



Preble Street Executive Director Mark Swann with former Preble Street caseworker Florence Young in the early 1990s.

Be A CHAMPION

BY MARK R. SWANN, MPSA

The following is an excerpt from a commencement address Preble Street Executive Director Mark Swann delivered this past spring during a graduation for Tufts University School of Medicine students completing their residency at Maine Medical Center.

This year marks my 25th anniversary as the executive director of Preble Street.

That's a long, long time. I remember my first day on the job vividly. I can't tell you who I had lunch with last week, but I can recall almost every detail of when I walked into the basement of the Preble Street chapel for the first time.

It was a dark, crowded, noisy place. A very small church dining room where we had a limited breakfast soup kitchen and drop-in center. The entire staff consisted of a wonderful social worker, Florence Young, and me.

I remember chatting with a client named Jerry. Born and bred in Portland, Jerry was a Korean War veteran who'd survived off and on the streets for many, many years. He was a bricklayer, a poet, a larger-than-life personality. And a chronic alcoholic.

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curbside

NEWS FROM PREBLE STREET

TURNING THE LIGHTS BACK ON

Preble Street and Maine Medical Center are pioneering an exciting partnership to ensure the most vulnerable underserved people in Portland have access to high quality, barrier-free healthcare.

The Maine Medical Center-Preble Street Learning Collaborative seeks to help fill the enormous void left by the closing of the City of Portland Healthcare for the Homeless Clinic in 2014; provide no-barrier access to health services, care-coordination and education; and create a new point of entry to the health system. Working together, Preble Street and Maine Medical Center hope to improve the quality of care and client access to existing providers and established medical homes, improve medical residents' understanding and education of the needs and care of homeless and other vulnerable patients, and increase understanding of health disparities.



Meredith Walley, a social worker for Maine Medical Center Homeless Health Partners works with a Preble Street client who had been struggling to access medical care.

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BOARD MEMBER PROFILE:

YEMAYA ST. CLAIR

Yemaya St. Clair has served on the Preble Street Board of directors since 2014. A graduate of the University of Washington with a bachelor of arts degree in environmental studies, she is currently studying counseling at the University of Southern Maine.

Professionally, she has managed the Student Conservation Association's Seattle-based high school program for urban teens, worked as a development manager for mental health agencies, served as a community mediator, and is a freelance writer. She co-authored the AMC Guide to Winter Hiking and Camping and is currently writing the AMC's Outdoors with Kids New England guidebook.

Yemaya lives in Portland with her husband, Lucas, and their two small children. In addition to Preble Street, she serves on the boards of SPACE Gallery and the Quimby Family Foundation.

From a reflection by Yemaya:

I first volunteered to help with a breakfast shift at Preble Street on a cold, gray March morning.

All winter, I had been thinking about Maine's homeless population, particularly on the frigid, snowy days when I passed someone huddled against a building for warmth, a paper cup at their feet. My heart ached the most when my three-year-old daughter, from the backseat of the car, asked me to read the sign each time we passed a person panhandling at an intersection. I had to explain that some people have no food, no money, and no shelter. Each time she asked why, I fumbled for an explanation, lost for words.

I sent emails to elected officials advocating for the city's homeless shelters. But still, I felt very detached from the day-to-day realities experienced by people on the streets.

As I pulled up a little before 7 a.m. people were already waiting outside the soup kitchen for the doors to open. Inside I got to work, setting out boxes of cereal, day-old pastries, and bowls full of generic peanut butter and jam, while fellow volunteers filled the hot tray with warm food.

When the kitchen opened at 8 a.m. the stream of people looked tired and worn. Many were obviously physically disabled. Some were old and others young.



“That moment struck me, reminding me there are people struggling around us all the time.”

Most were men. Some were New Mainers. A few wore work uniforms. Though I'd heard it before, their situation hadn't struck me until then: there were working people who could not afford to meet their basic needs. Minimum wage is not enough.

When I asked one woman how she was doing, she gave me a small smile and said her day was better because I was smiling. “You don't see that much,” she said. “It's nice to see someone happy.” I felt a mix of emotions: on one hand, I was glad she welcomed my smile; on the other, I felt guilty about being on my side of the breakfast bar.

As I helped people fill their bowls, almost all said thank-you. But, in so many ways, I felt as though I should be thanking them for exposing their need, their vulnerability and humanness.

