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2020



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NEWS FROM PREBLE STREET



Preble Street

Responding to the pandemic

By Mark R. Swann, MSPA, Executive Director

In March, Preble Street was in planning stages to open a new Women's Shelter, create a Healing Center for survivors of human trafficking, and consolidate and improve our services for youth experiencing homelessness.

Over the past 45 years, Preble Street has responded many times to community emergencies. Little did we know the next emergency was right around the corner.

The world changed, we hit pause on our plans, and we pivoted quickly to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Through it all, we have never lost sight of our mission while keeping our essential programs open, and keeping clients, volunteers, and staff safe.



Preble Street Executive Director Mark Swann

And everyone got fed.

We've restructured our Food Programs operations multiple times: first to limit the number of people at a sitting to adhere to CDC guidance; closing the Resource Center dining room and serving all meals to go as the guidelines tightened; then increasing the



Volunteer Anne prepares to-go meals at the Resource Center Soup Kitchen.

Preble Street ♥ Volunteers

When schools closed, high school junior **Ella** and her mom Jen began volunteering at the Resource Center Soup Kitchen. Ella says, "While I am able to endure uncertain times under comfortable circumstances, others are not as fortunate and need the help and compassion of their neighbors. Preble Street offers me the opportunity to give back to my neighbors who don't have the resources to help themselves."

Ann had to step away from volunteering at the Teen Center but started sewing reusable cloth masks. Ann and others have created and donated over 1,000 masks to essential staff and volunteers.

When **Lou**, a regular volunteer, had to make the difficult decision to suspend his shifts during the pandemic due to his age, he stayed involved by sharing every Preble Street social media post asking for volunteer support. Nine of his friends and family members signed up!

Derek can't join us for his usual volunteer shifts, and instead donated \$1,000 to Preble Street Food Programs to ensure staff have the necessary equipment and materials.

Catherine surprised the Food Programs crew with an order of Otto pizza. **Life Church Gorham, First Congregational Church UCC, St. Alban's Episcopal Church, and St. Luke's Cathedral** have all kept their monthly group volunteer commitments during this crisis. **Bennet, Griffin, and Victoria** turned their energy to volunteerism after finding themselves out of work.

These signs of hope — and so many more — remind us we are strong enough to overcome adversity with grace, compassion, and kindness. Preble Street has never closed its doors, and thanks to volunteers and supporters we never will!

On the cover: Preble Street volunteers are heroes! At the now daily Preble Street Food Pantry, volunteer Campbell works hard to prepare essential food boxes for families and individuals in need.

Food Pantry from weekly to daily service, going from serving 140 families a week to 500 as more and more people lost their jobs; then taking on the responsibility to provide meals three times a day for the City of Portland Oxford Street Shelter and quarantine shelter at the Portland Expo, the YMCA, Sullivan Wellness Shelter at the University of Southern Maine, and meals to veterans and families sheltered at local hotels.

Preble Street Food Programs leapt from 68,000 meals in March to 101,110 meals in April — a 49% increase in one month.

April	101,110 meals served 86% increase over last year 2,117 food boxes distributed 193% increase over last year
March	68,000 meals served 33% increase over last year 1,211 food boxes distributed 76% increase over last year



“ I had volunteered several times at the Resource Center Soup Kitchen before the COVID-19 pandemic and was always impressed by the dedication, selflessness, and industriousness of staff and volunteers alike.

I'll admit that, at first, I was hesitant to return to volunteer amidst a global pandemic. Ultimately, some fellow medical students and I made the decision to don our masks and volunteer for lunch, and I was quickly assured that Preble Street was staying on top of the rapidly changing CDC guidelines.

Now, more than ever, I am inspired and uplifted by the tireless work of Preble Street staff and volunteers. By adapting workflows and modifying routines, the organization has prioritized health and safety for everyone involved without compromising its lifesaving work.

