Back Bay Mission
Established in 1922

BACK BAY MISSION
strengthening neighborhoods, seeking justice, transforming lives

THE CHANGING TIDES

The Magazine of Back Bay Mission

Summer 2024

MEET THE TINY EMERGENCY SHELTER ON WHEELS PROTOTYPE!

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Reflections STORY

Executive Director
Pastor James Pennington

Dear Back Bay Supporter! I have had the immense honor of serving as the Executive Director of Back Bay Mission (BBM) for the past three and a half years. In this time, my experiences have ranged from feeling as if I've been here forever to moments where it seems my journey is just beginning.

Throughout this past year, I've had the privilege of being a keynote speaker and preacher at various conferences and churches within the United Church of Christ. In every presentation and sermon, I've sought to shift the conversation from "we have a problem with homelessness" to "we have a problem with poverty." I've also challenged listeners to reconsider the myth of the American Dream, drawing inspiration from Jesus' words, "The poor you will always have with you" (Mark 14:7). This profound statement, made as a Samaritan woman anointed Jesus with expensive perfume, has deeply influenced my reflections and messages.

What are the intersections of the American Dream and poverty in America? Consider this: 37.9 million people live in poverty in our nation. Mississippi stands out as one of the poorest states, with a poverty rate of 18.8%. Is the American Dream truly attainable for these millions of people? For those in Mississippi?

The American Dream, the belief that everyone has the freedom and opportunity to succeed, was popularized by James Truslow Adams during the Great Depression in 1931. However, its meaning has evolved over time. Isabel Wilkerson, in her book "Caste," encapsulates a harsh truth: "The myth of the American dream is shattered by the reality of caste."This quote underscores the deep-seated barriers that prevent so many from achieving this dream.

You, our cherished readers, understand our mission at BBM. We serve those who are homeless and living in poverty. Jesus' words resonate deeply with us, and we recognize that the American Dream, as it is commonly understood, feels out of reach for the thousands we serve and millions across our nation. The barriers to achieving this dream are formidable, and the notion of "pulling oneself up by the bootstraps" is indeed a myth.

At BBM, we offer hope. We walk alongside individuals who are unsheltered or living in poverty, ensuring they do not feel alone. I believe the solution to poverty and the elusiveness of the American Dream lies in the concept that "it takes a village." This phrase, rooted in an African proverb, suggests that it takes a community to create a safe, healthy environment where everyone can thrive.

This is our mission at BBM. With your unwavering support and encouragement, we become the village that supports those on the Mississippi Gulf Coast who are unsheltered and living in poverty. Your prayers, in-kind contributions, and financial donations are vital to our work. Together, we can provide the security and hope needed for people to realize their dreams.

Executive Director
Pastor James Pennington

find us online

FROM VISION TO REALITY WITH "EMERGENCY SHELTER ON WHEELS"

Back Bay Mission has a long-held mission: eradicating homelessness on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Recognizing the critical role transitional housing plays, we embarked on a unique solution– the "Emergency Shelter on Wheels" concept. These shelters provide immediate, safe, and temporary housing, a crucial foundation for individuals to rebuild their lives.

The mobility of these shelters is a key feature. Located in a hurricane-prone area, the wheels allow for easy transport of the units away from low-lying areas before storms, ensuring the safety of residents. This unique design merges our commitment to transitional housing with the necessity of disaster preparedness in our coastal community.

Last September, our vision materialized. We were proud to receive the "Emergency Shelter on Wheels" prototype – a remarkable testament to collaboration and community spirit. But the story starts even earlier, with a serendipitous encounter.

One Sunday after church, a Back Bay Mission volunteer and a Gulfport High School STEM instructor struck up a conversation. The urgent need for emergency shelters became a focal point, and a powerful alignment emerged. Gulfport High School's STEM students, with a recent grant from Harbor Freight Tools focused on impactful community projects, saw a perfect opportunity to make a difference.

Back Bay Mission, along with long-time volunteer and architect Michael Griffith, provided detailed plans. The STEM students, brimming with dedication and enthusiasm, brought these plans to life. The resulting prototype stands as a symbol of innovation and a community working together.

At Back Bay Mission, we're immensely grateful for this collaboration. The students' dedication to their community is truly commendable, and Harbor Freight Tools' commitment to fostering impactful education empowered these young minds to make a real difference.

Our vision for the "Emergency Shelter on Wheels" initiative has grown! We're now aiming to provide three transitional shelters on a single trailer, significantly increasing the number of individuals we can assist. We've already secured two trailers, and construction will commence upon their arrival. To make these shelters even more sustainable, each one will be solar paneled just as the prototype is!

If you'd like to support this critical initiative, whether you're interested in volunteering or contributing to the construction of these tiny emergency shelters, please reach out to Craig Steenkamp, Director of Housing Recovery, at csteenkamp@thebackbaymission.org.

