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NEWS FROM PREBLE STREET

SPRING 2022

**INSIDE: THE FUTURE OF SHELTERS,
VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR, MORE**



Preble Street

March 2020 was a time of pivotal change for everyone, including Preble Street staff and the people who use our services. COVID-19 hit the West Coast first, so we had a little time to learn from homeless service providers about what they were experiencing and how they were keeping clients safe. When cases started to pop up in Maine, it was clear what we needed to do: provide accessible, barrier-free, community-centered COVID-19 response services to people experiencing homelessness. In those early days, we truly didn't know the scope of the work that was ahead of us.

Immediately, the State called on Preble Street to open a 50-bed wellness shelter at the University of Southern Maine campus to help spread people out from the traditionally overcrowded shelters where social distancing was impossible.

Two weeks later, the State called again and asked Preble Street to create something we had never heard of before: a hotel-based Quarantine and Isolation Shelter. This would provide a safe place for people without homes, people living in densely populated housing, New Mainers, and healthcare workers to quarantine, thus reducing the spread of COVID-19 within the community. Preble Street would go on to manage two additional temporary emergency shelters during the height of the pandemic.

Homelessness is a public health crisis, and in our decades providing homeless services, especially over the last two years, we have seen time and again the critical role shelters play in creating a healthy community. When done right, these spaces provide people with safety and dignity until more permanent solutions are found. Operating with a coordinated response to protect public health, shelters have proven to be part of — not separate from — the larger network of social supports.

Affordable housing is front-page news these days and understandably so. Housing First is a model we stand by, and social workers across Preble Street programs are working hard to find transitional and permanent housing for individuals and families. But we cannot ignore the fact that Maine needs a larger, stable, and consistent shelter system to help us meet the complex needs of people experiencing homelessness. For the well-being of all who live in our communities, we must do better.

Swannie



Dr. Nirav Shah, Maine CDC Director (center), visits the Preble Street Quarantine and Isolation Shelter in July 2021

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Elena's Way: A model for future shelters

There are many circumstances that lead to people seeking emergency shelter. The lack of affordable housing and skyrocketing rent increases are the big news today, but unemployment, low-wage jobs, substance use disorder, the opioid epidemic, chronic health issues, severe lack of mental health treatment, economic uncertainty, domestic violence, defunding of critical social services, systemic racism, and discrimination based on sexual or gender identity are all factors too. Homelessness and poverty are caused by a broken social safety net and the larger systems that perpetrate racial, social, and economic injustices.

When designed and operated using both preventive medicine and social work best practices, emergency shelters are uniquely situated to promote the health and wellness of individuals accessing services as well as the surrounding community.

Preble Street's experiences at the University of Southern Maine Sullivan Gym in summer 2020 highlighted the many benefits of shelters that are less populated, well-spaced, offer a welcoming and calm environment, and are staffed by social work professionals. We started referring to this as a "Wellness Shelter" and the name stuck.

A Wellness Shelter provides warmth, safety, and trauma-informed care for individuals experiencing homelessness. It offers a healing and restorative environment and empowerment for people who stay there. But, perhaps most importantly, a Wellness Shelter gives hope for the future.

Construction is underway on the new Wellness Shelter at 5 Portland Street, and we anticipate opening the doors in fall 2022. Many Preble Street buildings or rooms are named after people who are activists or social workers or are significant in the history of the agency, including the Joe Kreisler Teen Shelter; Florence House; Logan Place; and Huston Commons. As we searched for a name for this new Wellness Shelter, one person kept coming to mind:

Elena Schmidt.

Without Elena, Preble Street would not be the organization we are today. Her wisdom, heart, and values-based skills helped Preble Street grow and expand our services. In her nearly 20 years here, she has served as the first Development Director, the first Human Resources Director, and now as Archivist and Leadership Advisor. Elena has helped build this agency through her fundraising efforts, commitment to our mission, and tireless devotion to helping people who need it most. She embodies so much of what Preble Street is today.

Elena's Way (pictured on the cover) will be a 24-hour, service-inclusive, and trauma-informed Wellness Shelter grounded in social work and medical best practices. Informed by the COVID-19 emergency, Elena's Way will be an ongoing part of the solution to homelessness and will provide warmth, safety, and intensive services to 40 individuals experiencing homelessness and complex health and behavioral issues who cannot access other shelters. Please join us in celebrating Elena's Way!



Elena Schmidt, Preble Street Archivist and Leadership Advisor

What is a Wellness Shelter?

