

## **Offering Families a Second Chance: How Supportive Housing Gave Mary and Her Family a New Life Together**

When Albany Catholic Charities met Mary in 2005, she was a 39 year-old mother of four recently released from jail after serving two years for drug possession and sales. She was struggling with addiction and homelessness, and wanted desperately to reunite with her children. Because of her time in jail and difficulty remaining housed, three of Mary's children (ages 11, 13 and 14) were in foster care; the fourth and youngest child was living with relatives.

Catholic Charities' offered Mary an apartment at Mercy House, their women's shelter in Albany, where she was able to reunite with her youngest child. Shelter staff recognized that supportive housing could also help stabilize and reunite her entire family, so Catholic Charities offered Mary a unit in their Supported Apartment Program.

Of course, housing and reunification with her children did not address all the family's needs. On-site case managers helped Mary enroll in a day treatment program for substance abuse. They helped Mary look for employment, with workshops on job retention skills and resume writing. They connected her with a Career Links program to identify work interests and find suitable job openings. They even helped Mary apply for a car through Catholic Charities' Wheels to Work program.

With the supportive housing staff's help, Mary got a job as a housekeeper at a local hotel in Albany. But Mary and her family still needed assistance with problems that could have sent them back to homelessness if left unaddressed. For instance, once Mary started working she was notified that her Medicaid benefits were frozen, leaving the family of five uninsured. Mary and her case manager discovered she had over \$10,000 of unpaid emergency room bills from basic health care she received soon after her release from prison. Staff enrolled the family in an affordable healthcare program, and helped Mary set up a payment plan to repay the debt.

Now Mary is paying off her debt while struggling to meet her family's needs on a tight budget. Catholic Charities is helping Mary meet these challenges by offering her budgeting seminars, workshops on how to purchase and prepare less expensive, healthier food, and parenting workshops to deal with the stress of being a single, working parent. Staff members are even helping Mary come closer to achieving her dream of owning a home, connecting her to a unique Albany program for prospective home buyers that offers credit, budget and pre-purchasing counseling.

Mary and her family have come a long way in the three years they've been stably housed in family supportive housing. She recently started a new, higher paying job cleaning state government offices. Now Mary dreams of sending her youngest son to college so he can pursue his own dream of being a teacher. Thanks to Catholic Charities' family supportive housing program, this is now an achievable goal.

Supportive housing has given Mary the chance to give her children better opportunities, all while saving tax payer dollars. The table below tracks some of the costs associated with Mary's family during the year prior to their move into supportive housing and compares those to the costs of living in supportive housing for a year. While these costs cover most if not all of the costs associated with helping Mary's family, it only begins to quantify the benefits of having a stable foundation for the family to grow.

Costs before Supportive Housing		Costs in Supportive Housing		Cost Differential
Foster Care for 3 children (ages 11, 13 & 14) <sup>1</sup>	<b>\$21,996</b>	Foster Care	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$21,996</b>
Emergency Care (18 visits at avg. cost of \$560) <sup>2</sup>	<b>\$10,800</b>	Emergency Care Visits	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$10,800</b>
Shelter <sup>3</sup>	<b>\$23,521</b>	Supportive Housing <sup>4</sup>	<b>\$21,091</b>	<b>\$2,430</b>
Substance abuse treatment	<b>\$0</b>	Outpatient treatment <sup>5</sup> s/a	<b>\$3,100</b>	<b>(\$3,100)</b>
Public Assistance <sup>6</sup>	<b>\$2,622</b>	Public Assistance	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$2,622</b>
<b>Total Costs before Supportive Housing</b>	<b>\$58,939</b>	<b>Total Costs in SH</b>	<b>\$24,191</b>	<b>\$34,748</b>

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> OCFS. Maximum State Aid Rates for Foster Boarding Home Payments and Adoption Subsidies. March 30, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Advancing Excellence in Health Care. Medical Expenditure Panel Survey. 2003.

[http://www.meps.ahrq.gov/mepsweb/data\\_files/publications/st111/stat111.pdf](http://www.meps.ahrq.gov/mepsweb/data_files/publications/st111/stat111.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> HUD Percentage of FMR in Albany as compared to New York multiplied by FY08 DHS Mayor's Management Report, Cost Per Day Family Facilities [http://www.nyc.gov/html/ops/downloads/pdf/\\_mmr/dhs.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/ops/downloads/pdf/_mmr/dhs.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Supportive Housing Network of New York. Implementing the New York/New York III Agreement. June 2006. pg 23. [http://www.shnny.org/documents\\_resources/NY\\_NY\\_III\\_Implementation\\_Plan\\_1.pdf](http://www.shnny.org/documents_resources/NY_NY_III_Implementation_Plan_1.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Scanlon, Anna. National Conference of State Legislatures. State Spending on Substance Abuse Treatment. December 2002. <http://www.ncsl.org/programs/health/forum/pmsas.htm>

<sup>6</sup> Community Service Society. Public Benefits Resource Center. July 2006. pg 6. <http://www.cssny.org/pbrc/consumerbenefits/pubassist.pdf>