



Hearth

Ending Elder Homelessness | Spring Newsletter 2024



Join us for Our Annual Meeting

Thursday, April 4, 2024

See last page for more information.

Did you know?

In 2023, 492 seniors were served by Hearth's housing and services!

Winter Walk

February 11, 2024

See more on page 6.



Hearth's New CEO — Inspired by our Founders

The start of a new year is viewed as a new beginning. There is often a commitment to make improvements in our lives or set goals to accomplish something new or challenging. A new year is also an opportunity to dream and imagine the possible. This year I am honored to serve as Hearth's new CEO. I welcome this opportunity to build on the vision and successes of my predecessors and plan for Hearth's future.

The mission to end elder homelessness and the foresight of the seven founding women is inspiring. It is their courage and dedication that guides the leadership of Hearth today.

My vision for Hearth centers around ensuring Hearth's current and future fiscal sustainability; expanding Hearth's reach and capacity to serve more clients; and increasing Hearth's visibility by actively engaging the community in Hearth's mission to end elder homelessness. I want to see Hearth Soar in '24 in **S**ervice, **O**utcomes, **A**ssessments, and **R**esults.

As I work to grow Hearth, I will strive to lead with the same dedication, energy and moral clarity as our founders. I am grateful for your support. Together, we can be a mighty force to end elder homelessness.

Sincerely,



Rhonda A. Pieroni
President and CEO

Pictured below: Anna Bissonnette, Founder/Board Emerita, Rhonda A. Pieroni, President and CEO, Ellen Feingold, Founder/Board Member



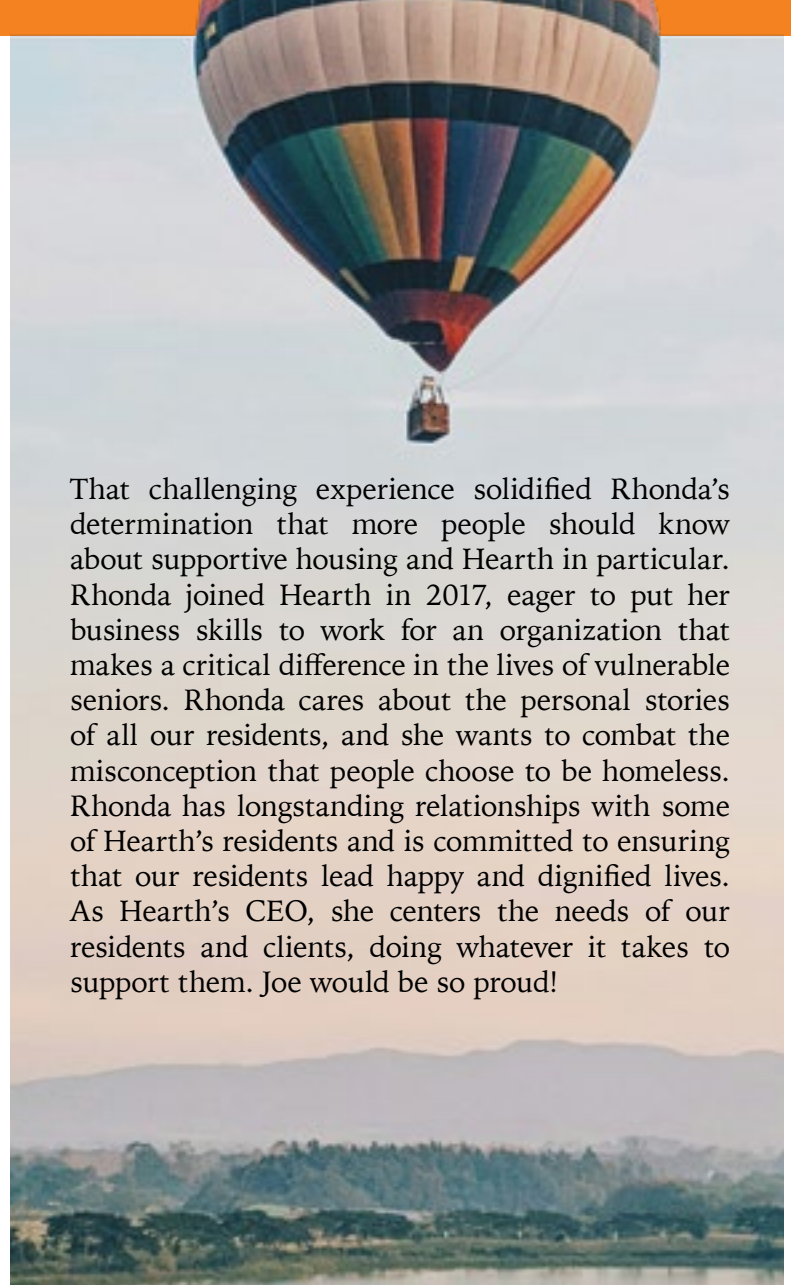


About our new CEO...

Rhonda's late brother, Joe, predicted it: he used to tell her that she would be a CEO one day.

