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Patients Given Chance to Help



Newsday / Donna DiStefano
Elam Edmond, center, and Gloria Hunter stop to give a sandwich to a homeless man in the Bronx.

Patients Are Given A Chance to Help

"Would you like a sandwich?" Tammy Davis asks a homeless man in Grand Central Terminal.

"What do you have?" the man asks.

"Cheese or peanut butter and jelly," Davis replies.

"Whaddya kidding me or something," the man said clapping his hands together. "I can get better food in the penitentiary. I'm tired of cheese sandwiches. What are we, rats?"

Davis, a 27-year-old patient at the Bronx Psychiatric Center where she is being treated for manic-depression, took the rebuff in stride.

"I was on the streets myself and I know how bummed out you can get sometimes," she said, handing out the last of

two dozen sandwiches she and her partners, Bill Brown and Gloria Hunter, had carted from the Bronx on the subway.

The three are part of a little-known project to feed the homeless born in the hospital in the Westchester Square section of the Bronx four years ago that is about to receive a grant of more than \$400,000 from the National Institute of Mental Health.

It is the first patient-run program in the country, and it began when a former patient asked Peter Masiello, a recreation therapist at the sprawling hospital, if he could take leftover food and feed it to nearby homeless.

Since then, the program has grown steadily, and each day about

25 patients, out-patients and former patients, who are paid \$10 daily to deliver sandwiches to homeless on the streets and bread to soup kitchens, fan out from the hospital on their mission of mercy.

But this hand-to-mouth program has proved so popular that papers of incorporation were recently drawn for the

"Share Your Bounty" corporation with a board of directors made up of mental patients. Dr. Peter Stastny, ward psychiatrist, and Peter and Bernadette Masiello, recreation therapists, act as advisers.

"But we can be overruled," said Masiello last week at an early-morning gathering on the fifth floor of the hospital. "I didn't want

them to continue to feed the homeless at Port Authority bus terminal because I felt it was too dangerous. They came back to me and said they felt it was important that they feed those people."

With some of the grant money expected next month the patients have decided to buy a nearby storefront and a van. They also hope to expand the program by bringing in more patients and paying them more than they're now getting.

"This is a positive thing," says Masiello, 37, who said he considers the program part of the patients' therapy. "For the first time in their lives they are able to help people less fortunate than

they. Many of them were homeless themselves so they can identify with the people they feed."

They also speak openly about their mental problems and at one group meeting last week that included Ellam Edmond, Rosalyn Gillette, Samuel Chesser and Edwin Montes they talked about their strategy for getting excess food to give to the homeless.

On the Lexington Avenue number 6 train later, heading toward Grand Central Terminal, Bill Brown, 27, who once studied for the ministry; Gloria Hunter, and Tammy Davis carried sandwiches they had made and agreed that feeding the homeless had become an important part of their lives.

"I'd like to be able to do this for the rest of my life," said Brown, who grew up in the Jamaica section of Queens and ran away from home because of "family problems."

"I've been on the street since 1981, and I went into the hospital to be treated for depression," said Brown, a soft-spoken man who acts as team leader and protector for the two women.

"I think a lot of people are on the streets now because housing is so expensive. Some are there because of low self-esteem. And some are there because they want to be free of the expectations of others, including their families."

Gloria Hunter, who has been feeding the homeless for the past nine months and who described herself as a paranoid-schizophrenic and is now an out-patient living in a community residence, said some mornings she was too overcome by fear to feed the homeless.

She is a graduate of Julie Richman High School, in Manhattan and left home a few years ago "because of a non-supportive family. They didn't know how to react to my disease." For Tammy, an out-patient at the state-run mental hospital suffering from depression, what she is doing now is a way of repaying the kindness of a man she has never met.

"I had run away to San Francisco and lived in a park. Every morning a well-dressed man would come by and pass out food and money to the homeless."

"I told myself that if I ever got the chance that I'd try to help people, too. I'd do this for nothing, because I know in my heart that if we weren't doing this some of those people would starve to death."

NEW YORK DIARY



Dennis
Duggan

SHARE YOUR BOUNTY, INC.

"Friends of the Homeless"

Bronx, New York

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Share Your Bounty, Inc. is an organization formed of patients and former patients of the Bronx Psychiatric Center who are concerned about the plight of the homeless in the New York City area. The organization collects food from companies and organizations which under other circumstances would be thrown away and distributes it to organizations in the Bronx and Manhattan that feed the homeless, such as soup kitchens. In addition, members of the group make and distribute sandwiches to homeless people at the Port Authority Terminal, Grand Central Station, a park near the United Nations, and the vicinity of City Hall.

