Until All of Us Are Home

The Process of Leadership at Project H.O.M.E.

A Leadership for a Changing World Collaborative Ethnography

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A Publication of the Leadership for a Changing World Program, Research and Documentation Component,
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About this project

This collaborative ethnography is part of a series of ethnographies implemented by the Research and Documentation component of Leadership for a Changing World (LCW). Collaborative ethnographies offer in-depth and rich portraits of leadership within selected LCW organizations and communities. Locally based ethnographers and awardees negotiate the research questions and design the research in ways that will contribute to the awardees' organizational objectives and leadership practices. Therefore, each ethnography is unique in its focus, method, and writing style. Some incorporate creative forms, such as photography and video, which are nontraditional forms of representation in research. They all provide detailed information about the history of organizations, their leadership dynamics, collaborations, transformations, and development. (http://www.wagner.nyu.edu/leadership/reports/ethnography.html)

LCW's Research and Documentation component is housed at the Research Center for Leadership in Action (RCLA) at the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, New York University. (For a description of LCW and RCLA, please see the inside back cover.) LCW uses three parallel streams of inquiry—ethnography, cooperative inquiry, and narrative inquiry—to explore questions related to the work of leadership. The program is committed to developing participatory approaches to research and uses dialogue with LCW participants as the core of the research process.

RCLA is proud to present this work to the LCW community and other social change leaders.

About Project H.O.M.E.

"None of us are home until all of us are home." This is the motto of the not-for-profit organization Project H.O.M.E. (Housing, Opportunities for Employment, Medical Care, Education). The words, expressing the organization's commitment to solidarity in struggle, are permanently inscribed in a beautiful stone mosaic just inside the golden doors at the entrance of 1515 Fairmount Avenue, Philadelphia, one of Project H.O.M.E.'s 11 residential facilities for formerly homeless men and women and the site of the outreach program and many of the administrative offices. The motto serves as a reminder that the true struggle is to end homelessness and as a clarion call to bring all of us, all of humanity, home.

This ethnography explores the process of shared leadership at Project H.O.M.E. We consider how leadership emerges through struggle and results in transformations, individual as well as social, in the context of personal struggles for recovery and family reunification, collective struggles for fair housing and equality, and administrative struggles to stay true to Project H.O.M.E.'s vision and pursue appropriate avenues for organizational growth.

The information and analysis in this ethnography is based on a yearlong (July 2003 to October 2004) participatory study. In keeping with the aims of the Leadership for a Changing World program, the ethnographers, Kathleen Hall and Jaskiran Dhillon, together with documentary photographer Harvey Finkle and Project H.O.M.E.'s Director of Education and Public Policy, Laura Weinbaum, worked with members of the Project H.O.M.E. community to explore how leadership is understood, experienced, and enacted in everyday practice. Our research took an appreciative inquiry stance, in which we, as researchers, participated with members of the Project H.O.M.E. community to explore and learn lessons from the meanings they gave to their leadership work. Therefore, our account weaves their stories together with an analytic thread that illuminates the lessons the stories provide. For more information on Project H.O.M.E., go to www.projecthome.org. For information on the photographs, go to www.harveyfinkle.org.

Acknowledgements

The LCW Research and Documentation team at the Research Center for Leadership in Action would like to thank Carol Stack for the valuable comments she provided on an earlier version of this ethnography. We also want to acknowledge the many contributions of co-researchers, partners, and other social change leaders in LCW who have been active participants in shaping our learning. We want to particularly thank the Ford Foundation for its generous support of the LCW program and the Research and Documentation effort.

PHOTO: HARVEY FINKLE

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The Structure of Project H.O.M.E.

PHOTO: HARVEY FINKLE

Project H.O.M.E. traces its history back to the winter of 1989, when a group of volunteers, including co-founders Sister Mary Scullion and Joan Dawson McConnon, opened a short-term emergency shelter for chronically homeless men in the locker rooms of a vacant city recreation center. They called this shelter the Mother Katherine Drexel Residence. As Joan McConnon tells the story of the opening of this first shelter:

> *"We opened it because the city wouldn't allow folks smelling of alcohol in the city shelter system. So there were people dying out on the street, many of whom were older alcoholics and many of whom were veterans. And so the city came and asked Mary if she would be willing to open up a shelter for these guys. The shelter opened at 7 o'clock at night and shut down at 7 o'clock in the morning. It was in the locker rooms connected to the pool in the Marian Anderson Recreation Center. It was very, very bare bones. If you could imagine there were 50 men in the building—25 and 25 in each locker room—with showers in the back. Then there was this little room in the middle where they gave out towels in the summertime. We didn't have a stove—we cooked everything in a microwave. We had no sink. To wash dishes, we took the hose off the washing machine. And the dining area was also where we had racks of clothes for the guys. We had to pick the guys up in vans because the neighbors didn't want homeless men walking through their neighborhood. The guys had the same bed every night. We'd save it for them. The guys would create their own little space and it would be theirs. At our first board meeting, which included Steve Gold, Sister Mary, Peg Healy, Joe Ferry, three or four of the guys from the shelter, and myself, we said to the guys, 'You live here, so you've got to create the rules.'"*

In the years that have passed since that first winter, the organization has continued to respond to the needs of the homeless population in Philadelphia. With a generous and unexpected gift from the Connelly Foundation, Project H.O.M.E. was legally incorporated. The result has been the creation of a comprehensive "continuum of care," consisting of street outreach and supportive residential programs. The programs range from entry-level to permanent housing, each providing comprehensive services, including healthcare, education, and employment.

The struggle to end homelessness begins with the work of an outreach staff that spends much of its time each day with people still living on the street. Project H.O.M.E. is the site of the Outreach Coordination Center, an innovative program coordinating private and public agencies doing outreach with chronically homeless persons in Center City Philadelphia. When people are ready to come off the streets, Project H.O.M.E. provides a range of residential options. The residential programs are designed to assist formerly homeless people who face distinctive challenges in their struggle to transform their lives.

Project H.O.M.E. has two entry-level "safe havens" with a total of 65 beds. One, St. Columba, provides a home for older men who continue to struggle with mental illness or are dually diagnosed with drug and alcohol problems. The second, Women of Change, provides case management, supportive services, and on-site medical care for chronically homeless, mentally ill women. Project H.O.M.E. also runs two transitional supportive residences for up to 65 individuals: Kairos House is a progressive-demand residence for men and women with a primary diagnosis of mental illness. St. Elizabeth's Recovery Residence is a transitional substance abuse facility, which provides counseling, education, and support services to chronically homeless men who are chemically dependent or dually diagnosed.

After residing in a transitional housing situation for approximately one year, residents qualify to move into one of the seven permanent supportive residences at Project H.O.M.E. These residences offer a more independent living situation by providing affordable single-room-occupancy (SRO) units to individuals and families who require regular, but not around-the-clock, supportive services and supervision.

In addition to providing residential programs for formerly homeless adults and families, Project H.O.M.E. has sought to reach out to the neighborhoods surrounding some of its facilities. They opened an after-school program, Seeds of Hope, in 1991, in the Diamond Street neighborhood in north central Philadelphia. A second Seeds of Hope program opened at 1515 Fairmount in 1992. Since 1996, Project H.O.M.E. has participated in the Philadelphia Plan, which, with the corporate investment first of Crown, Cork & Seal and currently of a new corporate partner, PNC, supports comprehensive community development in the neighborhoods around the St. Elizabeth's and Diamond Street residences. Working in conjunction with block captains and other neighbors, these efforts include development of affordable home-ownership for low-income families, economic development, educational and recreational programs for children and adults (including the Honickman Learning Center and Comcast Techonology Labs), and neighborhood beautification efforts.

