

FALL
2020

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NEWS FROM PREBLE STREET



A light in dark places

By Mark R. Swann, MSPA, Executive Director

Preble Street has never worked harder than during these past six months, and I have never been prouder of this organization and the incredible efforts of the staff, board, and volunteers.

Staff continue the heroic work of meeting people experiencing poverty wherever they are and uniting them with food, shelter, healthcare, housing, justice, and love. Volunteers continue to join us in making sure our neighbors in need are fed. Food and monetary donations continue to come in and help us meet the increasing needs of our community. We are continually humbled by the many individuals and businesses that support our work and our mission. *The love for Preble Street is real, and it keeps us going.*



Though the Sullivan Wellness Shelter — operated by Preble Street at the University of Southern Maine — was open for just a few months, the impact was enormous. The peace, stability, and safety this space offered, as well as the casework and support provided by staff, changed lives.

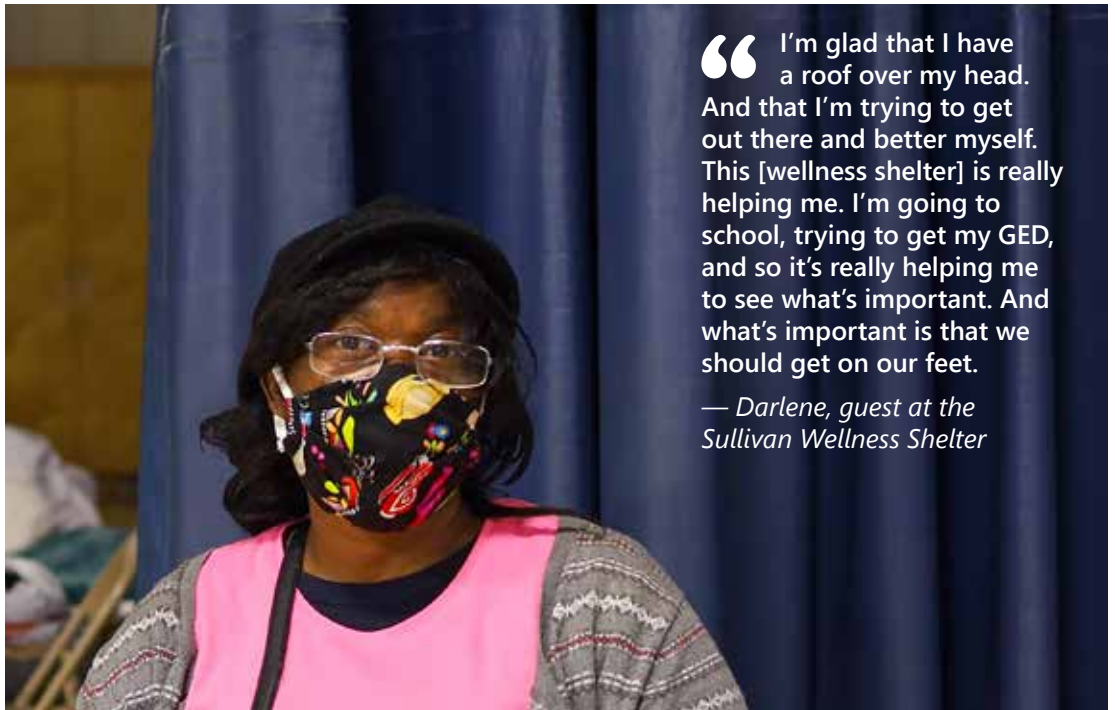
Dignified, life-saving shelter

As we head into the cold winter months, our minds and hearts are focused on the many unsheltered people in Portland. The chilling reality in this city is that homelessness is increasing while shelters are disappearing. There are already record numbers of people going unsheltered in Portland, and when the COVID-19 eviction moratorium expires this number will surge.

At Preble Street, we see firsthand the devastating physical and mental toll of homelessness, and we're here to respond to critical needs with services, empowerment, opportunity, and hope for our neighbors in need.

On the cover: A tenant at home at Florence House, one of three Housing First programs operated by Preble Street and Avesta Housing. Throughout the pandemic, Preble Street Housing First apartments continue to safely house 85 adults who were chronically homeless.

While continuing to run the Joe Kreisler Teen Shelter and Florence House Women's Shelter, Preble Street also opened a Quarantine Shelter early in the pandemic for people who test positive for the coronavirus. The shelter is for new Mainers, residents of group homes, and people experiencing homelessness. Individuals and families — 59% of whom are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color — receive case management to make sure their basic needs are met while in quarantine. We're working closely with the City of Portland to ensure anyone in these groups who tests positive has a safe place to stay, and we will be expanding this shelter now that the City quarantine shelter has returned to serving families as it did before the pandemic.



“ I'm glad that I have a roof over my head. And that I'm trying to get out there and better myself. This [wellness shelter] is really helping me. I'm going to school, trying to get my GED, and so it's really helping me to see what's important. And what's important is that we should get on our feet.

