoga sessions to allow women to de-stress, center themselves, and connect with one another.



Youth/family yoga inviting mothers and children to bond in a healthy, low stress environment.



Resources and workshops for mothers featuring journaling, group discussions, hair and nail care, and massage therapy.