Shared Leadership Is Relational and Distributed

Project H.O.M.E.'s success story could be framed—and in newspaper accounts often is—in terms of the contributions of its two extremely talented, devoted, and tireless co-founders, Sister Mary Scullion and Joan Dawson McConnon. Those outside the organization have often attributed the organization's success to these individual leaders, or more precisely, to Sister Mary's charisma—her spirit, vision, ability to inspire, and powerful devotion to ending homelessness—and to Joan's equally powerful commitment, pragmatic sensibility, and exceptional financial and administrative skills. But as Sister Mary and Joan were the first to argue quite adamantly, to capture the nature of leadership at Project H.O.M.E., one must not simply focus on the role of individuals.

Learning at H.O.M.E. #1

Like many social justice organizations, Project H.O.M.E. is vision-centered. The Project's clear and deep sense of mission permeates every aspect of the organization. It is what inspires the emergence of leaders, informs the development of programs and the quality of relations among staff and residents, provides sustenance to a staff and volunteers who work long and hard, and is the basis for community and the transformative power of social relationships.

PHOTO: HARVEY FINKLE

The Vision for Social and Personal Transformation Is Shared

At its core, the qualities that make leadership for social justice effective at Project H.O.M.E. correspond in certain ways to what researchers have defined as a transformational approach to leadership. Transformational leadership, according to the scholar James Burns, "occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation."* In this sense, leadership at Project H.O.M.E. is found in transformative processes that occur at all levels of the organization. As Sister Mary explains:

> "The person who is homeless, myself, the donors, the volunteers, whatever names you want to put on people, we're all being transformed by this transformation. That's kind of a catalyst up there. That's why leadership is at every level of our organization. Because no matter what situation you are in, you can be a leader if you strive for these ideals—whether you're the poorest person or the richest person, whether you're the most talented person or you're very limited in any kind of academic or intellectual stuff, or whether you're the most healthy person or you're sick."

The official mission of Project H.O.M.E. is "to empower persons to break the cycle of homelessness and poverty, to address structural causes of poverty, and to enable all of us to attain our fullest potential as individuals and as members of the broader society" (www.projecthome.org/about/). This sense of mission is founded upon the belief that, in Joan McConnon's words:

> "Everybody has value and everybody should be treated with dignity. And...somebody who is sitting on a grate is of no less value and no less important than anyone else. I think there's a shared vision that in this society people should not end up so disconnected that their only option is to sleep in a doorway or to sleep on a park bench."

*Burns, James MacGregor. *Leadership*. New York: Harper & Row. (1978: 20).

Creating shared leadership at Project H.O.M.E. has required bringing together a staff that shares the organization's values and vision. Administrators do their best to hire those who, as one administrator put it, "are about the mission." Yet the level of cohesiveness among the staff is also enhanced by the fact that those who are not about the mission soon leave to find jobs elsewhere.

Project H.O.M.E. adamantly differentiates its approach from traditional clinical or service-oriented, client/provider models of "dealing with the problems" of people who become homeless. According to Joan, staff who take a more "clinical" approach to working with residents seldom stay very long, because they find that their approach is completely at odds with Project H.O.M.E.'s vision and practice.

Residents Participate

Program residents are encouraged to become involved not only in their own personal recovery, but also in the broader collective struggle for fair housing and equality. For example, Project H.O.M.E. has a specific unit, Education and Advocacy, directed by Jennine Miller, that conducts voter registration drives and sponsors voter education events to discuss political issues in shelters, residences, and programs across Philadelphia. Residents often participate in the work of this unit and have attended trainings, such as the Center for Community Change's training on the role of media outreach in mobilizing voter registration and education programs. Resident and Board member Hyacinth King, in particular, has come to take a key leadership role in working with Jennine Miller to organize and publicize Project H.O.M.E.'s voter registration and education trainings. In addition, residents are encouraged, as was Brian Kane, who was living at the time at St. Elizabeth's Recovery Residence, to participate with staff in political activities that draw attention to issues of equitable housing and programs for the homeless. As Brian Kane explains, in these activities, the personal and the collective come together for residents in the struggle against homelessness:

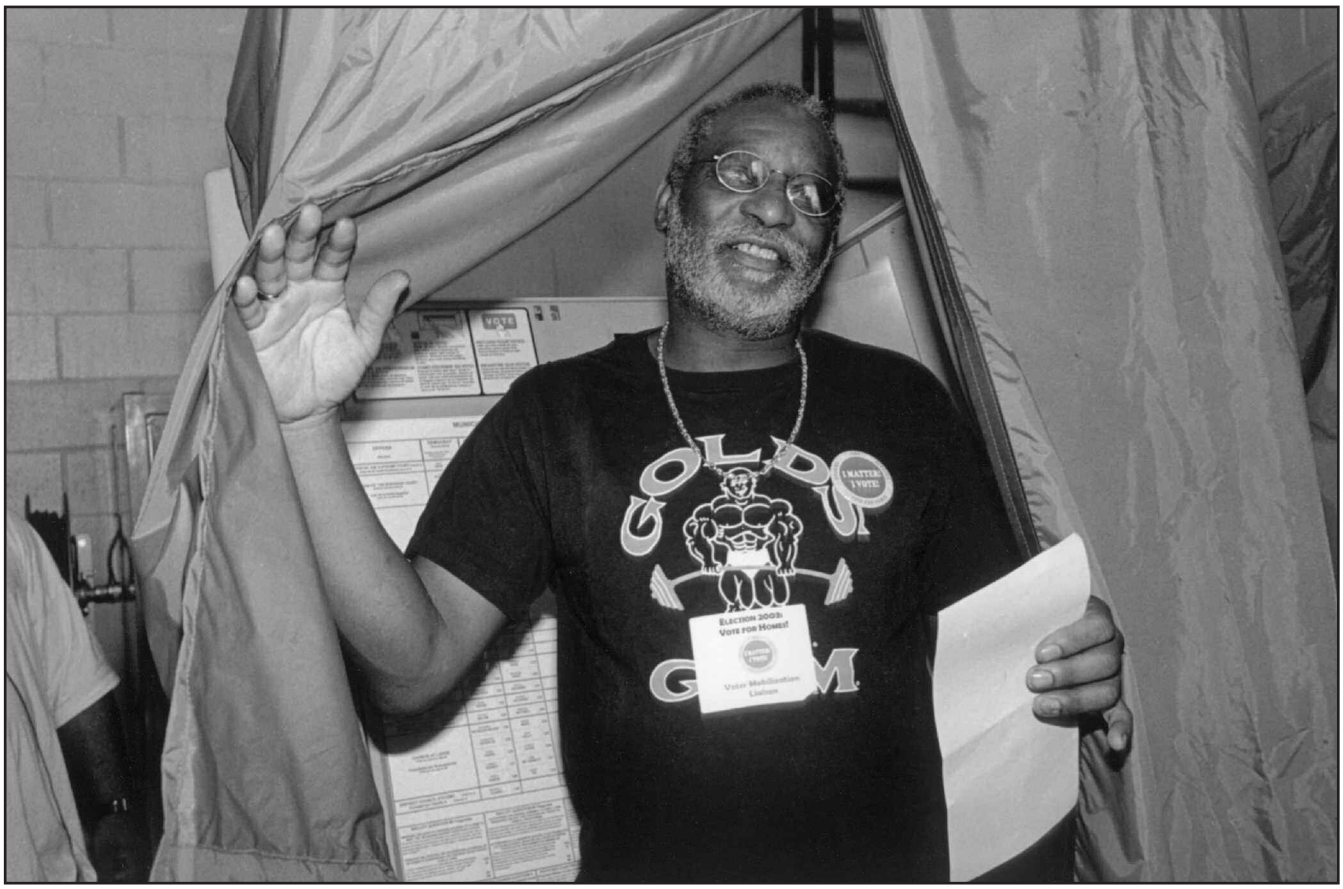
> *"The City of Philadelphia had given back over 109 million dollars to the State government that was going to help people with behavioral health, mental health, drug, and alcohol treatment and things like that. Without that type of funding available, intensive outpatient treatments were just going to shut down or were going to be limited to a certain number of people. And that's unacceptable. That portion of society has been ignored for so long as it is, including homelessness. We just felt that somebody needed to know that there*

What Is Shared Leadership?