A few days later, I was driving past Preble Street when I noticed a man crossing the street. My first thought was that I recognized him from the soup kitchen. But then I thought I recognized him as someone who worked at the library. From his clothing, it was difficult to tell if he was homeless or not, employed or not. Perhaps he was both employed and in need of a meal.

That moment struck me, reminding me there are people struggling around us all the time. We often have no idea what is going on in people's lives unless we care to find out, to listen, and to serve.



Preble Street Board Member Yemaya St. Clair

THE TOOLS *to succeed*

More than a quarter of homeless adults first experienced homelessness as children or teens.

Thanks to a generous grant from the John T. Gorman Foundation, Preble Street was able to pioneer a new intensive approach to helping homeless youth break that cycle and succeed on their own.

First Place offers homeless youth a path to permanent housing, helping participants find affordable apartments and providing structure and support as young people develop the skills to live successfully on their own—from budgeting to cooking, from career planning to positive peer relationships.

First Place youth who are eligible may also enroll in the Opportunity Passport program, a financial literacy curriculum to help young people transition from foster care into independent living.

Seven First Place clients have graduated from the program, taken over the leases to their apartments, and are doing exceptionally well. Youth like:

- Ivan, an asylee from Burundi who earned his high school diploma through the Portland Street Academy, received a college scholarship, and is now working for a local social service provider
- David who grew up in foster care and suffered a major depressive episode when he was disowned by his grandparents for being gay. Now he's working, practicing good self-care, and earning straight As at Southern Maine Community College.

Others are poised to follow them in making the leap toward greater independence.

The program has been so successful, the federal government's Family and Youth Services Bureau recently awarded Preble Street \$625,000—one of only nine such awards in the entire country—to create the Maine Transitional Living Collaborative (TLC) with community partner New Beginnings in Lewiston. TLC will offer a continuum of transitional services, including rapid re-housing and supported housing, for LGBTQ youth.

First Place staff have also branched out to assist dozens of other young people at the Preble Street Teen Center with their housing goals through the TLP Plus program, using Maine State Housing Authority Home to Stay housing vouchers and providing incentives to work on life skills development.

Homeless youth are smart, talented, thoughtful, and hard-working. They have the potential to be enormous assets to the community if given the opportunity to focus their energy on building skills rather than struggling to survive on the streets.

They have the will and the drive to succeed. First Place gives them the tools.



Preble Street Health Services Director Bill Burns poses with Portland Police Officer Daniel Knight after receiving his commendation.

OUTSTANDING CITIZEN AWARD

The Portland Police Department awarded Bill Burns, Preble Street Health Services Director and former Resource Center Coordinator, with an “Outstanding Citizen” commendation at its annual award breakfast in 2016.

In presenting the commendation, Major Donald Krier, who has worked closely with Resource Center staff, observed that police officers and social workers might approach things differently, but Bill has been instrumental in helping officers understand that social work values can help ensure positive community relations and fair and respectful resolution to community problems.

Here's what Portland Police Chief Michael Sauschuck had to say:

In recognition of your cooperation and unfailing commitment to the citizens of Maine, you are hereby commended and recognized as an outstanding citizen.

Bill Burns has served as the Coordinator of the Preble Street Resource Center since 2011. Upon his arrival, Bill reached out and introduced himself to all of the neighborhood stakeholder organizations. He emphasized open lines of communication and demonstrated a desire to work together on common issues rather than take separate paths.

Bill also took it upon himself to get to know officers assigned to the Bayside Neighborhood as well as officers who frequently work the soup kitchen overtime detail. This relationship facilitated greater trust between Preble Street and the Police Department and allowed employees from both organizations to better understand and appreciate each other's role and contributions. This, in turn, has improved the delivery of services in the Bayside Neighborhood.

The Portland Police Department commends you and thanks you for your assistance.



Shawna Holloway, a medical social worker embedded at Preble Street as part of the Maine Medical Center Homeless Health Partners program talks with a client who was recently outfitted with a prosthetic leg.

TURNING THE LIGHTS BACK ON

CONTINUED FROM COVER

Bill Burns, Health Services Director for Preble Street, says there have been many barriers preventing Portland's homeless community from accessing health care. "Sometimes they are not treated well in health-care settings. They may also think they don't deserve health care."