— Darlene, guest at the Sullivan Wellness Shelter

We also ran a 50-bed Wellness Shelter at the Sullivan Gym at the University of Southern Maine, where guests didn't have to line up for entry at night or leave in the morning. Staffed by Preble Street social work professionals with services and meals on-site, this program offered an opportunity for healing, and a chance for individuals to work toward their goals of housing, healthcare, and employment. It worked. It was astonishing how much the Wellness Shelter did for the morale and health of guests.

We're working to open a new, permanent Wellness Shelter at the site of the Preble Street Resource Center. Construction will begin as soon as a permit is in place. And with winter on the way, time is very much of the essence. It is absolutely imperative that we address the shelter bed deficit. *We cannot continue to leave our neighbors out in the cold.*

Charlie arrived at the Sullivan Wellness Shelter (SWS) the day it opened. He had fallen on hard times and had spent the last year living in a tent in the woods. At the SWS he had his own bed and safe place to leave his belongings. He didn't have to walk across town to line up for a shower, clean bathroom, or meals — everything was available in the space where he was now staying. He immediately connected with a caseworker and began to get his life back on track.

“While staying here I've gotten a lot of things done that I've wanted to do,” reflects Charlie. “I started working again — that gives me so much more flexibility, finally being able to put money aside to get myself into a home and help with other necessities. I got my MaineCare reactivated. I got my food stamps turned back on. I started going to therapy every week. I got back on medication for my mental health through Greater Portland Health that staff connected me to. So many good things are finally starting for me. I'm getting more self-esteem and more confidence. I'm not used to doing so well, being successful. It's a new feeling, but it's a good feeling. I'm happy that I'm getting into a better place.”

Staff at the SWS were a big support for Charlie. They talked with him about his future and options, helped him establish connections to other agencies that could help him meet his goals, and talked him through the process of reactivating his benefits that had fallen through when he was living outside.

“The staff here has been a tremendous help ... and so has having this place to stay. I'm not having to worry and focus on survival from one minute to the next ... I don't have to carry my bags with me everywhere I go. I'm getting reestablished and feeling like I'm a contributing member of society, again.”





Top row: Volunteers sort, prepare, and pack food for distribution. Bottom row: Food Programs and Street Outreach Collaborative staff deliver meals to area shelters and other congregate living programs, and to people who are unsheltered in Portland.

Serving more people today – looking forward to tomorrow

Since March we have almost doubled our food services. With Food Programs revamped — bringing warm meals to people where they are and expanding to an almost daily food pantry — we are providing 100,000 meals each month and are on track to provide over 1 million meals in 2020. The past few years we’ve provided 630,000.

Recognizing we couldn’t continue to safely serve hundreds of people in one space during a pandemic, we launched the Street Outreach Collaborative to connect people who are unsheltered with emergency shelter options, permanent housing, health services, food, and treatment programs. It’s social work without walls.



Giving back to veterans

Since March, Preble Street Veterans Housing Services (VHS) has placed 105 veterans and their families into emergency housing across the state of Maine each and every night. Caseworkers are helping those same families find permanent housing, obtain jobs, and get back on their feet.

VHS, along with our national and state partners, has provided key services, housing, and casework to hundreds of veterans over the last several years. A generous grant from the VA this year is enabling us to meet the crisis we’re facing now due to COVID-19, while also giving us the resources we’ll need to help manage homelessness among veterans for the next few years.

Thanks to MaineHousing funding, Preble Street, the City of Portland, and Amistad are partnering to provide rapid re-housing services to people experiencing homelessness. Rapid re-housing is an evidence-based intervention that uses casework and financial assistance to help individuals and families return to housing quickly and not become homeless again in the near term. To start, these three agencies are supporting up to 80 individuals with casework and housing assistance.

After being put on hold due to the coronavirus, we have started construction on our new, innovative Healing Center to support survivors of human trafficking, building on our leadership in anti-trafficking efforts. In one recent nine-day period alone, Preble Street Anti-Trafficking Services staff identified and started working with nine new trafficking survivors in Maine. It is clear that the complex needs of human trafficking survivors are among the urgent, unmet needs in our communities.



Renovations are underway at the future home of the Preble Street Healing Center to provide comprehensive services and case management for survivors of human trafficking in a dedicated safe space.

Through all of this Preble Street Teen Services, Health Services, Anti-Trafficking Services, and Housing First programs have continued without pause, meeting urgent needs and connecting clients to healthcare, housing, shelter, and hope.

Finally, a key part of our mission is to create solutions to the problems of homelessness, housing, hunger, and poverty, and our Advocacy team has been working to do just that. They've continued to fight at the local, state, and federal level for increases to SNAP, funding for shelter, affordable housing, and an expanded safety net. They are also working with people with lived experience of homelessness on the You Don't Need a Home to Vote campaign, helping people who are unhoused register to vote, setting up virtual interviews for people in poverty to speak to candidates, and ensuring everyone knows their voting rights.

None of this work would be possible without your support. ***Thank you.***

Signs of hope in recovery

After almost a year of homelessness and enduring mental health and substance use disorders (SUD), **Karen** enrolled in the Medication Assisted Recovery Program (MARP) — a unique pilot collaboration between Preble Street and Greater Portland Health. The multi-disciplinary MARP team supported her through the challenges she faced while addressing her mental health and SUD. When Karen completed the program earlier this year and moved into an independent apartment, the team continued to support her as she worked on her goals. Karen is now not only housed and sober but also employed, connected to specialty care for an old injury, and well connected to the local recovery community.



