

Street Sights

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WARMTH WITH DIGNITY

*Warmth with dignity,
the DaVinci Center difference*

By Ralph Davis

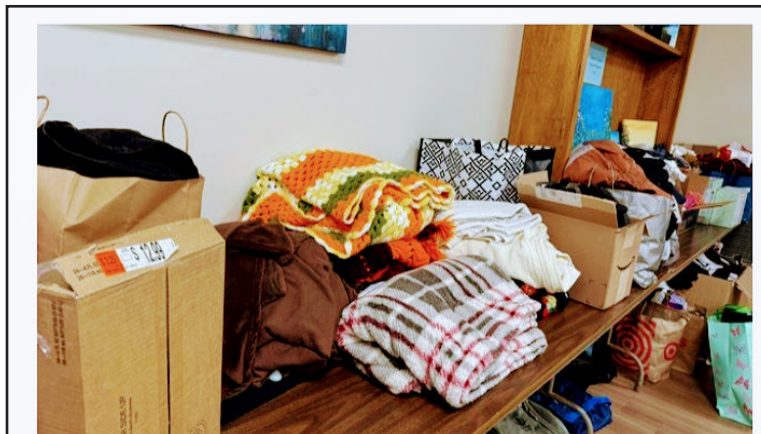
Foot stomping cold and icy hands. Chilled to the bone, the folks trudge, bus it, or are driven to the DaVinci Center located on Charles Street in Providence. Word is out that there is warmth there; a place to shake off the cold and settle in for the night.

Upon entering, everyone revels at the much-needed blast of heat already penetrating their cold bodies. Some immediately felt safe and secure as they recognize some faces of Better Lives Rhode Island staff. Even the ominous presence of a Providence police officer helps abate that uneasy feeling of being in a room filled with mostly strangers.

People are greeted with respect and kindness which is almost nonexistent at a few of the other "Warming shelters" in the city. At some of them, our friends are treated like annoying children, begrudgingly sheltered from the

elements and sent back into the cold as quickly as possible.

As our friends began to settle in, they were offered food and drink. Not food that is hastily thrown together that is 'Good enough for them.' Rather it is tasty, meals. They can even have seconds when



Clothing and blankets on a table inside of the DaVinci Center in Providence Wednesday night, Jan. 8, 2025. (WJAR)

everyone has been served. There were movies and snacks and bags to store their belongings. **All of the touches were provided by caring staff who know how they would like to be treated in such a circumstance.**

"We are like Planet Fitness, a no judgement zone," DaVinci Center

executive director Norma Gonzales laughingly said. She spoke of once spotting someone cold sleeping outside and how guilty she felt using a blanket at home. It is this eye of empathy, suffering when one sees our others suffer, and determining to help in a meaningful way that defines her and the staff at the DaVinci Center. It was without hesitation that she permitted the building to be used to get people out of the cold.

Paula Hudson heads up Better Lives Rhode Island and her depth of caring and compassion for unhoused friends came out very clearly in my short conversation with her. She was a case manager at Better Lives for over two years prior to assuming her role. Accordingly, she moved up with loads of first

hand outreach and case manager knowledge, compassion, and skills to model to her staff!

Paula learned in an earlier venture that relying on untrained volunteers to operate a warming center is inefficient and even dangerous.

Continued on page 3....

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

I am so saddened and infuriated by the loss of RICO, who was found frozen to death in Providence. RICO was a lover of sports. His favorite football team was the Philadelphia Eagles. He was a lover of music, especially Hip-Hop and RAP. He enjoyed creating beats with his cousins. He had a love for the outdoors most of all. Rico loved to share a meal with his favorite person in the world, Nana Ma (The late Joyce Dias).



It is unacceptable that someone can be left on the streets to die of exposure. Do we need more outreach workers? YES I believe we do. We must work together to do better, not just for RICO, but for everyone else in this situation.

Let's make this very clear: No one chooses to be homeless:

Just like you wouldn't intentionally choose to sleep outside in the cold, people don't want to be homeless.

Financial issues are often the main reason:

Losing a job, unexpected medical costs, or not earning enough money to pay rent can lead to homelessness.

It can happen to anyone:

Even people who seem to have their lives together can become homeless if they face a major setback, like living with someone and they pass away and you're not on the lease.

Contact us at street-sights@gmail.com if you are interested in being trained to be an outreach worker.

Sincerely,

Janice

DONATE



We can not sustain an all volunteer paper any longer. Help keep Street Sights alive!

