



Bearing Witness
 A NEWSLETTER of IMMACARE Inc. (formerly IMMACULATE CONCEPTION SHELTER & HOUSING CORPORATION)

Our Mission

ImmaCare Inc. strives to eliminate homelessness in the Hartford region, while building a more vibrant community, by creating safe and affordable housing options and increasing the skills, income and hope of those who struggle with housing crisis.

Our Vision

Because housing is a human right, **ImmaCare Inc.** will continue to work in partnership with the community to prevent and eliminate homelessness. We will provide a range of services designed to help individuals experiencing homelessness overcome the obstacles that stand in the way of securing and maintaining safe and affordable housing while becoming an integrated member of the community.

Immaculate Shelter and Housing Corporation is now:

ImmaCare Inc.
Improving lives since 1981

Our Guiding Principles

Building on **ImmaCare Inc.**'s history of service to Hartford's homeless, we have articulated four principles that are core to our philosophy and that will continue to guide our work.

They are as follows:

- **ACCEPTANCE** – We provide client-centered services, remaining open and non-judgmental
- **HARM REDUCTION** – We will encourage the individuals we serve to access services and resources that can help them to address their problems, including reducing the harm and dangers associated with addiction and untreated mental illness
- **PARTNERSHIP** – We will work in partnership with others in the community to promote a robust continuum of services for individuals who experience housing crises in Hartford
- **APPRECIATION** – We will value the work of the individuals we serve to make positive change, celebrating successes, both small and large

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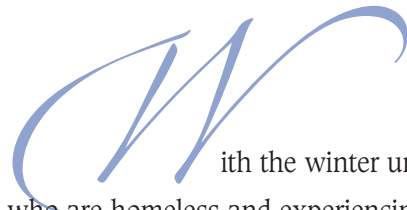
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With the winter under way and the cold focusing attention on those who are homeless and experiencing housing crisis, we have some major news to share about Immaculate Conception Shelter and Housing Corporation. We are changing our name! After much thought and deliberation during our recent strategic planning process in 2014, our Board of Directors has approved our new name and rebranding as ImmaCare Inc. As many of you know, we have been preparing for several years to move out of our founding home of the former Immaculate Conception Church property. We have owned this grand edifice for more than a decade. The facility is tired and not satisfactory for our important work of sheltering some of our community's residents most in need. We have been working on relocating the shelter. This is no easy process given the population we serve. The City of Hartford has been very cooperative with us in trying to help find a suitable location where we can build a purpose-built shelter with modern amenities, safety and security.

Our rebranding as ImmaCare Inc. is part of this relocation process. As an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization for many years, there has always been confusion as to whether we are part of the church because of our name. With our new name, that confusion should be greatly lessened. Be assured that we continue to hold dear the values of our Catholic Church roots, shared by all people of good will in the many faith traditions and Houses of Worship who share the common human values of respect and dignity for all people and creation. We hope that our new name is more inclusive for those who support us from the many other Christian, Jewish and Muslim faith communities around Greater Hartford.

As important to us is the impact of our name change on our clients. We removed "shelter and housing" from our name because no one wants to be publically associated with a "shelter." The new name focuses on an organization grounded in "caring," which we felt was far less stigmatizing to clients. Our logo will remain the same, however, which sheds some light on how we approach caring. To me, our



ImmaCare

“Treat people as if they were what they ought to be, and help them become what they are capable of being.” ~ Goethe

logo of the house being held by the multi-colored hands imparts the notion of homes being provided and supported by a diversity of approaches and helpers.

In a nod to our past, we kept the “Imma” from Immaculate. The “I” and “C” in ImmaCare are capitalized, which provides the same “IC” acronym that Immaculate Conception also had. Change is often hard. We know some will not initially like the new name. It has been steadily growing on us after our initial apprehension about it. We hope that ImmaCare Inc. will come to mean a place of respect, compassion, dignity, and hope for people experiencing housing crisis in our Greater Hartford community.

As part of our strategic planning, we also rewrote our mission statement and created a vision statement as seen on the cover of the newsletter. We have grown much since the days of being only a shelter in the basement of a church, and provide life-changing, and often life-saving, services.

We continue to work on securing a new site for our emergency shelter. We have had many ups and downs over the past year regarding this project. We continue to push forward and hope to have more news on this in the near future.