— Dr. Will Hirschfeld, graduate of Tufts University and Maine Medical Center “Maine Track” program

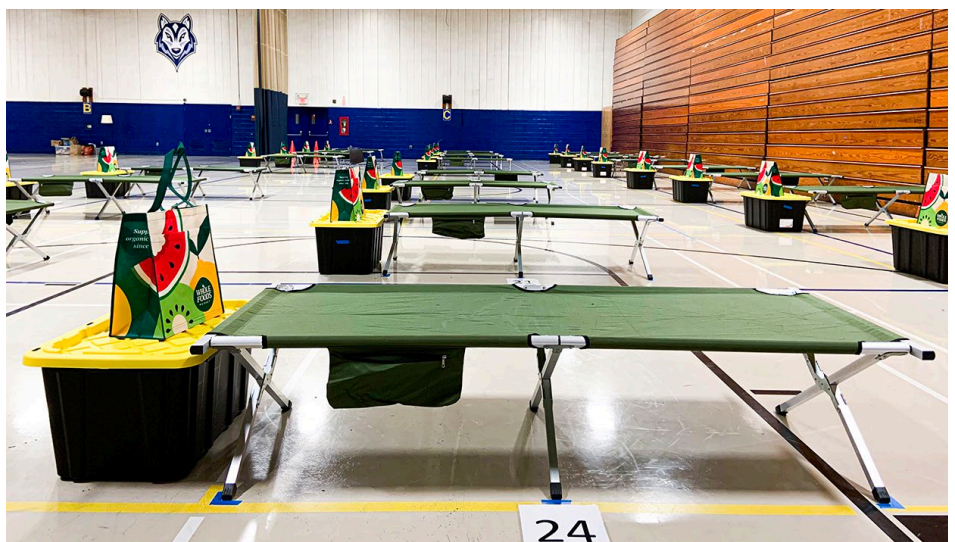
Creating dignified shelter for people without a home.

While countless messages implore us to stay home, hundreds of people served by Preble Street don't have a home. Our job has always been to make sure they are fed, sheltered, and safe. None of that changes, even while a virus is gripping the nation.

Since Governor Janet Mills declared a Civil State of Emergency on March 15, we've opened two new shelters to make sure the more than 500 people in Portland experiencing homelessness — who are particularly vulnerable to illness — can ensure physical distancing.

With our partners at the University of Southern Maine, Maine Department of Health and Human Services, and MaineHousing, we opened the Sullivan Wellness Shelter, providing 24/7 safety inside the USM Sullivan Gymnasium for people who are not sick.

We've hired over 25 new employees and reassigned existing Preble Street staff from various programs to operate the Wellness Shelter following guidance of the CDC and infectious disease specialists. Preble Street is also managing emergency hotel rooms and providing quarantine space and case management for people experiencing homelessness who test positive for COVID-19, and providing quarantine space for residents of group homes.



Top: Managing Director of Social Work Supervision and Training Mary Beth Sullivan leads an orientation for new Preble Street staff at the Sullivan Wellness Shelter at USM in Portland. Bottom: The shelter is all set up and ready for guests.