All charitable donations are tax deductible.

Scan the QR code to donate, or mail a check to Street Sights, 162 Orms Street, Prov, RI 02908

...DaVinci Center, continued from pg 1

Situations arise at any moment that require the skills needed to circumvent problems as smoothly as possible before they get larger. This time, she had some trained staff in place with some seasoned volunteers as well.

Why aren't more community centers opening up to help alleviate some of the human suffering of freezing people right outside their doors? We have surmised that they might consider themselves "too busy." Maybe they are simply not willing to put in the effort. Some might even have a mission statement that is rigid with no provision to work "outside of the box." Who knows? Ask them.

Even though he announced the opening, it is impossible to assign

any credit for this well planned, successful endeavor to Providence Mayor Brett Smiley. Under his cloak of caring for our unhoused friends is his dark, brutal side that orders the ruthless destruction of encampments and all belongings. Seemingly dangling, puppet-like, by the strings of Governor McKee and a vicious homeless-phobic radio personality, he goes forward joining the governor in lying about being concerned while creating even more obstacles.

As stupid and transparent as the ruling is that the "pallet houses" must be painted with 'fire resistant paint' and have fire suppression systems, so is the ruling that people must sit up, not dare lie down at the other warming shelters for "Safety reasons." These ruthless decision makers are little more

than bullies, pumped by their official titles. They seem deliriously happy to make living more difficult for our homeless friends. Sleep sitting up in a chair or stay cold outside? What a brutal Catch 22.

Promoting dignity with genuine attempts at making our friends comfortable in a caring and stable environment epitomizes the goal of the people that operate the DaVinci Center and the Better Lives Rhode Island warming shelter. You might want to consider calling either or both of them to see what support you can offer:

The DaVinci Center:
401-272-7474.

Better Lives Rhode Island:
401-454-7422.

OUR MISSION

Street Sights serves as a forum for advocates, homeless, and formerly homeless people, students, state officials, and the general public to share accurate and honest information about issues relating to homelessness. Our goal is to shed light on a subject not often addressed and, to some degree, ignored.

Advertise with us!

Street Sights is the only homeless magazine and resource guide in Rhode Island. Your contribution will help our friends continue to receive updated information. If you have a business or organization and would like to advertise see our prices below (we offer multiple months discount). Please email streetsights@gmail.com or call us at 401-499-3596

Full page ad \$250 per month
1/2 page ad \$150 per month

1/4 page ad \$100 per month
business card \$40 Per month
(Multiple months can receive a discount)

SPONSOR

If you would like to sponsor an issue please contact us. We welcome donations of any amount. All donations and sponsorships are tax deductible.

SUBSCRIBE

Individual subscriptions are available for \$30 per year. Issues are mailed out monthly. If you are interested please send a check made out to Street Sights to: 162 Orms Street, Providence RI 02908 or use our Paypal QR code above.

MICHELLE'S STORY

My name is Michelle. The year 2023 was a very challenging year, which led me to being homeless throughout 2024. May 2023, I am working as a policy director at a non profit organization, putting my MSW to use by working in systems change. I used the GI Bill to get my degree so I am not saddled with debt. My car is paid off and I use the VA for healthcare. Things fit, so I decided to run for local office. I live with my mom because I get to take care of her and it's economic. August 2023, my mom suddenly passes. I end up staying with my sister on her couch, the place is too crowded. I go to the VA for help with housing. I'm looking for apartments but it's slim pickings. Time after time someone swoops in before me. It's on a first come first serve basis so my great credit score doesn't matter, my clean record doesn't matter, my bank account doesn't matter. It was already hard finding an apartment that took pets, aside from my dog I had to care for my mother's 2 cats. It was already

hard finding an apartment that met my budget. There were so few apartments to pick from and when I found one someone always beat me to it.

April 2024, I could not stay where I was, so I moved into a shelter operated by Operation Stand Down RI for female veterans. Having to live in a shelter does something to you. It wasn't a terrible shelter but it wasn't where I ever imagined myself again. I didn't have an issue with substances, I never had. The only explanation for me being in the shelter was the shortage of housing. It was so competitive. Time after time again applying and missing out. While application fees were outlawed most places charged for background and credit checks. I felt like a failure. I went to apply for an apartment one day only to be told that there was an error and there

were no vacancies until a month and a half from then. I asked if I could apply for it, once the apartment became vacant it would still be a few weeks until I could move, I accepted it. I was tired of missing out and was lucky to be the first to apply for this apartment. I put the security deposit down without even seeing the apartment. I was desperate.

