

THE TRUST NEWS

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THE SKID ROW HOUSING TRUST QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER | FALL 2012 | ISSUE 21



New Dreams And A New Smile

M eet Brenda Hill, a 60 year-old mother of two and grandmother to 11, who has resided at the Trust's Senator Hotel Apartments for 3 1/2 years. Brenda is an active and vibrant woman with many hopes and dreams.

Brenda was born and raised in the Chicago suburbs. She was one of 7 children in her family. Brenda had a close relationship with both her mother and her father. Her parents did not have a good relationship with each other though.

Brenda says, "I came from a battered family – where my mother and father always fought. They were fighting so much that we didn't want to talk."

The verbal sparring eventually led to physical abuse. It was during one of those episodes that Brenda, her older sister Beverly and her younger brother Bernard witnessed a horrible act that had a profound effect on the direction of their lives.

Brenda says, "My mother scarred my father with some oatmeal and grits...third degree burns on him."

The incident was witnessed firsthand, and Brenda still has difficulty talking about it.

"That scarred us. That's when we started stuttering. We were in speech therapy for two years because we saw it happen," she said.

While Brenda, Beverly and Bernard were scarred emotionally; her father had suffered significant third degree burns over a good portion of his body.

Brenda's mother was incarcerated for a brief time as a result, followed by divorce and an unusual shared custody arrangement. Brenda and her siblings were to live with her mother for three years and then her father for three years.

While with her mother, all of the kids went to parochial school and when they were in her father's custody, they went to public school.

Brenda says, "I liked the catholic schools better. We learned to understand the value of speaking without stuttering. So my mother paid extra for us to go to after-school classes to learn how to speak properly."

Brenda did not harbor resentment toward her mother or her father. She loved them both. She could clearly see that it was only when they were together that the situation became unmanageable. So staying with her father for 3 years was a good thing.

"When he had us, we didn't have to want for anything. He made sure we had everything. He was a good provider," she said.

As Brenda moved into her teen years, she was an exemplary student. In 1968, when she was 16 years old Brenda was married to her first husband and gave birth to her daughter Storm. Sadly, her marriage was unsuccessful and a divorce soon followed.

A year later her son Jimmy Jr. was born and Brenda was married to Jimmy Sr., the father of her second child. She continued in school, receiving straight A's and was even elected Vice President of her class in her senior year of high school. She graduated at the top of her class in 1970.

Despite her success at school Brenda found herself fighting with her husband Jimmy. They fought in much the same way that her parents had fought. One of those fights turned physical, resulting in the loss of three fingers for Brenda. Fortunately, the doctors were able to reattach the fingers.

Brenda had lost about 3 pints of blood and needed a transfusion. Because of inferior screening practices she contracted Hepatitis C1, though she was not diagnosed until 20 years later.

Her marriage to Jimmy Sr. only lasted 1 1/2 years. Brenda did not marry again.

Brenda was a fighter though, and had learned how to effectively care for her two kids while going to high school. She used that knowledge when she went on to UCLA, thanks to an athletic scholarship she received for volleyball.

In 1972 Brenda was in a serious car accident that left her paralyzed for 8 months. During that time, her mother cared for her and her 2 kids.

She graduated from UCLA in 1975 with a degree in Business Administration. Brenda spent the next 15 years raising her children and furthering her education and career as a student and radiologist at Mount Sinai Hospital.

She also went on to get her real estate license, property management certificate and even went to a culinary arts academy.

Brenda's life took a turn for the worse after her children were grown and she started using drugs and drinking. In 1989 at age 37, she first smoked pot. From there it was a slippery slope to alcohol and then cocaine.

"I lost interest in myself," she says, adding, "I know that now."

As Brenda's relationships disintegrated and her life spiraled out of control, she eventually found herself homeless.

Continued on page 5.

