



(formerly Montachusett Interfaith Hospitality Network, Inc. - MIHN)

2020 Annual Report



758 Main Street • Leominster, MA 01453
978-466-1704
www.northstarfs.org



Core Purpose

Providing transformative services to families.

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Mission Statement

Provide stable housing, comprehensive services and advocacy for families in need of support.

.....

Vision Statement

A bridge to independence that ensures stable living for all.

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Executive Director's Retrospective

North Star Friends,

The year 2020 was unlike any that we have seen in the past 100 years. COVID-19 impacted the entire world with many lives lost, families decimated, businesses shuttered and food and housing insecurity brought to the forefront.

The barriers and challenges that homeless families faced this year were amplified a thousand-fold. Families lost their daycare providers which meant that they were unable to maintain their employment. Most companies and businesses that weren't deemed essential were closed for several months with 25%-30% closing their doors permanently. The result was all of our families lost their jobs for several months and then were faced with finding new employers once again.

The North Star agency and shelter staff worked diligently to react quickly and decisively to keep the shelter open during this crisis and to maintain all families, volunteers and staff's health. Sanitizing the shelter routinely, purchasing large quantities of PPE and building strong protocols became our daily focus. We continue to weather the storm well.

I am proud of the agency/shelter accomplishments that we made this year while faced with the world-wide pandemic.

- North Star residents and staff were kept safe.
- Our staff team remained dedicated to families with extraordinary commitment.
- All the children in the shelter continued with their education remotely.
- Our volunteers did not falter and made sure our families never missed a meal.
- Several capital projects were completed.
- Most impressive was North Star's ability to successfully transition seven families into self-sufficient, permanent housing.

Within this uncertain and scary year, North Star still forged ahead on our supportive housing initiative. We have secured a piece of land and assembled a highly skilled team to assist us in constructing a 12-unit, apartment complex supported by staff wrap around services. This is a colossal project for North Star and demonstrates the level of affordable housing need in our community. North Star's vision of being "a bridge to independence that ensures stable living for all" is alive and well.

Sincerely,



Jon Hogue, Ed.D
Executive Director
North Star Family Services, Inc.



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Excel Church

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College Seventh-day Adventist Church

Lunenburg Turkey Hill Family Lions Club

New Hope Community Church

City United Church



Bonnie Hathaway, Founder
Board President Emeritus

North Star Success Story

Becky and her baby son Brandon came to North Star Family Services in the summer of 2019. When the family entered the program, Brandon was less than two weeks old, Becky was suffering from medical complications from the birth, and they had no support system in place. With the support of North Star staff, Becky was able to secure daycare for Brandon and return to work within a few weeks. Over the next few months Becky struggled getting assigned more than 20 hours per week. She kept advocating for herself and her family and finally was able to work full-time hours in Spring of 2020.

However, her joy and excitement did not last long; the COVID-19 pandemic started and Becky got laid off. Like most of our homeless families, Becky was forced to collect unemployment and start over. She did not give up. She saved her unemployment income, and as soon as daycares opened back up, she fought to secure a placement for Brandon. She then immediately started with the search for a new job. Within two weeks, Becky was offered a position in a field that she is passionate about and allows her to help others. She quickly became a valued team member and with proof of employment was able to start her housing search. Shortly after Brandon's first birthday, the family was finally able to move into their new home. Brandon, who had just taken his first steps during his last few days at North Star, quickly improved his walking skills, so he could explore the family's well deserved new and safe home.



2020 Shelter Highlights

Virtual Walk Fundraiser

North Star's annual walk for families fundraiser was not able to happen at Doyle Field last spring. This year we did a virtual walk to raise funding for the shelter. The parents and children at the shelter got involved by making thank you signs for the end of the walk finale.



Volunteer Appreciation Event

In the early fall, North Star generally organizes a fun Volunteer Appreciation event.

With the pandemic we were distraught with the thought of not doing one this year. Our volunteers are our backbone and ensure that our families never go hungry while at the shelter.

The staff at the agency organized an outside, drive-by event where volunteers could receive a bottle of Bolton Orchards cider (donated by Bolton Orchards), as well, as a cutting board engraved with the North Star logo. It was a crisp day that was appreciated by many.

OUR VOLUNTEERS ARE SPECTACULAR !

During the pandemic
our volunteers provided
315 meals out of a possible 317
requested (a 99.4% success rate).



2020 Shelter Highlights, (cont'd)

*I appreciate everything you guys have done
from the bottom of my heart, god bless you
and thank you for helping my family and being thoughtful ♥*

A note to a volunteer from one our families.

Capital Projects

New Walkway

An unplanned project that was completed this summer was the tearing up and constructing of a new main walkway. A local contractor, Anderson Landscape Construction offered to donate most of the installation and Powell Stone & Gravel donated a huge number of paving stones. A true community effort that was much appreciated.