Understanding leadership at Project H.O.M.E. requires that we move beyond the tendency in much of the traditional literature on leadership to view it as an individual capacity or set of traits and behaviors. At Project H.O.M.E., leadership is a collective process. It is shared and distributed across all levels of the organization and is deeply relational and meaningful. It is co-constructed in ongoing social interactions. Within the Project H.O.M.E. community, shared leadership is both dependent upon and gains its power and authority from a shared sense of mission, that is, from a set of values, beliefs, and normative expectations concerning how the battle to end homelessness must be fought. These shared values, beliefs, and normative expectations are inscribed explicitly in the mission statement of Project H.O.M.E., and more importantly, are expressed and enacted concretely in the everyday interactions of members of the Project H.O.M.E. community. Shared meanings and values provide the foundation upon which the various forms of leadership at Project H.O.M.E.—such as Sister Mary's charismatic authority or Joan's administrative brilliance—flourish and gain support. Yet what gives these values and beliefs their legitimacy is how they are tied fundamentally to a shared sense of struggle, a struggle fought within the very real recognition of the crisis of homelessness in America.

are people out here and that we're more than just a statistic—we're living human breathing bodies. The idea for the rally was to get as many of us from all walks to go out there and to stand on the front steps of the Capitol building in Harrisburg and to show that we are people. People were there from across the whole state. And there was a Representative—she was a recovering alcoholic herself—and she had come out on the front steps and got on the microphone and spoke in support of us about getting money back, about restoring the money that was cut from the budgets. And there were other representatives as well that had come out there. There were union leaders, people from mental health institutions, behavioral health institutions. Everybody was out there."

Most directly, perhaps, residents are actively involved in the ongoing work at Project H.O.M.E. In 2005, eighty-three residents or former residents were either employed at Project H.O.M.E. or had volunteered or held stipend positions. Residents also regularly volunteer to go out on outreach with staff, and over the years, they have often accompanied staff from Project H.O.M.E. to testify before various commissions on issues related to homelessness. And from the beginning, residents have served as members of the Project H.O.M.E. Board of Trustees.



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Focus on Dignity

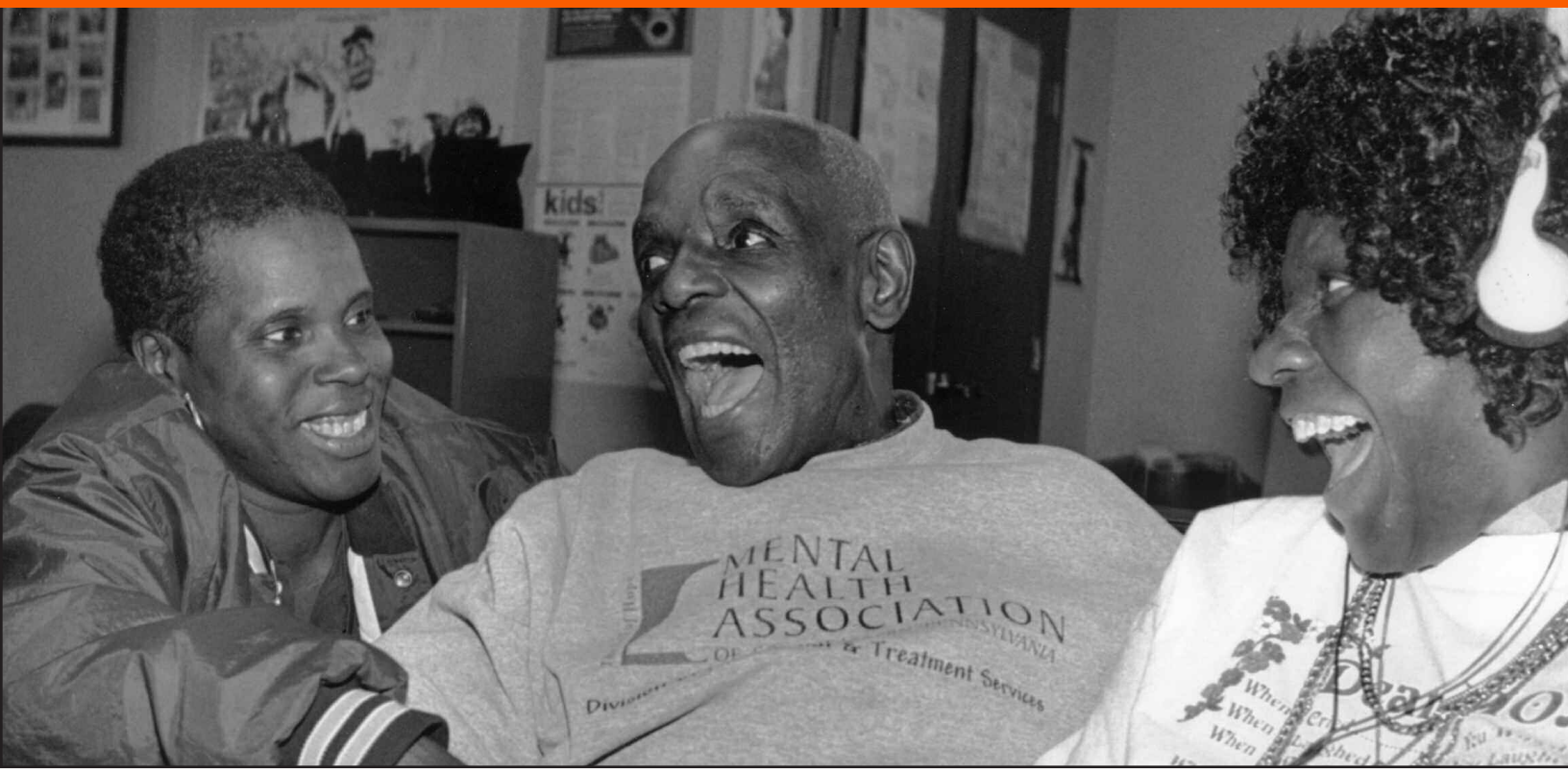

PHOTO: HARVEY FINKLE

A key aspect of this active approach to transformational leadership is a fundamental respect for the dignity of those who are struggling and their power to transform themselves. It is from within the relationships at Project H.O.M.E. that this transformative power emerges, as former resident Gabrielle Howee describes:

> *"Robert Bullock is an art teacher here. In high school I was a pretty good artist. I won some awards. And I didn't do it for a while for different reasons. I was just too busy in college and then after college I was just not into it. And when I came to Project H.O.M.E., I still wasn't actively doing any artwork. But one of the activities coordinators introduced me to Robert Bullock and said, 'You've gotta come to his class.' So I thought, well, they want you to do activities, so I came. And my first experience was that he would come by and comment on your work. And then my pictures were put in a show and a couple of them sold. I was completely amazed that anybody would want to buy my work. So it got me a bit more serious about my artwork. And later on Robert started coming to Kairos House where I lived. We would just talk, probably more talk than artwork. But I'd do art on my own anyway at that time because of him. He got me back to my art, just sharing himself. And that's what I think Project H.O.M.E.'s all about."*

Learning at H.O.M.E. #2
Listening, understanding, having compassion, and showing respect permeate the relationships and interactions we witnessed in all the programs at Project H.O.M.E. From Sister Mary and Joan down, throughout the organization, listening is a central component of transformative leadership.

