



MID-MAINE HOMELESS SHELTER AND SERVICES

Everyday Advocacy

The other day I was down in Augusta testifying in favor of a bill that would help people who have been evicted. There were a number of other people like me – professionals with lots of facts and figures and long years of experience. As the commercial says, we know a lot because we've seen a lot.

After all the professionals were done speaking, a young man in a suit took to the podium. He explained that he was also in favor of the bill. He then shared his story: he and his wife and young family were offered a job in a new state. They rented a house in their new town but on move-in day discovered the backyard was littered with glass that was embedded in the soil. With a dog and a young child, they needed that yard to function.

He said they tried to work with the landlord, but eventually ended up in an eviction court where, happily, the family was ultimately successful. But when they tried to rent a new house, they were turned down time after time because they had an eviction filing on their permanent record.

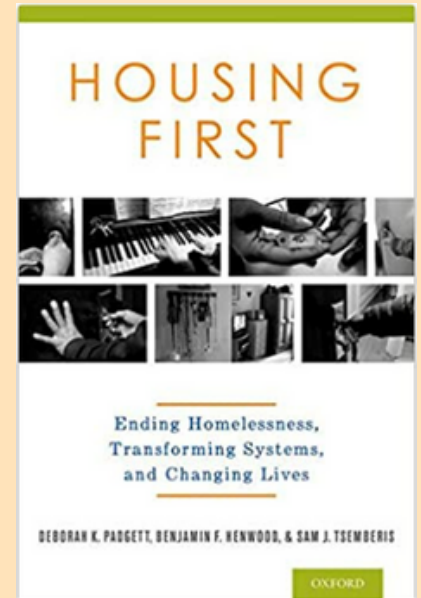
It was the most powerful advocacy I've witnessed this legislative session. He did more in 3 minutes than the rest of us had in the preceding 45. It was an important reminder that advocacy matters.

Addressing homelessness in our communities requires a lot of advocacy from all kinds of community members. This is how we make lasting change. So during this legislative session when advocacy matters perhaps more than at any other time, here is some encouragement on how we can all be better advocates for people experiencing homelessness.



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RECOMMENDED READING



Housing First: Ending Homelessness, Transforming Systems, and Changing Lives (Illustrated Edition) by Deborah Padgett M.P.H, Benjamin Henwood Ph.D., Sam Tsemberis Ph.D.

This book is the first to chronicle the story of Housing First (HF), a paradigm-shifting evidence-based approach to ending homelessness that began in New York City in 1992 and rapidly spread to other cities nationally and internationally. The authors report on the rise of a 'homeless industry' of shelters and transitional housing programs that the HF approach directly challenged by rejecting the usual demands of treatment, sobriety and housing readiness.

Kelly Rancourt has been volunteering at the shelter since 2005, starting when we were located on Ticonic Street. She and her husband have cooked Thanksgiving dinner at MMHSS for the past five years! When she isn't volunteering or working at Kennebec Savings Bank, she likes travelling and trying new restaurants with her husband!



Welcome to our new board members!

We're honored to welcome two talented and compassionate individuals to our volunteer board of directors.



Samantha Burdick was born and raised in Central Maine, and "boomeranged" back after college. She has a bachelor's degree from Northeastern University and a master's from the University of Southern Maine.

She spends a significant amount of her time advocating and working with community organizations serving on the board of Main Street Skowhegan, United Way of Kennebec Valley, Waterville Sunrise Rotary, KV Connect, and the Waterville Planning Board.

Save the date!



Our Annual Meeting will be held on Monday, June 26. Location TBD. Hope to see you there!



Many thanks to Waterville Rotary for their support! We are so grateful to have been chosen as the recipient for a Rotary grant in the amount of \$500 that will help MMHSS in our mission. Farthest left in the photo above is Tanya Fossett, Development and Communications Director at MMHSS.

