

One Woman's Trash . . .

For artist Rhoda White, the forgotten is remembered; the old made new again.



Artist Rhoda White with her sculptures.

She crawls under bushes to find hidden treasure. She peruses library books, studying pictures, for days on end. She once anesthetized a Maryland crab to study its anatomy. She knows the shape and behavior of

birds, climbs fences, jumps inside garbage dumpsters (and once lost a perfectly good pair of glasses there).

Artist Rhoda White buys as little as possible to create her work – only the clay and glaze with which to cover her sculptures – preferring, instead, alternative and readily available media: twigs, keys, coat hangers, discarded tin foil, torn fabric, scraps of paper, bottles, cans, and old glue sticks. Old

car springs, she says, make good jack-in-the-boxes. Burned out light bulbs provide the perfect shape for pregnant women.

“I just can't see going to the store when there's so much out there already,” says Rhoda, incredulously. “People are so wasteful and take too much for granted. You know how they say one person's trash is another's treasure? Well, that's absolutely true.”

Born in North Carolina, Rhoda grew up in a poor family that taught her to make the best of everything. “We always made things work and threw nothing away,” she recalls. “We stretched out old mattress springs to make fences and lined the walkway with found hubcaps instead of bricks.” Several years ago, Rhoda moved to Baltimore for a short-lived stay with her sister and other friends before she was evicted and wound up in a homeless shelter.

Rhoda came to HCH when she had no place left to turn. “HCH helped me so

much,” she reflects, “mentally, physically and spiritually.” A regular participant in the HCH Art Expressions Group, her work has been featured at art openings and Annual Meetings for the past three years. “The entire agency,” she says, “has encouraged me – helping both my spirit and my art. There were times when I didn't believe in myself; HCH helped me believe in myself.”

A self-taught artist, Rhoda's “found object” sculptures mark a recent evolution. “My art changes all the time!” she exclaims. “I just like everything – painting, sculpture, sewing, woodwork – so I combined it all in my sculptures.” Able to reveal her subject's strength and vulnerabilities, Rhoda transforms the forgotten and discarded into the whimsical and remembered. “Everything is reusable,” she stresses, when asked what she wishes most to communicate through her work. “We're blessed in so many ways we cannot see.”

HEALTH CARE FOR THE HOMELESS

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WINTER 2003

Maryland Can't Afford These Budget Cuts

Message from the President & CEO

\$500 million! \$1.8 billion! \$159 billion! These increasingly large sums are the deficits for the 2003 Maryland State budget, the 2004 Maryland State budget, and the 2002 federal budget, respectively. Historically, budget deficits have led to shrinking or eliminating programs for the poor and homeless. The implications for the work of Health Care for the Homeless and for our clients are disturbing: for there are some budget cuts that we just can't afford.

In 1992, Maryland faced a budget deficit – and the nearly 50-year-old State-funded Medicaid program for the poor was eliminated. Access to comprehensive health care for these vulnerable Marylanders has never been restored. This has increased hospital and health insurance costs for all Marylanders.

In 1994, the cash assistance program for the poor was eliminated. Thousands of individuals with disabilities became homeless as a result of these short-sighted budget cuts. Baltimore's downtown business district was crowded with people sleeping on the streets. This terrible hardship for these individuals became an economic problem for merchants as well. The police began to shift resources from crime fighting to moving homeless folks on the treadmill of shelter-soup kitchen-street-jail-shelter. Solutions were discarded in favor of reactions.

Now we face a new round of reductions in public spending, and programs serving the poor are at great risk. State revenues as currently constituted cannot meet the needs of our many sick and disabled neighbors. Programs serving these individuals and families may shrink or end, resulting in increased

(continued on page 3)

Low Temperatures, High Demand: *Clinic struggles with crowds, unmet needs*

At 7:30 on a blustery morning in January, 100 people line up against a brick wall outside Health Care for the Homeless, waiting to get in. A few have appointments; most are "walk-ins" for the day. When the doors open five minutes later, at least 20 are turned away. Along with the additional clients who will visit later that morning, they are told there simply aren't enough nurses, doctors, social workers, therapists and addiction counselors to see them that day.

"The hardest part about it is turning people away," says security guard Ken Hess. "We average 100 people each and every day before we can even open the doors. Everyone's cold and wet and anxious. Many have been out there since 6:30 in the morning when the shelters closed."

Addiction Team Case Manager Rolesia Rogers says the increased anxiety and frustration is felt throughout the clinic. "We always have a crowd of people here, but this winter they're coming in earlier to get out of the cold. People are agitated, hungry and often in despair. There are so many human needs in the hierarchy we need to address before we even get to the clinical needs."

To manage the crowd, staff open temporary overflow waiting rooms, show up early, work late, and learn new functions and responsibilities to see clients as efficiently as possible. "I can't even begin to tell you how proud I am of our staff," says Clinical Operations Officer Louise Treherne.