As many described, and we witnessed again and again, Project H.O.M.E.'s perspective on homelessness and commitment to treating people with compassion, respect, and dignity is readily apparent in the character of the pro-

Learning at H.O.M.E. #3

In contrast to the client/provider model, Project H.O.M.E.'s emphasis on transformation through struggle requires more equitable relationships, those in which staff and residents are each involved in a broader struggle involving personal as well as social change. The problem of homelessness, from the perspective taken at Project H.O.M.E., lies not simply within the homeless individual, but in the structural basis of poverty and the marginalization and mistreatment of those who find themselves on the street.

grams and the quality of relationships within these programs. At Project H.O.M.E., people *are* treated with dignity, beginning with the relationships outreach workers form with people who are still on the streets. As Genny O'Donnell, former Director of the Outreach Coordination Center, explains:

"Outreach itself is still very much grassroots and pretty much embodies the entire heart of Project H.O.M.E.—the entire mission, you know. And because we are working on the street level, it stays there. We're not into looking at people and what kind of illness they have and what their addiction is. And because we're not a hospital we don't have to, you know, classify anybody by their 'diagnostic code.' Everybody has the potential to turn their life around, and our role basically is to help them to do that and to explore the possibilities and the options they have. And we get to do it by treating them nice—by getting to know them, by hanging out with them on the street, by taking them to the hospital when they need it."

While the organization has clearly grown immensely in size and complexity, Sister Mary and Joan and other senior staff do their best to stay connected to the residents through regular visits to the various programs. In a more formal sense, Project H.O.M.E. has developed procedures that ensure that residents have regular opportunities to participate in leadership, to contribute their perspectives and express their needs. This is achieved through several mechanisms structured into the functioning of the various programs and the institution itself. We turn next to consider how leadership is distributed throughout the organizational structure of Project H.O.M.E.

Listening and Learning

In addition to having residents serve on the Board of Trustees, Project H.O.M.E. has developed several other vehicles for residents to express their views and influence program development and change. As Jeannine Lopez, Vice President of Residential Operations and Homeless Programs, explains, this emphasis on communication with residents is not only valued in principle, but it is realized in practice:

> *"We have many ways to listen to our residents. The Program Coordinators (at each residence) have regular meetings with residents, and then the Directors meet at least quarterly with every resident group, and talk about things and get input. Every year, our Board members (Claire Reichlin, in particular) interview a random sample of 20 percent of the residents. We then use the information we get to create our annual program goals. Each residential program does this internally together, and then they meet with the Director of Residential Services, and then they meet with me. I meet with the Director of Residential Services and the Program Coordinators on a quarterly basis to talk about those goals and see how things are going and try to help them with the barriers and just keep the focus on that so we can make progress."*

While Project H.O.M.E. can never be run completely democratically, formal and informal communication has always been central to how decisions are made and conflicting views are respected and addressed. These open channels of communication allow leaders to emerge, something that Carolyn Crouch, the Program Coordinator at Kairos House, tells us she particularly values about Project H.O.M.E.:

PHOTO: HARVEY FINKLE

"I really like how Project H.O.M.E. listens to people. At Kairos House we have monthly resident meetings. We give announcements for the month. We talk about things that are going on, things that might be implemented. And then we have a discussion time where people can bring up any concerns, any issues. We also have a suggestion box, and residents can actually put suggestions in the box and at the beginning of each resident meeting we go through that suggestion box and have open discussion about how we can solve the problems and/or have open discussion about the suggestions or problems or issues. There are a couple of residents who are leaders, and they voice residents' concerns."

Shared leadership in the neighborhood revitalization and education programs at Project H.O.M.E. has involved distinctive challenges. Project H.O.M.E. initially became involved in the St. Elizabeth's/Diamond Street neighborhood when it sought to open the St. Elizabeth's recovery program for homeless men in what had been St. Elizabeth's convent on Croskey Street. At first they encountered neighborhood resistance to opening the facility, but when Sister Mary agreed to move into the residence, opposition cooled and relationship building began. Sister Mary listened to neighborhood residents talk about their needs, and this led to the development of a partnership between Project H.O.M.E. and key local leaders.

Long-term resident and community organizer Miss Helen Brown is one of these key leaders. As a block captain, she has been a central force in this partnership. In discussing what contributed to the success of their collaboration with Project H.O.M.E., she often traces this success back to the way relationships were first initiated:

"People came into our neighborhood, and they offered us things. Everyone promised to do something, but nothing ever happened. But when Sister Mary came she didn't say, 'Project H.O.M.E. can do X, Y, and Z.' She asked, 'What can Project H.O.M.E. do to help you?'"

Working with, rather than imposing programs on the neighborhood took a great deal of effort on the part of people like Miss Helen, Miss Chris Whaley (former Community Organizer and now Restorative Practices Manager at Project H.O.M.E.), and Priscilla Bennett (who is known as Miss Tee and is the Lead Teacher for grades 1 to 3 at the Learning Center) to gain the trust of local residents and find ways to work together, as they discuss:

***Miss Chris**: "We did a lot in the early days. I mean we do a lot now, but it was different. It was just different—implementing things. You have to get everyone's vision and then plan it and then implement it."*
***Miss Tee:** "It's building relationships and being consistent too. That was a major component, consistency. There are always people in and out of the neighborhood, you know, and the community is highly suspicious."*
***Miss Chris:** "With all of the false promises, that's why it seemed harder, because we had to keep proving ourselves. It is easier to prove now because of the successes of things that happened ten years ago, eight years ago. The hardest hard part is getting people to believe in you, that you are going to keep your word."*

Maintaining trust and openness within a working partnership continues to require hard work. But as Jacqueline Lipson, Teen Program Counselor/Liaison, describes, open channels of communication provide a vehicle for leadership:

A key aspect of this active approach to transformational leadership is a fundamental respect for the dignity of those who are struggling and their power to transform themselves.

"Project H.O.M.E. is very dedicated to making sure that any project they seek out or take on, you know, to assist the community or enable the community to revitalize itself, to create more opportunities for members of the community, they make sure that the community is the main part of the decision-making process. The way that it works here is block captains, folks on each block that represent all of the people on that block, and those block captains meet. So the block captains communicate with Project H.O.M.E. to make sure that the things we are working towards are the same. So it is very organic. It just seems to work."

Devotion and dedication to leadership in struggle permeates the organization, yet it starts fundamentally at the top, in the way Sister Mary and Joan are seen to live the mission every day of their lives. While the story of leadership at Project H.O.M.E. is not simply a story of the contributions of these two amazing women, their actions provide inspiration and a leadership model for people at every level of Project H.O.M.E. As Jacqueline Lipson also shares:

"Project H.O.M.E. is a great example of how a large nonprofit can remain grassroots at heart and stay true to the mission. Sister Mary and Joan are very much a part of the everyday goings on. So what the program managers are up to and what they are doing, the issues and chal-

lenges, you know, they are really aware of those things. So you don't feel so separated from either of them. I feel very comfortable calling either one of them for their guidance or leadership at any point. When you have two such dynamic personalities, it can't help but trickle down to the organization."

Learning at H.O.M.E. #4
Project H.O.M.E.'s success in building neighborhood partnerships is due to the fact that they did not come into the neighborhood and tell residents what was good for them. The organization has nurtured ongoing partnerships supporting local leaders as agents of change, leaders who were already engaged in the struggle to transform their own neighborhoods.

While each of the exceptionally talented co-founders humbly downplays her own contribution to leadership in Project H.O.M.E., each speaks highly of what the other has contributed to the organization's success. Sister Mary, along with so many others, continually recognizes Joan's contributions to the growth and management of the organization. Joan is a brilliant fiscal planner and administrative leader. Sister Mary Scullion, by all accounts—except possibly her own—possesses many of the qualities of a charismatic leader. As Joan describes, Sister Mary inspires. She also provides the backbone of the organization with her unwavering determination, fighting spirit, and tenacity. "I watch Mary," Joan tells us:

"I watch Mary, and I see her ability to bring people to Project H.O.M.E. and engage them and stir something in them. I see her tenacity, and I see her perseverance. So I can see it, I see it very clearly in her ability to never say die. It is just amazing to me. And I just watch her, where something that seems insurmountable to me, she just chips away at it. And eventually it's done."