OUR CURRENT NEEDS:



Reusable spray bottles



Washcloths



Earbuds

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1. Get Educated: when we see someone in our personal lives or out in the community, it can be easy to generalize based on that experience. I try not to do that, although, admittedly, that single experience can be powerful. To balance that perspective, I spend a lot of time reading about homelessness – its causes, how we can address it, best practices, and how homelessness fits into a broader policy context. One of my favorite books on the subject is *Housing First: Ending Homelessness, Transforming Systems, and Changing Lives* (Illustrated Edition) by Deborah Padgett M.P.H, Benjamin Henwood Ph.D., Sam Tsemberis Ph.D.

2. Get Involved: there is no substitute for getting involved in your local community and understanding how your local town or city council is tackling difficult issues. We're incredibly fortunate to have a city council in Waterville that is supportive of the work we and others do in addressing the individual and systemic issues relating to poverty, addiction, housing instability, and homelessness. We can always use another advocate at the table or in the room.



3. Find a way to serve: community service is the lifeblood of getting things done in America and it is one of the most fulfilling methods of advocacy. And there are so many ways for each of us to use our time, talents, and treasure for advocacy! Many people engage in direct service by serving a meal, swinging a hammer, or mentoring a young person. Others prefer indirect service, like hosting a fundraiser. Some even join a nonprofit board of directors (hint, hint) because they have experience running a business or nonprofit and enjoy governance. Find a way to serve that suits you.

During the legislative session, another great way to serve is communicating with your elected officials. They value the views of their constituents more than any other. Now is the time to put those letter writing and public speaking skills to the test! Check out what's happening at two committees: the Joint Committee on Housing and the Judiciary Committee and sign up for the email list to get all the latest information (<https://legislature.maine.gov/committee/>)

Finally, it's important to create space for people to engage in self-advocacy. Standing in your truth is a powerful experience, both for the individual and for our communities. The more we listen to people with lived experience, and encourage them to speak for themselves, the better off we'll all be because we won't waste time developing plans that don't work.

Instead, we'll be co-creating a better future together.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katie".

Dr. Katie Spencer-White
MMHSS CEO



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Joe P. volunteered at the shelter this past winter before heading to New Zealand for college. His contributions were appreciated by staff and guests alike, and he will be missed!

What was your first impression of MMHSS?

Everyone was helpful and kind. I was given clear directions on what to do.

What do you wish other people knew about MMHSS?

There is no shame in needing help, especially during the winter months.

Was there anything that influenced your decision to volunteer with MMHSS?

I found it on the Waterville website. After applying to some of the other organizations, the MMHSS was the only one to respond.

What do you do when you aren't (working, volunteering)?

I play guitar and drums.

Volunteers needed

We always need volunteers to help with kitchen tasks, organizing, basic cleaning, and various projects that come up. Stop by the shelter to get a volunteer application, or email olivia@shelterme.org for more information!

PRESS RELEASE

Mid-Maine Homeless Shelter and Services was chosen as one of seventeen recipients for a grant from Maine Housing, and will receive \$696,000. We plan to use this money to purchase a second building that can be operated as an offsite warming center. This will allow us to serve more individuals in our shelter on Colby Street, as well as more individuals in need of our warming center. This past year, we served an average of 17 people each night in our warming center, in addition to our regular guests. The need is there and growing.

"MaineHousing is pleased to announce it has awarded more than \$16.3 million in state grant funding for 17 different housing and shelter projects across the state. In total, these initiatives will support housing and shelter for more than 500 people in Maine who are experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity.

...The funding for these projects comes from Governor Janet Mills' Winter Emergency Energy Relief Plan, which passed with the broad bipartisan support of the Maine Legislature in January. In addition to the funding announced today, the Governor's plan also included funding for short-term overnight warming shelters, for which \$1 million to fund 13 shelters was award in February."
(Excerpt from: <https://mainehousing.org/news/news-detail/2023/03/23/mainehousing-awards---16.3-million-for-shelter-and-housing-supports-statewide>)