

HOMeward

WINTER 2020

Meet the fearless Andrea Hill

You have brain cancer.”

When Ms. Andrea Hill got this news late last year, she called the one person who was always there for her: Health Care for the Homeless Peer Advocate Ry-Keara Bates.

Ry had worked with Ms. Hill to navigate the grueling process of finding a home the year before and built up a strong rapport. “Ms. Hill was so adamant about her housing, healing – everything,” Ry explained. “Even when a few places fell through, she never gave up.” And the same is true with her cancer diagnosis.

Never one for self-pity, Ms. Hill takes on her radiation treatments the same way she’s approached other hurdles in life – with courage and a little help from Ry. “Sometimes I feel like I’m a walking miracle,” Ms. Hill reflects. “If I could get through all the substance use and living in a shelter, I can get through this. When you go out into the world, you have to be fearless.”

Now, instead of wondering where she’ll sleep or how to store her medications, Ms. Hill has a stable home where she can focus on her health and recovery.

After each appointment, she calls Ry to check in, comes home to the apartment she picked out in a neighborhood she loves and lays down in her bed to rest.



Ms. Hill is ready to face her next hurdle: cancer.

Help more people
find a place to heal.



www.hchmd.org/advocacy

Real talk between moms



Rickiea and her kids come to the Health Care for the Homeless Baltimore County clinic for care—and connection.

Last year, our Baltimore County team helped Rickiea Sanders move her family from the emergency shelter into a home of their own. Clinic Manager La Keesha Arrington-Vega sat down with Rickiea to reflect on their strong and spirited bond.

Rickiea: I'm from Baltimore, born and raised. I didn't have a mom and dad growing up – I had a godmom. So when she passed away, my kids were all I had. Last year, we spent Christmas in a hotel, and then we came to the shelter. We were there for eight months. La Keesha is our hero.

La Keesha: You are your own hero. You advocated for yourself as much as we did.

Rickiea: Yeah. I'm a go-getter. Once I stick my mind to something, I have to get it. I had to get out of the shelter. I was pregnant with twins. I had to follow curfew and eat the same food every day. My kids were around drugs.

La Keesha: I tried to help you as a human being and a mom. Sometimes that meant the kids were in my office—eating all my fruit snacks! But we helped you with health insurance and getting your kids covered. Our case manager, Umoh, helped you apply for disability, negotiated your lease and turned over every stone in the county to secure the deposit. I really just coordinated the appointments, transportation and made sure you were being taken care of.

Rickiea: Now I have a cozy apartment on the West side. I've been there three months. It's not perfect, but I cook every day. I don't have to wake up with others around me. I can use the bathroom in private...oh wait, not with seven kids I can't! But day-by-day, I'm working on myself and my attitude, too. I'm learning to be patient with my kids.

La Keesha: I have one child, and I don't know how I'm going to do it some days. Watching you, I've seen a quiet, dignified strength. You've got a loud strength, too (laughs), but I've learned that it's okay to take help when it's offered.

Rickiea: There's not a lot of people who push me to be successful. Even though you get on my nerves, I love you.



DONATE MONTHLY

Join heartbeat—a group of committed monthly supporters—to build a future without homelessness one month at a time.

giving.hchmd.org/heartbeat



WORK HERE

Looking to build relationships across boundaries like La Keesha and Rickiea?

We're hiring:

www.hchmd.org/work-here



CONNECT

Follow in PEEP-member footsteps (pg 3) and gather your friends to assemble street survival kits.

www.hchmd.org/fulfill-our-wishlist



PEEP members celebrate another successful food drive.

The power of our friends

It's early on a Monday and a group of friends sit around a table talking. Val's mom is in the hospital. Lonnie's feet are bothering him again. Edna sang in the choir at church. Clinton smiles and says, "How about those Ravens?!" The table erupts in cheers.

This is the weekly meeting of People Encouraging and Empowering People (PEEP), an emerging nonprofit organization and group of donors. Proudly wearing matching t-shirts, they dive into agenda item one: their fourth annual holiday food drive, which fed 11 families experiencing homelessness.

"Helping others is a big part of our recovery," says Lonnie Nelson, hinting at another aspect of PEEP's purpose. "We've all been through a lot, but we also know there are a lot of people out there who are still struggling."

In addition to their shared mission to give back, Val, Lonnie, Edna and Clinton all "graduated" from the state-certified addictions treatment program at Health Care for the Homeless.

"This group is a safe space," Lonnie says. "When you're in treatment, you come here to the clinic every day. But when you graduate, all of a sudden you're on your own. This is like after care for us. It's about knowing you're not alone."

As clients complete the addictions program, PEEP members cheer them on at the Friday graduation ceremonies. And they let folks know that, come Monday, there's a place where they'll be welcome.

"Being clean means a lot to me," says Desmond Williams, who's rarely missed a meeting over the last three years. "I have a better relationship with my friends and family. I have a lot left to give, and being around people who understand what I'm going through makes me feel much stronger."