Sister Mary's devotion and determination to the struggle to end homelessness has become a powerful symbol in this City of Brotherly Love. Over the years, she has won the respect of many local politicians, in relation to whom Mary has proven to be both a strong adversary and a wise and trusted collaborator in the development of more equitable city policies on homelessness and affordable housing.

PHOTO: HARVEY FINKLE

PHOTO: HARVEY FINKLE

Sister Mary touches the hearts and minds of everyone she meets, corporate executives and homeless people alike, for she sees beyond superficial social differences to the dignity of all human beings and responds accordingly with great respect, compassion, and empathy.

Sharing Stories

Our interviews are filled with "Sister Mary stories." Nearly everyone we spoke with shared at least one, completely unprompted by us. Her spirit and devotion are inspirational to the homeless people she befriends, her staff, the volunteers, Board members, donors, and her long-time compatriots in the fight against homelessness. Mike McGee, a graduate of St. Elizabeth's Recovery Residence and former Manager of Our Daily Threads Thrift Store, shares this story:

> *"I've always told this story about living at St. Elizabeth's with Sister Mary. It was the winter I think of '96. She drives a very modest car, one that might break down. So here it is, 30 inches of snow on the ground and she's not able to move around. And she takes off at 10:30 or 11 o'clock at night to walk from here to 23rd and Columbia Avenue. That's a good little walk up Ridge Avenue. And this is an environment around here that can be very, very dangerous. And she's a white woman walking up Ridge Avenue at 11:30 or 10:30 at night. Some people would be vulnerable. I would say that if you had done that, you would be vulnerable. No one would know you. They would approach you and ask you what you're doing here and where you're going, can I help ya? But they're approaching her in a way of saying, 'Sister Mary, why are you out here? Who are you looking for, and hey, I'm not letting you out of my sight. I'm going with you.' And they would. By the time she got home, she had a group of people with her to protect her. And these were not church preachers, these were drug addicts, drug addicts that she had fed, or given a blanket to, or taken to one of the shelters in Philadelphia. They were trying to help her, you know."*

Stories of transformation are shared formally at ritual events—at memorials for those who have passed on as well as the yearly service held on Thanksgiving Day—and informally in everyday conversations. Stories of personal transformation are told not only by residents. Volunteers and staff share powerful narratives expressing how their lives have been changed within relationships they have formed with members of the Project H.O.M.E. community. Bonnie Hahn, a long-time volunteer, shares this story about her friend Rosie, who had been a resident of Kairos House:

> *"It's been five years since Rosie's been gone. She lived at Kairos House and everyone loved her. She would make you laugh. She had a tough spirit. And she just brightened my life. We had many cups of coffee, and she'd tell me stories with a sense of humor that was unparalleled. She grew up in Virginia on a horse ranch with well-to-do parents, who sent her to the University of Pennsylvania to study dental hygiene. They left her an inheritance, but her husband absconded with the money and she was left with nothing. She went through very hard times. She got a job during the war at the Colt Gun Factory in Hartford, Connecticut, as a foreman. And she was a very tough supervisor. She made sure everything was done right. Later she came to Philly, I don't know how. She was hit by a bus—she was a tiny lady, bent over with a cane, in pain much of the time, but with a sense of humor you wouldn't believe. An amazing woman and I just loved her to pieces."*

The power of struggle and transformation lives on in the stories of the Project H.O.M.E. community. These stories give voice to the solidarity felt among its members, describing personal connections and reinforcing the bonds forged in the crucible of struggle. Shared leadership at Project H.O.M.E. emerges and is nurtured in the way leaders at all levels of the organization identify with, are inspired by, and live the organization's social justice mission. This creates the social fabric that holds the organization together and the energy that is a catalyst for ongoing processes of transformation. The rituals and stories the community shares reinforce the social fabric, as past victories and present struggles merge in an overarching sense of the ongoing mission of Project H.O.M.E.

This visionary foundation, however, while fundamental, does not completely explain the success of shared leadership at Project H.O.M.E. Success has also required putting the vision into practice, not only in relationship building, but also in developing strategies to achieve organizational goals. We turn now to consider the pragmatism that lies at the center of Project H.O.M.E.'s approach not only to envisioning, but to achieving its ends.

PHOTO: HARVEY FINKLE

The Heart of Leadership at Project H.O.M.E.

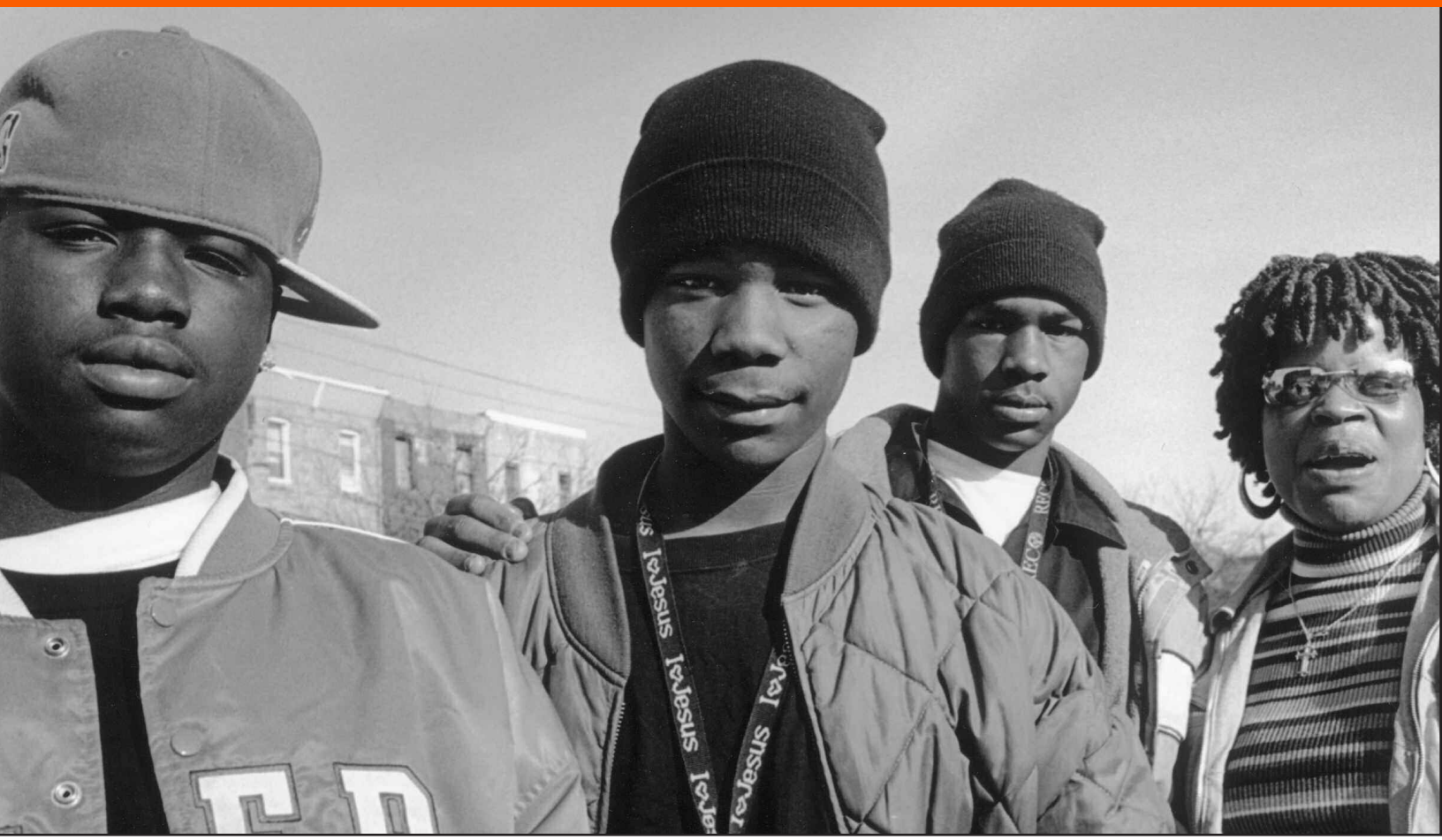

PHOTO: HARVEY FINKLE

Sister Mary has found over the years that the issue of homelessness brings out a sense of mission in people across all sectors of society. The homeless person is a prophet for our age, a sign that something is very wrong in our society, sending a clear message about what needs to change if our society is to become more humane and just. There is a simple truth in this, and Project H.O.M.E.'s success, Sister Mary believes, is based in its ability to respond to crisis and genuine need:

