COTS 25TH ANNIVERSARY 1982–2007

A story of courage, compassion and community
Several COTS founders gathered in October 2007 to recall the early years and help put pieces into place for the story of COTS told on these pages. Seated: Sister Lucille Bonvouloir and Gary Eley. Standing, from left: Charlie Biss, Jim Rader, Mike Cunningham, Gretchen Bailey, Bob Kiss and Mike McNamara.
Message from Rita Markley, Executive Director

As we mark this 25th anniversary, we are more compelled than ever to remember how improbable it would have seemed back in 1982 that COTS would reach this milestone today. Back then, homelessness was still so unexpected, so rare in our community that nobody anticipated an ongoing shelter operation beyond that first winter.

As the housing market tightened over the years and the economy shifted, the number of people turning to COTS surged well beyond what any of our founders could have imagined. With each new challenge, this organization responded with thrifty pluck, creating innovative strategies to address the growing needs of homeless families and individuals in Vermont.

What we celebrate most this 25th year is the extraordinary capacity of this community to care. The history of COTS reflects, in many ways, the unique qualities that characterize Vermont. In the following pages you’ll read the unfolding story of COTS that embodies the ingenuity, the courage, and the perseverance this community, with an enduring compassion we all share for our most vulnerable neighbors.

Although COTS has evolved over the years from emergency shelters to a focus on prevention and housing for those facing the crisis of homelessness, the heart of this organization has maintained its fundamental commitment to humanity and the belief that everyone deserves a home.

We carry forward our founders’ abiding faith in a better world and their unwavering belief in the dignity and the infinite promise of every human life.

AWARDS

MAXWELL AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE
From the Fannie Mae Foundation
Awarded 1992 for developing St. John’s Hall

BEST PRACTICE AWARD: BLUE RIBBON
From the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
Awarded in 1998 for its innovative approach to ending homelessness through an agency partnership.

BEST PRACTICE AWARD: HONORABLE MENTION
From the U.S. Conference of Mayors
Awarded for work in building a continuum of care for homeless adults and families in Burlington in December 1998.

GUNTER AWARD
From the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
Awarded in 1999 for the COTS Rental Opportunity Center (now the Housing Resource Center) for innovative and effective programs in finding solutions to homelessness.
A story of courage, compassion and community
In the fall of 1982, a group of community volunteers organized to open an emergency shelter for the homeless people who were appearing in Burlington, sleeping in doorways and in City Hall Park. That group became the Committee on Temporary Shelter. The first COTS shelter opened its doors on December 24 at the Sara Holbrook Center—a community center by day that became a homeless shelter by night. Volunteers staffed the shelter that first winter, offering a safe, warm place for people to sleep, literally on cots, and take refuge from the bitter cold.

Now, 25 years later, COTS operates seven programs, including four shelters and 50 units of permanent housing serving approximately 1,500 people annually—our community’s most vulnerable men, women and children who have precarious housing or none at all. Over these 25 years, the number of people facing the crisis of homelessness has escalated dramatically, and COTS is the safety net—the only place to turn for those who have nowhere else to go. The story of COTS reflects the values of a community that saw a need and responded with courage and compassion. That is what we celebrate in our 25th year.

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Humble beginnings

From the very beginning, COTS has been a community effort.
The history of COTS is really the story of who we are as a community.
Our founders were a diverse group of volunteers who came together as a
committee in the fall of 1982. They were concerned about the handful of
people who had recently begun sleeping in City Hall Park. They were worried
about what would happen when the ripping cold winds of December arrived.

As winter approached, they organized what became known as the
Waystation project. Their sole purpose was to ensure that no one froze to
death on the streets of Burlington. They recruited volunteers, rounded up
cots from the Vermont National Guard, and made arrangements to use space
at the Sara Holbrook Center as an overnight refuge during the harshest
months of winter. It never dawned on any of them to dither over the risks
or delay action until further study. Turning their backs on those anguished
faces in City Hall Park was not an option. They just moved forward.

On Christmas Eve 1982, the Waystation project opened its doors with
Mike Cunningham and Sister Lucille Bonvouloir on hand to welcome anyone
who needed shelter. Temperatures that night were well below freezing.