Like any group of friends, members of PEEP laugh together, cry together and sometimes disagree. But most importantly, they all know they're not alone.

Housed or unhoused, we all have something valuable to give others. Help end homelessness with your gift: www.hchmd.org/more-ways-give

Remembering those we loved and lost

Baltimore native and Homeless Persons' Memorial Day planning member Mark Council helps keep friends who have passed away alive in love.



Q: How did you get involved in this event?

I've lived in the shelter since 2011. Two years ago, I saw the flyer, and the advocacy group I'm in, Housing Our Neighbors (HON), thought it would be a great idea to go. Now, I go to planning meetings to stay connected and share ideas.

Q: How would you describe this memorial?

It's hard to put the event into words. People read aloud the names of people we've lost due to the experience of homelessness. When we come together like this, we make sure our brothers and sisters are not forgotten. We recognize them and give them the respect they deserve.

Q: What resonates most with you?

I knew some of these people. When they read my friend's name, I thought, "Man, I just saw him." He was a good guy. I met him up at the shelter, and I was really heartbroken when he passed away. One name is too many, but over the last year we went up to almost 200.

Q: How can we make sure there are fewer names on the list next year?

People need to get informed about what's happening in the homeless community. Remember that on any given day, you could be homeless. Take the time to check on people you see sleeping on the streets and make sure they're doing okay. That can save a life.

Remember those we lost in 2019.
www.hchmd.org/news/alive-love

Break down barriers and make friends

Like many of us, Debbie Sostman has struggled with what to do when she sees people sleeping on the street. Before volunteering, she felt disconnected and unsure of how to help.

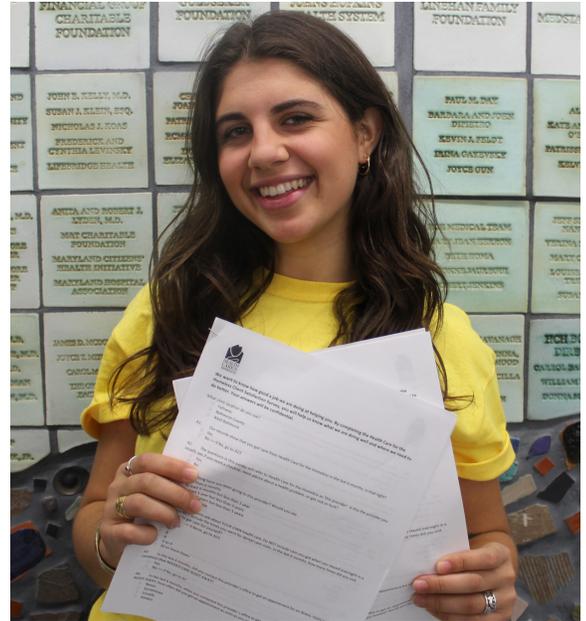
“I think a lot of us are aware of the work that needs to be done in Baltimore, and we feel this huge weight on our chest,” Debbie reflects. “For me, the way to lift that weight is to further engage.”

Twice a year, volunteers like Debbie help hundreds of clients to fill out surveys about their experiences. These surveys let us know how we’re doing as an agency—and where we need to improve. By surveying, volunteers also directly connect with people with the lived experience of homelessness.

When Debbie offered the first person a survey in our Fallsway lobby, she got more than a simple yes. She had a conversation that left both of them laughing until they cried.

“The client was so funny. And told me she hadn’t had fun like this in so long,” Debbie says. “To have a moment like that with a stranger helped me cross so many perceived boundaries. After a few visits, I’m making friends here. I recognize faces and people know my name.”

Debbie adds, “I wish everyone could have an experience like this. It means a lot to come here and see people face to face, listen to their stories and care for their wellbeing.”



Survey volunteer Debbie gathers feedback—and friends.

See the results of the survey and Debbie’s volunteer work.

www.hchmd.org/performance-improvement-0



LOBBY DAY | Thursday, February 27

Wonder what you can do to make lasting change in Baltimore? Join staff and clients in Annapolis to advocate for policies that end homelessness. RSVP at www.hchmd.org/lobby-day

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

THE CHOCOLATE AFFAIR | Saturday, February 1

What do you crave? The crowd? The energy? The chocolate? Join Baltimore’s top chefs for a night that ticks all the boxes. Tickets at chocolateaffair.org or call 443-703-1345

CLINIC TOUR | Thursday, February 13

Your chance to see our downtown clinic in action. Tour starts at 9 a.m. RSVP to tours@hchmd.org

MAMMOJAM MUSIC FEST | Saturday, March 7

Rock out to support cancer screenings for women like Ms. Hill (pg 1). Tickets at www.mammojam.org

CLIENT ART SHOW | Thursday, April 23

Enjoy a free gallery-style evening of art and community. Select artwork will be for sale (cash only). 5-6:30 p.m. RSVP at www.hchmd.org/client-art-show