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## Offering Hope to Cape Cod's Homeless

by Hannah Depin

"Hope" is a word used a lot in everyday speech, in everything from commercials, to political campaigns, to movies. But what is hope, really?

Emily Dickinson, unable to put the concept into words, likened it to a bird singing a wordless tune. But Cape Codders need not look further than Ocean Street, Hyannis, to see what hope really is. Here, it abounds.

Homeless Not Hopeless opened its first two homes in 2007. Unlike other shelters, the Homeless Not Hopeless homes do not offer shelter for merely a few hours or for one night. Instead, the homes take in residents that live together and form a community.

In the organization's own words: "Everything done in the Homeless Not Hopeless homes guides people to recover their ability to work and live independently." This may be through attention to medical and addiction issues, through participation in daily chores and home projects, or through instruction in skills like meal planning and financial literacy.

"But the real education," insists the group, "is to teach individuals how to be part of a family."

The familial atmosphere can be a welcome change for those accustomed to the trials of homelessness. "I was homeless for ten years on the streets of Hyannis, Dennis, and Yarmouth," said founder and president of Homeless Not Hopeless, Billy Bishop. "There is no way that I can explain how inhumane it really is."

Mr. Bishop explained that homeless men and women live anywhere they can find shelter – under tarps in the woods, inside old cars and trains, and inside of abandoned buildings. But perhaps worse than that is the disrespect and condescension homeless men and women face on a daily basis.

Many residents come in feeling embarrassed or belittled. A major step in the Homeless Not Hopeless process is learning to love oneself again.

Homeless Not Hopeless is run by a group of hardworking volunteers. Each home is managed by a formerly homeless person, who voluntarily lives with and guides the residents.

No one has ever received pay for his or her work; all money raised benefits the program. Most recently, the organization was able to purchase a new home on Main Street, Hyannis.

At a press conference held in the new home in December, speakers addressed some concerns. Most of all, there seemed to be concern about the public's perception of homelessness. Too often, homeless people are looked down upon.

Awareness is one of the organization's goals, and in the past has met it with success.

"My wife and I were extremely nervous to learn that homeless people would be moving into the house right next door," wrote a neighbor of one of the homes, "...but we are no longer afraid of homeless people, as we were, and we are proud to have these men as our neighbors."

Homeless Not Hopeless needs more of this kind of support. When enough funds are raised to complete the renovations, the organization will open the fourth home to accommodate eleven women.

Since its start, more than 170 Cape Codders have been helped by Homeless Not Hopeless. Still, there is a need.

On December 21, the first day of winter and the longest night of the year, the Cape Cod community came together for a Special Memorial Service, at the Federated Church in Hyannis, to honor the homeless who had passed away in 2012.

The fifteen people were honored in a series of eulogies, speeches, and songs, a heartbreaking reminder that the work is not

yet finished. Attendees were left with the hope that, by next year, there would be no need for a memorial service at all.

For the last five years, Homeless Not Hopeless has been offering "a hand up, not a hand out." Though it hasn't always been easy, the work this organization does is making a difference for the homeless, and now, there is more hope than ever for Cape Cod.



Hannah Depin is a Junior at Dennis Yarmouth High School and would love to become a professional writer someday. She has been involved with the DY Human Rights Club for three years, which focuses on current human rights issues around the world. Homeless Not Hopeless is a cause this club takes a deep interest in.

The DY Human Rights Club also held a walk-a-thon to help the Cavalry Baptist Church after it burned down in Hyannis in March 2012. Currently, the student members are examining the growing crisis of Human Trafficking. They also discuss political issues and current events concerning human rights.

The Human Rights Academy is a group of Cape Cod schools with Human Rights Clubs or similar clubs. Twice a year they hold day-long workshops to share their projects and ideas and learn more about human rights.

**Publisher's Note:** When I first heard this poem I knew I wanted to publish it in this magazine. What I recalled as the "Cardboard Sky" poem never left me. I spent a year trying to track down the poet, Colorado T. Sky, who'd read this poem at the 2011 Memorial Service for the Homeless in Hyannis. I finally connected with the formerly homeless poet last December, just in time for this Winter issue.

Although the Holidays are over, I hope you will remember your homeless neighbors this winter, and perhaps take time to see how you can offer them a helping hand. I am honored to have the poet's permission to share his poem here. I hope it stays with you, just as it stayed with me.

### **Christmas (revised and revisited)**

by Colorado T. Sky

The old woman wheels a shopping cart  
Containing all she owns  
Down a dismal city sidewalk  
Greyly paved with ice and snow  
And the eight-track tape loops carol gaily  
As the holiday lights the malls  
And a Volvo plows a puddle  
And splashes her torn sneakers  
With the detritus of Christmases

So very long ago

Down a sullen city alleyway  
A silent figure creeps  
Lean and mean and just fourteen  
Looking for a place to sleep  
Rummaging through the dumpsters  
Scavenging something to eat  
As the wind blows brightly-colored paper  
Along the ground around his feet

In the lee of a trashcan rampart  
Underneath a cardboard sky  
An ancient hero settles in  
To lay down, as if to die  
Ignored by the land he swore to serve  
And a monolithic bureaucracy  
His Silver Star shines grimly dim  
On his "welcome homeless" travesty

But whatever happened to the kind of Christmas  
That came at Christmastime?  
Riding on an electric train  
In the window of the five-and-dime  
The spirits of childhood Christmases  
Seem all to have faded away  
Riding through a shattered dream  
In the shadow of a one-horse sleigh.

(1994/2010)

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Colorado T. Sky