> *"What works is really responding to a genuine need or some kind of suffering or pain that people are in. I find that a lot of people really sincerely do want to help and be part of a society that's healing and whole, and compassionate and just and all those wonderful things. People will do what they can and contribute what they can. And the people who are actually homeless are like a prophetic sign in our society—I say this a lot—that something's radically wrong. So I see that, actually, their plight is what transforms so many in our society to be more human. It's definitely a very reciprocal process of transformation where everyone has a role to play in making this a more just and compassionate society."*

Shared leadership at Project H.O.M.E. emerges from this sense of a higher purpose. At the most fundamental level, organizational development at Project H.O.M.E. has resulted from people banding together to achieve these ideals. As Sister Mary describes it, leadership and direction over the years at Project H.O.M.E. have arisen through a process of continually searching for what is required to uphold the dignity and respect of all people as you struggle to find practical ways to effect change.

Responding to Immediate Needs

Shared leadership emerges in its purest form in the many moments of crisis staff members face in their struggle to respond to immediate needs. What many staff members come to recognize is that regardless of one's position, leadership is doing whatever it takes to respond to immediate needs. As Kristen Edwards, Program Coordinator at Women of Change, shares:

> *"I'm relatively new to Women of Change, which is an entry-level safe haven for women. I started out in September 2003 as a case manager and was promoted to Program Director about a month later. So I was struggling with trying to figure out what the heck my role was at Women of Change—first starting out as case manager and now having this new position. This week has shown me that there is no role at all. What it all boils down to is trying to make sure that everybody is okay. It's been a really crazy couple of weeks with people moving out and code blue, so people are moving in and a lot of emergencies and things. So we really just had to take care of one another, and I think our team finally formed because caseworkers may be out at meetings, or the kitchen coordinator is trying to help someone clean out a locker, but somebody's hungry, so I have to go and heat up somebody's lunch while I'm in the middle of a report, which is part of my 'PC role.' But this person really needs to eat, or this person really needs their medication. And so it was really nice, sort of swapping roles and doing things for one another and really having the team come together and support one another. We grew a lot closer over the last couple of weeks."*

The generative force behind organizational growth at Project H.O.M.E., historically, has been the project's commitment to responding to pressing needs. Its approach to change has always been deeply pragmatic, each step directed toward accomplishing a particular end.

This pragmatic orientation is profoundly functional in terms of responding to the immediate needs of the homeless population in Philadelphia. This is particularly true in the winter months when drastic measures are required to combat what for people on the streets becomes a life-or-death situation. When the temperature drops, everyone is expected to show leadership, to do whatever it takes to get homeless people off the streets. Staff must not only share the mission, but they too must be flexible and pragmatic to demonstrate leadership in the chaos of the moment. This is illustrated well in the story Jennine Miller, Coordinator of Education and Advocacy, tells about taking a new role in a crisis situation:

> *"What I have been thinking about a lot lately with all the snow coming this week is an emergency shelter that we ran in this very space [back space at 1515 Fairmount] during the snowstorms in January 2000. Similar to what is happening right now, there were code blues going for a long time, and the city ran out of shelter beds. The city used their limited resources to open a warehouse for men who were on the streets, but there were still women who had no place to go. So Sister Mary came to me one afternoon and said, 'You know we are thinking about opening this emergency shelter in the back for women. Do you think you might be able to help out?' And I said, 'Oh sure.' She came back later that day with a to-do list. She told me, 'We need pillows, volun-*

Learning at H.O.M.E. #5

Sharing stories plays a significant role in community building at Project H.O.M.E. Stories, when told, affirm what has been achieved, personally or collectively; and the shared experience of reliving these stories binds the community together.

teers, meals, cots.' She had a whole list. And I said to her, 'You know, Mary, I need to know who's in charge.' And she said, 'Well, you are.'

"There was a creative kind of chaos that went along with trying to turn our makeshift space into a safe and dignified place for the women. And the thing that struck me the most about that experience was the acceptance that the women had for each other, the community that was formed so quickly among the women, and the way people really looked out for each other."

Over the years, building the organization has required Sister Mary and others to take on many new roles, such as fund raising—which did not always come naturally. Yet with the support and guidance of other leaders, such as Peg Healy, Founding Board Member and President Emeritus of Rosemont College, Sister Mary has become an exceptional fund raiser. As Peg Healy describes:

"When it was clear that we had to do some fund-raising, I said to Mary, from the start—since I was a college administrator and knew all about fund-raising—I said, 'Mary, you're going to have to be the chief fund-raiser, I mean we can set it up, but they're all going to want to talk to the person in charge.' No, she said, she couldn't do that. Few people enjoy asking people for money. But of course, you meet people and some of those people are connected to people of wealth and that helps a lot in raising big dollars. And Mary loves talking about Project H.O.M.E. and about the plight of the homeless.

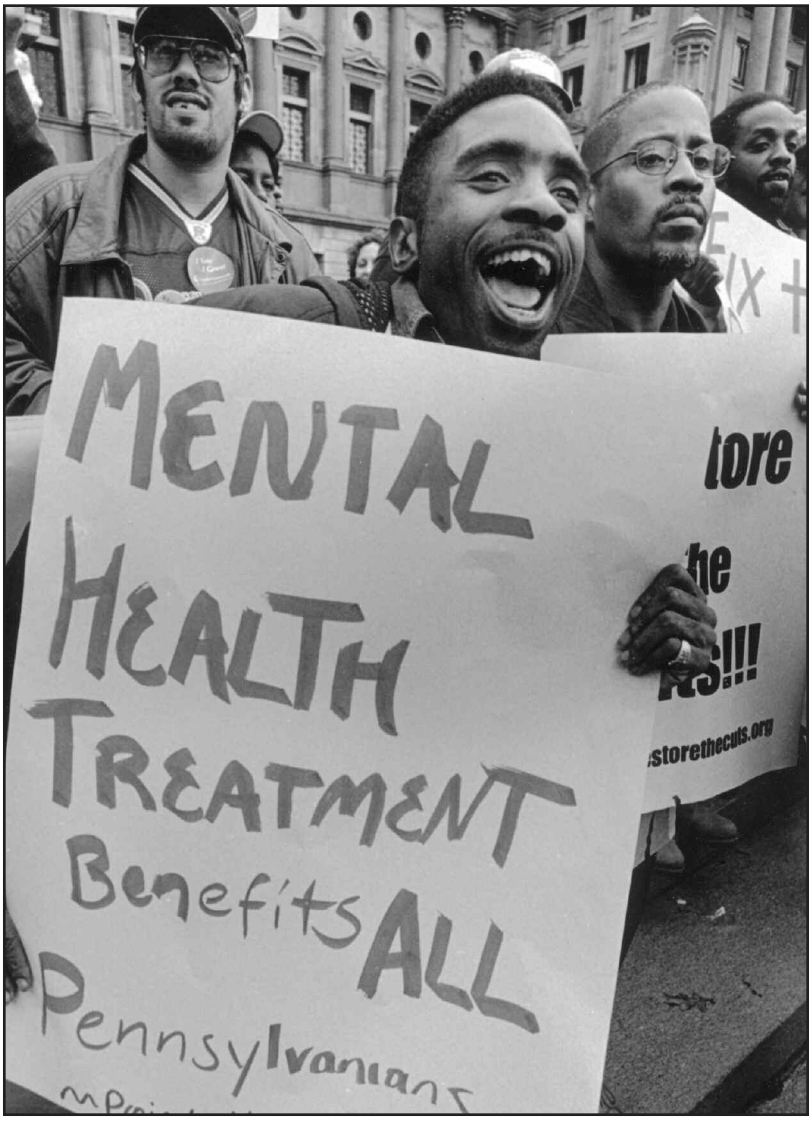

PHOTO: HARVEY FINKLE

"Then of course, the other thing that happened for Mary was that people recommended her for big city prizes. She got the Gimbel Award. She got the Philadelphia Award. She got several awards, and suddenly she was a figure in town who had the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval—all this is important in terms of getting money. So when she went, people listened, it wasn't just another fly-by-night organization wanting to do good that was not going to be there in two years."