Back then, homelessness was still so unexpected and rare that nobody
anticipated an ongoing operation beyond winter. The committee on
temporary shelter was just that: a temporary response to the startling
appearance of destitute Vermonters huddled in doorways along Church
Street. These early volunteers had no blueprint or plan, no operating
manual. They saw a desperate human need, and with little more than a
wing and a prayer, they responded.

Although COTS has evolved over the years to focus on prevention and
housing for the homeless, the heart of this organization will always carry
the thrifty pluck and the enduring compassion of our founding volunteers.
In our 25th year, what we celebrate most is the extraordinary capacity of
this community to care. We carry forward our founders’ abiding faith in
a better world and their unwavering belief in the dignity and the infinite
promise of every human life.

During that first winter at the Waystation, six or seven men typically spent
the night. They were veterans who suffered the physical and psychological
scars of combat, people with disabilities, people who had fallen through the
cracks of the existing social services, and people who were simply poor.

The plan was to close in April when the weather was less severe and
reopen in winter only. But a freak spring storm brought people back.
Then, even as warm weather arrived, the number of people seeking shelter
did not decline. Meanwhile, federal spending on affordable housing and
rental assistance began a retreat that persists to this day. Compounding
the situation, Burlington became a boom town. The city won accolades
for “livability” that were well deserved but also bound to boost property
values—and thus rents.

Jim Rader was Burlington City Clerk during
Mayor Bernie Sanders’ administration. He was
one of the founders of COTS, representing
the city.

He tells this story: “Jonathan Kozol has
always been one of my heroes. . . . I was in
Washington, D.C., for a National Coalition for
the Homeless board meeting. One evening
we got a cab — I get in the front seat and a
guy gets in beside me. He turns to the people
in the back seat and says, ‘Hi, I’m Jonathan
Kozol,’ and he introduces himself to the rest
of the cab. At that time he was researching
Rachel and Her Children.

“No one else in the cab apparently knew
who he was. I introduced myself and he
said, ‘Oh, you’re the city clerk who works on
homeless stuff.’ Here I was meeting one of
my heroes, and he knew my name! He said it
was very unusual at that time for a city or a
city official to be involved on the right side of
the homelessness issue. Cities were seen as
the enemy just about everywhere else in this
country, but not in Burlington.”

Jonathan Kozol is one of America’s most
forceful and eloquent observers of the
intersection of race, poverty, and education.
First published in 1988 and based on the
months the author spent among America’s
homeless, Rachel and Her Children offers a
look at homelessness that resonates even
louder today.
Homelessness was becoming a major problem in big cities across the country. In Burlington, too, it was proving more complicated than anyone had realized. Large national forces were having local, individual impacts. The committee of volunteers quickly realized that a cot and blanket were not going to be enough.

The early days

The early Committee on Temporary Shelter (COTS) spent several years building partnerships with its colleagues, connecting homeless people to resources that could address the many obstacles they faced. Did a veteran need a birth certificate in order to receive promised federal benefits? Did a person with disabilities need help qualifying for Social Security?

Questions like these invariably led to relationships with other organizations, perhaps none more productively than the Homeless Health Care Project. Involving the Howard Center, the Community Health Center, Champlain Drug and Alcohol and COTS, this project addressed the ailments that contribute to homelessness, including medical bills that can overwhelm a low-wage earner’s ability to pay rent, and how illness can thwart a return to stable housing.

The successful group effort on that project established a continuing pattern: for each new challenge, COTS’ reach broadened and more of the community became involved. When the Wilson Hotel went on the market in 1983, and Burlington—in the midst of renovating a number of downtown apartment buildings into upscale condominiums—was at risk of losing that affordable-housing option, the business community became the newest member of the team. Real estate leader Rich Feeley approached Dudley Davis, then president of the Merchants Bank, to investigate financing for buying the hotel. At that point COTS was not yet an official nonprofit organization. It had little track record and no credit rating. Yet the banker organized a consortium of banks to underwrite the loan. Members of the business community joined the COTS board, too.

Today The Wilson remains an important permanent-housing option for people moving from life on the street to sustainable independence in a decent room of their own. It also houses the Waystation, COTS’ overnight emergency shelter for single adults. None of this could have happened without a caring, responsive business community.