Scenes of peace from the Sullivan Wellness Shelter

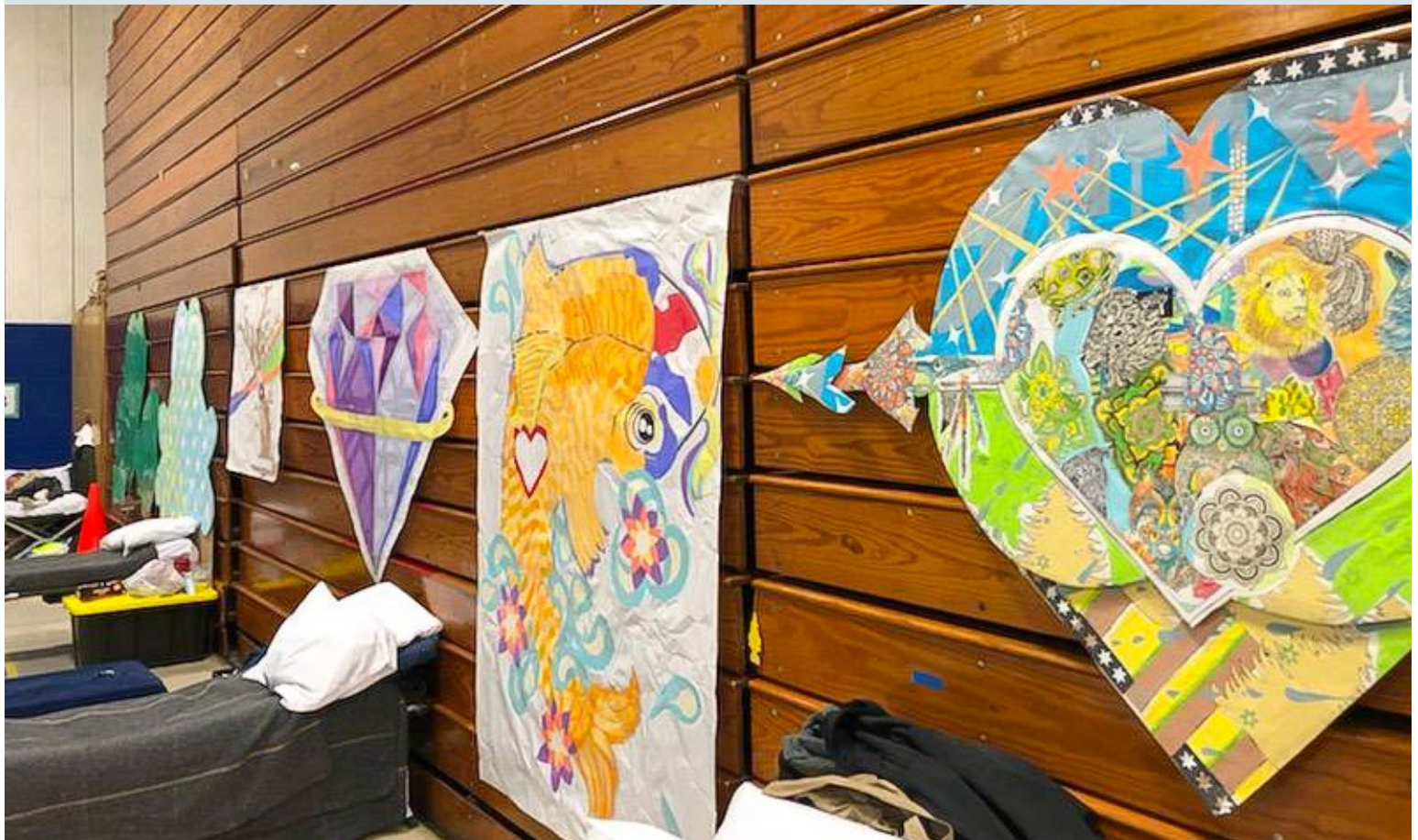
"I enjoy being motivated by perpetual feelings like love, peace, balance, growth," reflected the guest who created the beautiful pieces pictured below and shared them with his neighbors.

Another guest was sweeping the sidewalk in front of the shelter. He talked about his desire to give back and the struggle he has "as a man of his age" dependent on others for shelter and health.

A new guest arrived, saw an old friend, and they went to hug. Stopping abruptly, they laughed and agreed they can't do that for now. The person who had been staying at the shelter then helped orient her friend and shared all the positive experiences she is having — being able to rest while staying nourished and well.

Meanwhile, a man settled across a table, set up dozens of colored pencils, and proceeded to work on a detailed piece of art.

Working on an intricate puzzle of a stained-glass window, a man in his sixties spoke of his grandmother who immigrated to the United States when she was 18 and his life growing up in a "family like *Leave It To Beaver*." He is a painter by trade who wants to work again and shared how aging brings tolerance and acceptance of life-changing events like this pandemic.



