

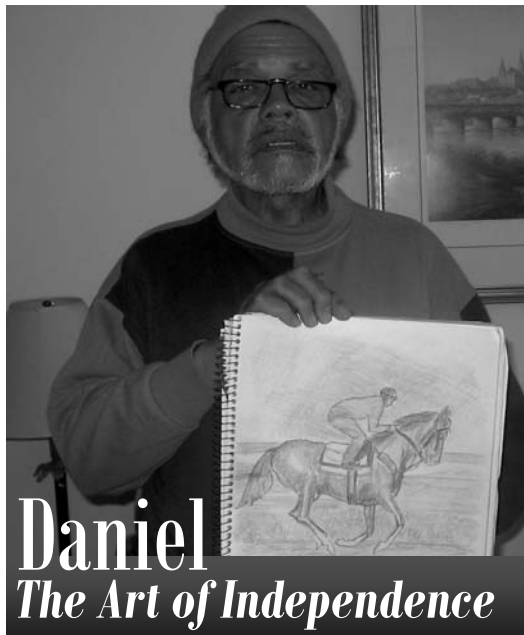


Shelter Stories

THE NEWSLETTER OF ST. LUKE'S SHELTER

JUNE 2005

Offering transitional shelter, life-reclaiming support, and food service job training to people experiencing homelessness



Daniel *The Art of Independence*

by Derek Willis and George Siletti
Photograph by Derek Willis

The pictures in Daniel Holmes's sketch book show some of his favorite scenes from Washington: a drawing of Lafayette Park, another of the Jefferson Memorial. Colorful and carefully rendered, they show orderly scenes undisturbed by the currents of daily life.

The picture of Holmes's own life is beginning to come into sharper focus, too. He's working toward his GED and has exhibited some of his art locally. In May, Holmes moved from St. Luke's Shelter into Zeke's House, a group home for men near Chevy Chase Circle established by the Community Council for the Homeless at Friendship Place (CCH/FP).

"I'm in a much better situation than I was two years ago," Holmes said on a recent Saturday morning in the quiet living room at Zeke's House. With the help of CCH/FP caseworkers, he has re-established his Social Security benefits and

obtained identification that will help him open a bank account.

And he says St. Luke's Shelter helped him turn his life around. The goal of his stay at the shelter was "to become independent," Holmes said, and shelter counselors like Saeed Woodall encouraged and supported him. "Saeed is a good counselor—he's a big help," added Holmes. "He always gave me support in terms of some of my abilities and character support."

For Woodall, the feeling of gratitude is mutual. "Knowing and working with Daniel had a deep and positive impact on me and my work," he said. "It was a challenge to earn Daniel's trust. Keeping his trust was a joy, as over time Daniel began to open up and share his concerns and accomplishments with me."

Holmes's hard work toward his own goals and his enthusiastic participation in shelter activities contributed greatly to the life of the shelter. "He had a balancing effect, which helped the guys bond and motivated several guys," Woodall recalled. "I'm sure that I am not the only one to say that Daniel is someone I'll always remember."

When Holmes first arrived in D.C. during the mid-1980s, he was shuttling back and forth between here and his home state of Massachusetts. In the late 1990s, though, he became homeless. At first, Holmes refused to stay in shelters. But after hours of conversations with CCH/FP staff, he decided to move into St. Luke's. "CCH told me St. Luke's was one of the best resident shelters," Holmes recalled. The shelter's program appealed to him because it could help him get his life back on track.

Continued on page 4

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- Letter from the Executive Director 2
- Volunteer Spotlight 3
- Partnership Provides Refuge on Freezing Cold Nights 3
- Neighbors Helping Neighbors 4

Shelter Stories is published quarterly.

Editor: Margaret Guroff
Artist: Kate McCann

Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Friends of St. Luke's:

St. Luke's Shelter is poised for big changes. But we are not leaving our history behind. From the first alliance between a community of faith and a community of activists, forged 14 years ago, St. Luke's Shelter has set high standards, both for ourselves and for those we have been honored to serve.

Two months into my new position as executive director, I stand emboldened by the diverse community of enthusiastic supporters and their steadfast commitment to the mission and growth of the organization. There is great vision here, and I am privileged to work with a wonderful staff and board of directors in developing an ambitious plan for realizing it. *Fast forward!*

Through team building with shelter counselors and strategic planning with board members over the course of eight weeks, St. Luke's Shelter has identified a number of ways to enhance life at the shelter. Activities will include regular classes in life skills, seminars on street law, and capacity building workshops focusing on topics such as how to cope with employment issues related to one's criminal record.