Located on site at 20 Portland Street, the Collaborative is staffed by Bill Burns, former Preble Street Resource Center coordinator, in a new role as Preble Street Health Services Director, as well as by an MMC nurse practitioner, residents from the program areas of psychiatry, family medicine, and internal medicine, medical students from the MMC Maine Track program, nursing, pharmacy, and social-work students, and MMC's Homeless Health Partners case management team, full-time medical social workers from MMC who have been embedded at Preble Street since early 2015.

"The Maine Medical Center-Preble Street Learning Collaborative combines the best of our two organization's capabilities in order to meet the unique needs of an underserved population in an effective and sustainable way, and aligns with MMC's commitment to delivering innovative population health and affordable care services, as well as our three-part mission of caring for our community, educating tomorrow's caregivers and researching new ways to provide care," said Peter Bates, M.D., Chief Academic Officer, Maine Medical Center.

Homeless Health Partners social workers have been documenting gaps in services since the program began in 2015 to help Preble Street and MMC understand what systemic issues need to be addressed to ensure people experiencing homelessness have access to care.

MMC clinical staff seek to address those gaps, including access to walk-in care, mental health services, triage, urgent, and follow-up care, wound-care, substance abuse treatment, and more.

Be a CHAMPION

CONTINUED FROM COVER

We shared a favorite poet, Charles Bukowski, and Jerry and I tried to crack each other up with different Bukowski stories and myths.

Jerry would stay at the shelter for months at a time. Then we'd find him a room somewhere, he'd last a few months, and then end up back in the shelter again. This went on for years. Until he died. His heart exploded, was how it was described to me, one night as he lay on the floor of the city shelter trying to sleep.

We had a memorial service for him in the Resource Center. We have lots and lots of memorial services there, more than two per month, on average. Balanced on some file cabinets, we have a cardboard box with the words "memorial service stuff" scrawled on the side. It's filled with candles, some plastic flowers, a clean tablecloth. We have it down to a system, how to host these sad little services in our soup kitchen dining room.

I distinctly remember thinking that day that there must be a better way. Not just that we have to do better than these sad-sack funerals in a soup kitchen. But that there must be solutions, even for hardcore, really challenging people like Jerry. Real and sustainable solutions.

So we set out to find that better way.

We opened Logan Place with Avesta Housing on March 24, 2005. The best day of my career. What we did

differently starting on that day was offer housing with no strings attached. We didn't demand sobriety. We didn't demand medication compliance. We didn't demand a psychiatric label. We didn't demand a Medicaid number for billing purposes. Instead of saying you need to deal with your mental illness and addictions first, we offered them housing first.

That very night shelter numbers went down by 10% and stayed down for the next four years until the recession hit.

Preble Street and Avesta followed up the great success of Logan Place by opening Florence House five years later.

And we're hard at work at opening our next one, on Bishop Street, where we hope to target not just chronically homeless people, but those who are medically compromised, those who are among the highest users of the health care system in the state. People like a newer Logan Place tenant who spent over 1,000 nights at the hospital.

To do this we will need lots and lots of champions.

All of us need to be saying that homelessness is not okay. It is not enough to feed people at soup kitchens and feel good about it. It's not okay for people to sleep and die on mats on the floor. It's not okay to hold makeshift memorial services, over and over again.

You can be a part of that.

THE LONGEST NIGHT OF HOMELESSNESS

In 2016, 33 lives were tragically cut short by the hardships of homelessness.

Hundreds of people came together on Wednesday, December 21, during an annual vigil to remember homeless friends in Greater Portland who have died.

Portland's Annual Homeless Persons' Memorial Vigil takes place on the winter solstice, the longest night of the year. For 22 years, Portlanders have gathered on the evening of the winter solstice to shine a light on the on the tragedy of homelessness, mourn lives that are lost, and to reaffirm a commitment to ensuring that everyone who needs a home finds one.



STUFFING THE BUS

In November, hundreds of students from Portland area schools and community volunteers helped Rewind 100.9 stuff two big yellow school busses with more than 100,000 pounds of donated food for Preble Street. Over the last 11 years, morning DJ Chuck Igo has brought in over a million pounds of food through his annual "Stuff the Bus" food drive. Dozens of volunteers gather at the Resource Center Soup Kitchen each year on the day before Thanksgiving to help unload the donations, which will feed the hungry Mainers who rely on the soup kitchen and food pantry.



