



A Word

From our President...



BHCA has grown substantially in the last several years, serving more than 100,000 people in the last year. We have reached a point where this growth has opened up a variety of exciting opportunities for the agency.

As we expand to better serve our clients, we are beginning to move towards diversifying into alternative revenue streams and expanding our services to surrounding counties. BHCA has served Baltimore City well for years, and the model we have developed and fine-tuned will enable us to bring the same level of service to a larger population.

We see this growth as an opportunity to fulfill our mission on a larger scale. As we push towards fighting for equality in health outcomes for everyone, we need to make BHCA more visible than ever in order to access more potential clients. We have been developing a rebranding and marketing campaign to help increase awareness of our agency and the services we provide in Baltimore City and throughout Maryland. We expect that these changes will position us at the forefront of the changing health care scene. You won't want to miss the debut of our new look, logo and video montage of client success stories that will be available on the website in mid-November. I hope that our staff, clients, and partners are as excited as I am to be part of a vital and growing center of health care service in Maryland.

Kathleen Westcott

BHCA's Treatment Information and Referral Line Provides Guidance to Those Seeking Treatment

The road to recovery can be a difficult and frightening journey. Many people seeking help are unaware of the available resources, or how to access them. Others who wish to seek treatment wrongly assume that they are ineligible because they are uninsured or their insurance won't cover the treatment. [The Baltimore City Treatment Information and Referral Program \(I&R\)](#) is a collaboration with [Baltimore Substance Abuse Systems, Inc \(BSAS\)](#). This program, funded by BSAS and operating under BHCA's Special Initiatives Division, provides information about available drug treatment options, as well as access to available programs. Callers receive information, as well as assistance with making an appointment for services appropriate to their specific needs. The I&R program also accepts calls from patients, family members, treatment providers, and concerned citizens.

Adrienne Hawkes works as the Information and Referral Program specialist, and has been with BHCA for two years. She says her work on the phone line is a necessary resource for Baltimoreans, because it "eliminates a lot of the frustration and fear that people who need immediate assistance experience" when seeking treatment. The addition of two Certified Addiction Counselors in the fall of 2011 will help improve the I&R program when it re-launches on November 7, 2011. These counselors have many years of experience in the field, and are ready to assist callers requesting treatment for themselves or others. In January, BHCA will add a third

counselor to the team. This counselor will act as an assessor and be placed in the field, conducting face-to-face screenings at community sites.

One of the advantages of housing the I&R program at BHCA is our knowledge of access points for insurance programs. Many clients who call to request treatment services are uninsured or under-insured, a barrier which all too often keeps people from receiving the treatment they desperately need. The I&R staff screens all clients for insurance eligibility at the time of their call, and will assist clients with insurance applications over the phone and in person. By confirming insurance status before clients enter treatment and assisting clients once they are enrolled in treatment, BSAS-funded treatment programs are able to bill third-party payers, leaving publicly-funded slots open for uninsured clients.

The I&R program provides a necessary service to both patients and providers. The ability to fill open slots at treatment programs provides the agency an edge in the current financial environment. BHCA works closely with over 40 providers to secure appointments, fill open slots, and help clients transition from one level of care to another. To learn more about the I&R program and how you can partner with us, please visit the [Special Initiatives](#) section of our website or contact Sadie Smith at (410) 649-0529 ext. 3040 or ssmith@bhca.org.

From Howard Street to Home: A Client Success Story

In December 2010, BHCA received a call from City Hall about a large contingent of homeless people disrupting the view under the Howard Street Bridge. A BHCA outreach worker was assigned to the case, and quickly dispatched to see what could be done to help. After searching for more than an hour, the staff finally located the



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couple in question: 62-year-old Thomas Edwards and his wife, Rebecca who were hardly a contingent.

Shortly after Thomas lost his job, the family lost their home and became homeless. Rebecca was able to find work at a nearby hotel, but she gave most of her salary to her sister to cover the cost of caring for the couple's two children. Mr. and Mrs. Edwards had been living under the bridge for seven years and barricaded themselves behind an enormous collection of trash bags, storage bins, bicycles, rakes, and other items which comprised all their worldly possessions. Included amongst all the debris, was their prized collection of twenty-seven wooden baseball bats.