Strengthening the safety net.

Our Advocacy work at the city, state, and federal level has continued unabated to strengthen the social safety net for people experiencing homelessness, hunger, and poverty during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We need to ensure no additional people in Maine are subjected to homelessness and the associated harmful impacts on physical and mental health. As people across Maine are ordered to stay at home to slow the spread of COVID-19, it is a dramatic reminder that *housing is healthcare*. And we must have legislation that addresses the challenges of people with low-income, who face the largest burden from this public health crisis and economic downturn.



Any COVID-19 stimulus package must provide additional food assistance — including strengthening the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program — as well as funding for homelessness services, rental assistance, emergency shelter, housing stabilization services, medical respite care, and street outreach.

The COVID-19 situation has intensified the affordable housing crisis in Maine, and the sharp rise in layoffs has left households struggling to keep a roof over their heads and meet basic needs. People experiencing homelessness are especially vulnerable, and stimulus package funds could provide them with additional shelter options, including hotels and short-term rentals, to stay safe and healthy.

We called on a nationwide moratorium on evictions, foreclosures, and sweeps of homeless encampments to ensure people with low-income will not lose their homes and shelter during a public health epidemic when it is critical to stay inside.



Essential services continue to change lives.

In addition to providing emergency services (food programs, new shelters, the Joe Kreisler Teen Shelter and Teen Center, and the Florence House Women's Shelter) we continue to operate our three Housing First programs — Logan Place, Huston Commons, and Florence House apartments — as well as case management and housing support with our Anti-Trafficking Services and Veterans Housing Services.

Across the agency amazing work continues despite the pandemic:

- Clients are using telemedicine for health visits and engage in physically distant community meals and art projects;
- A Florence House Safe Haven client and two First Place program youth just became housed;
- The Veterans Housing Services team helped almost 30 clients with temporary emergency shelter at hotels; and so much more.

And internally, to thank our incredible staff for the extraordinary work they do helping others day in and day out, we instituted a 50% "Gratitude Pay" raise for everyone working at essential direct service programs.

As the COVID-19 situation evolves, we're assessing how to operate both in the immediate and long-term. One thing we know for sure is that people experiencing homelessness remain incredibly vulnerable throughout this public health crisis, and we will continue to work closely with partners to maintain dignified shelter and professional services.

As always, making sure people are safe, fed, clothed, home, and healthy is what we do. No matter what.

"The threads that connect us to clients, and us to each other, across programs, is something wonderful. An intricate and amazing web that changes the lives of clients forever, and has changed me, too."

— *Andrew Bove, LCSW, Resource Center & Sullivan Wellness Shelter Director*

While guidelines keep us physically distant, the Sullivan Wellness Shelter illustrates the connection of staff across programs.

This effort goes beyond social work staff — from Food Programs to Facilities to Finance to Development, the entire agency played a crucial role.



This shelter has brought a sense of peace to so many people and shows how powerful such conscientious and collaborative efforts can be. It's astonishing how much it has done for the morale and health of guests, all of whom are working on their goals with a caseworker.

Of course, we can't do it alone. Epidemiologists from Maine CDC and infectious disease specialists from the Maine Medical Center Preventive Medicine Program come through with prevention measures. Northern Light Health has been very generous, deploying nurses to conduct testing for guests and staff. And vendors like the amazing team at Elizabeth's Extra Clean — the silent caretakers of the building — constantly keep the space sparkling.

In the midst of 24-hour preparedness and constant vigilance, there is still music in the air.

Housing First — permanent housing with supportive services — is an effective solution to chronic homelessness, changing — even saving — lives. Housing First works because it offers support, builds trust, and empowers tenants to live independently. When they no longer have to deal with the stress and danger of the streets, tenants begin the journey from homelessness to hope.

Since 2005, Preble Street and Avesta Housing have applied respective strengths to solving homelessness in Portland with support from Portland Housing Authority and the Portland community, opening the initial Housing First site in Maine at Logan Place.

