

March/April 2024 News

Make your gift today

Raising Up Voices: Advocating for Change (Part 1 of 2)

As our readers may be aware, Hands On Hartford works hard each and every day to create opportunities for our community to thrive-by providing services and resources to support their **overall health, housing stability and food security, along with a chance for meaningful connection.**



To accomplish this, our work involves a number of direct-service programs, including our MANNA community pantry, kids' weekend Backpack Nutrition Program, Gather55 participation-model restaurant, supportive housing and neighborhood services, and Day Center & Homeless Outreach programs. Importantly too, our team members are involved in helping to raise up the voices of the people we serve, part of that involving being **advocates for change.**

One such recent example was an opportunity for a Hands On Hartford (HOH) staff member to provide their own perspectives on the complex issues in Connecticut surrounding homelessness. As a long-time Case Manager and HOH's current Community Housing Activity Coordinator, **Trevonn Coleman was invited to attend a three day retreat called "The Homeless and Housing Reboot Think Tank Retreat"** earlier this year at the Water's Edge Resort & Spa in Westbrook, CT, hosted by the Corporation for Supportive Housing and the Department of Housing and headed by Connecticut's Commissioner of Housing, Seila Mosquera-Bruno. As the only Case Manager in the state in attendance, **Trevonn was proud to contribute his experience-based insights to the conversation, a conversation that included a diverse group of people from across the state, including property managers, lawyers, nonprofit leaders, and folks with lived-experience with homelessness.**

As part of the retreat and a true "think tank" experience, the group participated in discussions regarding needs-assessment and prioritization (including necessary changes to help folks gain access to services through 2-1-1) and talked through ideas covering a variety of subjects, including strategies to improve the homelessness response system, how to provide better coordination and access to resources to ensure no one is excluded, ways to find funding for housing, how to better navigate the housing system for those with justice-involved backgrounds, and many more



subjects. Trevonn noted the retreat evoked a “raw and honest” open discussion, with a unique opportunity for the group to break into diverse teams to problem-solve some of the issues discussed and then present their recommendations to a small panel.

Given the many complexities of homelessness and housing, Trevonn shared that three days was not enough time to actually “solve” anything specifically, but that **it was a valuable experience to gain insight into a variety of perspectives, learn how to work cohesively with a diverse team with a wide range of beliefs and interests, break down silos, foster empathy and understanding across a variety of people, and offer solutions to those**

who can start to put change in motion. As follow up, a smaller subset of this group has been meeting to expand upon the efforts started at the retreat.

Meanwhile, during this short Connecticut legislative session, much legislation-advocacy is being conducted. **For years, Hands On Hartford, along with many nonprofits and the CT Coalition to End Homelessness (CCEH), have been advocating for an increase in funding to stabilize and strengthen the Homeless Response System.** We strongly encourage our readers to “raise up your voices” around this critical issue. Readers can also educate themselves by visiting CT CAN End Homelessness’ advocacy page [HERE](#).



To date, the full funding request has not gained traction [read more about the current budget [HERE](#)], however, partial funding is still hoped for. In this rapidly evolving and changing legislative landscape, continued advocacy efforts are needed to raise up the challenge of homelessness for far too many of our CT neighbors.



As part of our advocacy work, on April 24, 2024, Hands On Hartford staff, along with over **180,000 nonprofit supporters from across the state, attended the “Rally for Nonprofit Funding and Advocacy Day”** on the lawn of the State Capitol, in support of increasing funding for nonprofits throughout CT. According to The CT Community Nonprofit Alliance (The Alliance), a statewide association of community nonprofits in Connecticut whose mission is to advance excellence in community-based nonprofits through advocacy and capacity building, **attendees were also joined by a “bipartisan, bicameral group of 55 members of the General Assembly, 20 of whom spoke**

to the crowd and voiced their support for increasing funding for nonprofits”.

In these last few days of the legislative session, we need your help to keep the pressure up! [We urge everyone to contact, by phone and/or email, their local legislators to ask they support a substantial increase in funding for community nonprofits](#), even if you have contacted them previously. You can find out your representatives [HERE](#).