In partnership with new board member Marianne Ali, manager of Fresh Start Catering, we have also further developed our job readiness and life skills training program, Next Step Kitchen. This month, we will launch a series of three 12-week courses for women and men from across the District. Because the church and shelter renovation project is expected to begin this summer, classes will be taught at DC Central Kitchen (DCCK), located on the ground floor of the Federal City Shelter near Judiciary Square. The DCCK facilities are being generously provided by Robert Egger, the organization's founder/president, and a shelter board member. I am happy to report that the Potomac Chapter of Meeting Planners International (PMPI) has again chosen our Next Step Kitchen program to be its Charity of the Year. In 2004, PMPI donated \$6,980 to the program. Many thanks to shelter meal volunteer Nancy Riker for promoting our work among her PMPI colleagues!

Central to our expansion is the brilliant renovation planned for the shelter. Many thanks to Pastor Anne Yarbrough and the trustees of St. Luke's United Methodist Church for their mission-driven generosity! The church lives its motto of "Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors."

The new structure will provide more private and comfortable sleeping areas, as well as a separate lounge and kitchenette for shelter residents. The well-equipped training kitchen will enable us to improve the level of food service instruction we can provide on site. Finally, the shelter counselors' sleeping quarters will be separate from shelter offices!

I end this letter by reflecting your generosity back to you, through some moving words from Charles Campbell, who joined the shelter brotherhood a few weeks ago. "It was a miracle that there was a bed available at St. Luke's the very day I got out of the halfway house," he told me recently. "I prayed that a solution would be provided to me. And the one provided was a bed here." For Charles, being around people who believe in him is vital to his efforts to reclaim his life. "St. Luke's is more than positive people, it is a family. Becoming part of the family made me feel like life was livable again."

— *Kate McCann*

ST. LUKE'S SHELTER

Board of Directors

Chair: June Kress
Vice Chair: Andrea Morris
Treasurer: Craig Silliman
Secretary: Judie Guy
Members: Marianne Ali, Sharon Armstrong, William Carmody, Robert Egger, Margaret Guroff, Susan Lepper, Shalom Mulkey, Jen Runyon, George Siletti, John Snedden, Derek Willis, Anne Yarbrough

Staff

Executive Director: Kate McCann
Training Chef: Jerald Thomas
Shelter Counselors: Larry (Saeed) Woodall, Melvin (Assad) Hill

Volunteer Coordinators

Bobbie Carr, Shelter Dinners

Homeless Service Partners

Community Council for the Homeless at Friendship Place
Georgetown Ministry Center

A big "thank you" to teenager Greg Jenkins and his mother Susan for bringing and sharing breakfast with shelter residents!

Interested in joining our breakfast club? Sign up for a weekend to bring a meal for yourself and to share. We also accept donations of breakfast items such as cereal, milk, fruit, and orange juice. Donations can be made every evening between 6 pm and 8 pm and on weekdays by appointment. Contact Kate McCann at 202.337.4275 or kate@stlukesshelter.org.

SAVE THE DATE!

**Help the Homeless
Walk-A-Thon**

November 19, 2005

Volunteer Spotlight



Meal volunteer Kathryn Webb (right) recently brought her mother Carol Webb (center) to share dinner with shelter residents. Resident Charles Campbell (left), who recently moved into the shelter, helped them put finishing touches on a delicious meal of taco salad, corn bread, and—for dessert—Carol Webb's homemade chocolate chip cookies.

Kathryn, who lives in Virginia, has been volunteering to provide meals at St. Luke's since reading about the opportunity in *The Washington Post* two years ago. "I thought, 'Here's something I'd enjoy and can easily do,'" she recalls. Mom Carol was visiting from Oregon, where she volunteers at a family shelter.

Photo and caption by Judie Guy

Partnership Provides Refuge on Freezing Cold Nights

by Margaret Guroff

A lifesaving new program at St. Luke's Shelter grew out of a deeply felt loss. In December 2003, a beloved former shelter resident, John Maher, froze to death in a wooded area of Tenleytown. One year later, in December 2004, an empty classroom at the church became an emergency shelter for as many as 10 homeless men whenever the temperature dipped below 32 degrees.

"We just felt like we should do this," recalls June Kress, chair of the St. Luke's Shelter board of directors. "We had to do it."

The idea for the so-called hypothermia shelter, which is separate from St. Luke's year-round, six-bed transitional shelter, came from Andrea Morris, executive director of the Community Council for the Homeless at Friendship Place (CCH/FP). She was concerned that no shelters in Ward 3 were equipped to house men who were actively drinking, as Maher was at the time of his death. Speaking before the D.C. Council's Health and Human Services Committee last November, Morris urged the creation of emergency cold-weather shelters in all eight wards, staffed to handle anyone who needed a warm place to sleep. Representatives of the District's Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness (CPPH) and the Department of Human Services responded by offering Morris financial support if she could find room in Ward 3 for such a shelter.