With data showing significantly improved tenant lives and decreased financial burdens on city emergency services, shelters, jails, and detox programs, Avesta and Preble Street replicated this model in 2010 at Florence House, specifically focused on women experiencing homelessness. Then in 2017, in response to increasing homelessness in Portland precipitated by rapidly diminishing state support for social services, we collaborated once again to build Huston Commons.

These programs have been enormously successful, providing our vulnerable, traumatized neighbors the opportunity to reclaim



There is music in the air at Preble Street Housing First program Florence House where tenants enjoyed a new piano during the winter holiday season.

15th Anniversary of Logan Place

The original Housing First site in Maine and a partnership between Preble Street, Avesta Housing, and Portland Housing Authority, Logan Place provides apartments and 24-hour supportive services to people experiencing chronic homelessness in Portland.

On March 24, 2005, the day Logan Place opened, the number of people using the city overnight shelter decreased for the first time in 20 years. Before that night, the City of Portland Oxford Street Shelter had exceeded its capacity 70% of the time for a year.



10th Anniversary of Florence House

Building on the success of Logan Place, in 2010 Preble Street once again partnered with Avesta Housing and the Portland Housing Authority to create a second Housing First program.

Florence House provides emergency shelter in addition to permanent supported housing for people who identify as women who have experienced chronic homelessness. At Florence House, staff bear witness to the factors that have formed their unique stories, whether they are 18 or 85: domestic violence; disabilities; mental illness; and medical, educational, and vocational systems that were not able to meet their needs. At Florence House they find a sense of safety and stability, connection to the community, and skilled caseworkers to help them build a new life off the streets.



their lives and contribute to the larger community.

We don't have to accept homelessness. It's not enough to feed people at crowded soup kitchens. It's not alright for people to sleep on mats on the floor. It's not okay for our neighbors to live for years on the streets.

Now as ever we will continue to follow our mission to respond to emergencies and seek long-term solutions for people in need.



John, Logan Place tenant since 2010, enjoys a day out fishing.

“ I was homeless for 25 years before moving into Logan Place. I was mostly sleeping in a tent by the train tracks. I worked on and off at a few jobs. My life was a mess.

The best things about having moved into Logan Place: I get to go out fishing (pictured) and on fishing trips with my fishing partner every year. I also like going out boating. And cooking meals for the house — I cook a lot of the meals. I do the same thing at Florence House — go over and do the meals.

I've been able to pay off debt from before I moved in. I also got to go and get my ID. It was a hassle before because they wanted a birth certificate and an address. After moving in it was easier. Now everything is up to par.

I got in contact with my sister. I hadn't been in touch at all before. It was hard at first, but it got easier.

And I started attending church since I moved in. That's where I met my fishing partner. I get to spend time with him and his wife and two daughters each summer. Been going every year since I moved into Logan Place.

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TO:

Pictured: Preble Street staff measure the distance between cots at the Sullivan Wellness Shelter at USM.
Photo: Marc Glass/USM Public Affairs

Thanks Preble Street
... You helped me when
I was homeless ... You
guys rock!!!!

Preble street staff and
volunteers are some
amazing people. So many
would be so lost without
them. Truly admirable to
say the least.

You people are ROCK
STARS! Each and
everyone of you!
Thank you!

Thank you for all you
do to help so many
vulnerable members
of our community!

Love in action.

My birthday was last week
and my friends joined me in
raising \$1,000 for you folks.
I'm sorry the need is so great
but glad you're here.

Preble Street has never closed its doors and never will.

We depend on the community to keep us going —
especially in a time of crisis. Donations are needed to
cover staffing, equipment, and overhead costs.

Thank you to all who have already given. The people
we serve depend on our support and need to know
we care about them, value each and every one of
them, and love them.



**Supporting Preble Street
with a recurring monthly
donation is the most
convenient and impactful
way to move Mainers
forward.**

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