Watson had been using opiates and methamphetamine for decades. He and his wife have been homeless since 2006, and for most of that time, Watson was not receiving primary care, despite having diabetes. Since enrolling in the MARP program, he has turned his life around. With support from a Preble Street caseworker, Watson has almost completely stopped his substance use, is getting mental health support, and has kept a steady job, has his diabetes controlled with help from a doctor, and is now housed. His next goal is to restart his construction business.

MARP optimizes existing SUD treatments and recovery-oriented services and adds monitored daily Medication Assisted Treatment paired with mental health counseling. Housing is often the first step toward recovery, not the last. Wraparound supports remain in place as long as necessary to prevent a return to homelessness and ensure appropriate levels of care are in place for true recovery and housing success to occur.



“Volunteers are a crucial component to serving the most vulnerable members of our community. Since the pandemic, new and familiar faces have risen to take on new roles, bring extra joy to our operations, and show that banding together and asking “How can I help?” can bring forth real change.

— Haley Foydel, Preble Street Volunteer Manager



Board Profile: Dr. Benjamin Shambaugh

How did you get involved with Preble Street?

I'm the Dean at St. Luke's Cathedral in Portland. When I started there, St. Luke's was running the weekend Soup Kitchen at the Preble Street Resource Center — before Preble Street took over operations of the Soup Kitchen every day, 365 days a year — and one of my jobs was to manage that kitchen, including volunteer teams and writing grants. We served three meals a day on Saturday and Sunday all year long. Eventually, Preble Street took over the food services which was great.

Because St. Luke's ran the soup kitchen for 25 years before Preble Street operated it, Preble Street thought they should have

a St. Luke's representative on the Board of Directors, and Mark Swann asked me to join. St. Luke's still has a team that volunteers at lunch on the third Sunday of every month. Furthermore, I'm an Episcopal Priest and the Episcopal Diocese is very connected to the work of hunger and homelessness.

There are a lot of nonprofit organizations in southern Maine. Why do you think Preble Street stands out in the crowd? What is it that Preble Street does better than anyone else?

I think it's the quality of the staff and the leadership; the dedication and generosity of the volunteers. And that the foundation of Preble Street is a social work model, which is one of the key things Joe Kreisler (Preble Street founder) had going from the very beginning. The goal was never just to feed people, but to help raise them up, empower them, and help them become productive members of society. The Housing First model Preble Street uses embodies that, as does the way that social workers rather than police are the ones who are performing outreach. Another thing that is really wonderful about Preble Street is collaborations. Preble Street collaborates with the City of Portland, with agencies around town. It's really part of a bigger network and team, and it is not just in Portland anymore. It really is a statewide effort.

Why is the work Preble Street does important to you or to others who might consider supporting these efforts?

I think it's wonderful to see that your actions have an impact and that you can make a difference. Sometimes in this world you can get overwhelmed by the level of problems. Hunger, homelessness, poverty — all that is really hard. So, when you put a face on it and you see the changes that are happening in people's lives, it makes all the difference in the world. One of the things the faith community has done for years on Maundy Thursday — the day when Jesus washed the disciples' feet — is run a foot clinic for people experiencing homelessness (pictured). We literally wash people's feet and then nurses will look at them and provide care. When you're doing that it's the conversation with the person and looking them in the eye, hearing their stories, and knowing that the little things you do are making a difference. Giving someone a little brightness in their lives — I think that's a huge motivator.

What specific projects or aspects of Preble Street are you committed to?

I became involved because of projects related to hunger, and food service is important to me. That's what brought me in. I also firmly believe in the Housing First movement. I started at Preble Street soon after Logan Place (the original Housing First program in Portland, operated in partnership with Avesta Housing) opened and was here for the openings of Florence House and Huston Commons (second and third Housing First programs in Maine). Those places make a huge difference. It's Maslow's hierarchy of needs — when you have housing, everything else gets better over time.

What do you do when you're not at Preble Street?

Our congregation is very involved in service to the community, so caring for the community in general is a large part of what I do. I'm also a tuba player and I play with the Maine Pops. We play concerts at gazebos and parks and nursing homes and all over the place. In a normal summer we do about 30 concerts. Maine has a wonderful tradition of community bands and it's a lot of fun.

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Pictured (here and below the fold): For the annual Preble Street art show, artists residing at Preble Street Housing First programs (Logan Place, Florence House, and Huston Commons), as well as youth from Preble Street Teen Services submitted works in celebration of creative passions and harm reduction. View all the pieces at preblestreet.org/artshow2020.



Top left to right: "Waterfall" by Michele; Untitled by Trista; Untitled by Kenny
Middle row: "Spring" by Gil; Untitled by Chicago
Bottom row: Untitled by Anonymous
Above the fold: "Hope" by Anonymous



Preble Street depends on the community to keep us going — especially in a time of crisis.



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