Capital Projects, (cont'd)

Kitchen Renovation

In the early months of 2020 (Pre-covid -January and February) the shelter did a complete remodel of our two kitchens. We were fortunate to get state funding for this project. While we lived in a saw dust environment for 8 weeks, the final result was worth it. The project was complete only two weeks before COVID became a topic in the news.



Before



After

Touchless Food Delivery System

With winter approaching, the shelter had to figure out how groceries and food drop off could be done due to the COVID precautions. A local contractor, Ken LeCuyer from All Phase Contracting Services, donated the labor and materials for our new "Food Hut". What a spectacular addition to the shelter.



Heated shed keeps food warm.

Capital Projects, (cont'd)

Remote Learning Enhancements

North Star worked diligently preparing for online/remote learning for all of the children. Computers, printers and tablets were purchased. The learning curve was steep for many of the adults with regard to the use of computers, email and Zoom.

All of the shelter families were heavily affected by the pandemic as was staff members. Staff had to be extra careful when traveling back and forth to their homes and while conducting agency/program business. Two of our three full-time staff members had to juggle their full-time jobs at the shelter, as well as supporting their children's educational needs. We met this challenge head on and in the end made it work.



Work station set up for a staff child right by Moms desk

Volunteer Gift

One of our extraordinary volunteers is Paul Koval. Paul agreed to make a dining room table by hand, in his workshop, for a family that recently graduated from the shelter to her own apartment. Paul made this beautiful table and delivered it to one of our North Star families.



Wireless computer was purchased for the program.

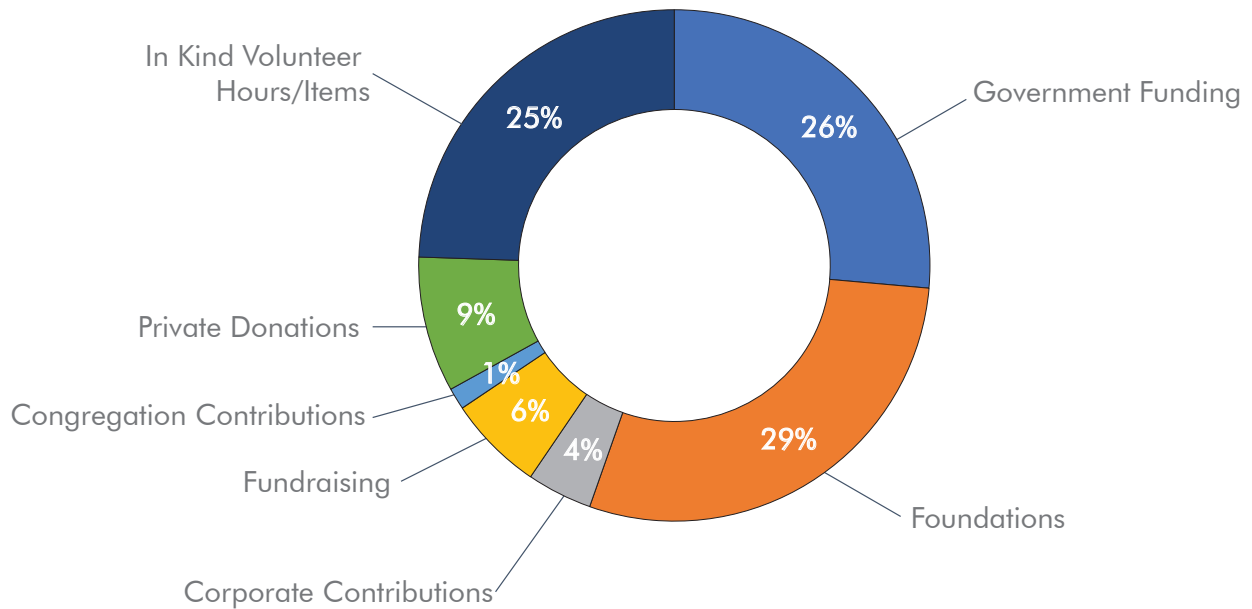
Supportive Permanent Housing Project

North Star has been working on an exciting project for the past 24 months that will bring affordable housing to the Northern Worcester County region. We have purchased twelve acres of land close to the shelter that will contain a twelve-unit, supportive, permanent housing complex (owned and operated by North Star) and a 45-50-unit, affordable housing complex (owned and operated by our partnering developer).

Early due diligence on the land has been completed (environmental and civil assessments) and site/building architectural drawings. North Star will be working with the City of Leominster to bring this project to completion. Funding for the project will entail CEDAC grants, a state DHCD grant application and a capital campaign to help supplement the North Star building development and operational costs of the supportive, wrap around services.



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**to all of our donors, volunteers,
Board of Directors and staff members.**

**Collectively, we were able to provide quality care
and support to homeless families with children in our community.**



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