

# Bearing Witness

May 2020

## A Note from the Executive Director



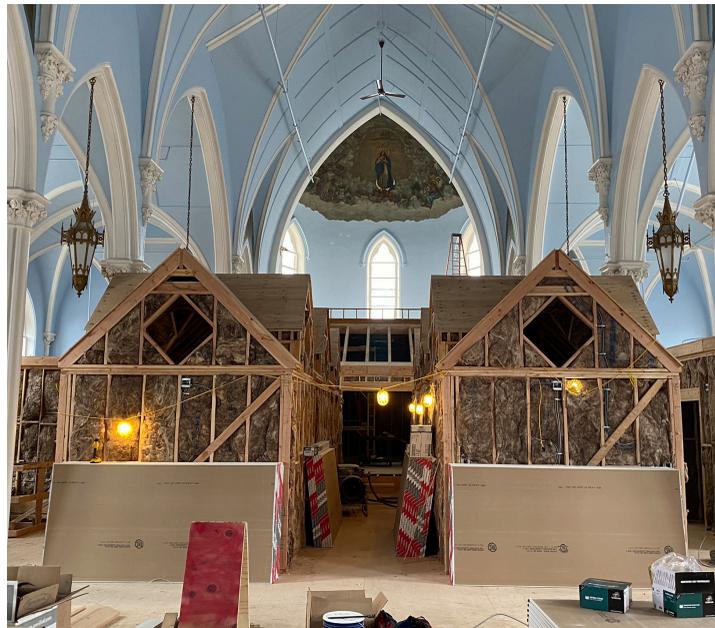
Dear Friends,

ImmaCare's Shelter Renovation Project is moving into its final months. Though we are excited

for the amazing transformation happening right before us, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, construction work on our shelter renovation project has slowed to allow for appropriate safety measures.

As you know, the shelter is currently closed for renovations. Prior to COVID-19, Shelter Shift Supervisors were assisting at the City of Hartford Warming Center to allow for more individuals to be served, and Shelter Case Managers were providing diversion services at Mercy Housing & Shelter, the Hartford Public Library, and at the House of Bread. As part of the Greater Hartford Coordinated Access Network (GH-CAN), we are pulling together resources that agencies can offer to serve the most vulnerable population in response to the COVID-19 crisis.

We now have shelter staff working shifts at one of the area hotels where clients who are most at -risk of infection have been transferred to prevent infection. Locally and nationwide, shelter systems have been working on "decompressing" shelters to lower the number of people in any one shelter to allow for some of the "social distancing"



that has become part of the world lexicon. As others have noted, "physical distancing" is probably a better term to describe the desired outcome. We need the social connection with others now as much as ever. This social connection has had to become more technology based; technology not readily available to people receiving services in the homeless services system. Our system is filled with people with either or both of substance abuse and mental illness histories. Social isolation caused by this pandemic can be expected to cause relapses in recovery and new experiences of these conditions. There will be great demand for services I believe in the coming months and years at a time when funding resources are likely to be scarce and stressed

due to massive amounts of emergency spending to meet the crisis today.

As we get closer to the date that the shelter will reopen, we will be announcing ways we will improve upon the services we provide to those accessing our programs. We are confident that the months we have been closed for the renovations will

be well worth it, especially to those who will benefit from our services and the updated modifications. These changes will allow the shelter to become compliant with HUD and ADA requirements, to serve clients with dignity and efficiency, and to support their health and safety. We will be open as soon as humanly possible.

May you and your loved ones remain safe and healthy during this unique and challenging time in our history.

Sincerely,

Louis Gilbert

## Stay Informed About ImmaCare

Sign up for our mailing list to start receiving our e-newsletter *ImmaComm* to keep up-to-date with the Shelter Renovation Project and more: [ImmaCare.org](http://ImmaCare.org) (scroll to the bottom left corner for Mailing List sign-up) and if you haven't already, 'Like Us' on Facebook: [Facebook.com/ImmaCare.CT](https://www.facebook.com/ImmaCare.CT)

# Decades of Donations



Regular ImmaCare supporters Albert and Christine\* have developed an unconventional way to give back to their community. They are avid “couponers” who love finding incredible deals on items to donate to local organizations.