Stephanie Boyce, Hands On Hartford’s Director of Homeless Prevention, Outreach and Food Access (pictured center, here with two of our Homeless Outreach Team members, Dawn Tyson and Staché Jones), emphasizes how critical advocacy work is:

“There is still so much more than must be done to ensure that everyone in the state has a safe place to call home. We know that we can end homelessness here in Connecticut. Advocacy is crucial to ensure that the stories of the individuals who do not have a safe place to call home are heard. Advocacy is a place where our front-line staff can share their experiences on trying to end homelessness. Advocacy is an opportunity for individuals who are currently experiencing homelessness, or have experienced homelessness, to share their stories and speak to what is truly needed in order to end homelessness.”



We thank **Trevonn** and **Stephanie** for sharing their insights on homelessness in Connecticut and hope our readers are moved to **make their voices heard** by joining us in advocating for change in our state and local communities.

Next month, our readers can look forward to part two of our “Raising Up Voices: Advocating for Change” series, which will feature highlights of our engaging Faces of Homelessness Speakers Bureau program.

We are Still in Need of Walkers and Donors!

Hands On
Caring in Action HARTFORD

Join Our Walk Against Hunger Team!

SATURDAY, MAY 4TH
CHECK-IN AT 8:00AM
WALK AT 10:00AM
DUNKIN' PARK
1214 MAIN STREET
HARTFORD, CT

There's still time to join our "Hands On Hartford

You don't have to physically walk to raise funds for us! We'd love for you and your friends, family, colleagues, business, school, civic group and/or faith community to join us in-person on

Saturday, May 4th if you can!

Gates open at **8:00am** and the **1.5 mile walk begins at 10am** at **Dunkin' Park**, home of the Hartford Yard Goats in downtown Hartford!

This year's walk will once again be a **TON OF FUN** and hosted by local media personalities and our goal is pretty lofty -

We hope to raise \$50,000 to support our food security programs including our kids' Weekend Backpack Nutrition Program and our Community Pantry.

Friends & Family Team" for
CT Foodshare's 2024 Walk
Against Hunger!

We still have far to go to reaching
our goal, so please make your
donations today!

[Register or Donate HERE!](#)

Save These Dates!



Hands On
Caring in Action HARTFORD

**Hands On Hartford invites you to
celebrate Memorial Day with a
free Community Meal!**
Indoor or outdoor seating and meals to-go.

Menu: Cheeseburger or Veggie Burger, Beef Hot Dog,
Tuna Macaroni Salad, Baked Beans and
Fruit Salad.
Plus: Coffee, Snacks and Various Ice Cream Treats
All are welcome!

55 Bartholomew Avenue, Hartford, CT 06106
(off of Park Street, two blocks west of Pope Park)

Monday, May 27, 2024
Doors Open: 10:00 am
Meal served: 11:00 am - 1:00 pm

For more information call 860-728-3201
Bus passes available in case of inclement weather.

We hope you'll join us for our next
free community holiday meal on
Monday, May 27 here at
Hands On Hartford!

Enjoy getting to know your neighbors
over delicious food and fellowship.

Everyone is welcome and we are
offering both meals to go
or dining inside/outside.

Our **menu** will include a choice of a
Cheeseburger, Veggie Burger or
Beef Hot dog, plus Tuna Macaroni
Salad, Baked Beans and Fruit
Salad.

Doors open at **10:00am** and our
meal is served from
11:30am-1:00pm.

Please help us spread the word!



**HANDS & HEARTS
TOGETHER** CELEBRATING OUR LEGACY

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2024, 5:30 PM
THE CONNECTICUT CONVENTION CENTER

Save the date of
Thursday, October 17, 2024
for our **Hands & Hearts Together**
Celebration!

This Year's Event will be a
Double Celebration:
**Executive Director
Barbara Shaw's Retirement** as well
as **our 55th Anniversary!**

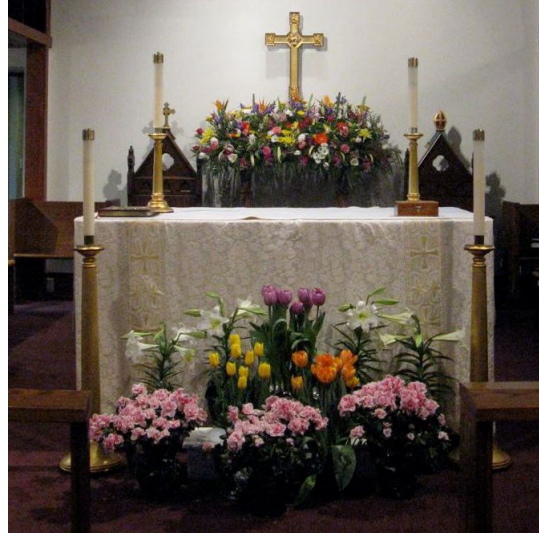
Keep a look out for additional event
info and sponsorship opps!