This project is a celebration of partnership, a testament to what can be achieved with creativity and compassion. Together, we look forward to continuing the fight against homelessness.

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TRIUMPH OVER ADVERSITY: CHRISTOPHER'S JOURNEY TO A NEW HOME

By: Michael Rowan, ESG/HOPWA/HUD Housing Case Manager

"Christopher" found himself paralyzed from the waist down after an accident years ago. He has battled many different obstacles since. After facing many episodes of being unsheltered, he decided he wanted to seek a new way. He worked with the Day Center case manager to gain housing through the local housing authority. However, he was unable to locate his ex-wife to obtain written documentation of their separation. This caused him to be disqualified for the senior housing in Biloxi. The housing case manager took the referral and began working with him to secure an apartment to call home. This took some time as he needed an apartment that would be accessible by him, as he is wheelchair bound. On the first night home, "Christopher" began coughing up blood. EMS quickly took him to the hospital. "Christopher learned that he had experienced a stroke. After spending two weeks in the hospital, "Christoper" was able to be released to his new home. Today, he has a roommate who assists him with everyday tasks around the house. The home is filled with laughter and joy. "Christopher" remains hopeful and is working with the housing case manager to hopefully receive his disability approval soon.

MAKING AN IMPACT

I met "Bob" several years ago when he came to the Micah Day Center. He had been unsheltered for about eight months and was staying in the woods. From the very beginning his goal was to find employment. He would share with me that he applied for several jobs and was waiting to hear back. At the time he did have identification, so he was able to apply for a new Social Security card. When he got the card, he gave it to me to put in his file for safe keeping. I then explained the process for Back Bay Mission to help with the fee for the ID card. He was told that he would need to bring me proof of employment application for BBM to do a check request for the fee for the ID card. This, however, took about a year to come to fruition. I would do the check request and then he would not pick up the check to bring to the DMV. Then he got his Social Security card out of his file, that he requested, and lost it. He now needed to order another card, but this time had to go through a different process to get it, since he no longer had a valid ID. Once he ordered and received the new Social Security card, we focused on getting the ID again. He provided proof of job application, and another check request was made, and he again received the check for the fee. When he returned to the Day Center with the ID card, I was so happy for him because I knew that he would now be able to get a job. I made a copy for his file but not before telling him how proud I was of him for getting it done. Several weeks later he came to see me at the Day Center and told me he had a job but needed to get the new hire paperwork done. He did not have a phone and did not have email access. I told him to give the hiring manager my work email and I would help him complete it. Later that day, he was able to get it done and when I spoke to the hiring manager while he was in my office, she expressed that they were happy to have him on staff. During this process I told "Bob" that I had a favorite salad at the restaurant he was now working at and that I would stop by one day. Jokingly, he said for me to wait at least a week before coming in so he can learn how to make it. I told him I am looking forward to it.

I realized very quickly as a case manager for the Micah Day Center that outside factors affect each person differently when they are working on their goal(s). I don't know what they experience or what they go through before they walk through the Day Center doors. It may take someone a short time, or it can take months to a year for them to accomplish even the simplest of tasks. The important thing is that they keep trying and I am here to encourage and help them along the way.

By: Kirsten Hebron, Micah Day Center Case Manager

BRIDGES OUT OF POVERTY

On December 21st, our latest cohort of Investigators successfully graduated from the Bridges Out of Poverty program! After weeks of rigorous study, dedicated learning, and significant personal growth, these individuals have completed a transformative journey designed to empower them with the skills and knowledge needed to overcome the challenges of poverty.

The Bridges Out of Poverty program, led by Ms. Elizabeth Sandoval and Ms. Shemiko Brown, focused on providing participants with a comprehensive understanding of both their own community and the broader world. Referred to as Investigators, participants engaged in a 16-week course that included exploring crucial life skills and scenarios such as money management, language skills, time management, job services, social skills, family structures, communication strategies, motivation, and persistence.

Throughout the course, Investigators completed assignments and held discussions that were designed to foster deep understanding and practical application of the concepts learned. Our Investigators were not alone on this journey; they were supported by Mentors who provided advice, information, and encouragement. These Mentors, along with trained facilitators, ensured that the Investigators had the guidance they needed to navigate the program and beyond.

Throughout the program, Investigators worked through real-life scenarios, developing solutions and strategies that they can apply to their own lives. This hands-on approach, combined with the unwavering support of their Mentors and the program's facilitators, prepares participants to face and overcome the obstacles that contribute to poverty.

The journey culminates in a graduation that marks not just the end of the program, but the beginning of a new chapter in the lives of the Investigators. Armed with new knowledge, skills, and a supportive network, these graduates are now ready to apply what they have learned to achieve lasting change for themselves and their families!