Their hobby began more than 20 years ago when their son was born. The birthing class had a reunion at the hospital where each was given a booklet of coupons. Back then, stores often did coupon tripling, and when they took their coupons to the store they found they were to receive \$.05 back for each diaper cream that they purchased. Surprised by this, an idea was sparked and it took off from there. Albert and Christine have learned how to leverage coupons to make their money go extremely far, and stockpile items at an impressive rate. Albert shared a story about when they purchased a literal ton of pasta to donate to a local foodbank,

and another time when they found brand new men’s pants for \$1 apiece.

The couple does regular drop-offs to organizations in Hartford, Willimantic and Middletown, donating a wide range of items, including food, personal hygiene products, school supplies and clothing. When they find incredible deals on useful items, they can’t help but purchase them to give away. On the day of their most recent ImmaCare drop-off, Albert’s itinerary consisted of six drop-offs, including four shelters and two schools.

Albert affectionately refers to their couponing as their shared hobby and explained that they invest a lot of time into this passion project. Albert estimates that he spends between 45 and 70 hours per week picking up items at stores, and then dropping them off to the fortunate

recipients. He’s quick to say that Christine is the mastermind behind the organization, doing the research on deals and coupons and making him lists for his shopping trips. He estimates she spends even more time on the project than he does. Albert and Christine derive great joy from this ongoing act of kindness. Giving back is ingrained in them both. Albert shared a memory from childhood, recalling how his mother struggled with mental illness, but always felt better when participating in the prayer line. He still holds her words in his heart, “The best way to feel better about yourself is to help someone else.”

*\*names changed to respect their request to remain anonymous*



Due to recent developments in the spread of the novel coronavirus, ImmaCare has moved its fundraising event, *Celebration of ImmaCare* to:

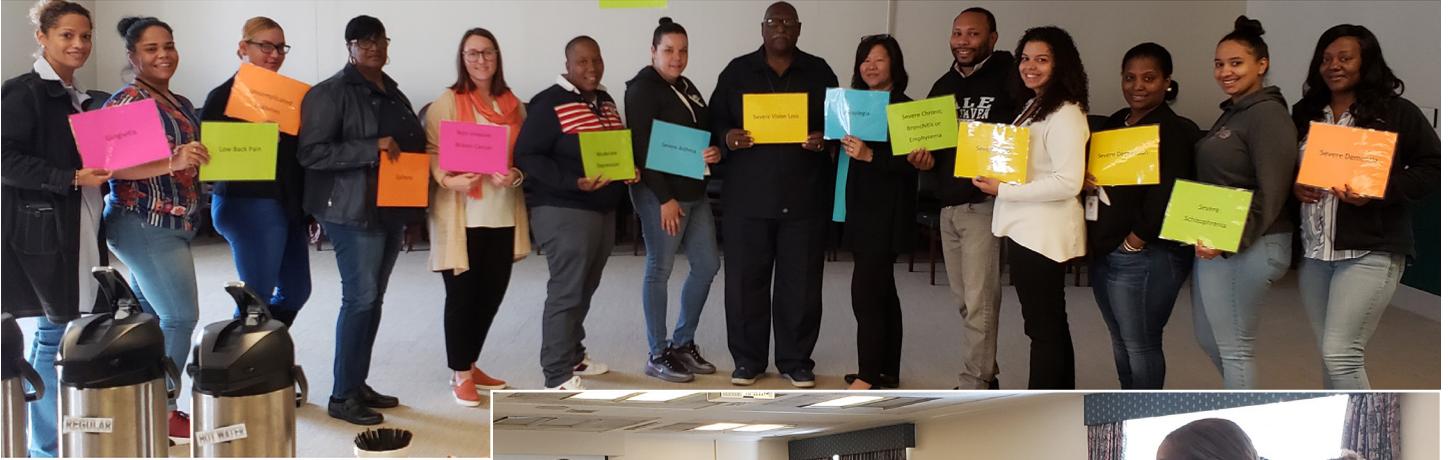
**Thursday, September 17, 2020  
Pond House Café  
West Hartford, CT at 6PM**

