

PLEASE USE THE ENCLOSED ENVELOPE TO MAKE A DONATION TO NEXT STEP CENTER.

OUR MISSION:

To provide a temporary home for Somerset County families and individuals, enabling them to work toward a resolution of issues that might have led to homelessness. We do this by referrals to other county agencies for potential assistance and in-house counseling.

Our policy is to offer a helping hand, not a handout.

Next Step Center, Inc.
P.O. Box 850
406 Stoystown Rd.
Somerset, PA 15501
(814) 444- 8588
www.nextstepcenter.org



The new year brings warmer weather, festive spirits, and volunteers from the Penn State Extension “Master Gardeners” (bottom right), and volunteers from Grace United Methodist Church with Pastor James (top left) to the Next Step Center and Glade’s Centre.



NEXT STEP CENTER, INC.

Newsletter

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Vice-chair: Marlene Gotjen

Treasurer: Art Gotjen

Secretary: Paul Bomboy

Cory Merrbach

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Executive Director:

Lisa Wengerd

Transitions Coordinator/ Security:

Justin Kerrigan

Transitions Program /Office Assistant:

Becky Kozuch

Community Housing & Advocacy

Director:

Amanda Webreck

Community Housing & Advocacy Case

Manager:

Chrystal Shaulis

Community Housing Program Assistant

Tammy Purbaugh

Maintenance & Security Technician

Donald Myers

Directors Note: How did the Shelter Begin?

By Ernest D. Withrow

I recall awakening early one winter morning and driving to the office seeing icicles glistening in faint sunlight as they hung from trees and porches. The sunlight reflected off the snow-covered ground lending character to a beautiful winter landscape. The scene looked as if it had been taken from a picture in a winter wonderland. The moment was quickly interrupted as I turned my car radio on. The news broadcaster had just announced the death of an elderly woman who had frozen to death during the night. A grim reality reduced the snowy fairy tale to the cold temperature it represented.

Born on that cold morning, the Next Step Center took its first breath. It was the vision of two people, both in awe over the senseless death of a human being who had lost her life due to a lack of heat or a place to escape from the bitter cold.

I remember attending the first board meeting April 27, 1995. We gathered in the dining room at Kings Restaurant. All the participants were eager to see results. Our task was to show evidence that Somerset County needed a shelter for those who found themselves homeless. This committee compiled statistical data from local agencies and some as far away as Harrisburg. The planning stages of a shelter quickly proved to be a monumental undertaking and we often found ourselves multitasking.

As part of the advisory board, I met with many people from several committees throughout Somerset. Some were more willing to welcome a shelter than others. It was the responsibility of the advisory board to analyze the concerns of the community at large. Many people felt that a shelter would bring un-wanted residents to the neighborhood. Thus, the committee vowed that the shelter would only provide housing for Somerset County residents. This single fact seemed to ease the conscience and concerns of all. That was just the beginning.

Our Community Partnerships



LIVE UNITED



The Point

By Lisa Wengerd

The Point-in-Time (PIT) count is a count of sheltered and unsheltered people experiencing homelessness on a single night in January. The Next Step Center partners with Tableland Services, Inc. to complete this count. HUD requires that Continuums of Care conduct an annual count of people experiencing homelessness who are sheltered in emergency shelter, transitional housing, and Safe Havens on a single night. Continuums of Care also must conduct a count of unsheltered people experiencing homelessness every other year. Each count is planned, coordinated, and conducted locally. Somerset County Point-In-Time Count January 2022 findings:

All Households & Persons	Total Persons / Households		Emergency Sheltered		Unsheltered	
	2020	2022	2020	2022	2020	2022
# Households	4	10	3	8	1	2
#Persons	10	14	9	11	1	3
#Children <18yrs old	5	1	5	1	0	0
#Young Adults 18-24 yrs. old	1	4	1	4	0	0
#Adults 25+ yrs. old	4	9	3	6	1	3

Somerset County numbers may seem low but remember that's one night, from my experience over the last 9 years there are many more we do not know about because our homeless looks different than Pittsburgh or even Johnstown given our rural setting and having a limited number of volunteers to go out on that night limits the search, but homelessness is still here it's everywhere. Sleeping in cars, under a bridge, in a tent, an old shed or garage, couch surfing.

Homelessness, you must look at the whole persons whole picture, medical, past rental history, mental health, employment, family. I hear many times "well they can find a job there are openings everywhere" it is not always that simple. How do you get a job when your cloth need washed, you need a bath or you only have one pair of jeans and your shoes are falling apart or you have tooth ache so bad that you are having trouble talking because of the infection, you haven't ate a good meal in days or you have income and you call to look at an apartment and you are denied or never receive a call back? Rising rents and low availability make finding and keeping permanent housing more difficult for homeless and at-risk people and linking mainstream health & behavioral services with housing can also be a challenge.

That is where we come in The Next Step Center the only homeless shelter in Somerset County. We have a team of seven seasoned well trained dedicated individuals who are out there helping our homeless and at risk of homeless get back on their feet finding safe affordable housing and obtain self-sufficiency while linking them to other services they need. If you would like more information on HUD Point-In-Time Count visit their website at <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs>. If you would like to volunteer for the count or volunteer in other ways to help the Next Step Center give us a call at 814-444-8588 x11.

