



Shelter Stories

Offering transitional shelter and life-reclaiming support to people experiencing homelessness

THE NEWSLETTER OF ST. LUKE'S SHELTER

SUMMER 2008

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TWO AMIGOS: Residents Abbas Habibi and Larry Roberson on graduation day.

A Course in Miracles

At first glance, Larry Roberson and Abbas Habibi seem to have little in common. But Roberson, a North Carolina native, and Habibi, who came to the United States about 10 years ago, bonded during their recent Out of Poverty class at St. Luke's Shelter, an experience both men said had made them better-prepared for their new lives.

"I was a little apprehensive at first," said Roberson. "What made it easier was that the guys were able to have camaraderie outside of class. We were able to take the mask off."

Habibi, who was born in Iran and has lived in the Boston area, said the class has helped him work on maintaining a positive outlook on life—something that has been difficult for him. "It wasn't easy in the beginning," he said. "But we're all human; we have a lot of things in common. We read an opening statement every time we come in: 'I'm going to get out of poverty through the help of my friends.'"

Joseph Boddie, the instructor for the class and a part-time shelter counselor, described the course curriculum as lessons on personal responsibility. "Most people think about economic

poverty, but there are other types of poverty," Boddie said. "It's any unmet need. We look at a person's history—talk a whole lot about their roots and where they came from."

To illustrate lessons on making responsible choices, the class watched a documentary about the collapsed energy company Enron. Roberson said the question of how to handle power and money made an impact on him. "The more I looked at it, the more I knew that stuff and things wouldn't make the man," he said.

What makes the man, Boddie said, is being industrious, and talking about not just behaviors but their consequences. Thus the course helps students map out their current set of relationships and identify patterns that might be standing in the way of personal progress.

Both Roberson and Habibi have specific plans for their immediate future: with some help from supporters, Roberson will be enrolling in a college course, the first step on the path to a career in social services. "I'm going to be hungry for knowledge," he said. Habibi, who moved into an apartment in mid-July after seven months at St. Luke's, has taken some computer classes and is aiming for a job as a medical assistant.

They'll both carry with them the manual from the Out of Poverty class to help remind them of the lessons they've learned. "The goal is really outside of class, not in class," said Boddie. "Graduates tend to do really well in terms of not becoming homeless again."

Boddie also may have some help with the next class. Roberson and Habibi said they wanted to come back and speak to the students finding their way out of poverty.

—Story and photograph by Derek Willis

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From the Director

We know the process works. The success stories we share with you here are snapshots of a large and growing group of men whose lives have been transformed by finding a safe, sober and supportive home at St. Luke's Shelter. In collaboration with our service partners (see box at right), our six-month, six-bed program provides a semi-structured, intensive environment where men can refocus and rebuild their lives.

In 2004, D.C. began a gradual shift away from providing temporary shelter to securing permanent, supportive housing for people experiencing homelessness. Mayor Adrian Fenty recently committed to creating 2,500 new permanent supportive housing units by 2014. It is believed that these permanent

housing sites will significantly decrease the demand for emergency shelter throughout the city.

Where does this shift leave St. Luke's Shelter? As we recently learned, it leaves us acting as a model for the new face of shelter in the city. In a recently completed study, The Urban Institute advised the District to remake its shelter system by eliminating large shelters; creating smaller shelters with specialized services; proactively identifying client needs; and expanding case management. That describes the program we have had in place for more than 15 years. And we know the process works.

You can read the Urban Institute's report at www.urban.org/publications/411696.html.

—Shalom Mulkey



TOO DARN HOT: Allen Hengst and Shelter Director Shalom Mulkey man the St. Luke's tables at this year's Glover Park Day festival on June 6. Though temperatures that day reached into the hundreds, the turnout was strong, and the shelter collected \$1,000 in donations.

ST. LUKE'S SHELTER

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Miriam's Kitchen

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How to Contribute

Along with participating in the Help the Homeless Walkathon on November 22—see our website at www.stlukesshelter.org for details—you can help St. Luke's Shelter by donating meals, time, or money. Here are some easy ways to contribute:

- Through the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) for federal employees. Our CFC number is 50532.
- Make a contribution by check or online with a credit card at our website, www.stlukesshelter.org.
- Shop online at iGive.com and a percentage of your

sale can be donated to St. Luke's Shelter.