The Administrative Struggle to Keep in Touch

As Project H.O.M.E. has continued to expand in size and complexity, it has worked hard to maintain its vision and a grassroots orientation across its programs. Yet, Project H.O.M.E.'s success has brought many new challenges. First, in a large organization, staffing issues obviously multiply; and Project H.O.M.E.—like most nonprofit organizations—continues to face issues related to staff turnover.

Over the years, the Project H.O.M.E Board of Trustees has added a number of powerful Philadelphia civic, philanthropic, and business leaders to the list of long-term supporters and active resident leaders. Lynne Honickman, President and Founder of the Honickman Foundation, and her husband, Harold, in particular, have become tireless and deeply committed supporters of Project H.O.M.E. They have not only given substantially in terms of their vision, time, and financial resources, but in collaboration with the community and staff, were instrumental in the creation of the Honickman Learning Center and Comcast Technology Labs (a state-of-the-art technology education facility). Their leadership continues to make a substantial difference through the Entrepreneurial and Digital Arts programs. Their caring network of family, friends, and business associates was responsible for developing the partnership between Germantown Academy and Project H.O.M.E., which resulted in the Community Partnership School, an independent school serving neighborhood children that is located in the Learning Center.

Yet, the struggle to respond to the needs of Philadelphia's homeless population has required a good deal more than financial backing. The early leaders at Project H.O.M.E. had to fight intense political battles in order to both bring attention to and gain support for their vision for addressing homelessness. A pivotal event in this history was the struggle to open the residence at 1515 Fairmount. The fight to "Free 1515" began in 1990, when the plan to develop the permanent housing facility at 1515 Fairmount Avenue was blocked by NIMBY (Not in My Back Yard) opposition from groups in the surrounding neighborhood and backed by local elected officials, including then-mayor Rendell. The fight for 1515 evolved into a four-year legal and political struggle to uphold fair housing and the basic civil rights of persons with disabilities. It took three more months and a second federal court ruling before Mayor Rendell used his authority to end the dispute. The city lost the legal suit, and thanks to the hard work of Philadelphia lawyers such as Steve Gold and Mark Schwartz, the case set a legal precedent that continues to be key in the struggle for fair housing and civil rights nationally.

While advocacy is still a core component of Project H.O.M.E.'s social justice approach, the political battles Project H.O.M.E. has fought and won shifted the politics of homelessness in Philadelphia and made it less necessary to use aggressive activist actions to achieve current aims. Yet in terms of Project H.O.M.E.'s leadership, victories in early battles like the fight for 1515 Fairmount gave the organization visibility, legitimacy, and respect—political capital, of a sort, which Project H.O.M.E. continues to leverage locally and nationally to this day.

The organization also continues to struggle with ways to increase the racial, ethnic, and religious diversity among its staff. Unity in diversity is a central component of its mission, and efforts to add diversity to the staff as well as to the content of Project H.O.M.E.'s programming have received a good deal of serious attention. Increasing staff diversity, leadership development, and retention are all identified as key targets for new strategies in the recent strategic plan.

Targeted outcomes stated in Project H.O.M.E.'s strategic plan include increasing the percentage of neighborhood and resident hires by 10 percent to achieve at least a 25 percent total by the end of the plan and increasing the percentage of people of color and overall diversity. Other outcomes of the strategic planning process were the creation of a leadership development program "to grow the depth and capacity within the organization among existing staff" as well as enhancements to Project H.O.M.E.'s new employee orientation programming, aimed to ensure that "all new hires will better understand the mission, values, and array of programs of Project H.O.M.E. as demonstrated by a post-orientation survey."

How to introduce diverse cultural traditions and religious observances within a single organization, genuinely and respectfully, is not self-evident. But the staff is sincerely grappling with these dilemmas and is creating ways to be

In keeping with its collaborative approach to shared leadership, it has partnered with other city service organizations, politicians, and advocacy groups in a collective approach to the struggle. According to findings in a recent HUD report, a critical component of Philadelphia's approach to ending chronic homelessness is shared leadership.

more inclusive, such as observing Jewish and Islamic religious holidays in addition to Christian celebrations.

The increasing size of the Project H.O.M.E. community has had significant implications for relational ties among staff and between staff and residents. As former resident and staff member Mike McGee reflects, the kind of organizational growth and enhanced professionalism that has enabled Project H.O.M.E. to build the Honickman Learning Center and Comcast Technology Labs, or Kate's Place (a new residential facility in the heart of Philadelphia's Center City), has inevitably affected the nature of relationships:

"Of course when I came here whoever came through the door and if I was there we'd grab and hug, 'Oh, how you doin'?' Man or woman, it didn't matter. We were more of a family in that sense. That's nonexistent today.... You know, it's just a more diverse group of people, it's a larger group of people. It has grown maybe eight to ten times. As we have, what, 12 to 13 building sites now? So it's grown tremendously. There's no way we can be that small family unit we once were."

Project H.O.M.E., during the past few years, has devoted a great deal of attention to developing its professional management capacity. Senior staff members have worked with consultants to develop strategic plans based upon outcome data as well as the input carefully gathered from people across the organization—residents, staff, Board members, donors, and volunteers. Yet, in the midst of these efforts to create a more efficient and effective organization, Project H.O.M.E.'s leaders continue to focus on the needs of the people on the street and living in the residences. As Joan describes, the most important struggle is to stay rooted and connected:

"In my mind, the challenge, as we grow and some of us move away from direct relationships, is the struggle of staying connected. Because the more you become disconnected, that's where I think it begins to erode. And so if you were fortunate enough to have the job where every single day you're being with the residents, there's an energy there. I think it's why a lot of people are here. So the challenge for those of us who are one or two steps removed from that is to stay rooted. If those folks become disconnected or un-rooted, it can change the dynamic."

Leadership in the Broader Battle against Homelessness

While advocacy is still a core component of Project H.O.M.E.'s social justice approach, the political battles Project H.O.M.E. has fought and won shifted the politics of homelessness in Philadelphia and made it less necessary to use aggressive activist actions to achieve current aims.

With Project H.O.M.E.'s success has come not only organizational growth and increased professionalism, but increased authority as well—new opportunities to shape how the city of Philadelphia as well as other cities across the nation meet the challenges of homelessness and the need for more affordable housing. With greater authority, Project H.O.M.E.'s approach to advocacy and activism has taken on new dimensions. While Sister Mary and the Project H.O.M.E. community are still deeply committed to activism, such as leading demonstrations and supporting political action when needed, they now influence public policy through a wider range of interventions.