Morris brought the idea to a meeting of Friendship Place Partners, a coalition of congregation-based housing providers in Ward 3. St. Luke's then-executive director, Susan Keenan, heard the call and consulted Pastor Anne Yarbrough. The church council quickly approved the request for emergency beds.

Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington provided the staff for the hypothermia shelter, which was filled to capacity most nights it was open, according to Luis Vasquez, the program's administrator at Catholic Charities. The two groups of men did not mix, but Vasquez was impressed by the family atmosphere at St. Luke's. "The [transitional shelter] residents there really seemed to want to be helpful," he recalls. When tasks such as carrying in cots would arise, "people always volunteered, even though they'd been out all day working."

Though the hypothermia shelter is naturally closed for the summer, its benefits go on. For one thing, CPPH gave St. Luke's more than \$6,300 for utilities, supplies, and other operating costs of the new program. For another, after long talks with St. Luke's counselors Morris Holley and Saeed Woodall, Vasquez was inspired to try to re-create St. Luke's family feel in a new shelter for 15 women he opened in Columbia Heights in February. "The small size makes it so much easier to help people," he says.

The Art of Independence *continued from page 1*

For Mandrake Sumners, CCH/FP street outreach specialist, Holmes' experience shows the value of making a long-term commitment to people who need identity documents along with other help. That kind of commitment is rare among homeless service agencies, Sumners says, because if clients aren't signed up for Medicaid or Social Security—for which they need valid ID—agencies can't bill those government programs for the staff time it takes to help these clients. Despite these and many other challenges, the collaborative case work of CCH/FP and St. Luke's Shelter proved to be a winning combination for Holmes. "St. Luke's Shelter creates the calm, structured, and sober environment many clients need to feel safe and to focus on reaching their personal goals," said Sumners. "This is great reinforcement of the work that we do at CCH/FP."

The stability that St. Luke's helped provide to Holmes has enabled him to continue his artistic pursuits—yes, that was a Holmes original on this year's shelter Christmas cards. He often sketches at night, and he rarely ventures out without his sketch pad. In April, three of his works were exhibited at the James Cardinal Hickey Center, the downtown headquarters of Catholic Charities—and all three sold. "I feel like I was born with [art]," Holmes explained. "I'm even getting a little better now because I can do a little more with it. I can concentrate on it a little better."

Holmes has also been writing. An essay he wrote for a city government contest won him a tour of the U.S. Capitol on May 26.

When Holmes visited his future room at Zeke's House for the first time, he could scarcely believe his eyes. "This isn't my house—it can't

be," he thought. After his struggles on the street and his time in the shelter's dormitory environment, the idea of having his own room was "overwhelming," he recalled.

These days, Holmes is concentrating on finishing his GED, for which he takes weekday classes. "Once I got into this program, I was just determined that I'm going to get a certificate, get a full, documented degree," he said. "I'm getting so close, I'm just going to keep staying on track until I do."

Holmes has another aspiration as well: he wants to serve as an example to others coming from situations similar to the one he was in not too long ago—to show them that his progress can be theirs, too.

"I'm trying to set that example of somebody that has succeeded," he said. "Getting to a point where you can support yourself and give something back."

Neighbors Helping Neighbors

Whether it be in the form of giving money, bringing dinner to share with shelter residents, cooking with kitchen students, or donating time and talent, St. Luke's Shelter has always relied on the generosity of its neighbors.

We need your help this summer to preserve and enhance our programs!

Here are some examples of what your donation can do:

- \$1,000 provides 12 weeks of intensive life-skills training for six shelter residents
- \$265 buys six months' worth of bus passes to help one shelter resident get to doctors' appointments, job interviews, and potential housing
- \$160 covers one Next Step Kitchen student's travel to classes and field trips during the 12-week course

- \$75 provides six shelter residents with six months of access to voicemail, computer, and office services
- \$35 covers one Next Step Kitchen student's certification in safe food handling

Visit our website frequently for news about our programs! If you'd like to make a donation, you can send a check made out to "St. Luke's Shelter" to 3655 Calvert Street NW, Washington, DC 20007.

For those who prefer to give consumer goods, St. Luke's Shelter has a regularly updated "Wish List." The box to the right lists some of our current needs.

For more information, or to schedule an in-kind donation, contact Kate McCann at kate@stlukesshelter.org or by phone at 202.337.4275.

—Susan Lepper

WISH LIST

- Instant oatmeal, coffee, milk, sugar, non-dairy creamer, juices, soda, breakfast hot pockets
- Laundry detergent, color-safe bleach, shampoo, conditioner
- Gift cards: Safeway, Starbucks, Office Depot, CVS
- New men's cotton/blend undergarments and socks
- Bananas, apples, oranges, power bars, granola bars
- Gift certificates: McDonald's, Loews Cineplex
- Digital camera (with zoom)