



Annual Community Report 2018-19



(Hear Me Project, WRNFP 2011)

The Windham Region No Freeze Project, Inc. is a not-for-profit agency dedicated to the short and long term survival of adults in our community experiencing homelessness in the Windham region. We provide safe, temporary shelter in a caring environment and strengthen connections to the community and human services resources. We collaborate on and lead local and state initiatives striving to end homelessness in Connecticut.

It has been an exciting year to be doing the work of ending homelessness in Connecticut! We are seeing the benefits of this statewide effort in the Windham region and right at our shelter door. As part of a coordinated access system doing this work in the Northeast, the WRNFP continues to be the first point of entry for people struggling with homelessness where our main mission of saving lives and embracing people with compassion and love has not changed. This is the most difficult part of our mission as well, as we fight the debilitating stigma associated with homelessness and supported by society at large, to remind people that they are valued and needed and still part of the greater community. It is at our shelter door that a person will receive support from staff and many volunteers and will often find the strength to engage in the process of seeking housing. We are proud to be that welcoming, warm open door for our community.

The state agencies supporting the initiative to end homelessness continue to do their part by increasing housing and support dollars in the region and are currently working on the goal of ending family and youth homelessness by 2020, and to make homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring in Connecticut by 2023. The WRNFP has taken on the vital role of coordinating the homeless youth initiative in the NE CAN for the third year, organizing a coalition of interested individuals, agencies, and youth to begin to build a system that will address the needs of these young people. Using grant money that we received in 2017 from the Liberty Bank Foundation, the Northeast Street Team reached out to community events and schools to identify youth in our region at risk of or homeless. In addition, the Episcopal Church of Connecticut has given the WRNFP funding to assist homeless young adults obtain housing quickly. It is an enormous undertaking to create the resources in Connecticut and locally that will be needed to help these young people from falling into the cycle of homelessness. We carry on imagining the impact on ending homelessness if we can stop the cycle from ever starting!

As we imagine a state without homelessness, take a look at the role the WRNFP continues to take on to end homelessness beginning with the Homeless Youth Initiative in the Northeast Coordinated Access Network.

Ending Homelessness for Youth

The WRNFP's Homeless Youth Coordinator, with the support of a \$5,000 grant from Liberty Bank, continued the work of meeting the statewide goal to end youth and family homelessness by 2020. The HYC has led the Youth Engagement Team Initiative (YETI), a collaborative team of community members and coordinated access network agencies, to:

- Raise awareness about the issue of youth homelessness. Most young people do not self-identify as homeless if they are couch-surfing or frequently staying with friends or relatives to avoid unsafe situations at home. The Youth Engagement Team Initiative has campaigned through street and school outreach efforts to help young people understand that help is available and how to access it.
- Coordinated the Youth Count! for the NE region. For one week in January, the NE YETI team took over 900 surveys of youth in schools and colleges, on the streets, and in shelters and programs to obtain an accurate census of young people and where they are living. This is part of an annual statewide effort to understand how many youth are in unstable housing situations or are homeless and to assess how best to help them.
- Implemented NEST (Northeast Street Team). With the infusion of the \$20,000 from Liberty Bank Anniversary Competition the HYC was able to put in additional hours to jump start the street team with the purchase of a banner, tabling items to attract young people at events (sunglasses, free frosty tags) and a Youth Assistance Fund to be able to provide housing financial support for youth experiencing homelessness or at risk.

Below is the tracking for activities between October 2017 and June 2018:

1. HYC coordinated 25 meetings of the Youth Empowerment Team Initiative and NEST
2. Tabled at six events in Willimantic and Putnam Street festivals reaching over 4,000 people and resulted in 93 youth completing the screening tool for risk of homelessness.
3. The HYC presented at over 18 school groups to educate students and school staff on the new initiative and the upcoming youth count.

There are four goals that we meet each year. The program outcome report continues with our primary goal of sheltering people.

Goal 1: To provide a warm, safe place for homeless people over the age of 18 to spend the night throughout the winter months.