Preble Street Resource Development Assistant Ray Hepler and Rewind 100.9 DJ Chuck Igo hit the road to collect donations from area schools.



US Sen. Angus King and Bruce Hepler were among the dozens of volunteers who came the day before Thanksgiving to unload two school busses full of donations for hungry Mainers.



Players from the Portland Rugby Football Club loaned their muscle to the cause.



Preble Street Executive Director Mark Swann stands with former Portland Mayor Michael Brennan and area attorneys with the Maine Homeless Legal Project.

MAINE HOMELESS LEGAL PROJECT

The Gift of Respect

Each week, volunteer attorneys from the Maine Homeless Legal Project offer a free legal clinic to clients at the Preble Street Resource Center.

The project, spearheaded in 2014 by attorney David Soley, who leads the real estate litigation group at Bernstein Shur, represents a partnership of the American Bar Association, Volunteer Lawyers Project, Pine Tree Legal Assistance, and Preble Street.

MHLP attorneys from a dozen area firms offer pro bono legal services to close gaps in legal resources for people whose homelessness is caused or compounded by legal issues.

"People who are homeless often face a number of legal problems that need to be addressed or resolved before they can establish stable housing," explains Preble Street Executive Director Mark Swann. "And navigating the legal system is a daunting challenge that has been relieved by having a clinic on site at the Preble Street Resource Center. This exciting partnership connects vulnerable people with just the help they need to get them out of the shelters and back on their feet."

Built on a model—Project H.E.L.P.—introduced in 2004 by Judge Jay C. Zainey in New Orleans, which has since been implemented in 21 cities throughout the United States, the project has made a serious impact in the lives of homeless Mainers.

After clients have been prescreened by caseworkers, volunteer attorneys help clients resolve problems related to tenancy issues, drivers licenses, child support, bankruptcy, Social Security, small claims court cases, immigration, restitution, protection from abuse, acceptable identification, and other obstacles to stability. Many cases are wrapped up during the initial consultation, while others require ongoing pro bono representation.

As one Resource Center case manager reported, "I watched this morning as (a volunteer attorney) provided hundreds of dollars worth of legal advice to a guy who was homeless. He was kind, thoughtful, and respectful. He translated the vagaries of the law into very clear statements, developed a plan of action in collaboration with the client, and was altogether terrific."

But MHLP has offered some of the most vulnerable people in Maine much more than just legal advice.

Another Preble Street case manager added, "Clients are being met with respect, with active listening. They're really feeling like they have advocates and allies. Their legal needs are being met. They're being taken seriously."

And the love goes both ways.

"Preble Street's staff are amazing people," said David Soley. "They are there to help you in any way needed. They're a well-oiled machine. As an attorney, you literally don't have to bring anything but your skills and expertise."

One formerly homeless client, who worked with a volunteer lawyer in hopes of recovering money she'd been defrauded of, said the experience left her with a tremendous sense of empowerment, "I realized I'm not powerless. I do have a voice, and it's being heard. Sometimes that's all a person needs is to be heard."

VOLUNTEER PROFILE:

BETTY HAYMON

Betty Haymon is a retired educator who spent her working career as an elementary school teacher in the Gray-New Gloucester area. Teachers are heroes in their own right, educating and shaping the lives of our young people. But Betty's contributions to her community did not end with her profession.

Betty has been volunteering at Preble Street for nearly a decade, serving in both the Resource Center and Teen Center Soup Kitchens. She is in the Resource Center Soup Kitchen early every Saturday morning—a shift that is one of the hardest to fill—helping prepare breakfast for 300-400 people who rely on emergency food services for meals. Betty is a force in the kitchen. She takes care of the dishes—hundreds and hundreds of them. It's a project that typically requires four volunteers, but Betty handles it on her own.

On the first Thursday of each month—and any time when shifts are light and extra hands are needed—Betty also volunteers for the dinner shift in the Preble Street Teen Center Soup Kitchen, warming, serving, and cleaning up for dinner without the assistance of kitchen staff. Competent and reliable, when Betty is volunteering, the caseworkers know the meal is covered and they can focus on the work of getting teens housed, connected with service providers, or making sure they are safe for the night.