August 2024 I was finally able to move in. Today and everyday I am grateful to have a roof over my head. I wish people could understand that not all homeless people are the same, each case is individual and so many of our neighbors are just one tragedy away from homelessness. Homelessness isn't so much a personal failure but a policy failure. So many people live paycheck to paycheck. It's hard to keep positive when so many others are suffering. I do the best I can and that's all anyone can do.

"Having to live in a shelter does something to you. I felt like a failure but I knew that there were some things that were out of my control that kept me in the situation I was in. In the military I was taught to never give up and I continue to apply that every day. Hope also kept me going, hope for better days."

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU QUIT SMOKING?



HARD, YES. IMPOSSIBLE, NO.
 Insured or uninsured, trying to quit or helping a smoker quit, we can help. Read on.



1-800-QUITNOW
1-800-784-8669

RI HOMELESS BILL OF RIGHTS: In 2012, RI formally protect the rights of those experiencing homelessness through RI General Laws § 34-37.1-3. **The Homeless Bill of Rights states you have the:**

Right to use and **move freely in public spaces**, including, but not limited to, public sidewalks, public parks, public transportation and public buildings, in the same manner as any other person.

Right to **equal treatment by all state and municipal agencies**, including but not limited to, public libraries, police, RIPTA, EMS, city and town halls and the state house.

Right to **employment nondiscrimination** while seeking or maintaining employment due to the lack of permanent mailing address, mailing address being that of a shelter or social service provider, or because they know or think you to be experiencing homelessness.

Right to **emergency medical care** free from discrimination. You cannot be denied medical care or emer-

gency services because of your housing status. You have the right to be treated when you seek medical attention.

Right to **vote** at your local polling place, register to vote, and receive documentation necessary to prove identity for voting without discrimination because of your lack of address.

Right to **confidentiality** and protection from disclosure of records and information, including but not limited to: shelter sign-in lists, service provider records, waiting lists, and medical records without appropriate legal authority.

Right to a reasonable expectation of **privacy** (protected from search or seizure) of your personal belongings, such as a backpack or a tent, to the same extent as if you were in a house.

If you feel your rights have been violated go to www.rihomeless.org/hbor or email info@rihomeless.org

Empathy in Action: Practical Ways to Support and Respect People Experiencing Homelessness

We would like to offer some advice to help those experiencing homelessness. I'd like to start by stating that our unhoused brothers and sisters deserve the same respect and courtesy as any other person, including yourself. To build on this, I also think it's important to **introduce yourself by name, and ask their name in return**, which can be a nice icebreaker and also helps restore their sense of dignity and self-worth.



or personal hygiene items. Socks are always appreciated by this community. You could also make a monetary donation if you're able to, or perhaps just direct people to services that can help them with housing, connecting them to resources, and identifying their needs. **If you're interested in working directly with our sisters and brothers, you could also seek training.**

By showing homeless people respect and empathy, and connecting them with appropriate resources, we can help make a real difference in their lives.

If you're still not sure on what you want to do, contact us and we will help you find what you're looking for: streetsights@gmail.com

As for ways to help people who are unhoused, I think the best place to start is by **volunteering with homeless-serving organizations.** It's a chance to get to know people on a one-on-one basis, hear their stories, and find out what kind of help they need. Another way to help is to **donate clothes**

CAROL'S STORY

By Minister Brian Archibald

If you were to come to the morning breakfast at Church of the Master, you probably wouldn't even notice her. She's a rose among the thorns. A shiny little positive light that seems to never have a complaint. She just does what she needs to do for her husband and the family that she shares a place that they squat in. Even I, in my position as a minister, with all of my insights that are a necessity for my position didn't notice her until someone recommended that I spend some time getting to know her, and I'm glad I did.

Her name is Carol Bartlet. She is sixty-seven years old and at a young age she traveled with her family as an army brat which eventually ended her up in Rhode Island. She has been married for 38 years and takes care of her husband who had stroke which paralyzed half of his body and has suffered a heart attack among several other issues. On April sixth of last year she was evicted with very little notice and forced out of her home having to leave many of her personal possessions including the remains of her daughter.

