

I feel grateful to tell you a bit about my 82 year old mother and about her situation from becoming homeless, to being homeless and then to thankfully getting a place to live through the help of Cassie Gillespie of Safe Harbor Health and the Champlain Housing Trust.

As you may or may not know affordable housing in the state of Vermont is tricky; especially for those on limited incomes (and I would imagine given the amount of paperwork and focus needed for those with any kind of mental, emotional or learning challenge).

My mother had been/is (?) on the list for section 8 housing since 2010. They said it would be a 5-7 year waiting list. (I checked in August of 2013, it is now 7-11 year waiting List). She was 79 years old at the time and had been away from Vermont (working in Alaska through the Vista Program), but returned and needed a place to live. With the waiting for something to come up, the fear and realization that Vermont is an expensive place to live and the lack of any "real" help from the Agency on Aging, she felt that she should return back to Ohio where things seemed cheaper and more affordable. She left and lived with a niece of hers for almost a year, waiting for a solution. She got lonely, wanted to be closer to her children and yet, seemed to be increasingly confused about where and what she should do to live out her life. I had noticed that she was changing and that "something" was shifting in her. I had to wonder was this shift just old age, dementia or what?

Once again, I tried to get help from the Agency on Aging. I found it trying to get into any sort of "system" and get help while trying to understand the in's and outs. It was terribly difficult, not to mention frustrating.

I don't know how anyone with the stress of low income, health problems etc... can find their way through the system without help. An individual needs LOTS of perseverance, luck and the ability to focus and fill out A LOT of paperwork.

She again returned to Vermont (May of 2012) hoping to find a cheap, affordable place to live. Meanwhile, she thought she could flip flop from staying with my brother and with me and others that she knew until something came up. I noticed she no longer seemed to have the attention span, much less the know how to make out housing forms; asking the questions and remembering from one day to the next was a real challenge. It was at this point that I went up the ladder at the Agency on Aging to get help. The "help" came through in the way of helping us with paper-work but it was slow going. There were and are waiting lists everywhere.

The shift really happened after months of trying to get my mother's teeth fixed. (Again, she was unable to do paper work etc... All these agency make it really HARD to get HELP. I know that people finagle but WOW!) It was the day that she was in the dentist chair and we had the pre-opt, we were all set and then...

I asked the question, "You will bill her for this appointment, right"? The doctor said, "No, you have to pay the total upon leaving". (I thought, seriously... how long had we been

waiting for this moment). So, the doctor took the Xrays and it was suggested to go to DCF to get a voucher to help pay the cost of having 6 teeth pulled.

I took my mother to DCF first thing in the morning. As we were sitting there in the waiting room making out the paperwork, she asked me "should I check the box for emergency shelter?" The situation was getting worse at my brothers with his late nights and my mother sleeping on his couch for a year and a half. I would take her on the weekends but, couldn't do more because of the preschool business I run in my home.

Not only did we get funds from DCF to help pay for her dental work, but when they recognized her as an "emergency shelter" candidate, everything changed, and finally, an agency took her need for housing seriously.

She was granted 12 days at Harbor Place and dental care. She LOVED the room. But, she had difficulty understanding her need to contribute when the 12 days ended. Again, with the meetings and explaining to my mother, she slowly but surely worked through each hoop she was asked to jump. But, it's these "hoops" that are hard and scary for those that are unable to have just their BASIC needs met. This is where I feel that these Social Workers are a gift. Cassie did the extra work of asking the questions and pushing through the paper piles that must live in the possible rental places that await those without. Then, the Agency on Aging helped me explain to my mother the needs expected of her.

I found the assistance of both Social Workers a huge help. My mother could listen to them much easier than listening to her daughter (me) that just wanted her basic needs to be met. It is always seemingly easier to hear another rather than a family member.

She did not want to leave "Harbor Place". She seems to get comfortable as she is aging and does not like change very much. Yet, she gets bored easily and thinks she knows what she needs. The world has changed so much and these people need help in order to sift through each process needed for each life surviving need.

All in all, she stayed at Harbor Place for 6 weeks. At the end of the first subsidized 12 days, she resisted paying out \$28 per day for the next 2 weeks (over \$400) because she didn't feel like she could afford it. But she eventually paid. Because her expenses were limited to 50% of her income, she was then able to get another 2 weeks subsidized. By the end of that period, the social worker at Harbor Place was able to locate a more permanent living situation through Winooski Housing at 83 Barlow Street.

The housing at 83 Barlow costs my mother 1/3 of her income, so it is less expensive than the emergency shelter, and she has a one-bedroom apartment. Even so, if she had been left to her own devices, she would have chosen not to move there. Again, she felt that she couldn't afford the rent, she didn't know anyone there, it was unfamiliar, etc. The combination of fear, apprehension, and confusion over forms and obligations could easily have derailed this. As it is, we still have obstacles in getting her set up with automatic deduction, payment of security deposits, and the basics like getting a phone,

furniture, and something as basic as a bed to sleep on. Without the social workers AND support from family (AND the fact that her family support happened to have time off during this period), this would never have happened. It is no surprise that homeless people cannot work through the system effectively.

Thank you for your time in hearing our story.

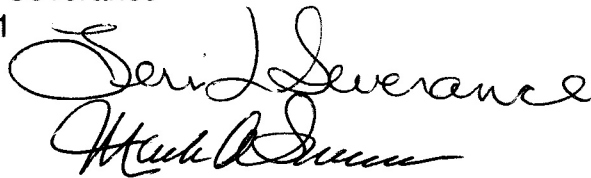
I hope this helps give a view of the hurdles that are real for real people and the gift that Harbor Place contributed to our story.

Please feel free to contact us if needed

Sincerely,

Terri and Mark Severance

(802) 343-0471

Handwritten signatures of Terri and Mark Severance. The signature for Terri is written in a cursive style, and the signature for Mark is also in cursive, appearing below Terri's signature.