Executive Director's Corner

Dear friends and colleagues,

We believe that an increased dialog about homelessness, substance abuse and supportive housing needs to take place. Too many of our assumptions about substance abuse are based on misconceptions about addiction and treatment. Ample scientific evidence about addiction exists - and yet we tend to ignore both the research and anecdotal evidence that should inform us about these important issues, despite the fact that an ever increasing percentage of our population is affected by addiction.

We need to begin talking about addiction, not just because it is critical to solving homelessness, but because it has implications in all of our lives.

Addiction is a destructive, but fascinating disease because it impacts individuals very differently. Some people are highly vulnerable to physical addiction. In Alcoholics Anonymous this phenomenon is often referred to as the 'allergy of the body.' Alcoholics describe how alcohol appears to affect them differently than other people. They describe how difficult social drinking is, because once they have one drink, they find themselves drinking 10 more. Research and life experiences show that lots of people can try alcohol and drugs and not become addicted. This is true even with highly addictive drugs like opiates. Life experiences, brain chemistry and possibly genetics (although the evidence is starting to suggest that this is not the case) can dramatically increase an individual's chances of becoming addicted to substances.

We also know that chemistry is not alone in driving alcohol and drug addiction. Painful life experiences, particularly childhood trauma, dramatically increase the risk of addiction and dependence. Psychiatric disabilities and learning disabilities also correlate with drug use, and is sometimes described as "self-medicating" to reduce the symptoms of these conditions. The emotional pain mitigated by drugs and alcohol cannot be ignored, and is why therapy and spiritual programs are often essential to recovery.

The path out of alcohol and drug addiction is even more varied than the causes. We have met residents whose addiction was truly driven by the allergy of the body and who achieve sobriety through medical detox and medication to curb alcohol cravings. We have met others who need the emotional support of daily 12-step meetings. We have met residents who will do anything to be clean, and dedicate every minute of the day to trying to stay sober and yet relapse anyway. The disease of addiction is astoundingly painful to watch and we must always remember that we have no idea what the addicted person is going through, because addiction impacts each of us in different ways.

One of the most problematic concepts in our cultural meta-narrative about addiction is *enabling*. The idea of enabling an addict is widely used in Alcoholics Anonymous. In the famous [Open Letter from an Addict](#), written to the families of alcoholics, there is the line,



Karen Burton (pictured) is a former resident of the Abbey Apartments. She is one of many who have used their time living in Trust apartments for recovery. Karen now has a place of her own, near her family in south LA.

"Don't cover up for me or try in any way to spare me the consequences of my drinking." Throughout recovery the idea that addicts must 'hit bottom' to develop the will to recover is embraced. But there is a fundamental flaw in this reasoning – far too many addicts hit bottom, after bottom after bottom - and end up dying from their addiction(s).

It's true that hitting bottom can be an important motivator, but it is just as true, that for some people hitting bottom does not lead to sobriety. For these individuals the exact opposite may be true – compassion and support may be what makes the difference in allowing the individual the opportunity to change behavior. To complicate matters, the idea of enabling behavior is based on interpersonal relationships and was never meant to inform public policy. The body of research showing that **Harm Reduction** and **Housing First** models work continues to grow, including an extensive multiphase study currently being conducted by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University on the Housing Opportunities Program Evaluation (CASAHOPE).

The CASAHOPE study has found no correlation between the type and amount of substance use and housing retention, completely debunking the myth that people experiencing homelessness need to be 'housing ready' before accessing permanent housing.

Along with housing stability, the study has also shown that supportive housing has no negative impacts on substance use or health, in contrast to life on the streets where studies have shown that substance use increases and health deteriorates. Even in supportive housing without requirements for abstinence or participation in treatment, the study participants demonstrated decreased substance use, which is consistent with previous studies.

Contrary to the belief of some, providing homes to people who are still active in their addiction **does not enable** their substance use. The Trust is committed to providing permanent supportive housing opportunities for those who are still struggling with their addictions. Why? Because we know that the best chance for them to overcome addictive behaviors is when they have a stable foundation and the non-judgmental support to do so – including a home that they can call their own and the support to address the behaviors that they want to be free of.