Today, she is squatting in an apartment with other family members and friends who are living with no other amenities except electricity. No heat, no refrigerator, nothing. As she told me her story, I had to muster up all the courage I could so as not to cry from this story of a beautiful, quiet

gem whose only wish is to find safety and security for her and her loved ones. And to make things even worse, she has to be out of the place she is currently living in on the 28th of this month.

Currently she is waiting for a word from Amos House who is actually opening a seniors center. I'm not sure if they will be providing housing at this center, but it is my hope and prayer that they are doing something more than just creating a drop in shelter because as we all know there is a serious need that is not being met in our state, or by its politicians

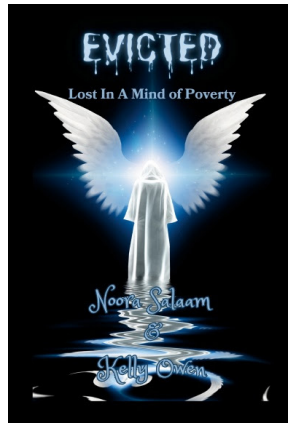


who claim to be doing all that they can, and yet people like this beautiful young lady are suffering. As I interviewed this beautiful woman, I began to think about what might happen to me, my wife and my roommates if my landlady just decided to say that she needed us to move, and yes, this can happen. Not just to me, but to any of us. The laws in this state favor landlords and barely do anything to work for the tenants of the places that we live in. It's a sad situation when a 67-year-old resident is reduced to squatting and living in a situation that can be potentially dangerous, and nothing is being done about it. What is the

solution when our government officials are doing absolutely nothing but sitting on their hands? Our unhoused residents are suffering and desperate for something, anything to give them the safety and security that is supposed to be given to every human being in this country, in this state, in our city. What is the solution for this lovely gem, a rose among the thorns, whose only desire is to have a place that she can call home?

New Book: *Evicted - Lost in a Mind of Poverty*

“EVICTED” *Lost In A Mind of Poverty* are raw accounts of what these individual women, across geographic, cultural, racial, and religious divides, encountered in their lives, with a blue print that has testified to be their resilience, grit, and to be more experiences that their self-worth that goodness veils. Noora and Kelly connect- COVID pandemic in itself was a global, but tended beyond to be scientific genocide upon the human race. It was their in-depth conversations, which served as the basis for this book about the homeless and their own individual experiences. Needless to say, life on the streets extends beyond addiction, and it is these reasons that these poets explore in their poetry, individually and with their collaborations.



NB: All proceeds of the sales of this book will be going to **Street Sights**, a magazine and resource guide for the unhoused in Providence Rhode Island, as an expression of gratitude that life prevails beyond our pain. And also to show appreciation to Dave Eisenberger, a member of SNQ.

Forward by Robert R. Bradley, Jr., LCSW, LSATP Family Therapist and published author.

To order a copy of *Evicted*, visit: bit.ly/evicted-street-sights

We are so appreciative of the generosity of the authors, Noora Salaam and Kelly Owen. Please share this with your family and friends.



Organizational Spotlight: FEEDRI



I had the pleasure to visit FEEDRI last week and sit down with Johanna, the director. Street Sights is excited to work with them to help bring food to our most vulnerable, our homeless sisters and brothers. We talked about ways we can provide food to those who are outside living in deplorable conditions. Right now we are working on a plan that needs all of YOU who are feeding our friends to come together to strategize ways that we can all do better. Will you join us in this important conversation? Would you be able to join a zoom meeting to be a part of the planning process?

Please contact Streetsights@gmail.com and let us know. We know we all can do better. Let's work together!

FeedRI.org



Every Rhode Islander deserves reliable access to nutritious food. Since 2009, Feed RI has turned this belief into action, creating sustainable solutions to food insecurity across our state.

Visit Hope Market: All are welcome at Hope Market! Every shopping trip powers our mission to feed Rhode Island – today and tomorrow.