The Hospitality Center provided safe, temporary shelter, linkages to services and compassion and care to 146 unduplicated guests between November 1, 2018 through April 30, 2019. 72% of guests self-identified as male, 28 % female and all guests reported low or no income.

Highlights of demographic changes this season

Of the 123 people who reported a residency town 87% of the guests reported Windham/Willimantic or one of eight surrounding towns as their last place of residence. 5% from greater Windham county and 4% out of Windham County.

Goal 2: To provide information and referrals to guests in need of health and social service programs.

The WRNFP is the only open access assessment location in the Windham area for adults. The goal of the Community Navigator is to provide coordinated entry into the shelter and housing resource system by working with people to remain in or obtain stable housing and or to quickly move out of shelter. The Navigator completed 239 intakes over this season either through a 211 scheduled appointment or as a walk in.

The Community Navigator has the funds available to facilitate housing support activities. *The Leigh Duffy Diversion Fund* is part of a broader strategy that prevents homelessness for people by helping them identify immediate alternate housing support and financial assistance to help them return to housing, thus avoiding the spiral down into shelter. Guests already in shelter can access the funds to help them move quickly out into housing. Total funds spent for diversion and assistance this season were over \$19,000. The Windham Welfare Bureau funded \$5,000 of this fund for people specifically from Windham/Willimantic. The WRNFP funding has few restrictions and can be accessed quickly which is often the bridge funding that keeps people out of shelter.

Fund Breakdown:

- Housing assist: Rental subsidies \$14,855.09 Hotel/Motel: \$1206.75
- Transportation: Bus tickets/Gas cards \$985.50
- Identification and License: \$2,157
- Miscellaneous: \$929.49

In addition, guests have two opportunities to receive assistance in connecting to housing supports. In the evening when they are checked in for the night and in the afternoon when our office is open from 1:00pm-4:00pm. Healthcare, risk reduction and case management services are provided on site by partner agencies including Perception Programs PATH Outreach and Risk Reduction programs, United Services, and Generations Family Health Center. During the warm months all these services continue to be offered throughout the week from 1-4pm along with showers and hygiene services. People are also able to maintain a locker and storage of personal items during the summer which encourages continued connections with staff and volunteers while working on housing.

Healthy Living Program

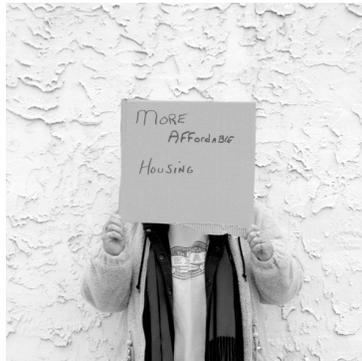
- *Health and Hygiene:* This program provides members of our community access to air conditioning, fresh drinking water, toilet facilities, personal care items and showers during the week and over the summer months when the shelter program is closed. The shower

program provided over one 110 showers to people without stable housing over the summer season.

- *Laundry Program:* Through funding from the Altrusa Club of NE Connecticut shelter and guest bedding and clothes laundering was provided for over 179 people. In addition, this past year, the Storrs Community Church in collaboration with the shelter and the Fluff-N-Fold has provided a laundry program twice a month at the Fluff-n-Fold, conveniently located right next door to the shelter, for people with no income and homeless and/or newly housed. These two groups provide a needed service to our guests while supporting a neighboring business in the plaza.

Healing Arts program: Licensed Massage Therapists (LMT) continue to volunteer to provide fifteen minute weekly chair massage to our guests to help to relieve anxiety, provide a positive touch experience and introduce guests to self-care strategies. Pat Shimchick, LMT provide over 120 massages to guests this season combined with additional self-care techniques that were discussed with guests that included the use of herbs for relaxation, breathing techniques including Qigong, and microwavable rice pillows.

Reunification Program: One guest received funding to relocate this season. A 43 year old man received funding for a plane ticket to return to Florida where he had been successful with employment and housing in the recent past. Family was willing to receive him and support him until he was stabilized.



