



Thank You and Farewell

If you've visited the Somerville Homeless Coalition offices in Davis Square, or if you've run in the annual Road Race, stopped by the booth at ArtBeat, or joined the Save Our Homes Walk, you've probably met Executive Director Mark Alston-Follansbee. He's the friendly guy wearing a peace sign pin. Mark is committed to peace and social justice, and he has been working to address and prevent homelessness in Boston for over thirty years. As he readies for his retirement in June, he reflects on the path that brought him here.



Photo by Richard Chase

Mark was twenty-one years old when he arrived home from Vietnam in March of 1968. He had planned to be a journalist but was drafted after his first year of college. He spent a year serving overseas, and when he returned he was, in his own words, "a mess." The years that followed were difficult, as he struggled to make sense of his experience and re-adjust to society. "For years," he says, "I really had no focus or aim in my life."

A series of impulsive decisions brought him to Boston in 1985. It was here that he first saw people experiencing homelessness. "There was this one group of guys who would always ask me for money. I started talking to them and found out a lot of them were veterans. I don't think homelessness was in my consciousness at all until I started talking to these guys on the street. **I was pretty sure that if I hadn't had the support I had when I came back, I could have been out there too.**"

First he was angry. Then he wanted to help.

Finding ways to help wasn't easy.

In 1985, many were just beginning to notice the growing problem of homelessness, and few services were available. After some searching, Mark connected with the then-new Homeless Services for the City of Cambridge. Mark was working retail and volunteered on his days off, creating a guide to the help available to people living on the streets. In the following years he worked for the City of Cambridge and a Cambridge homeless shelter.

Mark joined the Somerville Homeless Coalition as Executive Director in 2000. During his eighteen-year tenure, the SHC has helped thousands of individuals and families find or stay in their homes. Permanent housing and case management programs joined the shelters and food pantry program. In recent years the organization has been able to develop homelessness prevention programs. The budget has grown from \$950,000 to \$3.2 million, but the need for aid has outpaced the funds available. "We've been able to develop a real continuum of services in Somerville." Mark notes, adding "**We have the skills and experience to do much more than we're doing, but we're limited by the resources available to us.**"

As he prepares for the road ahead, Mark is grateful for his years with the Somerville Homeless Coalition, and the support the community has given both him and the organization. He hopes this support will continue in his absence and adds, "I've gained much more than I've given. I've found something that's been meaningful for me and hopefully helpful to others. Thank you all."

Partner Spotlight: Preventing Homelessness through Legal Assistance

Many people who come to the Somerville Homeless Coalition for help aren't homeless, yet. They are worried that they may become homeless. They are struggling to make ends meet, and to find a safe, stable, and affordable place to live. This housing "insecurity" is further exacerbated by factors beyond a tenant's control. Rents are skyrocketing and wages haven't kept up. In this hot real estate market, some long-term residents find themselves facing eviction when a landlord sells a building to a new owner who plans to renovate and flip, or simply raise the rent another few hundred dollars a month.



This spring, the Somerville Homeless Coalition and Cambridge

and Somerville Legal Services (a branch of Greater Boston Legal Services) have been working together to offer assistance to Somerville residents who have questions about their rights in case of eviction or landlord neglect, navigating a housing search, and applying for rental assistance.



One-on-one sessions with experienced housing attorneys from CASLS, such as Ellen Shachter pictured here, were available in May and June at the SHC offices in Davis Square. Three other workshops were also offered at the St. Polycarp Apartments

on Mystic Ave. in May.

SHC's Director of Programs, Lisa Davidson, sees a need for this kind of assistance every day. She frequently speaks with clients who have faced housing discrimination or have legal questions about de-leading and other housing health and

safety issues, and she has watched rents steadily increase over the years. "We've seen (rent) increases of 3-5% on a yearly basis. There's a lot of low-income Somerville residents renting in the private market who are feeling the crunch. We're trying to get the word out that there are resources in the city. SHC has funding for short-term and long-term rental assistance, and there are other subsidized housing resources."

Susan Hegel of CASLS emphasizes that this assistance is available to anyone with questions about tenants' rights. "This is a great opportunity for renters (of all incomes) to obtain legal advice about their housing situation and to find out about their rights as a tenant, including rights about their security deposit, bad conditions, eviction process, lease provisions, rent amounts and other similar topics."

The workshops were made available thanks to funding from the **City of Somerville's Health and Human Services Department**. Doug Kress, the city's Health and Human Services director, notes **"Safe and stable housing is one of the key social determinants of health. Partnering with SHC and CASLS to provide these opportunities allows us to better connect residents to needed services and this partnership is invaluable in helping to address housing instability."**

Anyone in need of assistance about homeless prevention or housing rights is encouraged to contact the Somerville Homeless Coalition (617-623-6111) or Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services (617-603-2700).

Last year, the Somerville Homeless Coalition helped prevent 287 people, including 115 children, from becoming homeless. Working with our partner agencies, such as Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services, we expect to serve even more in 2018.

Peace and Justice Campaign

Your donation will be doubled to help others



If you've ever encountered a homeless person on the street and wondered how you can help, know that your donation to the Somerville Homeless Coalition will make a real impact. We go beyond putting a band-aid on the problem of homelessness. We provide a comprehensive set of services, from street outreach to shelter and permanent housing, from support to prevention, as well as a food pantry.

Homelessness is an issue of social justice and it can be solved. We have launched a Peace and Justice Campaign to help us help more people.

Donations made by June 30 will be doubled! Our board and a couple of anonymous donors have contributed \$14,000 as a Challenge Matching Fund. It is the support of our community that makes it possible for us to be the safety net, providing shelter and support. **Thank you** for being part of our caring community!

Make your gift online at www.shcinc.org or mail a check to Somerville Homeless Coalition, One Davis Square, Somerville, MA 02144, memo: Peace and Justice.

Fill a Backpack for Success

Back-to-School collection drive

Education can be key to ending the cycle of poverty. Children experiencing homelessness or hunger face special challenges to their education. Their living situation affects their ability to focus and learn, their ability to relate to others, and their overall mental health. We do our best to provide food and shelter, but still more is needed.

Every year, members of our community collect new backpacks, pens, pencils, notebooks, crayons and other school supplies for children in our shelters and assisted housing. These necessary supplies help give kids the tools they need to succeed. A list of needed items and drop-off locations can be found at www.shcinc.org

In addition to the annual school supply drive, the Project SOUP food pantry always welcomes donations of healthy snack items for children to bring to school and breakfast items to start days off right.



Donations from Middlesex Federal Savings



**Saturday, October 6
9 AM, Rain or Shine
Davis Square**

Running to Help End Homelessness

On October 6, hundreds of people will take to the streets to help homeless and hungry families and individuals in our community. In its 23rd year, the race aims to raise more than \$90,000 to support programs and services for those in need.

Registration is now open at www.shcinc.org or www.active.com. And it isn't too early to start forming your team and collecting pledges!



And they're off!



Team Fidelity National Title

Upcoming Events to Benefit SHC:

Save Our Homes Walk to Prevent Homelessness

Sunday, June 10, 2:00 – 4:00 pm

City Hall, Somerville

Redbones Pig Pickin'

July 30, 5-9 pm (Rain date August 6)

Redbones, 55 Chester St., Somerville

Golf Tournament

Thursday, September 20, 11:00 am

Sandy Burr Country Club, Wayland

*To get notices of upcoming events emailed to you, please sign up for the
'All Events' email list at www.shcinc.org*