Treating the Root of Local Homelessness: A Collaborative Internship with Safe Harbor Easton

Sarah Woodruff (WGS 351)

WHAT IS SAFE HARBOR?

Safe Harbor Easton is an emergency and transitional homeless shelter that serves over 275 homeless members of the Easton community.

Safe Harbor has 36 overnight beds and a day program that can accommodate up to 80 individuals per day.

Day program participants and residents are given access to warm food, individualized case management, employment services, group therapy programs, recovery services, free medical/dental/eye care, personal hygiene items, the clothing closet, GED programs, and mental health services.

WHO IS SAFE HARBOR?

It is hard to believe that just last year, Leroy was on the streets, controlled by his addiction to alcohol and drugs, living out of abandoned buildings, and eating out of trash cans.

Leroy came to Easton after his son who lived in the area had his first child. He was hospitalized shortly thereafter for a stomach ulcer.

Following his hospitalization, Leroy began receiving disability payments. He asked his son to move him to take some of it for safekeeping. His son brought his daughter to their meeting.

Leroy held the sleeping baby girl, but she didn’t wake up until her father was walking her back to the car. As Leroy was leaving, his son called out to him, and held up his daughter. Leroy smiled and told us that the little girl ‘wouldn’t let him “16 up the whole street”’. At that moment, Leroy decided to quit, “because that’s my little girl right there”.

Upon returning to PA, Leroy was hospitalized again for a chest infection after ingesting poison at the landscaping job he had secured with a local professor. Upon release, he stayed with a friend for a month before getting kicked out for confronting the man about abusing his wife. With no other apparent alternative, Leroy again attempted suicide.

This time, Leroy found his way to Safe Harbor. He is now employed and has been living in his own apartment since November.

Kris has survived cervical cancer, a hysterectomy, her own addiction to alcohol, and severe domestic violence.

Kris was working in the hotel and restaurant business, and was on the road to recovery from alcohol when she received a diagnosis that would turn her world upside down. Kris had cervical cancer, and her only hope to remove the cancerous cells was a full hysterectomy.

Her significant other used her apartment to distribute and store drugs while she was hospitalized, and failed to pay her rent.

Consequently, she lost her apartment while still recuperating from surgery. Upon release, Kris was forced to move into the Quality Inn downtown Easton.

Things quickly went from bad to worse as Kris relapsed and found herself in a situation of severe domestic violence. “I lost everything, even my job, because of the physical, mental, and emotional abuse.”

Kris then came to Safe Harbor.

“I am so grateful to Safe Harbor for saving my life. I am working on finding a new job and getting my health back. Everything is changing for me.”

Kris attends meetings and attends church every week. Of her Recently, Kris’ ex found her and beat her again. Yet, sitting in front of me with bruises under her eye and jaw, she spoke with nothing but optimism for her future. “I’m still here,” she shrugged, “and what I learn here at Safe Harbor is being told on the streets. I tell people about this place, about what they did for me. I have hope now.”

“My definition of hope,” Kris told me, “is having on, pain ends.”

Jeffrey Poch, known around Safe Harbor as “Poch”, is one of Safe Harbor’s extraordinarily devoted case managers. It is hard to believe that in 2007, Poch was homeless, struggling with drug addiction, winning several open warrants, and living under the bridge behind Lafayette College.

Poch used to participate in the same day program that he now oversees.

When Poch sought case management at Safe Harbor, he was told that he would have to turn himself in for the open warrants in his name. Poch turned himself over to the authorities and was sent to prison, where he spent six months in the Community Education Center (CEC) drug and alcohol education program.

Upon his release, Poch dedicated himself to improving the lives of others in any way that he could. He holds a particular soft spot for those who face the same challenges that he once faced, and managed to overcome. Adhering to his motto that “community is method, community is healer”, Poch volunteered with Weed and Seed of Easton, assisting in outreach programs such as the Fatherhood Initiative and the Front Porch Project. Poch also spent time volunteering at Safe Harbor, eventually helping to lead the men’s group in their discussions. In 2013, he interviewed and was selected for the day program case manager position at the shelter.

Beyond his integral role at Safe Harbor, Poch currently serves on the Recovery Coalition Board, and the Returning Citizens Round-table, two organizations dedicated to aiding formerly imprisoned members of the community successfully reenter everyday life. He has regained custody of his children and is working towards a degree in social work at Northampton Community College.

Howard County Councilwoman, enacting the Root of Local Homelessness: A Collaborative Internship with Safe Harbor Easton

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HOW TO GET INVOLVED

For more information on how to get involved, please visit Safe Harbor’s webpage at: www.safeharboreaston.org

Click the “How to Help” tab for information on volunteer opportunities and meal calendar openings.

Safe Harbor is located at 536 Bushkill Drive just behind Lafayette College.

We accept donations of food, clothing, personal hygiene items, and much more.

Please call 610.258.5540 for information