

A Home Without Borders

Otto spent decades on the streets of the District, afraid to let anyone get close to him. Until he met Megan



In the 1970's, a young baker named Otto moved to DC from Switzerland to realize his dream of becoming an apprentice at the world-renowned Watergate Hotel kitchen. However, after a few personal and professional setbacks, Otto's mental health declined. He started to believe he was literally cursed and brought bad luck to everyone he cared about and everything he touched. As things got worse, Otto removed himself from everything he knew, including the apprenticeship he had worked so hard to obtain. Far from home and without the means to support himself, Otto soon became homeless. His mental health deteriorated on the streets. Otto refused to reach out to family and friends because he did not want to "curse" them. It would be over 30 years spent in homelessness before Otto would find family and home again.

During his decades on the street, Otto survived by fetching food out of dumpsters with a hanger so as to not touch the dumpster and contaminate it with his "curse". He came in frequent contact with homeless outreach programs throughout the City, but Otto always declined housing, believing he would curse any home he tried to build for himself.

Over the years, Pathways to Housing DC has gained a reputation for "never giving up" on people. Our experience has proven that with the right approach and the right relationship, every person's struggle on the streets can be ended. One day in 2012, a member of Pathways' mental health team was assigned to work with Otto. Like many case managers before her, Megan offered Otto housing and he declined. So Megan began the slow work of building a relationship with him instead. She started with short conversations and as Otto's confidence grew that he wasn't cursing her, he allowed Megan to bring him pizza for lunch. They continued to meet regularly for lunch for years but not without difficulty. Otto would frequently disappear and not show up for lunch, worrying that he was cursing Megan by spending too much time with her. But Megan always looked for him. Finally one day, Otto agreed to let Megan start the process of getting him the

services he needed, including a voluntary legal guardian.

Unfortunately, Otto's health was declining. Although he was afraid, Otto was taken to the hospital where he underwent emergency surgery for a large tumor. Megan stayed with him in the emergency room and was by his side when he was transferred to St. Elizabeths psychiatric hospital. This was Otto's first time in a building in 24 years and also his first time being under treatment with medication. As Otto's physical and mental health was finally recovering, Megan once again asked if he was ready for housing. Otto responded simply: "I want to go home."



Megan and Otto in Switzerland

Otto's family hadn't given up on him, either. His brother even came to D.C. to try and convince him to move home, but symptoms of his mental illness wouldn't allow Otto to do so. When his brother died, his niece took over her father's dream to bring Otto home. After months of emails, calls, and skyping sessions, Otto

decided that it would be best to reunite with his family in Switzerland. He asked Megan to fly by his side for support. In the Summer of 2017, Megan flew to Zurich with Otto, where his niece and sister-in-law greeted him with Swiss flags waving. Otto moved into a nursing home near his family where he has his own room and great views of the mountains. Otto and Megan remain in contact and they recently video chatted for their birthdays, which are only 10 days apart. Otto spent his 75th birthday, not feeling cursed or that he was causing harm to those around him, but feeling loved, supported, and safe at home.



Where We've Been and Where We're Going

Christy's Corner

Christy Respress, MSW
Executive Director

"What do you need?" For the majority of people experiencing homelessness that we meet, the immediate answer is equally simple: "I need a home". This small, yet powerful, exchange is the basis for the Housing First model that Pathways to Housing DC has pioneered over the last 14 years. A concept that was initially met with skepticism, Housing First is no longer a controversial practice, but the BEST practice for ending homelessness. Why? Because asking what people need and then delivering it to them works. Housing ends homelessness and housing FIRST works.

Most people say "Yes" to housing immediately. For some, it takes time to build relationships of trust that can overcome past disappointments or personal belief that they are not worthy of a home. For Otto, it took Megan, who stayed by his side and kept looking for him, even when he didn't show up to meetings.

Megan, who showed care and concern for Otto and never judged him or his beliefs. Megan, who reunited Otto with his family and accompanied him on his trip home. This relationship developed over time, and was born out of compassion and consistency. Pathways to Housing DC's goal is not just to end homelessness, but to do so permanently. 91% of the people that our Housing First programs serve, stay in their homes and never return to the streets. A big reason for that success is our incredible staff and the services they provide. Megan and Erin, who is featured in this month's staff spotlight, embody the person-centric Pathways DC philosophy of unwavering belief that recovery is possible.

Your generosity is also a big reason for the success of Pathways to Housing DC. Without your support, we would still be an effective, but small, organization whose reach was limited. Through your investments and the support of this community we have grown from a staff of 9, serving about 100 people a year to a staff of over 130, serving over 3,000 people each year. Your contributions not only allow us to reach more people, they allow us to think strategically and introduce innovative programs that can be even more effective in the ways that they deliver services. The Downtown Housing First Team and "Pathways Home" teams are two prime examples of programs that would have been impossible without our community partners. With your continued support we can, and will, end homelessness in the District.

Pathways Happenings



Thank you to the DC Dream Center and the Southeast White House for donating over 50 brand new mattresses!



Veteran's Day Celebration held by our Veteran's Housing First team for our veteran consumers.



We are thrilled to have so many generous and community-driven partners in this community. This work would be impossible without them.



GCAAR Young Professionals Network assembling welcome home baskets from donations they collected



Our Executive Team wears the ugly holiday sweaters the staff made for them!