Goal 3. To raises awareness and concern about the issue of homelessness within the community and region.

This year we continued our commitment to educating our community on the issues of homelessness and poverty as a means to reducing both. We continue to be a service learning site for Eastern Connecticut State University and the University of Connecticut and provide volunteer opportunities for over 75 students each season on and off site. In addition, each university has additional student groups who contact us to coordinate educational session's which often result in activities that collect clothing, bedding, personal care items and supplies which help the shelter reduce expenses. Employees and volunteers of WRNFP educated our community at over thirty-five public venues this past season that included educational settings, community and faith based groups and community organizations. Staff and guests from the *Storytellers Program* spoke at seven public awareness raising events this past year.

Goal 4. To discuss and advocate both short and long-term solutions for ending homelessness in the communities of the Windham Region.

The goal of ending homelessness is one of the founding principles by which the Windham Region No Freeze Project began. The WRNFP mission is aligned with *Opening Doors- CT*, a framework to prevent and end homelessness in Connecticut. As we maintain the mission of providing a warm safe space for adults experiencing homelessness, we have strategically grown the organization in a way that also provides support for the NE Coordinated Access Network (NE CAN) system. We have expanded the organization to fill gaps in the CAN system:

- The Executive Director continued to provide coordination services to the NE CAN for the 5th year. In addition she represents the NE CAN on the statewide CAN Leadership Team.
- The Shelter Manager position was increased to full time to provide coordination services for the new Homeless Youth Initiative in the NE CAN to ensure this region has access to any funds available for this initiative.
- The Shelter Manager is also the Data Manager and Housing Registry Facilitator for the NE CAN.

The WRNFP continues to be a member of the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness and staff attends yearly trainings and conferences.

Local Employers

We are a local employer providing over 56 seasonal part time positions in the past seventeen years. These are entry level positions generally filled by people who have difficulty finding employment due to personal history that includes some of the same issues as our guests. We have become a step into the more stable job market for many by providing a work reference for staff seeking to move on to permanent full time work. Staff is provided limited training on basic job skills to be successful in a workplace and provided the opportunity to practice and learn on site. Staff is referred to the CT Department of Labor programs for additional skill enhancement as well. Currently, the WRNFP employs seven seasonal part time employees and three full time employees.

Saving our Youth

Supporting a young man through a difficult time and helping him to move on starts with engagement. A 20 year old man I will call Chris came to the shelter one night. He had been living in his place of business in Willimantic, space he had rented to provide personal training which he had since closed. He had been a good tenant and the landlord let him stay on temporarily however the space at night was freezing cold. He had no family support as they rejected him as a teenager when he disclosed he was gay. He was waiting for his security deposit to move to Arizona to live with his friend. It was November but would not receive his security deposit until sometime in January. He also was receiving \$730.00 in Social Security Benefits. He was also adamant that he would not leave the state until he paid off some lingering debts he owed. Chris was very kind, somewhat awkward, suffering from mental health issues significant enough to make him eligible for SSDI. We soon learned that out on the streets he was being targeted which created more isolation for him. We assisted Chris by allowing his stay in shelter to “help us” with cleaning and other duties during the day where he felt safe. We encouraged him to pay for his plane ticket right away and assisted him in obtaining it online. At one point, there was an altercation with a guest, and Chris ended up injuring his wrist. Over the course of the next month we ensured that he got the medical care he needed, rides to appointments, and emotional support. Staff remembers holding his hand in the surgeon’s office as he nervously discussed a minor surgical procedure. Though he was a physically strong young man, he was very nervous and afraid of the procedure. Eventually, we encouraged him to connect with a friend who he had felt embarrassed to call, who allowed him to move in with him until his move to Arizona. His last text to us in January was from the airport thanking us for all the love and support he received. He was only with us for 28 days, but in that period of time if the shelter had not been here, we cannot imagine what would have happened to him.