A Wellness Shelter is a 24-hour, service-inclusive, and trauma-informed shelter for individuals experiencing homelessness that is grounded in social work and medical best practices.

A Wellness Shelter offers:

A healing and restorative environment that contributes to better outcomes for clients

24-hour care and services at one location

Opportunities for choice that empower people accessing services to be the decision-makers about how to best meet their own needs

A layout, design, and operational workflow that provides personal space, reduces the spread of illness, and positively impacts emotional health

A trauma-informed approach to social work that allows for creative problem-solving and individualized assessments (e.g., accommodating couples) that may not be possible in other shelter environments



Preble Street staff celebrate the work accomplished at the Quarantine & Isolation Shelter, March 2022

Farewell to our Quarantine & Isolation Shelters

At the end of March 2022, the hotel-based Quarantine and Isolation Shelter operated by Preble Street in Scarborough, Maine, closed.

Since its opening, more than 800 individuals have been served at the Quarantine and Isolation Shelter, amounting to more than 900 unique quarantine stays, and more than 7,500 bed nights. That's 7,500 nights that someone did not need to worry about where they were going to quarantine while sick with or exposed to COVID-19. That's more than 800 individuals who had safe shelter, reducing the spread of COVID-19 and helping keep our communities safe.

"These efforts get to the very essence of what COVID-19 has required of us — to think creatively and act quickly," said Daniel Brennan, Director of MaineHousing which funded the program. "This work is vital to Maine's public health response to COVID-19. These shelters have saved lives, protected crucial healthcare resources, and supported local businesses."

"Our team and our community partners adapted at the drop of a hat," shared Sam Chamberlain, Managing Director of Quarantine and Isolation Shelters at Preble Street. "There were countless instances where partners, providers, medical professionals, and members of our community sat around a virtual table to come up with rapid solutions to never-before-seen challenges in our community. To this day, I remain in awe of what we accomplished together."

The goal of the Quarantine and Isolation Shelter was to ensure a safe space for people to quarantine and reduce the spread of COVID-19 within the community. Many people came to us simply needing a place to quarantine safely. Others needed more support — access to medical care, sustainable food resources, more permanent shelter, and longer-term community support.

Preble Street has always, and will always, adapt to meet the changing needs of the people we serve. We develop, assess, and grow services in our community in response to needs as they arise, establishing programs such as the MMC-Preble Street Learning Collaborative, Food Security Hub, and the new Elena's Way Wellness Shelter.

Leaving an Impact

It is with tremendous gratitude that we bid farewell to Preble Street Board members Judy Bertram, Jane Bradley, and Rob Ravenelle. Each of them has brought unique strengths to the table and worked tirelessly to help ensure that Preble Street expands to meet the changing needs of our community and succeeds in our mission.

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

Judy Bertram (29 years of service): Before I discovered volunteering in the dining room at Preble Street, I enjoyed raising funds for a few local organizations. Yet that work did not give me the hands-on experience I craved. Interacting closely with clients and bonding with like-minded volunteers while serving breakfast gave me a deep admiration for Mark [Swann] and the staff. Witnessing their dedication and loving support inspired me to join the Board of Directors. Growing up in Portland I knew people struggled with basic needs, but as an adult I came to realize the importance of making a difference in my community. We all wish we lived in a world in which Preble Street didn't have to exist. Sadly, our clients and others need our services now more than ever before.



What do you consider the most important thing you've learned in your time on the Preble Street Board?

Rob Ravenelle (30 years of service): Humility. No person is more important than one in need in the moment and Preble Street has always put them first. Swannie often says "Love + Peace = Preble Street." But I believe humility is an equal part in that formula.



As you reflect back on your time serving on the Board, what makes you the most proud?

Jane Bradley (7 years of service): Being part of an organization that has the willingness and ability to embrace growth and change. Preble Street never stops examining ways to improve its services and expand and tailor them to more effectively address the needs of the people it serves. A good example of this during my tenure is the expansion of services for Veterans and survivors of human trafficking. Even more impressive is the organization's ability to undertake change. Virtually overnight in March 2020, Preble Street adjusted its practices to safely provide food and shelter under pandemic conditions. The extraordinary professionalism of the organization's leadership and staff to meet the challenges and re-evaluate the ways to carry out its mission manifests a maturity, creativity, and nimbleness that makes me incredibly proud of the work Preble Street does. It has been an honor to have been a part of it.