Lisa Wengerd
Executive Director



“Reaching Stability Successfully”

By Justin Kerrigan

Stability can mean different things to different people; however, it means reaching a stable state for most. For one guest at the Next Step Center, to reach stability in his own life he needed to find stability mentally, physically, and financially. Prior to coming to the shelter, he was battling with many various medical and mental health issues. He applied for SSI benefits to compensate his income while gaining better stability through partnering mental health providers in Somerset, PA since he was unable to work due to declining mental health. He entered the shelter in mid-November 2021 after finding himself homeless with nowhere to go. During his 30-days, the shelter seemed to be helping his mental health with the assistance of shelter staff and community volunteers through the evening shelter transitions program. Soon after the first 30-days ended, he agreed to move into our transitional housing apartment at the Next Step Center where he found temporary housing stability while he continued to attend to medical issues and waited for a determination on his SSI claim.

Throughout the following months he faced many difficulties with his mental health, but he was able to regain stability with the help of staff and other guests. The Next Step Center assisted him with completing his application for SSI and SSDI through the SOAR program, which expedites the review process for SSI and SSDI benefits. And he began searching for housing options in the Somerset area when he received approval for SSI and SSDI benefits for his medical conditions. In mid-June 2022, after completing numerous subsidized housing applications and searching for affordable housing, the Next Step Center was able to move him into his own apartment through a master lease with a partnering landlord where we will continue to provide housing and case management services.



Justin Kerrigan

Transitions Program Coordinator



“Landlord Spotlight!”

By Amanda Webreck

The Next Step Center prides itself on developing meaningful and comprehensive relationships with our extensive network of landlords. This month, we will be highlighting one of our distinguished property management/landlord duos: Double T Rentals (est. 2007).

Todd and Tyler Thomas are a father and son team that have taken on the rental property business by storm. Landlords in Somerset County have faced unique barriers that have created a challenging environment for many to maintain or sustain their rental properties- causing a lack of affordable housing within our community. Tyler Thomas noted that “According to the current economic situation in 2022, our biggest challenge is determining a fair amount for rent. With expenses increasing, as landlords, our first instinct is to increase rent. However, it is crucial that we must consider what is fair for our tenants. Another challenge is finding good tenants. It is important that we find tenants that not only respect our buildings, but also respect the other tenants. Many of our tenants have been with us for several years. Finding honest, trustworthy, and respectable tenants is vital to the success of Double T Rentals.”

Over the past two years, The Next Step Center has honed a unique relationship with Double T. Rentals including the use of master leasing properties and innovative case management services to mitigate landlord/tenant disputes. “Overall, our interactions and experience with the Next Step Center have been fantastic. Everyone is very friendly and easy to communicate with. For example, over the past two years, we have been presented with numerous obstacles. The amazing team from the Next Step Center has always been willing to assist every step of the way. Our partnership with the organization has been very enjoyable, and I look forward to our continued relationship with them,” Tyler added.

The Next Step Center continues to expand and foster our network of landlords. Landlords like Double T. Rentals are instrumental to improving the long-term condition and rental market within our community.



Amanda Webreck

Community Housing & Advocacy Director



Summer in Somerset

By Tammy Purbaugh

“The ache for home lives in all of us, the safe place where we can go as we are and not be questioned,” Maya Angelou.

This quote by Maya Angelou sums up the vision of Glades Centre as a place to make a home. The vision of Glades Centre as permanent, affordable housing came to fruition. Residents now have a safe building that is clean and well maintained, a safe place to be who they are and to call home. For one resident, Jimmy Yost, finding a home was a journey of steps.

His journey started at being homeless and having addiction and mental health issues. His first step was being at the Next Step Center shelter. It was a safe place to start over. His next step was a step toward having his own home. He moved to a not yet remodeled apartment at Glades Center, a space that was his very own with his own kitchen and bathroom. For Jimmy, who is from a culinary background professionally, a place to cook brought a little bit of his old self back. Just having a place to go at the end of a long day changed his mental health.

Jimmy’s journey was not a straight line but a journey of one step up forward and two steps back, but he kept going. Although he had a place to rest his head at night, the apartment was basic and had issues from decades of neglect. It was dark and in need of tender loving care.

Jimmy worked through some of his issues with addiction, mental health, and finding employment. Those things started to improve because of his hard work, and his patience and perseverance paid off.

When a newly remodeled apartment at Glades Center became available, he literally got to move up from the 3rd floor to the 4th floor. The newly remodeled apartment was light, airy, and clean with new appliances and a view of Somerset that is inspiring. To quote Jimmy, “I now have some control, and I have my own little space in the world at Glades Center.”