Questions, interested in sponsoring
our event or
donating an auction item?
Contact Donna Colliton at
dcolliton@handsonhartford.org

Faith in Action



Sending a big "thank you" to **St. Patrick-St. Anthony Church** for their **Palm Sunday food drive**. They collected over **1,600lbs of non-perishables to distribute through our MANNA Community Pantry**. This was such a wonderful way to spread hope, joy, and blessings during this Easter season! And their generosity doesn't stop there- they have been hosting food drives and collecting thousands of pounds of food to support our food programs since 2018 in addition to partnering with us around our Neighborhood Services. What a special partnership!



Our friends from **St. James' Episcopal Church in Glastonbury** have been faithfully rescuing overstocked bread, rolls, and pastries from local bakeries **every week for over 2 decades, sometimes even donating between 100 - 400 lbs of food in one trip**. We love that both our community pantry participants get to take home some of these tasty treats each week and that St. James' is helping keep perfectly fresh, edible food out of our landfills. We so appreciate this longtime partnership and **St. James' generosity!**

Volunteer Recognition

April is National Volunteer Month and to honor this special time, we hosted our annual **Volunteer Recognition Night** last Tuesday evening with a "red carpet" theme. The night was tons of fun and included a photo booth, a delicious light appetizer spread (catered by our Gather55 restaurant), an awards ceremony, time for socializing, and touching remarks by Deputy Executive Director Janet Bermudez, Executive Director Barbara Shaw, and a myriad of HOH staff who presented the awards.

We took great pride in highlighting the incredible differences our volunteers have made over the past year. **In 2023 alone, our volunteers helped to distribute over 508,000 lbs of groceries through our Community Pantry, helped serve 42,000 meals through our Gather55 Day restaurant and our Community Meals Program, and packed a total of 1,877 backpacks full of nutritious food for school children at 8 schools right here in Hartford.**



The award recipients were, as follows:

- Paul Bobbit Award- Cindi Bates
- R. Regner and Carolyn Ardvison Exemplary Award - R.J. Cermola
 - Faith Group Volunteer Award- Avon Congregational Church
 - Corporate Volunteer Award- Pratt & Whitney
 - School Volunteer Award- East Hartford High School
- Superstar Awards - Paula Mitchell, Curtis Thomas, Steven Fischer, Sabrina Wright, Rafael Rodriguez, and Jill Hammerberg

From all of us here at Hands On Hartford,
THANK YOU to our 1,300 volunteers who served over 16,000 hours in 2023!
 Your dedication, selflessness, and commitment to our mission allows us to continue to offer high-quality services to our Hartford neighbors who need it most.



Gather55 Dinner Updates



We are delighted to announce that our Guest Chef for May is **Tim East** from **Union Kitchen** in West Hartford! He is bringing his modern approach to culinary classics to

Gather55 this month. Starting May 1, we will be adding the following items to the menu:

Pork belly with pickled peppers resting on a celery root puree,
Vegan eggplant rollatini with white beans and fregula, and
Basque cheesecake with smoked almond and braised figs.

And the best part?

Tim will be cooking and greeting diners at Gather55 tomorrow, Wednesday, May 1!

You don't want to miss it!

Find out more about guest Chef Tim East [HERE!](#)

And some other exciting Gather55 updates...

- Dinner Service now begins 30 minutes earlier, now at 5:00pm
- We now offer online ordering for pick-up and delivery! Click [HERE!](#)
 - We now offer private events at Gather55
 - We offer catering
 - We are accepting graduation party/dinner reservations!
- We are hosting a Mother's Day Buffet Brunch on Sunday, May 12.
(See below, seats are limited, reservations required)

A promotional poster for Gather55's Mother's Day Brunch Buffet. The poster features a white background with a floral border of pink and orange roses. The text is centered and includes the Gather55 logo, event details, pricing, and contact information.