Kitchen work is difficult and dirty work. But Betty is always willing to jump in and help out with the least desirable tasks, shifting the spotlight and often the thanks from herself to others. Her commitment is driven only by a will to serve "those who are often left on the fringe."

"Once I started, I really saw the need," she says of her years of service. "I saw how many people they feed and I saw how many teens they had at the Teen Center, and it just pulls at my heartstrings that so many people are in need of services. We're all one step away, one breath away, from our life changing."

"They come in and they're hungry, they're cold, they're wet, and they just want a place to sit down, get warm and have a cup of coffee."

"Every once in a while on a Saturday, I'll say to myself, 'Oh, I don't feel like getting out of bed.' And then I think, 'You know, if I were sleeping out on the street, I'd sure want someone to be there to offer me a cup of coffee.'"



Longtime volunteer, Betty Haymon



HOW YOU CAN HELP

WHETHER IT'S A BAG OF GROCERIES, A \$5 BILL, YOUR VOICE, OR A PORTION OF AN ESTATE, YOUR GIFTS ARE VITAL TO OUR WORK.

BY VOLUNTEERING

SOUP KITCHENS: Cook, serve, and clean up at three meals a day.

FOOD PANTRY: Sort and distribute emergency groceries on Thursdays.

CLOTHING CLOSET: Help sort clothing donations.

OFFICE SUPPORT: Help in the offices with filing, phones, and mailings on a one-time or ongoing basis.

PROGRAM SUPPORT: Lead enrichment activities or help with community meals, art groups, game nights, events, etc.

WITH IN-KIND DONATIONS

FOOD: Coffee, tea, cereal, juice, cooking oil, rice, pasta, salad dressing, beans, soup, tuna, canned tomatoes, and spaghetti sauce.

CLOTHING: (for men, women, and teens). Year round: New underwear, jeans, boots, sneakers, socks, and hooded sweatshirts. Winter: Jackets, hats, gloves (large and durable), and thermal underwear.

SHELTER ESSENTIALS: Towels, backpacks, duffle bags, and laundry detergent.

PERSONAL HYGIENE PRODUCTS: Deodorant, razors, shaving cream, soap, shampoo, toothpaste, toothbrushes, combs, and sunscreen.

TEEN NEEDS: Sports equipment (footballs, basketballs, soccer balls, frisbees), art supplies, movie tickets, bus tickets.

GROUP SUPPLIES: Playing cards, art and craft supplies, Scrabble, chess, checkers, date books, ESL books, knitting needles, yarn, books and magazines.

WITH FINANCIAL SUPPORT

CASH, CHECKS, OR CREDIT CARDS. STOCKS OR SECURITIES.

FUNDRAISERS: Proceeds from concerts, house parties, bottle drives, empty bowl dinners, casual dress days—at your church, school, business, neighborhood—will help.

TRIBUTE GIFTS: Honor a special friend or family member. Sending a tribute card to someone will make your congratulations, love, or sympathy more meaningful. When you make a donation to Preble Street, we can send a card announcing your gift.

PLANNED GIFTS. Talk to your financial advisor about methods you can use that can provide tax benefits, meet your financial needs, fulfill your charitable intentions, and further our mission. We will be happy to work with your estate planning professional.

ADVOCATE

CALL OR WRITE YOUR LEGISLATORS: Ask them to support solutions to homelessness, hunger, and poverty and support for our most vulnerable neighbors.

WRITE A LETTER TO THE EDITOR.

TALK TO FAMILY OR FRIENDS. Help to change the conversation.

Sign up for Preble Street Advocacy Alerts. Go to preblestreet.org and click "Sign up for E-News" to get updates on how you can make a difference.

Every hour and every dollar that you invest helps those most in need.

You can donate in person, by mail, or online: 38 Preble Street, Portland, Maine 04101, or preblestreet.org.

For more information, call 775.0026 or e-mail info@preblestreet.org.

curbside

NEWS FROM PREBLE STREET

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TO:

OUR MISSION

TO PROVIDE ACCESSIBLE, BARRIER-FREE SERVICES TO EMPOWER PEOPLE EXPERIENCING PROBLEMS WITH HOMELESSNESS, HOUSING, HUNGER, AND POVERTY; AND TO ADVOCATE FOR SOLUTIONS TO THESE PROBLEMS.

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