Congratulations to all our graduates for their hard work, dedication, and perseverance. We also extend our heartfelt thanks to Elizabeth Sandoval and Shemiko Brown for their outstanding leadership and commitment to the success of the program and its participants.

As these new graduates move forward, we are confident that the best is yet to come. Their journey out of poverty has just begun, and we are excited to see the positive impact they will make in their communities and beyond.

PAVING THE WAY

Last year, a beautiful brick walkway was started at Back Bay Mission with the first placed bricks in memory of Mary Sue Wilson Fairchild, former Back Bay Mission board member. The First Congregational Church of Houston worked with Back Bay Mission to find a way to honor Mary's generous spirit for helping others. The bricks were proudly placed in a walkway in front of the Mission House.

And after many requests, we are thrilled to open the bricks for purchase again! Whether you would like to honor or memorialize someone, commemorate your most recent mission trip, or just to leave an inspiring note to our unsheltered friends, your purchase will help support Back Bay Mission and our programs. This initiative aimed to pave a way to a stronger future and provide opportunities for those servedby the mission. Brick orders will be taken until Saturday, October 12, 2024. To place a brick order, visit www.bricksrus.com/donorsite/backbaymission or scan the QR code below by using a smart phone camera.

CHANGING TIDES & COMMUNITY

Dear Ones,

I am writing this message during our time as long-term volunteers at Back Bay Mission in Biloxi. Dan and I have been committed to this place since 2006 after our first trip the year after Hurricane Katrina hit the area. My love and respect continue to grow for so many reasons. For this message, I needed to find a focus, and that focus is on community.

Community is my "word of the year." It speaks to a shared mission or geographical location. It's also bound by our personal perspectives and experiences. Here at BBM, community looks different than it does from our world in Northwest Ohio.

The mission statement from Micah 6:8 is not just a sign on the wall or on the peace pole on the property. To act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God is the guiding principle of the staff in their daily work. Craig, who oversees the housing rehabilitation programs, has been here 17 years and is the most tenured staff person, notes he found his church here at Back Bay Mission. Jesus' ministry of what community is all about is here in full force.

The community that many of the unsheltered know is one of abuse, addiction, destitution, and poverty. The cycle is broken, bit by bit, each day at BBM. Folks come for assistance with many things. It is easy to say, "why don't they just get a job?" The roadblocks are overwhelming. Things we take for granted like transportation, showers, washing our clothes, having the ID we need, educational opportunities…the list goes on and on. Access to healthcare is another critical area that is dismal for those unsheltered or uninsured. The case managers (Kirsten, Michael, Shemiko, Vicki, and Terra) are investigators, researchers, debaters, and rule benders when needed.

The mission supports those with a job and housing as well as the unsheltered and unemployed. Some people live in their cars, come in for a shower, pick up their clothes that were washed the day before, and then go to work…can you imagine? I can't.

We've had storms while we were here. I woke up one night wondering what it would be like to be in a tent or under a bush in a sleeping bag with the rain pouring down. There are no overnight shelters in the area. BBM does its best to find housing alternatives, but not everyone is ready to be sheltered, again for many reasons. One man who moved into an apartment stayed a few days, saying there was just too much stuff, and the walls were confining. He moved out, back to the streets. Change cannot be forced.

Each day, there are myriad and complicated needs. BBM doesn't look away or back down in addressing these needs. Providing hope and restoring dignity are no small feats that are tackled day after day.

So, community here is about meeting folks where they are, not where you think they should be. It's about acceptance, love, sometimes tough love, and advocacy. Pastor James, the executive director, spends much

of his time at the state capitol and with the local authorities having the hard conversations to change policy that continues the oppression of poverty. Shawn, CFO who has been here 7 years and is the only CFO BBM has had, came from the for-profit world where greed seemed a way of life, and now says every day she knows that she's part of doing what no other agencies do and squeezing every dollar to make it happen. Jonathan, Dhiana, Amanda, Raysha, Carlin, Samantha, Todd, LaChonda, Sandra, Taylor, and Robert are the mainstays of this team that brainstorms, agonizes, and challenges the status quo all with compassion and care. Some of the staff have been on the other side of the need and understand all too well.

This, then, is the community of Back Bay Mission. One other huge piece of the community is the short and long-term volunteers. BBM could not be as effective or reach as many as they do without the hundreds of us who serve every year with their time, talents, and resources. Please prayerfully consider joining a team and seeing BBM for yourself.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, said, "The arc of the moral universe is long but bends toward justice." Back Bay Mission is doing all it can to hurry the bending along.

Blessings,

Pastor Dawn Balduf

2023-2024 DONATION TRIBUTES THROUGH JUNE 17, 2024

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