Gather55

JOIN US FOR A TRADITIONAL
MOTHER'S DAY BRUNCH BUFFET
FEATURING;

made-to-order omelettes
carving stations
pasta station
antipasto and continental breakfast table
and a smorgasbord of dessert treats

SUNDAY MAY 12
11AM - 2PM*
*Reservations Required

\$49.95 per person
\$16.95 for kids 10 & under

Gather55.com
55 Bartholomew Ave
Hartford CT
(860) 929-2316

All moms will receive a complimentary
Mimosa or Orange Spritz Mocktail!

Follow our Facebook page [HERE](#), our IG page [HERE](#).

MAKE A RESERVATION HERE

Please help us welcome our new team members!



Alex Cotto
Evening Dishwasher/Kitchen Assistant



Brenda Washington-Rheume
Tenant Assistant (weekends)

Positive Projects & Partnerships

We just love **The Rock Voices Choir** of West Hartford, a "no-audition adult choir that sings ONLY rock music" and whose mission is to heal themselves, and others, through song. This talented group frequents our Gather55 restaurant and wanted to further support Hands On Hartford's programs...and did they ever! **At their spring concert earlier this month, they raised over \$2,800 for Hands On Hartford - Incredible!** Pictured are Gather55 staff Ryan and Molly alongside Choir Director Jim Borotko. Thank you for rocking, Rock Voices!



Earlier this month we hosted a group of students from various parts of Asia studying for 5 weeks at **UConn's YSEALI program**. They were interested in learning more about **Hands On Hartford's Shared Kitchen program**, which enables new entrepreneurs to start their own small businesses such as food trucks and healthy food in-home delivery services! It was such a pleasure having them here. Go Huskies!



We had an awesome group from **Avangrid**, a leading sustainable energy company, recently visited us at Hands On Hartford to participate in a **customized service project** and **team building experience** they hired our Community Engagement Team to create for their staff team. Together, they packed **snack kits** for our Homeless Outreach team to distribute and also did an awesome job **organizing** our Backpack Nutrition Program room and Community Pantry. We appreciate the help, Avangrid!



Hands On Hartford is Hiring!

Hands On Hartford staff are dedicated, caring, and hardworking people who like to have fun while making a difference in our community. With great benefits, staff recognition and support, we value teamwork, compassion and community.



Check out these open positions and help us spread the word:

- **Bookkeeper (Part Time)**
- **Peer Support Specialist (Homeless Outreach- Part Time)**
- **Backpack & Pantry Program Liaison (Full Time)**

Find out more about these positions and how to apply [HERE!](#)

About Hands On Hartford

Hands On Hartford, in partnership with others, strengthens community in Hartford by responding faithfully to people in need through programs that change lives and renew human possibility.

We are committed to increasing food security and nutrition, improving health and providing housing while we engage volunteers and connect communities.



How Can I Help?

Make a donation! You will be part of a network of donors, volunteers and staff who work together to provide food, housing and related services for families who are struggling to make ends meet. To make a financial donation, visit our website at www.handsonhartford.org and click "Make a Donation Now," or mail your check to Hands On Hartford, 55 Bartholomew Avenue, Hartford, CT 06106.

Or contact **Donna Colliton** at dcolliton@handsonhartford.org for more in-kind donation ideas.

Request a matching donation from your employer! Many employers will match all or part of your donation - a great way to double your impact.

Leave a legacy. Ensure your long term impact on this community by including us in your estate plan, making qualified charitable distributions from your IRA, gifts of appreciated stock, or include us as a contingent beneficiary of your life insurance. Contact Executive Director, Barbara Shaw, at bshaw@handsonhartford.org or 860- 706-1502, to explore planned giving ideas and to join our Legacy Society.

We are grateful for our community and the love, caring, compassion and support we see every day.



PROUD AFFILIATE

**POINTS
OF LIGHT**
GLOBAL NETWORK



Visit our website



Hands On Hartford, Inc. | 55 Bartholomew Avenue, Hartford, CT 06106

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