Winston LaCasse
former client

In the early 1980s Winston LaCasse was working on a farm in Colchester when a mechanical error pinned him between a tractor and a wagon full of corn. Unable to work because of his injuries, Winston was living year-round in an unheated camper behind a Milton junkyard. He missed medical appointments because he had to hitchhike. Then in 1992 he developed a nasty skin condition.

“I was scared to death. I knew about COTS but I was anxious that they wouldn’t let me in at the Waystation if I was contagious…. They allowed me to stay close to a month. It’s a wonder I hadn’t frozen to death. My skin cleared up. Through social welfare they set me up in a one-room efficiency. That was a blessing: my own shower, my own bed.

“It’s a lack of knowledge that keeps people homeless,” he adds. “If there are resources out there, they may not notice. COTS helped me find out that I qualified for Social Security.”

As a result, Winston received a year of back benefits and moved to an apartment of his own. He also volunteered for the Homeless Healthcare Project, buying bus tokens and donating them to COTS. “Step by step I was moving up. But homeless people, they walk from the Waystation to the Food Shelf to get their breakfast—they have to walk everywhere. I gave back as best I could in my condition.”

Winston now owns his residence, a mobile home off North Avenue, where he lives with his cat, Mister Goodguy. He worries about the cost of living, especially the high price of heat. COTS remains an important ally.

“I need COTS like a guidance counselor, to keep my home. The public watches these survivors on reality TV, and the winner gets a million dollars. Homeless people are the real survivors.”
New faces: families with children

In 1986 a new problem appeared, this one a harbinger of how serious and widespread homelessness would become: the first family showed up at the Waystation door. Other families soon followed, turning to COTS when they had no other option.

Some were families with children, or women escaping a household of violence and abuse. Others were working people whose scant wages left them always on the verge of financial crisis. With no savings or safety net, one unexpected expense meant the rent would fall behind, leading to eviction and ultimately to homelessness.

They came with needs like anyone else without a home, but they also brought children. The Waystation offered a large dormitory with rows of bunk beds. There was no facility for a family—no privacy, no place to fix meals, no space to do homework. The first family to come to COTS stayed in the dank fieldstone basement of the Waystation.

To meet the urgent needs of homeless families, COTS joined together with City officials and the Women’s Consortium for the Construction of Housing to renovate an unused fire station on North Champlain Street. This group raised money and led the transformation of the building from a vacant firehouse to a vibrant family shelter, under the supervision of a local architect. Today the Firehouse Family Shelter provides a temporary home for up to five families at a time.

In 1992, the idea of teamwork and collaboration enlarged the purpose and reach of COTS still further. At that time, COTS needed handicapped-accessible space for its offices and daytime drop-in center for adults, the Daystation. Several other local nonprofits also were struggling to find adequate space for their programs, and COTS joined them in an unprecedented, collaborative campaign to raise funds for a building they could share. The result of this endeavor—called the “Regional Low-Income Emergency Facilities (ReLIEF) Campaign”—was the
The pattern was set: Each new challenge faced by COTS cultivated new partners, broadening the range of people committed to finding answers. COTS was simultaneously helping people facing the crisis of homelessness and expanding a community’s capacity to respond.

Unavoidable controversy

Not everyone loved what was happening. Early on, some city residents felt that homeless people who had been drinking or using drugs should be denied shelter—that taking them in was enabling their addictions. Homeless people should straighten themselves out or suffer the consequences, they reasoned. But the COTS board of directors adhered to the opposite principle: that no one, regardless of affliction, should be left to freeze in Burlington’s brutal winter weather. COTS board members resisted pressure to deny shelter to homeless inebriates until the Howard Center created an overnight detoxification program, which offered a safe alternative to the streets for those suffering from addictions.

Sometimes the sight of “homeless” people rankled other city residents. A person presumed to be homeless might behave inappropriately, or simply by his or her presence make more...
fortunate people feel uncomfortable. When one COTS client needed a bus ticket home to Colorado, intermediaries approached a Church Street restaurant owner for money to buy the ticket, and he complied. The story of this gesture evolved into something called “Westward Ho”—purportedly a program to rid Burlington of homeless people by buying them one-way bus tickets heading west. The national media leapt on the story, but the myth that it was a serious proposal lingers to this day. In fact, only one person received a bus ticket, and it was at his own request.