Artist Richard Crowner depicts the long line for services outside HCH.

"Everyone throughout the agency has pulled together and done their part. Our clients are incredibly sick, and unfortunately, we simply can't see them all."

Nurse Amy Seidenfaden notes that the clinical needs are greatly elevated during the winter months. "People with asthma are having much more trouble, and we're seeing an increase in cases of pneumonia. We're also paying a lot more attention to extremities – fingers and toes. One client has frostbite of the toes, and he'll most likely lose some of them." Seidenfaden says she hasn't yet seen cases of steam grate burns this season – welts and boils that cover the skin when a person sleeps atop a grate, seeking warmth. "We saw a lot of those last year. Hopefully the City's emergency overflow shelter has prevented them."

(continued on page 3)

HCH Mission Statement

We provide health-related services, education and advocacy to reduce the incidence and burdens of homelessness.



Shine the Spotlight!

HCH Nurses Advance! The HCH team of Registered Nurses – Melissa Waters, Amy Seidenfaden, Veronica Haughton, Muibat Sanni, and Team Coordinator Tina Bouchet (newcomer Laurie Salmons arrived too late for this) – was featured in the cover story for the December 2002 issue of *Advance for Nurses* magazine. The article addressed the role of HCH nurses throughout the agency and in the community and was distributed to nurses in Maryland, Virginia and Washington, DC. Congratulations to our HCH Nurses!

2nd Annual Baltimore Marathon Benefits HCH: During a recent ceremony to recognize the success of the Baltimore Marathon, HCH was awarded \$3,000 by Baltimore Mayor Martin O'Malley and 4th District Councilwoman Catherine Pugh.



President & CEO Jeff Singer says a few words about HCH after Mayor Martin O'Malley and 4th District City Councilwoman Catherine Pugh present a gift to HCH.

HCH Workshop Abstract Accepted by the CDC: The National Immunization Program and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently accepted a workshop abstract submitted by HCH Medical Director Dr. Njide Udochi and Nurse Practitioner student Craig Zylka, entitled "Strategies for a Hepatitis A and B

Vaccination Program among Inner City Homeless individuals in an Effort to Decrease the Morbidity and Mortality of Hepatitis C. The workshop will be presented at the CDC's annual conference in March. Congratulations NJ and Craig!

Charmed! On Thursday, February 6, HCH clients, staff and supporters gathered to celebrate the opening of "Charm City: Art About Our Streets," an exhibit of new work by members of HCH's Art Expressions Group. Thanks to Baltimore's Theatre Project for providing the space and to the jazz trio *Spice* for donating their time and talent to "spice up" the evening's festivities.

A Special HCH Thank You to Renee Basil for generously donating her time and talent to photograph staff and clients for HCH's newest organizational brochure. HCH staff appreciates Renee's hard work and dedication.

Candidate Ehrlich Visits HCH Addiction Treatment Group: On October 17, then gubernatorial candidate Robert Ehrlich and HCH Board member, then 43rd District House candidate, John Heath, visited HCH to meet with staff and clients and attended a Phase II Group of HCH's State-certified Outpatient Addiction Treatment Program. The candidates and the clients had an extended dialogue about homelessness and addiction treatment.

Fundraising with a Twist: On January 23, over 70 HCH supporters attended "An Evening with Branford Marsalis and the BSO" in the agency's first collaboration with the Meyerhoff Symphony Hall. As part of the *Symphony with a Twist* series, saxophonist Branford Marsalis, conductor Thomas Wilkins from the Detroit Symphony, and



The title piece of the Art Expressions Group show at Baltimore's Theatre Project.

the BSO delighted the audience with jazz-inspired classical pieces. After the show, Mr. Marsalis and Mr. Wilkins popped in for a private reception with HCH guests.

It was Fun; It was Fabulous; She is Fifty: Special thanks to HCH Director of Special Projects Laura Gillis for throwing a party to benefit the work of the organization. Nearly 100 friends and family members joined Laura on January 18 for a night of dancing and fellowship. In lieu of gifts, Laura asked all attendees to donate to HCH. Thanks to the following for their support of the event:

- Gillis Electric, Inc.
- Emmanuel Episcopal Church
- Joseph Zebley, III, M.D.
- Ryleigh's Brew Pub
- Well's Discount Liquors
- Roses and Buds Florist
- Hamilton Liquors
- Racer's Lounge



Board member Larry Lawrence (back to camera) and Board Chair Mary Jean Herron (background) look on as President & CEO Jeff Singer thanks jazz saxophonist Branford Marsalis for visiting a private HCH reception.