310 Bourne Avenue, Building 70, Rumford, RI 02916 (401) 638-4673

Hours: Monday: 3PM – 6PM; Tuesday: 12PM – 3PM; Wednesday: 3PM – 6PM; Thursday: Senior Hours (55+): 10AM – 11AM Regular Hours: 11AM – 1PM; First and third Saturdays: 8AM – 12PM

POETRY WALL

No Home by Anonymous

All alone nowhere to go
All I have is a blanket and coat
Usually my clothes soaked, I sit here cloaked
People passing by I watch them go by in the most usual way
Never a hello, nothing to say
I sit back and my tears falling as I cry
What happened? What have I done? Why has this life begun?
As I place my body underneath my shawl of just being cold
Where there is no sun, using a snowbank as a bed, a backpack a pillow to lay my head
A piece of bread I had saved from yesterday's meal it had quite the appeal, it was something my stomach empty it feels
I am cold and alone something known
I have no home, no place to sleep, not safe crying for some time, darkness creeps
Please someone it is a crime
Passing me by all the time
I want to do is cry how can you not help, only deny
Give me a smile - a hello - a time of day
I promise my best to say thank you and bless you, good day
My appearance may be different, it's because I have no home

Where I Belong by Christine Fernandes

I didn't start off this way
I used to wake up hopeful everyday
Somewhere along the line I made a big mistake
Now, no matter how hard I try
I can't get a break
I really don't know anymore where I belong
My life has become a sad and lonely song
And there are so many others just like me
In some type of bondage longing to be free
I see them lost in these hard streets
With quiet weathered faces the look of defeat
We can feel each other's hardship and pain
Oh the insufferable torture in our brain
I am forever grateful FATHER GOD has shown
That with these people I am never alone.

Have a poem you'd like to see in Street Sights?
Email it to: streetsights@gmail.com

RHODE ISLAND MEAL SITES

BE SURE TO CALL IN ADVANCE FOR INFORMATION AS SOME THINGS ON THIS LIST MAY BE OUT OF DATE.

PAWTUCKET:

Pawtucket Soup Kitchen
195 Walcott Street (401) 258-4616

Breakfast M-F 7:15-8:00am
Dinner M-F 4:45-5:30 pm
Saturday Brunch 10:15 - 11:00 a.m.
Lunch M-F Downtown Pawtucket
across from Visitor's Center - 11:30 am
and Collyer Park - 11:50 am

NEWPORT:

MLK Center

20 Dr Marcus Wheatland Blvd
(401)272-0220

Breakfast Mon-Fri 7:30-8:30am

The Salvation Army

51 Memorial Blvd
(401) 846-3234

Dinner Sunday 12:30-1:15pm
Dinner Friday 4:00-4:45pm

EAST PROVIDENCE:

Good Neighbors

55 Turner Ave (401) 433-0045

Lunch Mon-Thurs. 11:00am-1:00pm and
Friday 9:30am-1:00pm

PROVIDENCE:

Amos House
460 Pine Street , Prov. (401) 272-0220

Breakfast M-F 7:00-8:00am
Lunch M-F 11:00-12:30, Saturday 11:00-
12:00pm (closed first Saturday of the
month)

Church of the Master Meal Site

15 Valley Street (401) 861-5568

Breakfast Saturday 9:00-10:00am

Mathewson Street Church

134 Mathewson Street, (401) 331-8900

Breakfast M, W, Th, Sat 9-10:00am and
Sunday 8:00-9:00am
Lunch M, W, Th, Sat 11:30am-12:30pm
Dinner Friday doors open at 3pm,
dinner is served from 3:30-5:00pm
(Friday meal hosted by Better Lives
Rhode Island)

McAuley House

622 Elmwood Ave, Prov. (401) 941-9013

Breakfast Mon - Fri 8 AM - 9:30 AM
Lunch Mon-Fri 11:15 AM - 1 PM

Providence Rescue Mission

627 Cranston St, Prov. (401) 274-8861

Dinner Mon-Sun 5:00pm

The Salvation Army

386 Broad Street (401) 831-1119

Dinner Sunday 4:00-4:45pm (closed
first Sunday of the month)

St. Edward Food & Wellness Center

1001 Branch Avenue, Prov (401) 600-
1935

Lunch Saturday 12:00-1:30pm

St. Charles Soup Kitchen

178 Dexter Street, Prov (401) 946-5586

Dinner Thursday 4:15-6:00pm

St. Patricks Church

244 Smith Street (401) 421-7070

Dinner Monday 4:00-5:00pm

WOONSOCKET:

New Beginnings

24 Hamlet Ave (401) 356-4066

Lunch Monday - Thursday
11:30 am - 12:45 pm

Breakfast M-F 7:15-8:00am

The Rhode Island Community Food Bank supports 147 emergency food organizations around the state. Use your phone to scan the the QR code below to access a directory of all the emergency food providers in the state. Or visit the website: rifooodbank.org/find-food/

The Food Bank information is updated every month - open your camera and hold it up to the QR code it will pop up and then press to access the information.