Amid this atmosphere, in 1988, Sister Lucille Bonvouloir, COTS executive director, had a controversial idea. She proposed restoring St. John’s Hall, a run-down bingo hall in Burlington’s “Old North End,” to house the Daystation and to create low-cost, permanent housing for people moving out of shelter. Many neighbors objected.

It was COTS’ greatest challenge yet: persuade neighbors that good homes for former transients would be less of a burden than the noise and traffic of bingo nights, that their property values would not plummet, and that the conduct of homeless and formerly homeless people would not pose a danger. An ensuing legal battle over the city’s zoning permit wound its way to the Vermont Supreme Court, which ruled in COTS’ favor. In an effort to appease the neighbors, COTS abandoned plans for the Daystation but moved forward on the housing component, transforming the dilapidated structure into 18 single-room-occupancy units for adults, with a shared kitchen, common areas, and bathrooms, plus four affordable, one-bedroom apartments.

GEORGE LITTLE

George Little was chairman of the ReLIEF Campaign, which raised money for a permanent location for the Daystation and COTS administrative offices at 179 South Winooski Avenue—the building COTS now shares with two other nonprofit organizations. “No other social problem comes close [to the tragedy of homelessness],” he says.

He approached Warren and Lois McClure for a donation, and they listened attentively. Ultimately it was their $500,000 gift that put the campaign over the top, making a new home for COTS possible. “The community has given COTS good support since the start in the 1980s. It has had excellent leadership with unsurpassed motivation to improve the lives of homeless individuals and families,” he says, explaining why he supports COTS.

As for his role, he puts it this way: “It was gratifying to be asked to help. It was an experience to see a response from folks at all income levels. COTS has broad support—plus improving the life of just one person is a fulfilling event.”
Lois McClure, along with her late husband J. Warren McClure, has long been one of Vermont’s preeminent philanthropists. When she heard that many of Burlington’s human services programs were struggling to find decent office space, she went for a tour of the COTS facility at One Main Street.

“It was terrible. With these temporary partitions, there was no privacy or confidentiality for people in dire straits. It was such a sad thing,” she recalls. “It was pathetic to think they could barely find a place to put their desks and telephones. And it’s a desperate situation when you’re trying to be housed. It’s so basic, for people to need a place to live—especially families with children. It’s hard to imagine life in which a warm roof over your head is not a given. It’s the first thing you need if you want to have a life.”

A group of nonprofit organizations formed a coalition to help solve their rental woes, and the McClures made a generous lead gift to what was called the “ReLIEF Campaign.” She liked the opportunity to help a lot of organizations at one time, she says.

“I bet there isn’t a child in Burlington who doesn’t know what COTS is,” she adds. “They’re right out there teaching the community what the need is. When people see others who are not as lucky as they are, they learn the fairness of sharing.

“I’ve been as fortunate as anyone in this world. It’s a case of wanting to make a difference.”

Residents of the restored bingo hall shoveled neighbors’ walks in the winter and planted flowers in the spring. In time, one of the neighbors who had opposed the project dropped by with a plateful of brownies and offered an apology. The neighbors soon discovered that formerly homeless people are no different from others.

In 2000, the First United Methodist Church of Burlington strengthened its already strong bond with COTS by donating a rooming house on North Winooski Avenue. COTS renovated that building to provide chronically homeless people a roof over their heads and, more important, the tools and supports to grapple with complex mental health and substance abuse problems. The seven-room Smith House has been an astonishing success. Nearly three-quarters of the people who live there master the skills for self-sufficiency and move into permanent housing within a year.

During the late 1990s, COTS faced extraordinary challenges as the number of homeless families skyrocketed year after year. The Firehouse
Family Shelter lacked the capacity to meet the need, and COTS began renting motel rooms as an emergency measure to handle the overflow. In the spring of 2000, COTS turned for help to the University of Vermont, which generously donated the use of the Converse Hall dormitory to shelter families during the summer. The following year, COTS rented a dorm on the Trinity Campus so staff could continue providing shelter for the growing number of families who could not afford the exorbitant cost of housing in Chittenden County.

By 2002, COTS had found a poignant way to demonstrate that homeless families had become a “Main Street” issue. The organization’s philosophy was always to advocate for the development of permanent, affordable housing—the solution to homelessness—rather than emergency shelter, but now the number of parents and children living in their cars, in campgrounds and in motels demanded more transitional shelter options. COTS purchased the former YWCA building at 278 Main Street for just this purpose. Rather than seeking federal funding for the purchase, COTS had again engaged the community in creating a solution. Staff, board members and other volunteers gave countless tours and presentations and raised $1 million within a mere five months.