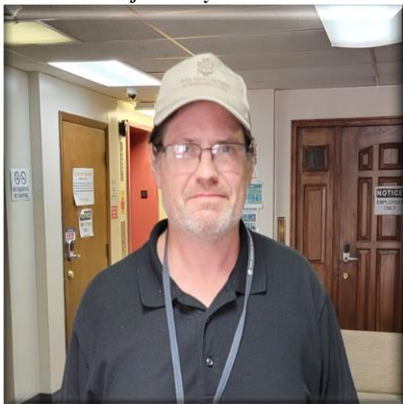
It changed his mental health to wake up in a clean and well-maintained space with a splendid view. According to Jimmy, “This really boosted my well-being and spiritual feeling of hope and goodness.”

Jimmy is now able to work on new goals like purchasing a car, getting a better job, and dealing with life’s issues. To say a little paint, new floors, and a clean bathroom doesn't change much is wrong. The vision of Glades Center is to give residents a safe place to be who they are and to call home, safe place for residences like Jimmy Yost to begin and continue their journey toward a better life.



Tammy Jo Purbaugh

Community Housing Program Assistant



Getting There “Successfully”

By Chrystal Shaulis

Zachary was homeless due to having no income and minimal housing skills to maintain a residence. Zach entered the Next Step Center back in October. Zach was placed in the Community Housing Assistance Program through NSC for supportive housing services. Zach moved up to NSC Transitional units until he was able to obtain income, along with gaining basic budgeting and housing skills. Zach had previously applied for Social Security, but the process was moving very slow. With the help of Amanda Webreck through SOAR Zach was able to get approved for Social Security. Zach started paying rent for the NSC Transition unit on his own, he then was moved to a unit that NSC has a Master Lease with the landlord. Zach continues to pay his rent to NSC on time with no issues. Zach will successfully be exiting the CHAP Housing Program and taking over the lease at the apartment he is in now that he has obtained income along with budgeting and housing skills



Chrystal Shaulis

Community Housing & Advocacy Case Manager

30-Days for Change

By Rebecca Kozuch

We have a client who was recently residing at the Next Step Center, and has had trouble with adapting and adjusting when he first entered the shelter. New surroundings and a change in daily routine made him motivated to find employment and housing in the Somerset area. During his stay at the Next Step Center, he attended daily life skills classes and workshops and 1-on-1 case management with the evening Transitions Program where he worked on budgeting, self-sufficiency, and overall health and wellness. After only several weeks, he obtained full-time employment locally and also found affordable housing with a local landlord. With assistance from Tableland Services and agreement with the landlord, he was ready to exit the shelter to move into his new apartment. With the support of Next Step Center staff, volunteers, and local partnering agencies, all this was accomplished within a 30-day time frame.



Rebecca Kozuch

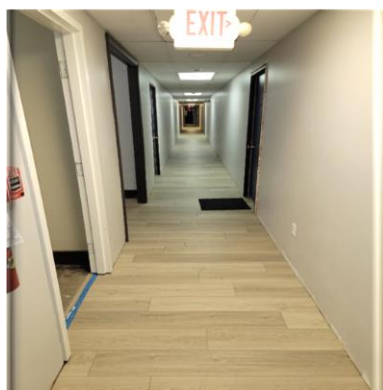
Transitions/Office Assistant

Glades Centre renovations have formed many important partnerships. The newest partner with Glades Centre is Lowe's in Somerset.

Lowe's employee delivering an order for further renovations at Glades Centre. (below)



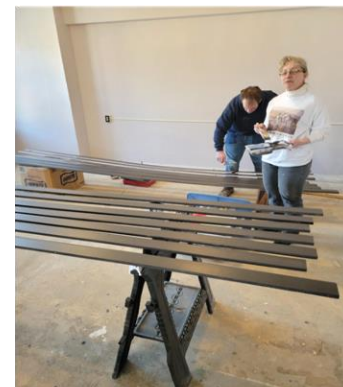
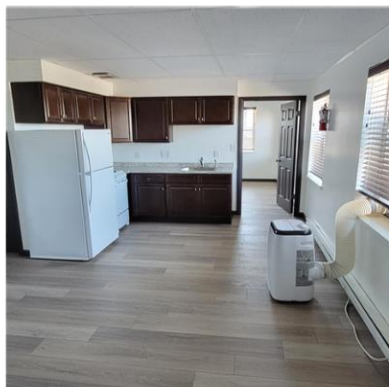
Volunteer Spotlight!
“Grace United Methodist Church”
 (painting the hallway and baseboard trim)



**THE 4TH FLOOR AT
 GLADES CENTRE –
 FLOORING IS
 COMPLETE! (LEFT)**



**APARTMENT #1
 AT GLADES
 CENTRE –
 REFINISHED!
 (RIGHT)**



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WISH LIST OF ITEMS NEEDED:

- Laundry Soap (liquid HE)
- Fabric Softener
- Dishwasher Detergent
- Bleach
- Floor Cleaner
- Pillows
- Towels
- Hand Towels
- Wash Cloths
- Zip Lock Bags
- Light Bulbs

Our Impact on 2021

- 54 individuals sheltered
- Includes 10 children, 1 veteran
- For a total of 825 people days
- Average stay 20 days
- 32 obtained safe affordable housing
- Remaining 22 exited to other housing options (friends or family)
- 40 obtained or maintained income