No matter your relationship with us over the years: Thank You. Thank you for continuing to care and support what we do, who we help and the services we provide.

Sincerely,



Louis Gilbert, *Executive Director*



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Education & Employment Manager

Mabel Cabrera

Mobile Outreach Case Manager

Tony Mack

A Look Back

28 Years and Counting – Students in Simsbury Support ImmaCare

Submitted by Jane Costello, Co-Chair of Project Outreach & Community Caring and Take Action Club Coordinator, Tootin' Hills Elementary School, Simsbury, Connecticut

This past fall, elementary school students at Tootin' Hills School in grades 4-6, parent volunteers, and teachers began our 28th year of making more than 200 peanut butter and jelly sandwiches each Friday for ImmaCare's clients. Known as Project Outreach each classroom is scheduled for at least two sandwich making opportunities on Fridays over a 20 week period. In addition, donated canned food, toiletry items and clothing are sorted each Friday by volunteers from rotating 1st - 3rd grade classes, and made ready for delivery to ImmaCare.

This wonderful long-standing tradition began in 1986, founded by parent leader Mary Hashmi and many others when Russ Butterworth was principal. The program has continued through the years thanks to a supportive parent-teacher organization and notably, former principal Ron Perrault, who was an incredible steward of Project Outreach for more than two decades. Mary wrote long ago that a second grade student shared that she didn't mind missing recess to sort collections because she liked helping people. That sentiment is still alive and well at Tootin' Hills nearly three decades later, and many would agree is a big part of what continues to drive this great service-learning program.

Recently renamed, Project Outreach & Community Caring (POCC), under new principal Kevin Cazzetta, POCC now also includes an exuberant volunteer student club known as the Take Action Club (TAC).

Thanks to student interest and parent support, the TAC began in the fall of 2013 with the support of an international educational partner and charity, Free the Children, and now welcomes on average 35 fourth through sixth grade students every other Friday morning before school. The club engages and empowers students to tackle the issues associated with poverty both locally and globally. Principal Cazzetta



POCC seeks to educate, engage and empower students to become caring, confident young change-makers; and lifelong active local and global citizens.

attends every meeting, reinforcing for students the value of their efforts. These students also proudly play an active role in raising awareness and funds to support the school's sandwich-making program for ImmaCare. Recently, the club eagerly welcomed Tony Mack from ImmaCare to an early morning meeting to hear all about his outreach work for ImmaCare. It was a great opportunity for students to hear first-hand about the challenges that ImmaCare clients face, and how their service work makes a difference. As one student remarked, "I really liked having Tony at our meeting because he is being the change," reciting Nelson Mandela's famous quote – right at the heart of what we believe the founders of this mutually beneficial relationship dreamed of long ago.



If you'd like to submit a story to our "A Look Back" feature, please contact Teresa Wierbicki at twierbicki@immacare.org.

A Day in the Life

Lessons of Suicide

Submitted by Steve MacHattie, LCSW, Director of Programs



I was deeply saddened by the news of Robin Williams' suicide. As with almost anything a "famous" person does, everyone now has a comment or thought about Mr. Williams' passing and, I suppose, I am no different. Robin Williams' death captured everyone's attention. We saw Robin Williams on the big screen, acting in humorous movies or joking on the television. We believed he was who we saw: a happy humorous man with many things to live for. Mr. Williams' suicide stunned us because, behind the smile and the jokes we find a person fighting with and losing his battle to the illness of depression. We wonder why he did what he did and we want answers to that question. Often, however life gives us questions that have no good answers. It sometimes comes down to that people are people. No matter where or who they are, all people struggle with something at some time or another.

In August of 2014, Mr. Williams' death and his struggle with depression was front page news, for the moment. At ImmaCare we work with men and women struggling with their own difficulties and they do so quietly because of the stigma associated with mental health and substance abuse issues. You won't read of the progress that they make or, unfortunately, the setbacks they deal with in their lives. I wrote once about the bitter sweet successes that we remember here at ImmaCare and how difficult it sometimes is to see the light in the middle of the day-to-day struggles our clients face.

As I write this article, I think of the individuals we serve that have plummeted further into their own diseases. I sometimes question why some individuals fall so far and so hard and are never really able to get their feet back on firm ground.