SISTER LUCILLE BONVOULOIR

An Orwell native who joined the Sisters of Mercy in 1960, Sister Lucille Bonvouloir notes that before COTS opened its doors, she had no experience caring for homeless people.

“Mike Cunningham was on duty, and I checked in that Christmas Eve night. We had our own life experiences to guide us. But my heart went out—my heart was drawn to help these people. So we learned as we went,” she recalls. “Staff learned that people needed more than a cot. They needed support services. They needed housing. And whatever they got, it needed to be coordinated.”

The clients’ humility and compassion were both striking, even at the outset. “I was riding to Montpelier with a formerly homeless man named Roger. He said, ‘Lucille, it took me six months before I could not feel agitated at night, because I took that long to finally accept that I had a place to live. And I don’t want what happened to me to happen to you, so take care of yourself.' The capacity of homeless people to reach out, to care. I carry that with me. It is a great gift.”

In the beginning, “COTS was not really a loved organization. People didn’t want to see people hanging out on Church Street—they were maybe scared. We needed to do a lot of education.

“The first COTS Walk was amazing. We thought if we could get 200 people and raise $10,000, it would be wonderful. Instead we had 700 people and raised $30,000. It caught on, I think because we connected fund-raising with awareness-building. Families could do the Walk. Parents with babies on their backs could go into the shelter where COTS provides for parents with babies who have no home.

“Now people are extremely generous—with their money, with their time, with dropping off food or blankets. COTS is an organization that people respect. It may be as basic as the fact that people really don’t want to see somebody else freeze. COTS has done a great job at helping people be aware of the reality of homelessness. And when you talk about homeless families, that pulls at the heart strings.”
A decade after the heated struggle for St. John’s Hall, not a single neighbor opposed the creation of a family shelter in Burlington’s coveted “Hill Section.” The 200-year-old Victorian building was renovated into bright, comfortable, dignified, temporary housing for up to 10 families—many with at least one employed parent—working with the help of COTS staff toward a return to stable homes of their own.

Who helps so many people to get back on their feet? Who helps ensure that there is always a chance for people to regain their independence? It is the many thousands of people in our community who channel their compassion through COTS—and that is the point. The story of COTS reflects who we are and what is best and most generous within each of us. Through this organization, hundreds of families have regained their dignity and a permanent place to live.

**New strategies**

COTS is known for working to fulfill its mission in new and often unexpected directions, sometimes contrary to conventional thinking. As federal funding for human services has declined, for example, many organizations have fought harder for a piece of the limited pie that remains. COTS has taken a different path, inspired by the teamwork, community partnerships and tenacity that characterized its early successes, and come to rely less and less on public funding.

COTS has chosen to engage the community instead. Today, in fact, generous and caring contributors provide more than half of COTS’ financial support. As a “home grown,” private Vermont organization, COTS is an active expression of local values.

Donations from the community—from individuals, businesses and the local United Way campaign—comprise more than half of COTS’ annual budget. In 2007, these sources provided a full 59 percent of our revenue. Over the years, as federal funding for housing and social services has declined, COTS has worked to engage the community rather than compete for an ever-smaller piece of the government pie. The community has responded with compassion and commitment, digging deeper to meet the need.
The strategy of involving the community has taken ever more creative routes, too. Given that most homelessness begins with an eviction, for example, COTS could have developed an adversarial relationship with area landlords. Instead, COTS and landlords have joined forces in two innovative ways.

First, some landlords have agreed to let COTS know when they have an apartment available, before advertising in the paper or tapping the student market. Landlords benefit because COTS can recommend “pre-screened” potential renters, assuring reliability. Meanwhile, COTS clients gain access to housing that, in Chittenden County’s tight rental market, might otherwise be snatched up before they even knew it was available.

Second, many landlords now notify COTS first when a family is at risk of eviction. Often the tenants are behind in their rent because of an unforeseen expense—a large medical bill, a major car repair. COTS provides crisis funding whenever possible, helping to keep the rent paid so the family is spared the trauma and upheaval of losing their home and making it a little easier to recover from financial crisis.