To purchase tickets or for sponsorship information, contact us directly:

**Teresa Wierbicki  
Twierbicki@immacare.org  
860-724-4823 x 103**

*We hope you can Celebrate with us.*

# Mental Health First Aid Training



ImmaCare’s direct service staff recently participated in a two-part course on Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) sponsored by the CT Chapter of American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. MHFA teaches how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance-use disorders. The course introduces staff to risk factors and warning signs of mental health concerns, builds understanding of their impact, and teaches how to effectively respond to mental health and addiction-related crises.

With the shelter closed for renovations, program staff has been participating in numerous trainings to keep on the leading edge of the human services field and be prepared to best serve our clients now and into the future once we reopen. ImmaCare Board member Patricia Graham suggested that the ImmaCare team take the MHFA course. Graham is a Licensed Master Social Worker and is one of the course administrators for MHFA, alongside fellow MHFA trainer Paula Rego.

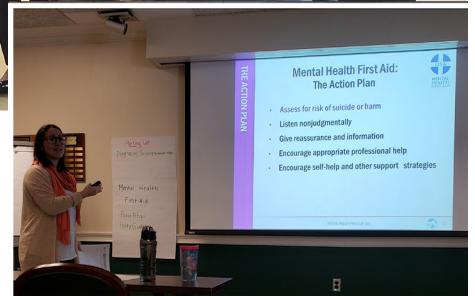
The course covers topics including understanding depression and anxiety, understanding substance abuse disorders, first aid for panic attacks and traumatic events, and much more. Mental health challenges and substance-use



disorders are two of the most common struggles for people experiencing homelessness, making this course especially pertinent. According to a study by the National Institute of Mental Health, 45 percent of the homeless population

**According to MentalHealth.gov, more than one in four adults living with serious mental health problems also have a substance use problem.**

shows history of mental illness diagnoses. Additionally, although studies vary, research consistently shows over a third of individuals who are homeless experience alcohol and drug problems and up to two-thirds



have a lifetime history of an alcohol or drug disorder\*.

After the training, Melvya Blount, Housing Location Specialist, reflected on the course. She has experience in the mental health field and expressed her appreciation for the information being accurate and up-to-date. She noted the high value for the case management team who works one-on-one with clients in their home environments regularly. The staff is now well-served to know the key components to be able to see signs, seek help when necessary, and be proactive regarding their clients’ mental health.

\*source: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4833089/>

# What's Cooking at ImmaCare?

Submitted by Claire Dalidowitz, Registered Dietitian/Nutritionist



This fall saw the start of a new health initiative at ImmaCare. Residents of Casa de Francisco visited the teaching kitchen at Futures, Inc. to learn about nutrition and healthy cooking. During the two-hour class, they learned from Chef Mara and Nutritionist Claire Dalidowitz. Residents learned how to prepare a chicken and asparagus stir fry with brown rice. No one in the class had tried brown rice before and everyone

was surprised by how good it was. One participant exclaimed with surprise, "Brown rice is really good!"

There was discussion about the importance of cutting down on salt as it contributes to high blood pressure, and included reminders to read labels and keep sodium

servings under 200mg/serving. This was especially important because residents openly equated salt to flavor and heavily utilize it. They were surprised to experience how delicious the meal was without adding extra salt. Chef Mara also reminded the group about the importance of preventing cross-contamination by not using the same cutting board for chicken and vegetables.



The USDA MyPlate resource was introduced to look at meals that are prepared, aiming to include at least three food groups in each meal and pay attention to portion size. Chef Mara challenged the group to learn new vocabulary and, as a prize, one participant won a plate with the MyPlate guidelines printed on it to help them implement their new knowledge. Activities Coordinator Kathy Gonzalez said, "The class was interesting and exciting. Everyone loved it and they are looking forward to the next class."



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