In 1998, Project H.O.M.E., with other members of the Open Door Coalition, led the fight against the Sidewalk Behavior Ordinance, which if passed unchanged, would have banned lying on public sidewalks and criminalized the homeless. The Coalition urged the City instead to fund solutions to help homeless people get off the street and into services and treatment. This action, together with other initiatives, directed increased attention to community relations, which has since become a central component of street outreach. As Genny O'Donnell, past Director of the Outreach Coordination Center, explains:

> *"[Community relations is] part of the outreach. That came in as part of the sidewalk ordinance back in '99 [sic]. The idea was to educate the community, mostly the business community, neighborhood town watches, stuff like that, and try to elicit their support in some of what we are doing. It's been really good. It started with Peter and then it went to Alex, and now Ed has the position and Ed's really great because he can really just, really sit down and talk to people and draw out of them what their concerns are. And then to have them turn that around to something more positive."*

Learning at H.O.M.E. #6
Education is a critical component of Project H.O.M.E.'s advocacy role. Members of the outreach team bring people from the street and current residents into classrooms (middle school, high school, and college) to discuss homelessness and dispel deeply entrenched stereotypes.

Ignorance and stereotypes perpetuate the discrimination homeless people encounter every day on the street. The outreach team views education as a key strategy for overcoming prejudice and is working with police, businesses, and citizens more generally to deepen understanding about the lives and needs of homeless people. It is a struggle to change mind-sets through transforming how the city and its citizens respond to homelessness and poverty.

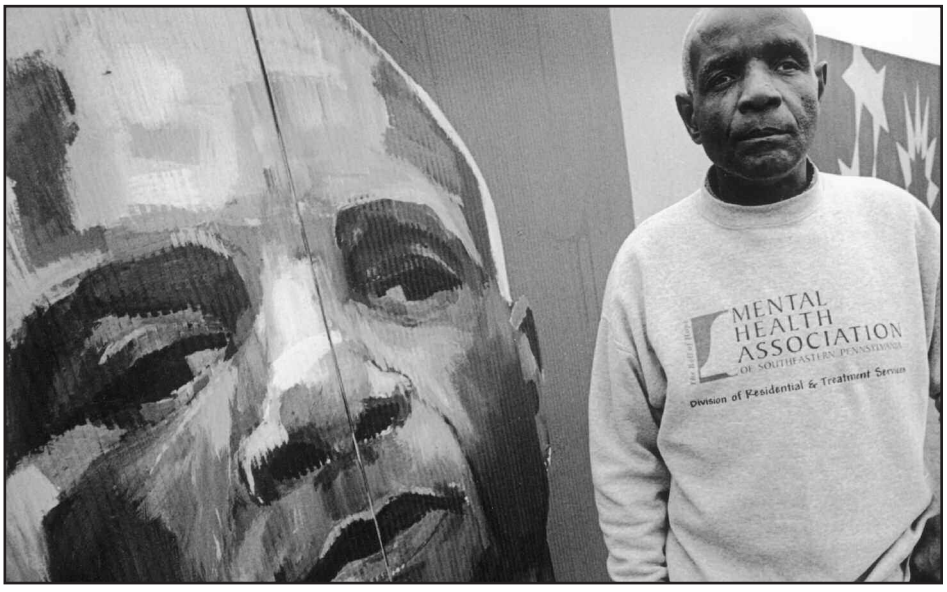

PHOTO: HARVEY FINKLE

Changing Philadelphia

Project H.O.M.E. has done more than create and sustain successful programs. It is slowly changing the face of Philadelphia, the urban fabric, and how the homeless and the formerly homeless are positioned within it. Yet Project H.O.M.E. has not accomplished this solely through its own leadership authority. In keeping with its collaborative approach to shared leadership, it has partnered with other city service organizations, politicians, and advocacy groups in a collective approach to the struggle. According to findings in a recent HUD report, a critical component of Philadelphia's approach to ending chronic homelessness is shared leadership.

Sister Mary and the work of Project H.O.M.E. have also increasingly garnered more national attention and recently figured prominently in a news story in the Sunday *San Francisco Chronicle,* entitled, "Success in the City of Brotherly Love." In this piece, Project H.O.M.E. and Philadelphia were acclaimed as a national model for ending homelessness. The article begins:

> *Philadelphia has figured out how to truly help its chronically homeless people. And how did this happen? Most folks point to Sister Mary Scullion, a nun who owns no home and lives with homeless people she rescues from the sidewalk—but who can pick up the phone and get a quick return call from everyone from the mayor on up to President Bush's homelessness czar. She spent the past two decades walking every Philadelphia park, alleyway, and street corner, where the down-and-out held out their hands or hid in a haze of mental illness, and she asked them again and again if they wanted to come inside. She built or badgered local leaders to build hundreds of supportive housing units and launched outreach teams to emulate her street skills—and she did these things in such a famously relentless but caring way that she was called 'Mother Teresa of the Homeless.'*
>
> *"Today, the city's homeless programs director, Rob Hess, uses her techniques as his guideline and has spent several years expanding them. Along with Scullion's ever-forceful assistance, Hess has launched cutting-edge programs that team up police with outreach counselors; created 'Safe Haven' housing, where the drug-addicted and mentally troubled can move in before they are stabilized; and coordinated all city services through a central office so counselors can keep track of which homeless person needs what and how much.*
>
> *"Hess says there is much more work to be done. The modest Scullion, a member of the Sisters of Mercy Catholic order and someone who loathes being called a saint, agrees."*

The January 12, 2005, edition of *Philadelphia Magazine* referred to Sister Mary as "this city's least likely power player." Yet, while Sister Mary's unquestionably impressive qualities as a leader continue to capture the imagination of the press, she also continues to explain successful leadership at Project H.O.M.E. in terms of strengths that are not as tangible, but are, in her view, far more profound:

> *"There's a lot of strength here that isn't tangible, but very precious, very important, and really a catalyst for what has happened and hopefully for what will happen in the future. It's not only what we've achieved in terms of what we can concretely see, but also the relationships that have been formed and developed that are really a very, very important part of life. And I guess being able to be a part of a community where we all are transformed through our experience and through our passions and loves and desires for social and economic justice. And that's a good thing. I mean as best as we can, and we still have a long way to go."*

Leadership, truly shared, exists in communal relationships where people are transformed in the struggle for social justice. This is the mission of and the message to be learned from leadership at Project H.O.M.E.

About the Research Center for Leadership in Action at the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, New York University

The Research Center for Leadership in Action (RCLA) promotes practice-grounded, social-science based, interdisciplinary research that will help strengthen both the theory and the practice of leadership in public service. The Research Center for Leadership in Action is based at New York University's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service. It was launched in August 2003 with support from the Ford Foundation.
Visit www.wagner.nyu.edu/leadership.

About the Leadership for a Changing World Program

Leadership for a Changing World (LCW) is a program of the Ford Foundation that recognizes and supports community leaders known in their own communities but not known broadly. In addition, it seeks to shift the public conversation about who are authentic leaders to include the kinds of leaders participating in this program. Each year, Leadership for a Changing World recognizes 17 to 20 leaders and leadership groups. Awardees receive $115,000 and participate in semiannual program meetings, collaborative research, and a strategic communications effort. LCW is a signature program of the Ford Foundation in partnership with the Advocacy Institute and RCLA, NYU Wagner.
Visit www.leadershipforchange.org.

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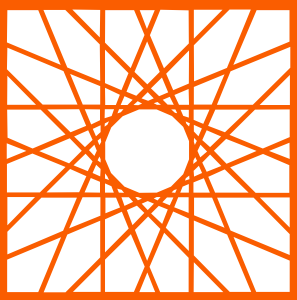
For more information about Leadership for a Changing World and the Research and Documentation Component, visit www.leadershipforchange.org or call 212.998.7550.

Credits

Amparo Hofmann-Pinilla from RCLA managed the production of this booklet.
Harvey Finkle created the photographs for this booklet.
Strategic Communications & Planning provided editorial support.
Hampton Design Group provided design and production services on the publication.

Published 2006



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