



## Local Annapolis Resident Barbara Crosby Spearheads Career Closet

Posted on 27. Apr, 2011 at 2:07 pm by [EOA Staff](#) in [Businesses](#), [LIFE IN THE AREA](#), [Non Profit Organizations](#)



With an increase of over 30% in homelessness in Anne Arundel County since 2009, the need is even greater for the community to help. The Career Closet was one way a local resident found that she could give back. Over the last several months, Annapolis resident, Barbara Crosby and a group of dedicated women, worked feverishly to create and open the “Career Closet” at the Light House, a homelessness prevention support center, located at 10 Hudson Street, in Annapolis.

Since the program started two months ago, volunteers have had 134 resident visits, and handed out more than 530 articles of clothing. Last month alone, the Career Closet volunteers served 43 residents, giving out over 200 articles of clothing.

Barbara Crosby became involved with the shelter over a year ago as a result of her son who was doing community service for St. Mary’s High School. Ms. Crosby volunteered with him in the pantry stocking shelves and packing grocery bags. She soon began volunteering at the front desk, helping out with general office duties.

According to Ms. Crosby, “I noticed that some residents were leaving for job interviews, and they weren’t dressed appropriately. I asked the Light House management if I could step in to help the residents on a one-on-one basis, to choose clothes at the Lutheran Mission. We couldn’t always find exactly what they needed, so I would search in other places as well (Goodwill, and Return to Oz) I really wanted to have these clothes available for our residents,

for free, at all times. We started a little closet in the old shelter, but space was very limited, and we couldn't store everything that we needed."

With the opening of the Light House on Hudson Street, Ms. Crosby has found a new home for the Career Closet in the basement of the Willow House, a Light House transitional home, just behind the new shelter. In January, the Career Closet began accepting clothes donations from the public.

The goal of the Career Closet is to be an ongoing support program for the residents at the Light House. "We help them while they are living at the shelter, and also invite them back after they graduate from the program. Being able to pick up career wear for free can be a big "leg up" for them. After they are place a job, they need to remain properly outfitted to hold down that job. So they might be in need of the Career Closet even after they leave the shelter," explains Ms. Crosby.

It is not just about providing clothes, but also about making the residents feel more confident. It is about making them feel good from the inside out. The transformations that take place are tangible and immediate. Their demeanor changes when they look in the mirror and they see the potential that lies ahead.

As one volunteer explains, "we save them the expense of having to outfit themselves to look job-ready. But more importantly, they benefit from knowing that all the volunteers care about them. We develop a relationship with the clients, and really want to see them succeed. Dressing a person is a very personal experience. We develop a mutually trusting relationship. We get to know our clients, and we see them on a regular basis. We rejoice when they succeed, and we comfort when they stumble. It is basic human interaction, based on dignity and love."

In the near future, the Light House will be providing other resources for residents, which will include interviewing skills and personal presentation classes. Ms. Crosby and her volunteers hope to also develop an internship program where clients can get "on the job" training and then be placed in local retail stores.

The Career Closet depends solely on volunteers to operate the program. A group of over 20 dedicated women help cover all the shifts and provide one-on-one service to the residents of the Light House. The volunteers range in age and backgrounds. They are retired women, working women, women in school, and stay at home mothers who all volunteer precious hours to enable this program to succeed. They commit to one shift a week, and attend a monthly volunteer meeting. Ms Crosby is now holding monthly orientations for anyone interested in becoming a part of this program. She is starting to offer training sessions to help educate the Career Closet volunteers about the struggles our residents face in their lives. Ms. Crosby explains, "it has been very enjoyable working with the women volunteers who work so hard to make this program possible. We all feel the same magic that happens when you help a resident. In that way, we share a special kind bond."

In addition to the Career Closet, the volunteers also set up clothes in the cafeteria everyday during the lunch program. Individuals and groups of volunteers prepare 200 bagged lunches that are distributed to those in the community who are in need. Last month alone, volunteers handed out 1,023 articles of clothing to over 232 community members in need received clothing during the lunch program.

As Ms. Crosby explained, "I have come to learn that homelessness can affect people from every walk of life. I have met some incredible people who just need a helping hand and are working hard to improve themselves. I am getting back way more than I am giving."

The Career Closet is open from 9-1pm Monday through Friday, and Thursdays 7-9pm to help the residents at Light House, and to receive donations. Volunteers are working on establishing a weekend shift to better accommodate the residents' schedules.

The Career Closet is in need of general year round career wear like blazers, dress pants, dress shirts, khakis, jeans, dress shoes, and belts. The hardest items to stock, and always need, are new undergarments including socks, underwear, bras, and undershirts.

For more information about the Career Closet, please call the Light House at 410.349.5056.

***Source: The Light House Shelter***