In addition to the profound human gains, the economics of these ideas are persuasive too. The first program spares landlords the effort and expense of listing and showing apartments. The second program keeps a family housed for a fraction of the

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**Ben Pruitt**

Ben Pruitt of Shelburne was 8 years old when he participated in his first COTS Walk. About a dozen neighbors and family members sponsored him. Now an 18-year-old senior at Champlain Valley Union High School, he’s never missed a Walk since. He’s been a Walk leader for church and school groups, as well as his Boy Scout troop. As president of CVU’s Key Club, a community service group, he coordinates 60 walkers a year—and still raises more than $600 each Walk himself.

“I’ve done the MS walk, the CROP walk, but COTS has the greatest appeal. I suppose it is because COTS helps people in the most direct way you can, when they have one of the greatest needs. The effort and the money go directly to the people who need it. Also you get to meet the people you’re helping, and you get to see the effect COTS has on the community.”

Ben served on the COTS youth advisory council, which seeks to educate school children about homelessness and to encourage them to get involved in volunteering. His final project to earn Eagle Scout status was to build bunk beds for the Daystation.

“I looked at what other Eagle Scouts had done, like building pavilions in parks, but I thought there were other needs. I’d spent time around COTS, and I learned something. Some people need a place to rest during the day because they work at night, at convenience stores or whatever. The bunk beds were a challenge because the space was so tight.

“In general COTS does a great job with what they have. But they always seem spread thin, so I’ve tried to help them out as much as possible. Almost everyone who gets involved with COTS even once stays involved. It’s a great feeling.”
The cost it would take to regain a dwelling once they’ve become homeless. The measure of success: more than 50 landlords currently participate in these programs.

COTS’ partners range from small rental endeavors to the largest institution in Burlington, the University of Vermont. In May 2000, when graduation weekend approached and 20 families under COTS were care poised to lose their hotel-room residences, UVM opened its Converse Hall dorm to COTS. Families moved in, and a unique community and a variety of summer programs developed on campus among COTS families. The university offered and implemented this opportunity in a mere three days, averting disaster for the families and illustrating how an innovative approach to a problem can reap positive results.

The consummate example of COTS’ engagement with the community is the annual COTS Walk. Launched in 1990 as a public-education idea with the expectation that it would attract about 200 people, this first-Sunday-in-May event has tapped the generosity and enthusiasm of thousands of walkers, volunteers and donors. Walkers follow the route a homeless person might take in the course of a day, stopping to tour COTS shelters, and learning how their support is put to use, along the way. It’s an event that promotes awareness, certainly, but also fosters connection and understanding.

Because each walker communicates about COTS with dozens of pledging supporters, the increased awareness of homelessness is incalculably extensive. It may be surpassed only by the growing sense, which thousands of people receive, that they can and do make a difference. That is why the music, the Ben & Jerry’s ice cream and the parade atmosphere make sense at the Walk: people are celebrating their contribution to something larger than themselves. The COTS Walk is not just fund-raising, it is awareness-raising—and for the participants each May, it is spirit-raising too.
This is how an organization like COTS comes to mean more than the programs it offers—helping people who need housing, yes, but simultaneously teaching a community how large is its compassion, its capacity to care. A student on a school trip visits a COTS facility one afternoon, sees the belongings of someone his own age, and his mind opens. A retired librarian visits a shelter to read with kids and feels her heart touched. An employer offers a job to a risky employee because he sees the potential. A college student in a service club broadens her education by learning how less

WIN WHITNEY

Volunteer

Win Whitney of South Burlington has volunteered at COTS for 15 years. He staffs the front desk, answers phones, welcomes visitors, and processes checks from the annual COTS Phonathon, and helps with any task that comes along—all with a smile.

“When people are semi-retired like I am, it makes the days more meaningful if you’re doing something good for someone else,” he says.

“I love COTS—they’re the nicest people. What they are doing is absolutely crucial. The lack of housing for families is so acute. I meet interesting people who have confronted real hardships. Yet it’s such a happy atmosphere.

“My day would be terribly long if I didn’t have something like this.”
Novelist Chris Bohjalian helped raise homelessness awareness at a “Writers Read for COTS” event in Burlington in January 2000. Throughout the day, he and nine other Vermont authors read from their work—fiction and nonfiction, poetry and commentary.