When BHCA's outreach workers first approached them to offer assistance, they doubted their sincerity. People experiencing homelessness are constantly faced with underhanded eviction attempts, and Rebecca was determined to hold on to their spot and their belongings. They avoided contact with the outreach workers and would not accept repeated offers of assistance until five days later when the workers returned on a bitterly cold morning. In order to keep warm, the workers had to huddle in the back of the outreach van to conduct the interview. Sadly, Rebecca was uncompromising and was un-interested in a shelter. She declared that she would only accept their offer if they "could find her a place where she can close the door and have her own key to lock it."

As Baltimore's snowiest winter in history raged on, the Edwards spent their last Christmas sheltered by boxes and trash cans. For 17 days the BHCA staff kept in close contact with them, earning their trust and respect. When an apartment was finally located, the couple accepted the offer of a new home sight unseen. On December 30th, twenty-two days after the initial outreach, they left their home under the bridge and moved into their new home with just a few of their possessions, including all twenty-seven baseball bats. Grant money helped cover some of the initial expenses along with a number of donations. The couple enjoyed their first meal--a sweet potato pie--in their new home with the two BHCA outreach workers. Mr. and Mrs. Edwards are still living in their apartment and doing well. To learn more about BHCA's Homeless Services, please visit www.bhca.org.



The house where Mr. and Mrs. Edwards now have an apartment.

Baltimore and BHCA Working to Educate Citizens on the Importance of Nutrition

Many of BHCA's clients struggle with chronic health issues like diabetes and hypertension. These conditions can affect a client's health and ability to obtain insurance. Many times these diseases are caused by weight issues, which can be a result of the lack of access to healthy foods in areas called food deserts.

Baltimore City has several food deserts, which are areas without adequate access to healthy, fresh foods and produce, or easy access to locations where these foods are available. A lack of nutrition information and the incorrect assumption that fast food is cheaper than healthier foods also contribute to an unhealthy lifestyle for many lower income residents.

Mark Bittman, an internationally renowned food writer for the New York Times, is an advocate for teaching families how to eat healthy meals on a low budget. "Most people can afford real food. Even the nearly 50 million Americans who are enrolled in the [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program](#) (formerly known as food stamps) receive about \$5 per person per day, which is far from ideal but enough to survive."

Baltimore recently became one of the first cities in the US to appoint a [Food Policy Director](#) or, "Food Czar". Holly Freisztat is responsible for improving both access to and demand for healthy foods. According to the Baltimore City Food Policy Task Force, those in the poorest neighborhoods have had to rely on carry-outs and corner stores for food. Many of these residents suffer from the highest rates of heart disease, strokes, and diabetes.

Since her appointment in 2010, Freisztat has been working to promote existing initiatives such as the "[Baltimarket](#)" or the virtual supermarket program. This program allows residents in four of Baltimore's food deserts to order groceries online. The groceries are then delivered to the local library the next day— free of charge. Customers can pay with cash, credit, debit, or EBT. The program offers incentives such as free grocery bags and various discounts for making healthier choices. More information is available on their website, www.baltimarket.com.

Fresh food has also become more available at local farmers markets. At participating markets, customers can buy tokens with their EBT card, and sign up for a weekly fixed price delivery of produce from a local farm, provided at a discount to those paying with EBT.

Baltimore has many resources available to those who are looking to change their eating habits. Also, many insurance providers cover visits with a licensed nutritionist. Call your insurance provider or primary care physician for more information.

BHCA President Kathy Westcoat is a licensed nutritionist whose dedication to a healthy lifestyle is reflected in the organization's emphasis on the whole person. BHCA may specialize in connecting city residents to health insurance, but we understand that staying healthy involves helping our clients make informed decisions in every area of life. Finding affordable, healthy food is a great first step!

For printed copies, more information, or to be added to our distribution list please contact Rachel Indek at RIndek@bhca.org

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