I sometimes think that we lack compassion for addicts because addiction is so prevalent in our culture. Who of us does not know someone who has, or have ourselves, struggled with addiction of some kind? And yet, despite the evidence to the contrary and possibly because of a desire to conform with the larger group, we believe that if addicts just tried harder they could get clean. Not so.

It is time to let go of the myths and accept the complexities of addiction. Addiction is a cunning, baffling and powerful disease that impacts every person differently. We will only make progress in fighting addiction when we can embrace a broader range of paths to recovery. Housing First and Harm Reduction models provide a very promising alternative.

Is this a popular notion? No, it is not. But we believe that it is the most effective approach, based both on recent research and what we see every day. When given the best opportunities to recover from addiction, recovery is possible.

Sincerely,

Mike Alvidrez
Executive Director

Save The Date

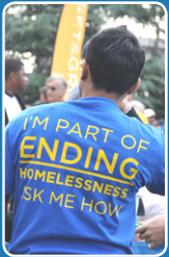
Wednesday, October 24, 6:30-8:30 pm

Join us for our next

Community Supper at Portofino Cucina Italiana

Space is limited, so register today
contact Jennifer Kim
jennifer.kim@skidrow.org

HomeWalk 2012



Join Team Skid Row Housing Trust at **HomeWalk 2012!** Come walk with our team of residents, staff, board members and community supporters, to raise awareness about homelessness in Los Angeles at **United Way's HomeWalk 2012.**

Registration is free & easy:

1. Visit www.homewalkla.org
2. Sign up with Team Skid Row Housing Trust
3. Use partner code **uwpartner12** to register
4. Come out and walk on November 17, 2012!

Contact Patryk at 213.683.0522 x152 for info.

Join us at HomeWalk 2012, and be a part of ending homelessness.

Upcoming Events

Sept 14, 21, 28 9:30 am

Dish Depot

Sept 18, 4:00 pm

Tour: Carver Apartments

Oct 3, 11:00 am

Tour: Abbey Apartments

Oct 13/14, 10:00 am

Piece By Piece - Pieces of Hope Event

Oct 16, 4:00 pm

Tour: Carver Apartments

Oct 24, 6:30 pm

Community Supper #5

Nov 7, 11:00 am

Tour: Abbey Apartments

Nov 17, 7:30 am

United Way: Homewalk

Implementing the Harm Reduction Model in Supportive Housing

The Housing First and Harm Reduction models are foundations of the Trust's work. Every staff person at the Trust is trained in these models and Resident Service Coordinators/Case Managers receive extensive training in operationalizing the models. Each employee comes to the Trust with different experiences of addiction and recovery, but all are committed to the goal of helping the residents retain their homes.

Some residents move in without a history of addiction, some with a commitment to sobriety, others find sobriety over time, and others struggle with their addiction throughout their lives. No matter what their history with or without addiction, every resident has a better chance of achieving wellness in their lives when they have a home and case managers that care about their success.

Meet three of the Trust's Resident Service Coordinators (RSCs), who work on the frontlines of supportive housing every day.



Richard Navarro

Richard has been with the Trust for close to 8 years. He started as a Peer Education Coordinator and has been promoted to Resident Services Coordinator. He provides service coordination and case management to residents in the Hart Hotel Apartments, the Crescent Hotel Apartments and the St Mark Hotel Apartments.

Richard says, "I think the housing first model is good. But I also think the resident has to *want* to change. The only thing we can do as case managers is continue to encourage residents and let them know that 'It's ok. If you are in your addiction, we are going to get you the help, so you can get out of the addiction and live a productive life.'"

Erin Antes

Erin has been a Resident Services Coordinator for the Trust for close to 4 years. She started at the St George Hotel Apartments and now works with the residents at the Rainbow Apartments.