The DC Federation of Citizens Associations Annual Holiday Luncheon



Thank you Home Goods and TJX Foundation!



Thank you to wonderful volunteer groups like Muslimah Society!



Staff members having fun at the Pathways holiday party!

Pathways is growing... because of YOU!

In the Fall of 2017, Pathways to Housing DC was proud to announce the formation of two new teams, approaching the issue of chronic homelessness in unique and innovative ways.

Downtown Housing First Team

Through expanded partnerships with the DC Department of Behavioral Health and the DowntownDC and Golden Triangle BIDs, Pathways added a new mental health housing team downtown. The team (one of the first of its kind in the country), will work in partnership with the street outreach teams funded by the BIDs to help 65 people living with serious mental health challenges sleeping on the streets move into permanent housing. Since September, this team has already ended homelessness for 16 people!

From left to right: Christy Smith, Registered Nurse; Mary Denham, Service Coordinator; Erika Hinson, Service Coordinator; Eric Scott, Peer Support Specialist; Stephanie Lyons, Clinical Supervisor



"Pathways Home" Team

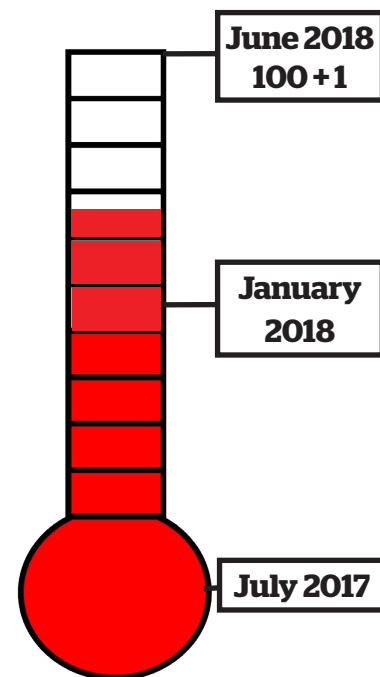
In partnership with Montgomery County, Pathways DC was one of thirteen programs nationwide awarded a five-year innovation grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to expand our services outside of the District for the first time. Pathways DC's expertise will be used to target Montgomery County's chronically homeless individuals with substance use and mental health challenges that are not currently being served by existing programs.

Tony Duncan, Peer Specialist, Marcela Medina, Social Worker, Pascal Peterson, Program Director

The Road to 101 Homes

With your help, we have ended homelessness for 68 people and are on track to reach our goal of over 100 by June 2018!

Our progress so far:



"What I've Learned..."

Staff Spotlight



Erin Brooks is a Team Leader for our Permanent Supportive Housing Team and recently celebrated 10 years of work at Pathways to Housing

DC. Erin truly embodies the caring, compassionate, and person-centric philosophy of the Pathways DC Housing First model. We sat down with her to learn more.

What's a favorite Pathways memory?

When I was working on [one of our mental health teams], one of the clients I was working pretty closely with had been estranged from his daughter. He hadn't seen her since she was 18 months, but was expressing interest in finding her. It had been 17 years. I went on Facebook and searched and found her and sent her a message to let her know that I knew her father and that he was hoping to reconnect. She actually wrote back. She was living in Florida at the time, but planned a trip to come to DC to meet her dad. I went with

him to reunite with his daughter for the first time in almost two decades. The meeting went well and they've stayed in touch ever since. She's now married and my client is now a grandfather. [Years] later, she messaged me telling me how grateful she was for helping reconnect them and make their family whole again. That meant a lot to me.

What have you learned from the work?

Homelessness and mental illness, substance abuse issues - they are nondiscriminatory. We've met and served and helped a lot of people who seemingly were doing really well in their lives. They were stable, and something happened and it all came crumbling down and they ended up in places they never thought they would. I've learned not to take life for granted - being grateful for having a steady job, a safe place to live, and that there are organizations like Pathways around just in case something happens.

What do you want people to know about Pathways and our clients?

I think people sometimes have the misconception that it's expensive to give

people housing and the services they need to recover their lives. The fact is, it really isn't, especially compared to the alternative of not doing anything and keeping people on the streets. There's also this assumption that you're giving people "free housing" but they don't have to "do anything" to earn it or deserve it. But, housing is a basic human right and one thing I've learned is that even though we don't have "requirements" for people to move into housing, removing that simple barrier of not having a roof over their heads opens up all kind of opportunities for people that they never knew they had.

Our Greatest Needs

- Large Men's Shirts: L, XL, XXL
- Large Men's Shoes: 10, 11, 12, 13, 14
- Sweat Pants, Waist Size: L, XL, 2XL
- Men's and Women's Underwear
- Pots and Pans
- Cleaning Supplies: Lysol Wipes, Sponges, All Purpose Cleaners
- Comforters, Sheets, and Pillows

Visit www.pathwaystohousingdc.org/our-wish-list for a full list of our needs, including our Amazon Wish List (Amazon ships directly to us!)

Winter 2018 Newsletter

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LEND US A HAND!

Volunteer

Sign up for future volunteer events like Martha's Market, or Saturday Volunteer Days at pathwaystohousingdc.org/volunteer



Donate

Help our clients make their apartment a home, by donating much needed household items like pots, pans, plates, silverware, and cleaning supplies. Contact Genesis at glazo@pathwaysdc.org to donate.

