AN EXCERPT FROM A RECENTLY DISCOVERED
BOULDER SHELTER FOR THE HOMELESS TEN-YEAR HISTORY

—AUTHOR UNKNOWN

December, 1982. Over two feet of snow fell in the Denver-Boulder area in 24 hours, the list of school and office closures stretched on and on, and thousands were stranded at Stapleton International Airport overnight as the airlines were forced to cancel all flights. The newspapers were calling it the "Blizzard of '82."

The entire city was literally shut down, but there was one special place in Boulder that was opening its doors for the very first time—that place was Boulder's emergency shelter. Those doors would open hundreds more times in those first few months and thousands more in the years to come. Those in need were offered a warm bed, a shower, a hot meal and companionship.

Sister Donna Ryan, who was a member of the original task force that founded the Shelter, remembers what the first Shelter was like. "It was pretty raw. I think there was only one tiny toilet and the whole place was glass so it was very cold. And the mattresses were on the floor," she said.

Back then, the Shelter was located in an abandoned RTD bus station at 12th and Canyon. The building was small and could house only 24 people, which big memories for those who were there.

On October 1, 2016, the Boulder Shelter for the Homeless began its 35th season of winter sheltering service for homeless adults in our community. Though the Shelter's beginnings were humble, they were also inspiring. Today, because of you, the Boulder Shelter continues to express a great tradition of community compassion and generosity, providing the essential services and support that are often necessary to help people get back on their feet.

During these many past seasons, the Boulder Shelter has provided more than half a million bed nights and well over a million meals for over 25,000 unduplicated clients, with the help of thousands of volunteers and supporters (just like you).

Why are numbers like these important? Only because each one represents a person, like George and Donald and Gary, whose stories vary greatly in the details, but whose individual experience of homelessness was equally shattering. George and Donald and Gary each have been in and out of the Shelter many times, experiencing the Shelter as a safe place to fail and struggling in their own ways to rebuild their lives. Second chances, even third, enabled these men to finally and recently move out of the Shelter and into independent housing. Their Shelter case manager said, "All three of these guys are prime examples of how the help we offer people can manifest into tangible outcomes in their lives. All are great individual success stories to hang onto as we navigate the zigzagging emotional path that is sheltering the homeless."
In this edition of Under Our Roof, we celebrate the people in the Shelter’s Housing First program, specifically those residing at 1175 Lee Hill.

(Please see the opposite page to read more about Housing First and to see some of the results of the 1175 Lee Hill program)

The 1175 Lee Hill project is a partnership between Boulder Housing Partners (the Housing Authority for the City of Boulder) and the Shelter. Boulder Housing Partners (BHP) developed and owns the Lee Hill building while the Shelter provides all of the case management support to the residents. The Lee Hill facility opened its doors in November 2014 and quickly moved in 31 chronically homeless individuals. As you can imagine, being given the keys to a safe, clean apartment, after living under a bridge for years, has a profound impact a person. And, more broadly, housing the chronically homeless touches the entire community. As we moved people into Lee Hill, this was evident in many ways.

For example, of the 31 people that initially moved in, seven were on the “frequent flyer” list from the local municipal court. These are people who have had numerous misdemeanor offenses (open container, trespassing, etc.) that landed them in the local court system. Housing these seven individuals has dramatically reduced their contact with law enforcement, taken them out of the court system and kept them out of the Boulder jail—a true win for the resident, and for our community.

The profound impact of this was brought home for me soon after Lee Hill opened when two Boulder Police Officers unexpectedly showed up with house warming gifts for several of Boulder County’s long-time homeless individuals—individuals who now had a place to call home at 1175 Lee Hill.

Greg Harms, Executive Director

GRATITUDE FLOWS ALL WAYS.

We at the Shelter are sincerely grateful to have the opportunity to be of service to those in need in our community.

From time to time our residents also express their own gratitude to us, sometimes with a note like this one.

And, of course, none of this would happen without you.

Thank you for supporting us, for supporting our clients, and for being a vital part of the process of creating space and opportunity for people to hold on so they can move on.
1175 Lee Hill, a Housing First facility, is operated by Boulder Housing Partners with case management services provided by the Boulder Shelter for the Homeless—providing 31 permanent supportive housing units to highly vulnerable, chronically homeless individuals.

Housing First is a programmatic approach designed to help chronically homeless individuals move quickly off the streets or out of the shelter system into permanent housing, accompanied by case management and support services.
Niwot United Methodist Church

How long has your group been volunteering at the Shelter?
Niwot United Methodist Church has volunteered at the Shelter for a decade. We have been involved with preparing and serving dinner.

What inspired your group to volunteer at the Shelter?
We wanted to give back to our community.

Has anything surprised you about volunteering at the Shelter? If so, what?
I am always surprised at how rewarded and connected to the patrons I feel each time I leave the Shelter.

What is your favorite story or interaction from your time volunteering at the Shelter?
I am impressed with the contributions made, and how some patrons help in the kitchen.

What do you share with other members of your organization/faith community about the experience of volunteering at the Shelter?
Volunteering is a simple way to contribute and make a difference in our community.

I share about the breadth of people that utilize the homeless shelter. People that are working all day or they are dressed up as if they are interviewing. The population served represents a larger cross section of the community than I expected.

Every time our church members serve at the Boulder Shelter for the Homeless, I get feedback about how meaningful it is. The older members of our church often go and serve alongside our youngest teens. This strengthens their relationships with each other, as well as them taking part in what is most important: serving and loving our neighbors, as we are called to do.

—Rev. Pam Everhart, Niwot UMC

We love our volunteers!

Last year, 1,357 volunteers donated more than 13,000 hours of work to the Shelter.
[ staff profile ]

Tracy Smith
Donations Processing Coordinator

Why do you work at the Shelter?
Working for a cause and a purpose that I care about has always been important to me. The opportunity to impact individual lives, improve the local community, and help create social change is something I have always aspired to. The talented staff I work with every day never ceases to amaze me with their passion, their insight, and their deep commitment to serving the vulnerable homeless population. I am inspired every day by my coworkers, the homeless men and women we serve, and the kindness of the volunteers and donors who give of themselves to the Shelter in order to make a difference.

What are your daily responsibilities?
I process all of the donations that come through the Shelter. I enter items into our database and assist in acknowledging the kindness and generosity of our donors. Database entries and updates are also my responsibility. More recently I have begun to assist in payroll and other administrative duties. Earlier this year I obtained my Human Resources Certification. I enjoy applying that knowledge to Shelter activities while at the same time expanding my comprehension of HR competencies from the excellent staff and policies already in place.

What exceptional challenges and opportunities have you discovered in your work here?
I am extremely lucky to have the opportunity to experience both sides of the beautiful community the Shelter is lucky enough to serve. I get to celebrate the accomplishments of the homeless men and women that seek assistance from the Boulder Shelter. I share in the heartbreak of everyone involved when a resident’s story does not turn out as we had all hoped. I also get a glimpse of the hearts and souls of donors who give of themselves. They give what they can out of kindness and sacrifice so that others’ lives may be improved. I am constantly reminded that people are good, they are willing to help each other, and the world can be a beautiful place if you know where to look.

What do you like to do for fun?
Reading, yoga, hiking, and traveling are some of my favorite activities. I also love spending time with my children, my husband, and my three dogs. I’m a big Colorado Rapids fan and follow the Colorado Avalanche as well!
A Shelter donor says...

“Fortune has smiled on our family. Each family member has a safe home and a warm bed to sleep in. We are daily conscious of people who have neither. The Shelter’s services for the homeless are a credit to the staff, the volunteers and to the heart of our community.”