In 2006, Chris wrote *The Double Bind*, a fictional novel inspired by the late Robert (Bob) Campbell, a one-time professional photographer. Bob had returned to Vermont, where he had spent part of his youth, when he was well into his 60s. Homeless and disabled by a stroke, Bob arrived at COTS for help. Shortly after COTS placed him in a room at St. John’s Hall, he died apparently from another stroke, leaving behind boxes of magnificent black and white photographs.

fortunate people live. A harried Christmas shopper pauses beside the annual Candlelight Vigil on the steps of City Hall, listens to someone reading off the names of people who’ve been homeless in Vermont, notices the icy chill in the air, and walks on with deeper awareness.

COTS aims to put itself out of business. Will that happen? Will the need for COTS vanish with the someday end of homelessness? Now that would be an occasion to celebrate.

The foreseeable reality offers little fuel for optimism. A new population of veterans, wounded emotionally and physically, is growing. Wages continue their erosion, especially at the low end of the labor market. Housing costs in Vermont defy national trends and continue to climb.

The good news, ironically, is that these challenges provide new opportunities for people to be enriched by helping to make a difference.

When the people of our community develop a plan to meet new needs, they are dreaming of the kind of community in which they want to live. When they join their neighbor’s struggle, they are appreciating the blessings of their own all the more. When they work on others’ behalf, they are demonstrating a belief that in a nation this prosperous, all people deserve a chance to recover from past trials and an opportunity to create a new future.

This belief in the worth and value of every person—and that everyone deserves a second chance—is the driving force behind COTS and the community that makes it possible. It is this extraordinary capacity to care that COTS celebrates in its 25th Year.
Emergency Shelter

COTS FAMILY SHELTERS
COTS operates the only two emergency shelters in Chittenden County for families with children. We can accommodate a total of 15 families at a time.

In 2007, COTS provided emergency shelter and support to 89 families, including 125 parents and 144 children. A third of those families had at least one employed parent.

THE WAYSTATION
This is a 36-bed shelter for men and women 18 and older. It is open from 6:15 p.m. to 8 a.m., 365 days a year.

In 2007, 332 individuals—an average of 29 a night—stayed here. The eight-bed women’s dorm was full nearly every night. Empty beds are typical during the summer, but in the summer of 2007 demand reached an all-time high.

THE DAYSTATION
This drop-in center for adults is open seven days a week from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., providing a refuge from the streets and access to an array of services and medical care.

In 2007, 806 individuals—an average of 49 people a day—used the Daystation. With the help of volunteers, lunch was served every day.

Social Services

FAMILY SERVICES
Provides outreach, support and case management to homeless and marginally housed families.

In 2007, COTS helped 212 parents and 246 children in emergency shelter and in the community through this program.

INDIVIDUAL SERVICES
Provides outreach, support and case management to homeless adults, both in shelter and in the community.

In 2007, COTS helped 320 homeless single adults through this program.

Housing

HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION FUND
Provides emergency grants to qualified families and individuals who face eviction or need one-time financial assistance to secure housing.

In 2007, COTS helped 21 households stay in their housing and helped 24 households pay security deposits and move into permanent, affordable housing.

HOUSING RESOURCE CENTER
Connects people with affordable housing and maintains a network of landlords willing to rent to COTS clients.

In 2007, COTS helped 45 families and 55 single adults find housing through this program.

TRANSITIONAL HOUSING
Up to seven chronically homeless and hard-to-house individuals at a time live at the Smith House, where they receive intensive support to overcome complex medical and financial issues. On average, 70% of the hardest-to-house individuals move into permanent housing each year. Two adjoining Section 8 (federally subsidized) apartments are rented to families.

PERMANENT AFFORDABLE HOUSING
Two facilities owned and operated by COTS, The Wilson and St. John’s Hall, comprise a total of 44 single-room-occupancy units and four apartments for those moving out of shelter and for elderly and disabled individuals.

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COTS Mission and Statement of Core Values

COTS provides emergency shelter, services and housing for people who are without homes or who are marginally housed.

COTS advocates for long-term solutions to end homelessness.

We believe…
… in the value and dignity of every human life.
… that housing is a fundamental human right.
… that emergency shelter is not the solution to homelessness.