Erin says, "Everybody deserves four walls. You shouldn't discriminate based on someone's addiction. I think that a lot of the reasons people do drugs – especially in Skid Row – is it is just a survival technique... My job is to help you with whatever you want to do. Sometimes that means we explore Harm Reduction methods, so long as you keep your housing. The goal is to help people stay housed and that's what is important and what really matters."



Gilbert Mascorro

Gilbert has been the Resident Services Coordinator for the Trust's Boyd Hotel Apartments for about 18 months. He became an Alcohol & Drug Counselor in 2004. He first worked with the Trust when he was employed for Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services as a Substance Abuse Counselor with the Project 50 program.

Gilbert says, "I came to this program with an attitude of complete abstinence. I didn't believe in Harm Reduction. I believed that people that were going to be housed should remain abstinent; until I came to Project 50. I saw how Harm Reduction and being housed first was helping them to stop – or to slow down their drinking and eventually stop. There are a few of them that did stop. I had never seen that until I came down here."

Working with individuals who are active in their addiction is challenging and can be humbling. Addiction comes with harsh consequences for a person's physical health, mental health and quality of life, on a daily basis. The Trust's Resident Services Coordinators are committed to standing by our residents as each one finds their own path to recovery.

Development Corner

In Development : The New Pershing Apartments

The Trust is awaiting word on the final piece of financing needed to begin construction on the **New Pershing Apartments**. **Killefer Flammang Architects** are designing the New Pershing Apartments, which is a one-for-one replacement of the existing 69 apartments. The 67 single room occupancy apartments on the site will be replaced with studio apartments, while at the same time preserving the historic façade of the building and providing improved commercial spaces. The building will include significant open and community spaces, on-site supportive services, underground parking and commercial spaces on the ground floor. The Trust hopes to begin construction in spring 2013.



In Construction : The Star Apartments

Construction on the **Star Apartments** has achieved 25% construction completion. The Star Apartments are designed by internationally renowned **Michael Maltzan Architecture** and will include 102 **prefabricated** apartments. **Westport Construction** will finish construction any day on the superstructure, which will provide the platform for the prefabricated modules to rise from and will accommodate 15,000 square feet of open and community space below this same platform. Trust staff recently traveled to Boise, Idaho, to visit the factory of **Guerdon Modular Buildings** to inspect the modular prototype. Guerdon's shop proved to be an efficient and effective plant for this prefabricated technology and will likely be an alternative and cost effective construction option in the world of reduced affordable housing resources. Stacking of the modules starts this Fall with estimated completion in Spring 2013.

These photos show future Star Apartments, in various phases of production. Each of the modules will be trucked down to Los Angeles to become a *home* for a new resident.

Completed : The New Genesis Apartments

Construction of the **New Genesis Apartments** has finally completed! Whew... Congrats to the **Housing Development** team, on their hard work and this **great** achievement. Designed by the well-known downtown veteran architecture firm **Killefer Flammang**, the New Genesis includes 106 apartments. 25 affordable apartments are reserved for low-income artists and other individuals or couples earning less than 60% of the area median income (\$35,000 for a single individual). 79 apartments are subsidized with project-based Section 8 and reserved for individuals who have experienced homelessness. The remaining 2 apartments are reserved for on-site property managers. The Trust has begun collecting rental applications and is awaiting the Certificate of Occupancy and approval from the city to begin leasing. Skid Row Housing Trust is excited to have completed a mixed-use, mixed-income housing development, in the heart of the Historic Core. We'll have more on the exciting businesses that will occupy the commercial spaces in our next newsletter.





Contributors Corner: Make a Difference

1. Give

Make a contribution to help provide the vital supportive services that help residents succeed. Visit skidrow.org or send a gift in the enclosed envelope.

2. Community Suppers

Join a Host Committee or attend as a guest and help open our community to new neighbors. Contact Jennifer at jennifer.kim@skidrow.org for more information.