The members of Share Your Bounty run their own organization with Edwin Montes as Director and William Brown as Floor Manager. There is a Board of Directors made up of outpatients with three volunteer advisors. The hospital currently contributes work space, storage space for food, including space in a freezer, and an office for the program director, secretary / treasurer, and out-reach manager.

Leadership is "inspired, not hired."

All the workers participate in making decisions and each person has specific tasks that they are responsible for. Members of the

group express a high level of concern for others, and pride in what they are doing. Several have been homeless at one point in their lives, and most need employment. Since 1986, workers have been paid wages for their work which has contributed to self respect and motivation. Starting with four workers on the payroll in 1986, the organization currently employs 17 people on a part-time basis.

The daily routine begins with everyone who distributes the donated goods meeting on Ward 27 at the Bronx Psychiatric Center. Those who distribute sandwiches make them in one of the offices on the ward, and then take them to one of the places in Manhattan where the homeless gather. Those who deliver bread, canned goods, and dry goods pick them up from the storeroom on the ward and the storeroom on the hospital grounds. Then they deliver the food to designated places who feed the homeless.

Share Your Bounty was started when a man who was originally from Jamaica became concerned about the amount of food he saw thrown away, first on the airplane, then other places, and finally in the hospital kitchen, when he knew that there were starving people in the world. With the support of key members of the hospital staff, a group calling themselves "Friends of the Homeless" was formed. Share

Your Bounty was incorporated in 1988 as

a non-profit corporation.

Some of the highlights of the history of the group have been securing regular gifts of food in 1985, a person who came in one day to write a check for \$500 out of his personal account, obtaining wages for workers in 1986, obtaining regular agreements for donations of food (such as from Grand Union and a local bakery), gifts of money from passersby while giving out sandwiches, and the recent article in Newsday about the program (October 1988).

**"Food is not wasted.
People have a satisfying
job. Homeless people are
fed."**

A number of difficulties have been encountered along the way. It has required a great deal of time, patience, and persistence, to say nothing of paperwork, to get the group organized, to get regular donations of food, to keep workers directed and motivated, and to get funds to operate the program. Workers do not have adequate clothing for cold and rainy weather which means that real dedication is required to get out the door in bad weather. Sometimes workers encounter

unsympathetic police or rough street characters who give them a hard time. Some of the places they go are tough places. Sometimes people ask, "Where are you from?" or "Why are you doing this?" and workers do not always know how to answer. Running out of food when there are so many to feed can be very discouraging. Everyone would like to improve the quality of food that is given out.

The energy for this program lies within the enthusiasm and motivation of the members of the group. There is a high level of cooperation, individual reliability and responsibility, mutual respect, and freedom to express creativity. Neatness, punctuality, and honesty are encouraged by everyone. The freedom to travel, the feeling that they can go to each other and hospital personnel with problems, and board support for doing their own organization have maintained the program as consumer run. The fact that several of the workers have had experiences similar to those they serve aids communication with the homeless. A successful "buddy system" and a willingness to take healthy risks helps deal with fear of the community and the discouragement of making the rounds in bad weather. The leadership style that has been throughout the project has been key in its development. Leadership is "inspired, not hired."

The support of key hospital personnel was crucial from the

very beginning. Working out of an open ward, in an open minded atmosphere with consent of the doctors created an environment in which the program could develop. The staff advisors style of being supportive while "letting go" has been very important throughout the whole process. A Training Program called "Capable" was helpful in developing management of the program. The Director is currently working on an office manual, with advice from the Board and the Advisors, getting the results of the program's experience clarified into operating procedures.

**"When I've done my job,
I've done something!"**

Volunteer consultants have assisted in writing funding proposals. Everyone is looking forward to receiving the first installment of a three year, \$420,000 grant from the National Institute of Mental Health. The grant will make it possible to obtain their own warehouse with freezer, an office in the Westchester Square area of the Bronx, their own van for deliveries, warm clothing for the workers, and better quality food. Plans are underway to add coffee, fruit, and juice to the sandwich distribution.

The first step in getting a program like this started is to identify staff who are interested in

"consumerism" and in feeding the homeless. There needs to be access to the homeless, donors of food, and transportation. The next step in organizing such a program is to find workers committed to the project who would go with staff to find the first donations of food, at which point contributions of food can begin, if necessary on a volunteer basis. The next step in maintaining an ongoing program is to locate a source of funds to pay workers. Once the project has begun to work smoothly, public advertisements can be made to seek additional donations of food and a grant can be sought to gain autonomy for the program.

The benefits of Share Your Bounty have been succinctly stated by one of its workers: "Food is not wasted. People have a satisfying job. Homeless people are fed." "A client run program that helps clients help themselves and others creates motivation, self respect, enhanced skills, and a valuable service to the community. Workers are able to say to themselves and others, "When I've done my job, I've done something!"

For further information please contact: