

Wow, This is How it Feels to Lift Someone Up!

I grew up in Peekskill...graduated college... had a great career in Human Resources...and have never had to depend on anyone.

I lost my job in January of 2020. I began searching immediately for a new one until the rug was pulled out from under me again when the Pandemic just shut everything down that March.

It didn't take long before I had to start dipping into my savings to pay for rent and food. It took even less time to realize that I couldn't stay in my apartment. I basically lost everything I owned and took the essentials I could carry to a hotel. It was devastating, I burned through the rest of my savings as I continued to look for work.

Honestly, I didn't even know where to go for help. Eventually, I got to Lifting Up Westchester's drop-in center at the Samaritan House Women's Shelter. It was very difficult to accept the reality of the situation. The staff were very kind and supportive. They helped me fill out mountains of required paperwork and encouraged me to find a Plan B career so I could get housing as soon as possible.

I remembered my family taking care of my grandmother and how fulfilling that was, so I was open to becoming a home health aide. I was able to use the computer at Samaritan House to apply for the training course, but I didn't have the \$30 to purchase the required book or the \$2.75 bus fare to get to class every day. While it was not a big expense, if you have nothing, that is a huge barrier to getting back on your feet. **Lifting Up Westchester paid for my book and the bus fare, and the staff made sure I had a quiet place to study.**

After a month, I successfully earned my certification and started working. I love taking care of people, but the hours are not full time or steady which has made it difficult to save as much as I need to find housing I can afford.

Finally, staff at Samaritan House got me into a room at the YWCA. It is the only place I can afford in Westchester County as a home health aide. I continue to work and save as much as possible to be able to move into an apartment. But I am starting to resume my search for a position in Human Resources so I can get back to my former life.

I am deeply grateful to the staff at Samaritan House for all their support and encouragement. Without them, I don't know what would have happened to me. It was such a terrifying time that I could have never imagined happening in my life.



Never in a million years did Cathleen ever think she would become homeless.

You Never Know When Kindness will Present You with a Lifeline

When we first shared David's story with you in 2020, he had just started his job at a local hospital in Environmental Services. You might remember David had a tough background. . . "I took the easy way out and ended up in prison." While in prison, David realized he had to change his life for good and he studied to be a paralegal and also a pastoral counselor.

When David arrived at Open Arms Men's Shelter he was surprised at how differently (in a good way) the staff spoke with him and how supportive they were. That had not been his experience at another shelter. People looked down at him and he felt stigmatized. But the kindness of Lifting Up Westchester staff helped him to open up about what his goals were.

Thanks to your generosity, our Housing Success and Employment Specialist team worked with David to help him secure a job in the hospital and find housing he could afford.

Three years later, David has been a star employee at the hospital for always going

above and beyond for the patients when it is not his job. David shared a really beautiful example of that kindness. He passed by a woman in the hallway who was crying because her father was about to have a heart transplant. David told her about this man who was diagnosed with cancer, had three heart attacks, a stroke, then Covid all within one week and survived because of the care he received in that hospital. Then he shared that he was that man. The woman asked him to come into her father's room to share his story with her father. A few days after his surgery, he was walking by and the woman's mother thanked him for giving her husband the confidence that he was going to make it and be ok. The daughter said, "you do not even know how much you helped my father."

We are so proud of David. He has overcome many challenges and is succeeding wonderfully in his job, in his apartment, in the community, and economically. **Because of the support you helped to provide,** David is building the



life he has always dreamed of. . .helping people, a new car, a trip to Hawaii, and so much more lies ahead.

"Lifting Up Westchester got me on the right track. It's not easy in the beginning to better yourself. It is something I have to be mindful of every day."

CAN'T ATTEND THE GALA?

You can still bid on the silent auction from afar to help us launch two game-changing initiatives...

- Expansion of our Employment Center so we can work with a wider group of individuals to build employment readiness skills and find jobs, and
- Expansion of our Community Kitchen to offer a place for individuals to go all day to access a variety of resources and services.

**To register online visit liftingupwestchester.org/gala.
The silent auction opens online the week of April 10th.
Check out our presale buy-now fabulous items.**

The silent auction will accept bids until 7:30pm on Thursday, April 27, 2023.

**LIFTING UP
WESTCHESTER
2023 GALA
CELEBRATING
LIFELINES
TO LASTING
CHANGE**

We are excited to recognize AvalonBay Communities, Leon Feigenbaum, and Walter & Sylvia Simon who have each been critical in strengthening Lifting Up Westchester's ability to make an impact on people's lives in Westchester County.

Double Your Impact with our \$200,000 Challenge Grant!

The challenge grant will help launch two game-changing centers: Community Central & Job Central.

Whether you send in a donation, buy a silent auction item, register for the Gala, or become a monthly donor, your gift may be eligible for this match. **Eligible gifts for individuals and organizations made through the end of April include:**

- New donors and pre-2022 donors giving \$1,000+ (100% matched)
- Donors who gave \$1,000+ in 2022 who increase their donation (100% of the increase matched)
- Donors who gave less than \$1,000 in 2022 who upgrade to \$1,000+ (100% matched)



Lifting Up Westchester's 6th Annual Essay Contest: *What are the Connections and the Misperceptions Associated with Homelessness and Mental Health*

The contest is funded in loving memory of Beth Massey Rubens, a lifelong teacher, tutor, and mentor with a particular love for language arts. Below are excerpts from a few of the essays that provide insightful reflections on the perceived relationship between mental health and homelessness. These essays are truly a glimmer of hope for a brighter future for everyone in the community.