- Share your wisdom by teaching shelter residents about a life skill. Recent classes taught by volunteers included basic computer skills and resume writing.
- Become an overnight volunteer and spend a Saturday night in the staff suite at the shelter.
- Drop off a hot meal for seven (six residents and one staff member) at the shelter.

For more information on giving, please contact Shalom Mulkey, shelter director at 202-337-4275 or shalom@stlukesshelter.org.

A Family Affair

You probably already know that St. Luke's can be transformative for its residents—that's the whole point—but it's surprising how often the place transforms its volunteers, as well.

That's what happened after Merilee Janssen joined a team of dinner volunteers from Friends Meeting of Washington in 2006. Once a month, she and two other women would bring a meal to the shelter and enjoy it with the men. Before long, Janssen's husband, David Oldfield, was coming along, too.

But the transformation really began when son Ben Oldfield graduated from Swarthmore College in 2007 and returned to the family's Chevy Chase home. Joining his parents at dinners, Ben began tutoring residents in computer skills. Then, he started going on long weekly runs with a resident who was training for a marathon. Ben became an overnight volunteer and

ended up devoting much of this year to service in homelessness and recovery. (He recently started medical school.)

Ben says dinners at the shelter helped his family to bond in a new way. "It's hard not to let the appreciativeness, the courage, and the humor of the guys at St. Luke's rub off on us," he says. "Many of those conversations have really stuck with me."

—Margaret Guroff



MOTHER AND CHILD REUNION: Ben Oldfield (right) began volunteering at the shelter with his parents, Merilee Janssen (left) and David Oldfield after he graduated from college.

The Play's the Thing

A group of shelter residents, staff, and volunteers took a June 14 field trip to the Church Street Theater near Dupont Circle for a performance of the play *Neglect* by the Journeymen Theatre Ensemble. Joined by former shelter director Kate McCann, now an artistic associate with the theater group, shelter residents were treated as honored guests. After the performance, they were invited to participate with the director and cast (see photo at right) in a discussion of the thought-provoking play about social isolation.

—Traci Copeland



Some Assembly Required

On July 19, volunteers from the church, the community, and the shelter itself spent the better part of the day assembling furniture, fixing beds, assembling classroom furniture, and organizing the kitchen at the shelter. In all 13 people participated in the event.



EARLY TO BED: Michael Monroe and Traci Copeland spent part of the morning fixing a bed frame.

Labor-Day Barbecue

We never stop thanking our friends, contributors, and dedicated volunteers ... but once a year, we do it with grilled meat. Please join us from 4 to 7 p.m. on Labor Day Monday, September 1, for a picnic that brings together shelter friends, staff, residents, and graduates.

The event will be held in the garden at St. Luke's United Methodist Church, 3655 Calvert St., NW, Washington DC, 20007. For more information, or if you would like to bring a dish, contact the shelter office, 202-337-4275, or email shalom@stlukesshelter.org.

November Walkathon

Each year, just before Thanksgiving, thousands gather on the National Mall for a three-mile stroll to raise money and awareness for homeless services programs throughout the region. This year's walk is scheduled for Saturday, November 22.

Once again, the shelter is participating, and we need your support! The more walkers who designate St. Luke's as their beneficiary, the larger our share of the donations from corporate sponsors.

Please walk with us or sponsor a walker! Details are available at www.stlukesshelter.org.

Update on St. Luke's UMC

At press time, St. Luke's United Methodist Church was in the throes of a sudden financial crisis. For operating funds, the church relies largely on income from an endowment created with proceeds from the sale of the Wisconsin Avenue land on which the Georgetown Heights condominiums now stand.

Because of extraordinary drops in the stock market during the first half of 2008, the value of the church's endowment fell slightly below the level where funds could legally be withdrawn for operating expenses.

The Baltimore Washington Conference of the United Methodist Church assembled a taskforce to assess the situation, and church leaders have been hard at work trying to prevent the closure of the church.

But the shelter—a separate entity—remains open, occupied, and in need of your support. All donations to the shelter support *only* the shelter. For updates on the situation as it develops, call our office at 202-337-4275 or visit our website at www.stlukesshelter.org.



St. Luke's Shelter, a collaboration between a community of faith and a community of neighbors, provides life-reclaiming support to homeless individuals.

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