For instance, we were recently informed that one of our longtime clients was admitted to a skilled nursing facility. I commented to the client's case manager that I felt guilty about being relieved when I heard the news of his admission; it didn't feel like a win to me. The individual was suffering the long-term effects of the choices he made

in his life. A "win" to me would have been to witness this individual's life being turned around. The sad truth was that the client had traveled so far down that there was no longer a possible turning around for him. It was also true that in this community, this individual was slowly dying. Now, in a nursing home, our client was eating, getting the desperately needed medical care, and was beginning to smile when our case manager visited.

I also think of the many clients we serve that came to us from jail, spent some time with us, succumbed to their "demons" and are now back in jail. When they are released from jail we will still be here for them. When they come back to us we will work with them, as much as they allow us. Some will be "successful" and not return to jail. Unfortunately, there will be days that, as we review the arrest records, we will find that some of our clients have once again gone back to jail. I will be informed of the clients that were arrested and I will wonder why? Then I will remember that often, life gives us questions that have no good answers.

Robin Williams' death makes us look at life a little differently. If it could happen to him, who else could it happen to? His death reminds me of what may be the biggest lesson I have learned while working here. The lesson I learned is that people are just people. It doesn't matter who they are, where they were born, what faith community they do or don't belong to, how much money they have or what their profession is. People are just people and all have their own dreams and successes as well as times they have failed at something, made a mistake, done something that hurt themselves and those closest to them. I hope that Robin Williams's death teaches us to be a little less judgmental of people that seem to have more struggles in life than successes.



New Program Offers Participants a Fresh Start

Part I: Education

Late last year, ImmaCare Inc. launched a new comprehensive Education and Employment program aimed at helping participants build skill sets necessary for gaining employment, fostering self-regulating behavior and boosting self-esteem.

The agency's goal for this initiative is to "provide a program that will help participants understand who they are, how they got here and where they are going," explained Education and Employment Manager Mabel Cabrera. The idea of this program originated at the "What you Say Matters" Luncheon, an event created to gain insight into the type of services and programs clients were seeking. Several clients expressed their frustrations with their employment searches and were interested in gaining job readiness tools.

Ms. Cabrera wanted to develop a program that went beyond the resume writing and basic job search skills that other employment programs tend to exclusively focus on. For the chronically homeless it is nearly impossible to gain steady, gainful employment or even an interview. In addition to lengthy periods of unemployment, many have criminal histories that immediately disqualify them from positions.

During the first year of the program participants took part in internal internships at ImmaCare's shelter, as well as an eight week course called "Tackling the Tough Skills." The internship portion of the program is designed not only as a way for participants in the shelter population to gain work experience, but to build self-esteem and self-confidence. Internships are one year, 40 hours a week and available to clients who have proven that they are kind, portray leadership skills and are likely to benefit from the

experience. During this time interns provide services necessary to the shelter's operation. These services include cooking, checking people in and supervising the completion of chores by those staying in the shelter.

The pilot class of "Tackling the Tough Skills" has taught participants about gaining employment, helped them to better manage stress and forced participants to examine the role their attitudes and choices have played in their relationships, health and overall wellbeing. The participants' self-reflection is sparked in part by discussions the group has about inspirational quotes, whose messages they connect to their own lives and experiences.





“Something was working; guys kept coming back,” said Ms. Cabrera of the course’s initial group of participants. The course was so popular with participants that when it ended they requested more classes. The experience has also helped form a community amongst participants, a rarity for many living in the shelter system.

Part II: Employment

After successfully completing the first-year, participants receive a Certificate of Completion, which qualifies them for entry into the social entrepreneurial stage of the program, which we are in the process of setting-up. While taking part in this business venture, they will also potentially have the opportunity to pay room and board for a single room occupancy apartment.

When asked what sets the program apart from education and employment programs at other agencies, Ms. Cabrera explained that it is the human connection established between facilitator and participant: “real issues come before employment.”

One participant stated: “I never knew until I came to this class that I had low self-esteem,” he continued, “...this is good, because I am learning things about myself that I didn’t understand before.”

Although the education portion of the program is off to a great start, there are aspects of the second year that have yet to be refined. The social enterprise venture is still in development and will likely be implemented in 2015. Ms. Cabrera’s hope is that participants will use this experience as an opportunity to “pay it forward” and help those currently experiencing the living situation they were once in.

Already, the program has had a positive effect on the lives of those who have taken part. In the words of one proud participant: “This changed my life.”