Her family saw plenty of evidence of Rhonda's drive. Upon graduating high school, she worked full time days and attended college in the evenings. Rhonda was the first in her family to attend college, earning a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration from Northeastern University and then an M.Ed. in Organizational Management from Endicott College. Although she felt she missed out on the experience of college life, Rhonda saw the benefit of having professors who were practitioners, and the advantage of studying with students who had work experience to share. Together they worked on business plans, projects and presentations, which propelled them to advance professionally. Rhonda began her career at Fisher College in Boston's Back Bay, eventually rising to be the Vice President of Administration.

When a family member needed help, Rhonda stepped in to assist. Back then, Rhonda had no idea that there was such a thing as supportive housing. She searched for every possible solution, but nothing seemed to fit. She encountered directly the sad reality that our healthcare system can be more oriented toward symptoms than root causes. For many seniors, supportive housing is the foundational aspect of their overall health.



That challenging experience solidified Rhonda's determination that more people should know about supportive housing and Hearth in particular. Rhonda joined Hearth in 2017, eager to put her business skills to work for an organization that makes a critical difference in the lives of vulnerable seniors. Rhonda cares about the personal stories of all our residents, and she wants to combat the misconception that people choose to be homeless. Rhonda has longstanding relationships with some of Hearth's residents and is committed to ensuring that our residents lead happy and dignified lives. As Hearth's CEO, she centers the needs of our residents and clients, doing whatever it takes to support them. Joe would be so proud!



Dignity in action: our Representative Payee's journey with residents

It is not enough to place residents into a safe and secure place they can call home; many need additional support. Managing one's finances on a tight budget can be challenging. Most of our residents receive social security income. A portion of their income goes towards their rent. They need to budget the balance of their income for food, transportation, medicine, and other necessities.

That's where Natacha Bernard comes in. Along with her other responsibilities in Hearth's finance office, Natacha is a "Representative Payee", which means she is authorized by the Social Security Administration to accept the monthly payment and assist residents according to the priorities and financial needs of each person. Hearth makes this service available to our residents, but it is not a requirement. Natacha has been in this role since 2021, but she originally joined Hearth in 2015 when she served as an Outreach Senior Case Manager.

"The work I did as an Outreach Senior Case Manager helps me as a Representative Payee now because I know how to advocate for my residents and protect them from potential scammers. I try to make sure they have what they need which gives them peace of mind. When they have peace of mind, I have it as well and can do my work to the best of my ability."

"It all begins with making sure that their rent is paid on time and once that happens, I help them work out a budget for the month."

Natacha says that in some respects, residents see her as family especially those that do not otherwise have a relative or caretaker nearby.

"I am protective of our residents. I work with them one on one because each of them has different needs."

Building trust with each resident takes time, patience, understanding them as individuals, and meeting them where they are. Sometimes that involves ordering personal items or supplies. Other times that may just involve staying with them on the phone while they share with her what is on their mind.

"The partnership between myself and the residents is sacred. It's about making sure that they not only trust me, but they feel heard and know that I am supporting them. I have certain clients that may feel overwhelmed when they think that they do not have control over their finances, but I reassure them and hear them because I understand how that must make them feel."

Overall, the Representative Payee is only one piece of providing sustainable supportive housing services and we are so glad that Natacha is part of the team improving the lives of Hearth residents.



Hearth Program Nurse: Cultivating Community



Joe Fitzgerald is Hearth's program nurse at three sites: the Anna Bissonnette House (Boston's South End), and Ruth Cowin House (Brookline) and occasionally at Olmsted Green (Franklin Park). Joe just celebrated his one-year anniversary at Hearth, having joined in February of 2023. He, along with the Director of Health Services, Mardi Mitchell, offer health support and share best practices with residents. One major focus is health education. Joe has extensive experience running support groups for people with various conditions. In March of 2023, he started a diabetes support group for residents at Hearth's Anna Bissonnette House.

“The residents were constantly asking me questions about what was best for them and often times they would say that they were alone in this, so I decided to create a space for them to share and learn. My approach is for whatever they need, to know it is there for them. I'm trying to teach them as kind of what I've been taught myself — because it's about instead of making drastic changes they need to start making smaller changes.”

The diabetes support group has been a huge success. Not only are the residents engaged but Joe saw a big difference in their eating habits and health numbers.

“I was happy that a couple of people in this group had a pronounced drop on their A1C (average blood sugar). One woman has lost 35 pounds. She felt liberated and like a completely new person”.

Joe also hosts karaoke on Fridays to bring more community to the different sites. He says that by hosting karaoke many of the residents that typically do not come out of their homes come out and either sing, dance or share a memory related to a song.

“What I noticed is that music and health go hand in hand. Music lifts people up and requires minimal effort just sit and listen and share. For me this is another way for us to not only improve our resident's health, but also create a sense of community and belonging. I want our residents to live a dignified long life and I will do all that I can to make sure of that.”