Wish List

Your generous donations help us to provide more comprehensive services to people experiencing homelessness. The following is a "wish list" of goods and services needed in the clinic. To arrange a donation, please contact the director of development at 410-837-5533, ext. 310.

- Art supplies: paint, beads, buttons
- Toiletries: travel-sized soap, toothpaste, lotion, shampoo, deodorant, razors
- Clothes: jeans, T-shirts, sweatpants, belts, new underwear and socks
- Multi-vitamins
- Small, canvas bags: fanny packs and back packs
- Weekly, multiple dose pill boxes
- Day planners and calendars



Hope Springs Eternal

Low Temperatures, High Demand

(continued from page 1)

On a bitter cold day in January, we had the opportunity to travel to Annapolis with Kelly to present testimony before the House Appropriations Committee about the importance of medical care and financial assistance programs for people with disabilities. Housed for the last year thanks to HCH staff and a State program for people with disabilities, Kelly readily agreed to tell her story to all who might listen once she learned of the potential for budget cuts during difficult financial times.

Entering a hearing room filled with distinguished legislators, Kelly was the exact opposite of the words one might summon to describe a 40 year-old formerly homeless woman with mental illness and a laundry list of medical complications living on State assistance in the amount of \$185 per month: *intimidated, shy, withdrawn*. No, not Kelly. Standing at less than five feet tall with an infectious smile and a voice that could grow to shake the rafters, Kelly told it like it was and didn't mince words: "I have asthma and diabetes and high blood pressure and Parkinson's disease – it means I shake a lot if I don't have my medications. I also have problems with my legs and my back, and I have a mental illness, which means that if I don't take my medications, I hear things not everyone else hears and see things not everyone else sees."

Her childlike honesty and forthrightness silenced the room. She went on to describe her time on the streets, the first

time she came to HCH, and the day she moved into her own apartment. "If it wasn't for the State program that let me get care at HCH and State financial assistance, I wouldn't be in my own place today." Kelly raised her head and caught their eyes, one by one. "I wouldn't have my medications and I'd still be living on the streets."

The FY2004 HCH advocacy strategy is simple: don't balance the budget on the backs of the poor. Ensure the continuation of important health care, housing and financial support programs for people experiencing homelessness. Maintain a strong, easily accessible mental health system. Get more drug treatment to more of those who need it. Kelly summed it up in two sentences: "There are a lot of us out here in the same situation as me. Please don't put us back on the streets."

I left Annapolis changed that day, somehow warmed on a bitter cold day in January. If Kelly can raise her voice and summon the strength to lay her life bare before a roomful of powerful strangers, then what excuse have any of us to stay silent about the need to hold harmless programs that benefit the poor and homeless in the face of the largest budget deficits of the past decade? Legislators will debate the budget through the end of the session in April. Use your own voice to let your representative know the importance of protecting health care, housing and income programs for the poor. Find out who represents you at <http://mlis.state.md.us/>.

For the first time, the Baltimore City Health Department and the Office of Homeless Services have adopted a death prevention strategy by opening a "Code Blue" emergency overflow shelter on the coldest nights. Used more than 25 times before mid-February, as many as 180 men, women and children seek refuge at the overflow facility. 80 percent of them say they would have had no other options, but to spend the night on the streets.

Back at HCH, Client Services Manager John Lane says he's seen one steam grate burn this year following a cold night that didn't meet the conditions of a Code Blue. "The client said he tried to get into a shelter, but that they were all full so he went to sleep on a grate. He pulled back his shirt to show me the blisters he found when he woke up."

Lane, who has worked at or near the front desk of HCH for the past five years, says the weather has a noticeable impact upon the number of people seeking services, but that it doesn't explain everything. "I've noticed a steady increase over the past few years. The unmet need is overwhelming."

Treherne agrees that weather alone doesn't fully explain the growing demand. "More than 80 percent of our clients are uninsured, there are far fewer affordable housing units than there were five years ago, and most of the women we see couldn't find shelter over the summer and they still can't find it now. The problem isn't only the weather. But inadequate community resources and weather like this are a dangerous combination."

Maryland Can't Afford These Budget Cuts (continued from page 1)

hunger, homelessness and hopelessness for the poor – and a declining quality of life for all Marylanders.

With homelessness on the rise even prior to looming budget cuts, it is important to remind ourselves that those who do not know history are condemned to repeat it. Curtailing assistance to the poor and homeless has costs—economic, social, and moral. Send this message to those who represent you in Annapolis: "Protect programs for the poor; Maryland can't afford these budget cuts." —Jeff Singer, President & CEO

Calling All Cars . . .

Health Care for the Homeless is now able to accept donations of vehicles. Proceeds will strengthen our services, education and advocacy on behalf of vulnerable Marylanders. Donations are tax deductible. For more information, please contact the Development Department at 410-837-5533, or e-mail manderson@hchmd.org. Thank you!