3. Take a Tour

Come see what the Trust does first hand. A Resident Ambassador will accompany the tour and provide their personal insight. Contact Patryk at 213.683.0522 x152 for more information.

4. Volunteer

Register to become a Trust volunteer and be the first to take action when volunteer opportunities become available. Visit skidrow.org to complete a Volunteer Profile and be added to our database of willing workers.



Volunteers at our Aug 18 Kit-building event (pictured) showed that younger people do care.

5. Build Welcome Home Kits

Build a Welcome Home Kit to help turn an apartment into a home or attend a Welcome Home Kit Building Event. Contact Jennifer at jennifer.kim@skidrow.org for more information.



As a member of the Resident Ambassador Program, Brenda has spoken to groups including a stop at the Thai Town Rotary Club. (Pictured Above)

Continued from page 1.

Brenda recalls, "I learned to survive being homeless. Sleeping on the street, getting food, going to the park to clean myself, my hygiene and dealing with the people in the same category I was in - smoking drugs."

Brenda knew that she had lost her way. But, she did not know where to go or how to get help.

"I kept the company of dope fiends. None of them were trying to progress."

Adding to the difficulty, in 2005 her son was caught up in gang crossfire and lost his life. It was then that Brenda found out that her son had 11 children from 6 different mothers - something she is not proud of.

Brenda lost what little direction she had at that point, and began doing things completely out of character.

She sold drugs to an undercover police officer and was sentenced time in Chowchilla prison. Her incarceration lasted 18 months. When she was released, she was homeless again.

She eventually connected with the Weingart Center and entered their "Epic Program". There she learned how to use computers, attended group therapy and started to grow once again.

She says, "I had it all and I lost it because of the choices I made."

As Brenda began to reclaim her life, she found a home with the Trust, in the Senator Hotel Apartments. During her stay at the Senator, she has learned a lot about herself and human nature.

"When I was smoking drugs, someone that offered me something to eat or drink made a difference for me. So I feel I should offer something positive. I want to have a positive impact on someone's life," she says.

This desire to make a difference is how Brenda came to be in the Resident Ambassador

Program. She wants to share her experiences with people with the hope that they can learn from her mistakes.

Brenda has also achieved a bit of a milestone for her, by getting her teeth fixed. Having the ability to smile has helped her want to get back out there and live.

Like many in recovery, Brenda has dreams of becoming a drug and alcohol counselor. She is attending Los Angeles Community College to get certification.

Brenda says, "What I most want to do, is help people I don't know, where I can be an advocate and say, 'Come walk with me baby.'"

Brenda's medical woes are not over though. She suffers from cataracts in both eyes, and the Hepatitis C1 that she contracted in 1969 still plagues her. Medications are not an option for her, because of the damage that 20 years of drug use has done to her liver.

Through it all, Brenda perseveres, and the commitment to continued growth has finally paid off for her, too. Last month, Brenda learned that she would receive a Section 8 tenant-based certificate. She is going to be leaving the Trust and moving in to a new apartment in the fall.

Brenda's hopes and dreams are within her grasp now. She can speak clearly again, and despite the cataracts, she can see a bright future for herself.

For Brenda, it is a new day. You can tell by the brilliance of her smile.

To learn more about the CASAHOPE study visit the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University at www.casacolumbia.org

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Skid Row Housing Trust's philosophy is simple:

Homes + Support = Success

Skid Row Housing Trust solves

homelessness by providing permanent supportive housing. The Trust provides

HOMES for people who have experienced

homelessness, prolonged extreme

poverty, poor health, disabilities, mental

illness and/or addiction. The Trust

provides critical SUPPORT services for

our residents to lead safe, stable lives

in wellness. The Trust ensures SUCCESS

by reducing homelessness through

opportunities for our residents and better

neighborhoods for our communities.

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skidrow.org and facebook.com/skidrowhousingtrust

inside



How the Trust's Resident Service Coordinators, like Gilbert (pictured above) are making Housing First their top priority.