If you are interested in learning how you can help kick-off our Social Enterprise Initiative, please contact Teresa Wierbicki, Director of Development 860-724-4823 x 103

“Our dilemma is that we hate change and love it at the same time; what we want is for things to remain the same but get better.” ~ Sydney Harris


A Big Win

Earlier in 2015, the Bowdoin College Women's Basketball team travelled to West Hartford, CT for a two day team bonding retreat at the home of Sara Binkhorst, senior co-captain.

Bowdoin College prides itself on the notion of "the common good" and on January 12, 2015 the Bowdoin Women's Basketball team embraced this value by volunteering their time to prepare and serve food to the residents of ImmaCare's Shelter in Hartford, CT. The 13 women on the team made 125 peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, as well as chicken noodle and tomato soup. They were given a tour of the shelter and talked with staff members about the services available to the residents living at ImmaCare. Senior co-captain Sara Binkhorst said, "We all left the shelter feeling extremely moved and humbled by the experience." Junior Shannon Brady said, "We talk a lot about wins on the basketball court, but this was a big win in the larger scheme of life." By the end of the day, the women left the shelter motivated to continue such impactful work upon their return to school in Brunswick, Maine.



SAVE THE DATE



Taste of the World

FRIDAY
APRIL 24, 2015
ST. THOMAS SEMINARY
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AN INTERNATIONAL FOOD,
WINE & BEER TASTING
TO BENEFIT IMMACARE INC.
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SHELTER & HOUSING CORPORATION

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AND DELICACIES FROM
AROUND THE WORLD.

WE ARE IN NEED OF A FEW AMAZING PEOPLE to secure Silent Auction Prizes, ads for the program book, and to sell tickets. Also, we are looking for donations of prizes for the Silent Auction. If you own or work for a business and would like to donate a basket or item from your establishment; if you provide a service that you would like to offer such as a salon, landscaping; a timeshare; if you have tickets to a play, concert, sporting event after May 1 you would like to donate; or if you would like to purchase an item, such as a gift certificate to an area restaurant, jewelry or a designer purse, please contact **Teresa A. Wierbicki, Director of Development: (860) 724-4823 x 103.**

The Way People Access Shelter is Changing

A used to be that clients would line up outside shelter doors waiting for/hoping for a shelter bed for the night. This process often left clients frustrated as they might wait for hours for a shelter bed only to find that there were no beds available. To address this frustration, homeless service providers, in conjunction with the State of Connecticut Department of Housing, utilizing the 2-1-1 Info Line created local Coordinated Access Networks (CAN) to access shelter.

Individuals in need of emergency shelter now call 2-1-1 where they will first discuss with the 2-1-1 services coordinator alternate emergency housing options, such as a family member/friend's house or a motel/hotel room to provide a safe, viable option to ease the person's housing crisis. 2-1-1 can also provide referrals to organizations which provide payments for late rent, utility bills, or possibly make a security deposit arrangement in order to divert individuals from the emergency shelter system. When there are no other options, 2-1-1- calls a triage center (for the Greater Hartford Coordinated Access Network, ImmaCare Inc. acts as the triage center for single men). Triage centers keep an updated list of shelter beds available within their network. Individuals are then sent to a shelter with the knowledge that, once there, they will be provided a bed for the evening.

Besides being one of the Greater Hartford Region's largest men's shelters (the largest during the winter when the City-funded "No Freeze" Shelter is open), ImmaCare's role in the Greater Hartford CAN includes: working with clients referred by 2-1-1 to access resources through two full days per week of CAN Assessment Appointments; triaging 24 hours per day all unaccompanied men throughout the Greater Hartford CAN who have been found to be in housing crisis and in need for immediate placement in one of our region's emergency shelters; and participating in Greater Hartford CAN planning meetings to ensure efficient/effective efforts to end homelessness. ImmaCare has attempted to take a leadership role in the planning of our CAN.

The goal of the CAN is to bring service providers together creating a network of providers working together to find the best possible resources for individuals in need. The desire is to provide needed services to individuals/families in need that will keep them out of the emergency shelter system. However, when emergency shelter is what is needed, the goal is to provide already frustrated individuals or families referrals to shelters where they know beds are available for them and helps reduce their uncertainty and stress for that night.

Stay Connected...

You can now stay up-to-date with news about ImmaCare by "Liking" us on Facebook (www.facebook.com/ICSHC.ct) and by joining our Mailing List by logging on to our web site www.ImmaCare.org.