Thank you, Judy, Jane, and Rob! Our agency and the people we serve have been extremely fortunate to have you help guide our way, and we wish you all the best in your next endeavors.

Take the Bequest Challenge

Legacy Society donors, Cathy Houlihan and Bo Norris will generously donate \$500 in your honor when you let Preble Street know you have included the organization in your will. Take the Legacy Bequest Challenge and learn more about becoming a Legacy Society member:

preblestreet.org/planned-giving.



THE NEED FOR SHELTER AND HOUSING

245

Between July 1, 2021, and March 31, 2022, **245 women and teens** used overnight shelter at the Florence House and Joe Kreisler Shelters.

75

An estimated **75 people** sleep outside nightly in Portland.

800+

800+ individuals found safety at the Scarborough Quarantine and Isolation Shelter between April 2020-March 2022.

100/77

Since October 2020, Preble Street Rapid Re-Housing has served more than **100 individuals**; over **77 people** have secured permanent housing.

Leon Gorman Volunteer of the Year

On April 14, we hosted our first in-person Volunteer Celebration since 2019, and it was worth the wait! The biggest highlight, of course, was **the presentation of the Leon Gorman Volunteer of the Year (VOY) Award to the one and only Donna Wampole!** Along with our admiration and appreciation, she received a beautiful cutting board made and engraved by 2013 VOY winner Bob Harradon.

Donna has been instrumental to the Preble Street mission as a delivery volunteer, a volunteer at the Florence House kitchen, and a weekly volunteer at the Food Security Hub. She's everywhere! Donna regularly serves breakfast at Florence House single-handedly and has even helped develop a training curriculum for Florence House breakfast volunteers, making it possible for new folks to get started quickly and easily. When she's not at Preble Street, Donna teaches in the Social Work program at the University of Southern Maine and sometimes even runs into her students as they conduct fieldwork at Florence House.

"Donna really stands out to me as an outstanding volunteer. She has volunteered in the kitchen all year and even provided meditation training at the Florence House retreat. She has provided MSW-level supervision for Florence House interns in the past, which is not a requirement of her job. She just did it as a dedicated member of the community supporting Florence House."

— **Laura Clark, Florence House Director**



Volunteer of the Year, Donna Wampole

Thank you to each of the exceptional people that volunteer their time with us! You are all amazing!

A Place to Call Home

For the two years that he experienced homelessness, 67-year-old George had to carry all his belongings on his back. A friend who had been connected to an apartment through the Preble Street Rapid Re-Housing (RRH) program suggested George reach out.

“I was feeling really discouraged, but after I got in touch with Rapid Re-Housing, they got me into an apartment so fast! I called and that opened the door for me to get help from Haley [RRH caseworker] to get me started and get me motivated and going in the right direction. She helped me figure out what I needed to do to get a place.”

After three months working with the Rapid Re-Housing team, George moved into his Portland apartment in August 2021. No longer facing the stress and uncertainty of living on the streets, he focuses on the beautiful parts of life. He enjoys spending sunny days feeding the ducks at the park and spends time at home watching cooking shows and Celtics games. One of his favorite pastimes is preparing elaborate, tasty meals, something he missed when he didn't have a home.

“I learned to cook watching my mom and dad. I think I was seven when mom started teaching me how to cook. Now that's what I do, if I'm stressed or just want to relax, I love cooking.”

Safe and happy in his home, George is excited to welcome a new roommate soon: a puppy.



George with his Rapid Re-Housing caseworker, Haley

The first food hub in Maine focused on food insecurity

The vision for the Preble Street Food Security Hub is beginning to become reality. The Food Security Hub will be a sustainable, comprehensive, and collaborative approach dedicated to ending hunger in Maine. When completed in 2023, this 30,000 square foot mixed-use space will function as an industrial kitchen, food processing center, educational/vocational site, office space, and conference center dedicated to collective advocacy work and efforts to end hunger.

The Preble Street Food Security Hub is located at 75 Darling Avenue in South Portland.

Rendering of the future Food Security Hub kitchen. This rendering and the cover image of Elena's Way were created by Kaplan Thompson Architects.



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"Social work here looks like having conversations and making connections. It looks like sitting down with a client to hear their story, driving a food box to a campsite outside of Portland, or making a phone call with a client to General Assistance."

Bob, Street Outreach Caseworker

TO:

THE MISSION OF PREBLE STREET IS

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.



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

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

Become a monthly donor and make long-term impact with just one click!

For more info: preblestreet.org/donate