A Gift from the Hearth Family

Each year we receive beautiful handmade gifts. Our board member, Marilyn Miller, donated these quilts made by her sister, Nancy L. Miller and her friend, Lynn McLean.

Winter Walk – February 11, 2024

Over 30 members of the Hearth community - staff, board members, friends and cute dogs! - came together with 4,000 people on Sunday, February 11th for Boston's annual Winter Walk to raise awareness and funds to end homelessness.



Hearth's Annual Celebration

On October 19th, Hearth hosted our Annual Celebration, the first after a several year hiatus due to the pandemic. It was wonderful to be back together again! Dr. Jim O'Connell, President of Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program, was our keynote speaker. We bid farewell to Mark Hinderlie, Hearth's CEO for the past 17 years. Former board president, Mary Parker, offered a magnificent challenge match of \$25,000, which brought in over \$60,000 to Hearth!

Many thanks to all our sponsors:

Doug Poutasse
Marilyn Miller
Kevin & Louisa McCall
Paradigm Properties
Dr. Tania Phillips
Diane Valle
Sue Forti and Bob Houlihan
Karyn Scheier
Gregory Manousos & Amy Rosenberg
Goddard House
Anne Marie Madigan
Stacey Zawel



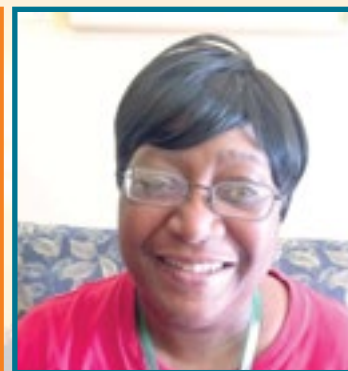
Representing their Neighbors' Interests, Meet Monthly to Advise Leadership on Issues Important to Residents

Every month, for over 14 years, in the activities room at one of Hearth's residential programs, ten residents from across Hearth's portfolio meet over coffee to share their experiences living in Hearth's programs. They call themselves the Community Advisory Council (CAC). Tom, a long-time CAC member and Overnight Manager says "I'm one of the original founders. The Community Advisory Council has been around over a decade. The initial function was to find things that would be good for all of residents of Hearth's properties. In our earlier days, a resident from Burroughs Street House shared that they were not allowed to have overnight visitors and learned from the other CAC members that other sites did allow overnight visitors. The CAC put together a recommendation to leadership to request that the policy that allowed overnight visitors also apply to Burroughs Street House and we were successful. More recently, the CAC has focused on recommendations to support resident safety, accessibility and improving the feeling of being at home. In the future I hope the CAC can take on making sure every resident is aware

of whom their CAC representative is at their site so we can continue to ensure we advocate for all of our neighbors."

Kathy, another CAC member, added "I feel as though I'm helping my community with things they're hesitant to speak on—I can speak on their behalf."

All of us at Hearth are deeply grateful to the members of the Community Advisory Council for all that they do to improve the quality of life for all Hearth residents.



Furnishings Fund!

Last spring, Hearth partnered with 2Life Communities to house nine previously homeless seniors in new apartments in Newton. As exciting as it was to have nine apartments for our Outreach clients, an additional hurdle was that we needed to furnish these homes. There is no steady source of funding, but we believe that furnishings are essential to the health and wellbeing of Hearth's residents. From our perspective, it is inadequate to give a person the keys to their new home if it does not have a bed, a table and a place to sit. Additionally, some of our clients have mobility issues, so we need to pay particular attention to their needs.

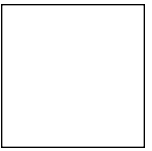
Hearth donors stepped up in a big way. In response to a summer appeal, we got \$27,000, which was enough to minimally furnish each home with a bed, mattress, table, chairs and in some cases, kitchen supplies. **THANK YOU!**

Hearth has an ongoing need for financial gifts to sustainably house our residents. If you would like to contribute to this effort, please go to www.hearth-home.org and choose "Furnishings Fund".





www.hearth-home.org | 617-369-1550 | 1640 Washington Street, Boston, MA 02118



Our Mission

Hearth is a non-profit organization dedicated to the elimination of homelessness among the elderly. This mission is accomplished through a unique blend of prevention, placement, and housing programs all designed to help elders find and succeed in homes of their own.

Follow us on social media!

@hearthinc @elderlyhomeless @hearth_inc

Save the Date!

Date: Thursday, April 4, 2024
Time: 8:00am-9:30am
Location: The Cathedral Church of St. Paul, Boston
(138 Tremont St, Boston, MA 02111)

You're Invited to Our Annual Meeting!

Join us for a light breakfast and meet Hearth's new CEO, Rhonda Pieroni. Learn about her vision for Hearth to **SOAR in '24** in the fight to end elder homelessness.
Contact: ceo@hearth-home.org



Rhonda Pieroni
President and
CEO
Hearth, Inc.



Keynote Speaker
Edward Augustus,
Massachusetts
Secretary of
Housing and Livable
Communities



Guest Speaker
Kenzie Bok,
Administrator,
Boston Housing
Authority