WISH LIST

- Alarm clock radios
- Can openers
- Batteries for smoke detectors
- Pots/Pan
- Flatware
- Toiletries
- Underwear (New) in all sizes
- Kitchen window panels
- Microwave ovens
- Toasters
- 4 cup coffee makers
- Coats (multiple sizes, especially 3X & 4X)
- Sweatshirts (multiple sizes, especially 3X & 4X)
- Thermal Socks
- Thermal Shirts (multiple sizes, up to 3x)
- Thermal Pants (multiple sizes, up to 3 x)

Q & A with Mabel Cabrera

Mabel Cabrera, Education & Employment Manager



How has your experience as ImmaCare's Employment and Education Manager changed the way you view those who struggle with unemployment?

Given today's economy, it's not hard to believe that jobs are hard to come by. Six years ago, when I started out as a housing case manager, I refused to accept it. I was convinced that clients just didn't want to work. This is no longer my belief. I'm convinced that finding employment for our clients is no easy task.

How did ideas for the program changes first come about?

When I took this position I asked myself, "How am I going to inspire change in my clients?" and, "What will I do to get them as excited about the program as I am?" I prayed on it and decided to pitch an eight-week pilot class to case managers.

Within two weeks, we started the "Tackling the Tough Skills" pilot class with seven clients from the shelter and scattered-site housing program. The class, created by Rosilee A. Trotta, Workforce Development Consultant at the University of Missouri Extension, is a five-part course created for "building skills for work and life." The course looks at attitude, responsibility, communication and problem solving, and ends with preparing for the workplace.

How was "Tackling the Tough Skills" received by participating clients?

Prior to each class, I wondered how many would show up that day. However, they were committed and attended. The class wasn't just a class, it was a community. For some, this was their only significant human connection. During this course, program participants have made immeasurable strides that will benefit them in their continued journeys to self-improvement and self-sufficiency.

What do you think participants gained from the experience?

For eight weeks, clients pondered about their attitude, where they are today because of it, and what attitude they want to adopt moving forward. We spoke about responsibility being a choice, how only we can change our behaviors and what that means. We are responsible for our attitude

which, in turn, determines the course of our everyday lives. We learned that communication requires lifelong learning, active listening and determines the success or lack thereof of all of their relationships. We learned that basic problem solving is about recognizing the problem, only then can we make efforts to address the matter. The course ended with a certificate of completion and seven very happy clients.

Share an example of a success that has come out of the newly improved program.

"John" wasn't sure that volunteering his time at the shelter was beneficial. He desperately needed money, but sleeping separate from a communal setting was something he couldn't pass up. He shared space with only two other "intern volunteers" as opposed to 74 men. John, who never stopped applying for employment, updated his resume to include his current internship. Not two months later, John interviewed for a full-time paid position at a company of his choice – and got the job! Soon after, he moved out of the shelter and into his own apartment. His resignation letter thanked ImmaCare for the opportunity to participate in the Long-term Shelter Internship program. John writes, "...the support given through my prolonged search for employment has been above what was expected and I deeply appreciate the efforts of the entire staff."

Success stories such as this are inspiring, and one I'd like to see repeated for years to come. Although we have quite a way to go, we are inspired to take big strides and are determined to make a real difference for our clients and in our community.

What does the future hold for the program?

The pilot class was a complete success and I was very happy. We will be offering "Tackling the Tough Skills" several times a year for all shelter and housing clients and as a requirement to all Long-Term Shelter Internship Program participants during their first year of programming.

The first year includes prerequisite courses and a 40 hour per week internship and in the second year, internal or external work placement. Prerequisite courses include classes in personal growth, financial literacy, health and wellness and work readiness.

Transforming Kindness

Allen Grant has been with ImmaCare on and off since 2009. Since December 2013, he has been consistently staying at the Shelter. The old church building was where he went to get a hot dinner, and lay his head down each night. It was his “home,” for now anyway. He was always quick to volunteer to do chores and help keep the building (which provides safety and warmth for up to 150 men on cold winter nights) well-kept and taken care of. This was how Allen spent his evenings.

During the day, however, Allen has been a longtime volunteer at Connecticut Community for Addiction Recovery (CCAR) as a certified recovery coach and outreach specialist. He visits recovery houses, halfway houses and shelters to bring the word of recovery. He doesn't only help those with drug and alcohol-related issues, he also helps those who need help recovering from what life may bring: social illness, loss of a loved one, gambling and food addiction. All are welcome in a safe place without judgment.

