Bring it Home raises nearly $120,000

Shawn Hunter receives 2017 Emmett Jones Memorial Award

Shawn Hunter didn’t know he was homeless growing up moving “place to place, house to house, apartment to apartment, couch to couch” with his mother, who he says was a drug addict.

After high school and being honorably discharged from the U.S. Army, he found himself following the footsteps of his mother. Shawn was a disabled American vet addicted to drugs and homeless. But he didn’t give up on trying to get onto a life path he had not known before.

In November 2010 he was discharged from what he says was “my final treatment center” and “I didn’t give up. I kept going.” A year later, Shawn entered our housing program and now works to inspire others who are living the life he once did. “He gives back so much to the individuals who are in need with their sobriety and makes sure they are staying on track,” says Rosie Jones, who was his supportive services coordinator for two years.

Shawn was presented with the 2017 Emmett Jones Memorial Award at this year’s Bring it Home event. The award is presented annually to recognize the hard work, perseverance and accomplishments of one of the participants in our programs.

These days, Shawn takes an overnight shift once a week answering a hotline for those struggling with sobriety, is involved with many Narcotics Anonymous groups and serves as a speaker at their conferences and is also a member of the Disabled American Veterans Keane-Rankin Chapter 1.

The presentation of the seventh annual Emmett Jones Memorial Award, named after a dedicated employee who died in 2010, was a highlight of this year’s event.

In addition, the event raised almost $120,000 with almost $25,000 raised for our Critical Needs Fund. Another highlight of the evening was the ability of sponsors, donors and attendees, to “meet” some of those we serve through our annual “Welcome to My Home” video.

Thank you to our major Bring it Home sponsors!

Leadership Sponsor: O’Brien Construction

Presidents’ Circle Sponsors: Flagstar Bank, Maplewood Development

Benefactor Sponsors: Community Living Services, Huntington National Bank, Mercantile Bank of Michigan, Perfect Floors, Piper Management
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This year’s video included stories from:

– Jack who lived many years of his youth institutionalized and now owns his own home and works at a nearby restaurant.

– Jeanine who worked with veterans who were homeless before becoming homeless herself. She is now safely and independently housed, employed and a volunteer in her community.

– Ed who used to live in a group home and now lives independently with one roommate and is in training to be a peer mentor with Community Living Services and a volunteer.

– And Wilhelmina, a victim of sex trafficking by her family, who was homeless and is now in one of our housing programs. She advocates for victims and those still in the life and hopes to soon own her own home.

Hoping for a dish rack

Adopt A Family wish lists now available

A dish rack, boxer briefs and undershirts are starred items on one man’s Adopt A Family wish list, meaning they are the most desired. Another wish list seeks fitted sheets, a toaster oven and a clock radio.

Our annual Adopt A Family program has begun for this year and wish lists are now available. The majority of the available wish lists, usually filled with basic household necessities, are from people who have moved from the streets and into our housing programs since January.

The steps for individuals, families, office or groups who would like to be involved are:

1. Sign up and get a wish list. This can be done through our website at https://communityhousingnetwork.org/support/adopt-a-family/ or by contacting Tami Jelinek at TJelinek@chninc.net or 248-824-7316.

2. Shop for gifts. We recommend spending no more than $100 per recipient.

3. Wrap and label your gifts.

4. Deliver the gifts to one of our distribution centers. Wrapped and labeled gifts can be dropped off at our distribution centers (Oakland, Macomb or Wayne offices) through December 4.

“This is my sixth year working on the Adopt A Family program along with Tami Jelinek who has been such an asset to the program the last 3 years,” said Lisa Fuhr, our Special Events and Volunteer coordinator. “We are very happy to offer Adopt A Family again this year. It’s a great way for the community to get involved with Community Housing Network.”

Video links

The Emmett Jones Memorial Award 2017 video is available on our website and here: http://bit.ly/2x8QVRN

The “Welcome to My Home” video is available on our website and here: http://bit.ly/2ipHpAw
We took on a huge, new program and 543 received housing

There is always a sense of accomplishment when someone we’ve worked with is able to move from the streets or a shelter into housing. Each situation involves a complex set of problem solving by our staff which may include helping the potential program participant secure a state ID, or sometimes it involves clearing up previous utility bills, and always it includes finding a place that is affordable and secure.

Recently we were faced with an opportunity, which was also a challenge, by receiving an award much larger than we thought it would be, for a service we had not provided before. “It’s tough in the first year; we had to ramp it up to accommodate this program that has huge amounts of regulations and barriers,” said Marc Craig, our president.

It’s important to spend the entire amount each year, he said, or what remains returns to the federal government “so essentially it would be a resource that would be lost to the community.”

Mellena Martinez, the Community Programs manager, and the Community Programs team were able to execute the entire program and house 543 adults and children in FY 2017.

“The fact that Mellena and her team were able to rise to the occasion and get that done, while at the same time not overcommitting, was definitely a tightrope,” said Marc. “We had to reallocate some resources, and a lot of people put a lot of effort to get this done.”

This program was in addition to other programs we were working with involving U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development grants in Oakland and Macomb counties. “We were working double to find landlords willing to work with the program,” said Amy Conniff, Housing Resource Community coordinator. “We had to do a lot of negotiation.”

Some of those coming into the program had many barriers to overcome and the HUD Fair Market Rent value is lower than the current actual market rate, she said. As an example, she cited the Fair Market Rent for the program is $658 for a one-bedroom apartment and $863 for a two-bedroom apartment, lower than what many have available.

“It was a huge task,” Marc says, “and a big accomplishment for sure.” The successful completion means we will likely receive the same program funding next year and it will be easier to help many more people because we now have a well-oiled process in place.

Adopt A Family

If you don’t have time to shop and wrap, cash donations are also accepted year round. There is a donation button on the Adopt A Family page on our website.

In addition, we also collect general items for those in our housing programs and others. Items needed are: dish soap, kitchen sponges, household cleaners, Kleenex, toilet paper, paper towels, shampoo, conditioner, hand/bath soap, lotion, toothbrushes, toothpaste, dental floss, shaving cream, razors and deodorant. If you have any of these items you would like to donate, please contact Tami at the contact info listed on Page 2.
Message from Marc Craig

President

Each issue will highlight a message from a member of our executive team.

As a community, and a nation, we have made great strides in the areas of including people with disabilities in communities and addressing homelessness, particularly among our most vulnerable populations. We have also made vast advancements in the awareness of the need for more affordable housing, and ways of developing stronger, more vibrant communities. I have worked in these areas for decades and have seen many positive changes. One noteworthy point is that Michigan became the 11th state to close all institutions for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. This is a vital social cause, and I applaud Michigan for doing it.

At the same time, there are discussions about policy and changes that deserve our attention. I am sharing them here so you also become aware of them. If you have any concerns on these issues, I urge you to share them with your elected officials.

The first is Section 298, presenting the prospective for overhauling Michigan’s public mental health system. While the current system varies between communities, there is clearly room for improvement, efficiencies, improved direct staff care wages and better integration between the behavioral and physical health systems.

I have been speaking with elected officials and community leaders with a message that when we consider major policy shifts as it relates to a program such as Medicaid, we need to be very intentional and deliberate about what the consequences are going to be. So far, I have been pleased, for the most part, that they were informed and cared about the issues and want to maintain the gains we have achieved.

As we move forward, I continuously urge that changes made should be accompanied by a certain degree of caution to not give up any of the good that has been accomplished so far.

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