Isabelle Vembenil, The Ursuline School 2nd place, 9th & 10th grade category

"I became first aware of the extent of homelessness in our community when I worked with my older siblings helping perform various projects that helped LUW's efforts to assist the homeless. However,



writing this essay brought to my mind yet another stigma that homeless individuals suffer from: being perceived as mentally ill or dangerous. Researching the link between homelessness and mental health taught me that homelessness is a complex problem with primarily socioeconomic origins, with mental health issues contributing to it in a minor way. The vast majority of those who suffer from mental illnesses are not homeless and continue to stay employed and housed. Most homeless individuals don't have mental illnesses, though they may naturally suffer from psychological distress brought on by their situation. Prolonged homelessness and adverse conditions may lead to some developing mental health issues, and mental health issues can result in some becoming homeless. However, correlation does not imply causation when it comes to mental health issues and homelessness. By providing those struggling with mental health issues with the support system they need, we can potentially prevent them from spiraling into homelessness."

Honesty Woods, Peekskill High School 2nd Place, 11th & 12th grade category

"Being homeless isn't something people just choose to do. It is something that happens to them. All things out of our control can negatively impact



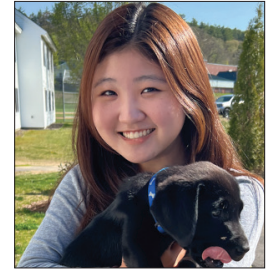
our mental health. Think about a time when someone or something else was in the process of making a decision for you. It stressed you out, right? Think about something that occurred in your life that was completely out of your control. It's a terrible feeling. Especially when it's something as life changing as homelessness.

For adults, homelessness carries a lot of stress and dangers. Especially for those with kids. There is stress, and hopelessness. For kids, there is a lot of confusion. I was a kid and I was confused, sad, and I felt terrible. I didn't really understand what was happening or why it was happening to me of all people. What did I do to deserve this? Truth is, absolutely nothing.

Homeless people are people too. They don't deserve to be judged and stereotyped. We, as a population, are people first."

Risa Goji, Keio Academy 1st place, ESL Category

"I think people experiencing homelessness are likely to be stigmatized or stereotyped as having a mental illness or poor mental health



because there is a misperception that homeless individuals are dangerous and should be avoided. It makes it more difficult for homeless individuals to access the resources they need to get back on their feet. The reality is that homeless individuals are no more likely to be violent than anyone else, and many are themselves victims of violence and abuse. I believe it's crucial to challenge these misperceptions and to work to address the root causes of homelessness and mental health problems, rather than simply treating the symptoms. This will require a multi-faceted approach that involves investing in affordable housing, improving access to mental health services, and addressing poverty and inequality."

CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL OF OUR 2023 ESSAY CONTEST WINNERS!

7TH & 8TH GRADE:

1st Place: Laura Leshaj, Eastchester Middle School
2nd Place: Cadence Kappel, Pelham Middle School
3rd Place (tie): Jacob Souza, Irvington Middle School
3rd Place (tie): Kate Bevan, North Salem Middle/High School
Honorable Mention: Ezra Shuf, Highlands Middle School
Honorable Mention: Emily Kasoff, Irvington Middle School
Honorable Mention: Rafe Goodyear, Pelham Middle School

9TH & 10TH GRADE:

1st Place: Le Wang, Edgemont Senior High School
2nd Place: Isabella Vembenil, The Ursuline School
3rd Place: Haley Berger, Briarcliff High School

11 & 12 GRADE:

1st Place (tie): Agnesa Rraci, Woodlands High School
1st Place (tie): Kristen Luther, Woodlands High School
2nd Place: Honesty Woods, Peekskill High School
3rd Place (tie): Natasha Pereira, Scarsdale High School
3rd Place (tie): Stacy Di Maulo, Alexander Hamilton High School, Elmsford
Honorable Mention: Lamyaa Hamid, Peekskill High School

ESL:

1st Place: Risa Goji, Keio Academy
2nd Place (tie): Rena Maruyama, Keio Academy
2nd Place (tie): Rika Ishii, Keio Academy

To read more excerpts from our 2023 Essay Contest, go to liftingupwestchester.org/essay-contest.

To get involved, donate or ask questions contact the Development Department.

www.liftingupwestchester.org
info@liftingupwestchester.org

Connect with us on social media:

@LiftingUpWestchester



Aria's Story Will Warm Your Heart

Aria is just a remarkable young woman. She transferred to a school in Yonkers from the Bronx following the tragic murder of her mother when she was in 9th grade. Despite mourning her loss, Aria was determined to graduate high school and enroll in college. She had some major academic challenges to overcome. She struggled with reading and writing to such a degree that it was making everyday tasks a huge challenge and that had a huge impact on her self-esteem. Aria also had a speech impediment which led to conflicts and fighting with her classmates and suspensions.

But Lifting Up Westchester does not give up on our kids. And that is because of people like YOU! The unwavering support of our team helped Aria learn how to minimize conflict at school, focus on her upcoming adoption, and continue to grow her literacy skills. Aria got the help she needed to

successfully overcome significant challenges and graduate high school.

In 2021, Aria enrolled in College with the ambition of pursuing her dream of working in the medical field. However, due to the pandemic, she was given online courses and struggled during her first semester. Our College Support Coaches helped Aria realize that this was not the right program for her and helped her modify the path to achieve her goal to work in healthcare to align with her strengths. Today, Aria is attending a trade school to become a medical technician while interning at a clinic.

Despite the demands of work and school, Aria is living with her adopted mom, continuing to receive mentoring support from

Lifting Up Westchester, and is committed to achieving her goals. Aria's story is an inspiration to all who face adversity, and her resilience and determination combined with your support will serve her well in the future.

Thanks to you, Aria can now forge her own path towards a successful life.