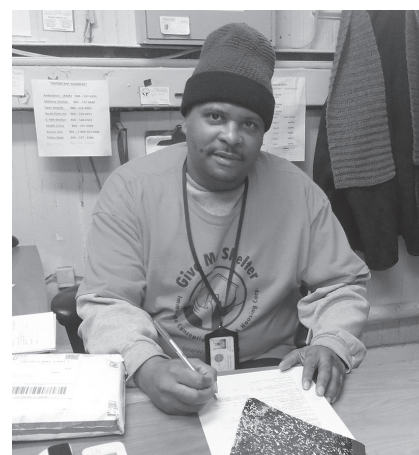
Two years ago, Allen applied for employment as a recovery coach at a local agency. Allen didn't get the job—or land an interview. He thinks his main downfall was that he needed to brush-up on the formalities of executing a successful job search: cover letter/resume writing, interview skills, presentation, etc. Fast forward to November of

2014, when Roger Clark (ImmaCare's Shelter Manager) approached Allen and told him about the agency's newly revived Education and Employment Program, which included a Long Term Shelter Internship component.

Allen was very excited about this program. Through the curriculum classes led by Mabel Cabrera, Education and Employment Manager, he learned about much more than cover letter and resume writing skills. Allen learned transferrable skills that can be utilized in work and in life. He learned about attitude, and how it builds strong character. He learned how the decisions one makes shapes their future. He learned that having a positive outlook will overall make you happier with life.

Allen said that the reason the class is so amazing is Mabel. She is sincere, serious and expects everyone to participate fully—heart, soul and mind. Allen's most treasured part of the eight week curriculum was the many quotes Mabel shared that went hand in hand with the topics for discussion: be it attitude, kindness, stress, change. They underscored the “lesson” and were often memorable.

Kindness isn't something that Allen needed any pointers on from the class. It's in Allen's nature to help those needing it most, which is why he has volunteered so long at CCAR. Recently he was walking in Hartford when he



Allen saw a young man (23 years old) whom he recognized from his volunteer work at CCAR, out on the streets with the few belongings he had in hand. He'd just gotten kicked out of the shelter he was staying at and had nowhere to go. Allen made a few calls, including to ImmaCare. He gave the young man money for bus fare from his own pocket so he can travel safely to ImmaCare with all of his belongings. Allen continues to mentor him today.

In addition to mentoring clients staying at ImmaCare, part of Allen's internship duties include assisting staff in all capacities related to running the shelter: from pat downs, to check-ins, mediating issues amongst clients, to cleaning, laundry and most importantly, making sure that all rules are followed.

Allen is truly enjoying the Internship experience, which he feels has prepared him well. It has served as a means for further improving his qualifications in something he feels passionate about: helping people. “I feel good when clients come up to me and say, ‘You're one of the good guys.’ It makes me want to continue to help my fellow homeless person.”

ImmaCare is especially grateful to everyone who donates to our agency. We are better able to serve our clients, and provide for their well-being thanks to your support. We sincerely appreciate you.



ImmaCare Inc.
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About ImmaCare Inc.

Since 1981, ImmaCare, formerly Immaculate Conception Shelter and Housing Corporation has been providing emergency housing and shelter services to thousands of homeless individuals. We focus on men who are most vulnerable, including those with HIV/AIDS or other health issues, alcohol or drug abuse problems, and mental health issues.

Mission

ImmaCare Inc. strives to eliminate homelessness in the Hartford region, while building a more vibrant community, by creating safe and affordable housing options and increasing the skills, income and hope of those who struggle with housing crises.

ImmaCare's service delivery is based on a Housing First model informed by a public health, harm reduction framework. Home is seen as a right and a foundation upon which fragile, broken and vulnerable individuals can, with proper supports, focus on improving the quality of life.

Programs

- Mobile Outreach
- Emergency Shelter
- Permanent Supportive Housing
- Education and Employment

Within these four components, ImmaCare offers shelter, food, clothing, referrals for medical and mental health services, case management, referrals for addiction services, entitlement assistance, education and job training, referrals and housing services.

For more information on ImmaCare or to find out how you can help, call
Teresa A. Wierbicki, Director of Development at (860) 724-4823 ext. 103.