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Profile: The Volunteers of the Haley House in Boston.

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It's 5 o'clock on a chilly morning in November. Dartmouth Street in Boston's South End is quiet except for the sound of the occasional delivery truck or the scratching of leaves being blown by the wind. A flock of birds silently rises up over the red brick buildings, an arc of tiny black dots against the white sky. The Haley House Soup Kitchen resembles most of the buildings in this quiet neighborhood of elegant Victorian row houses, rooftop chimneys and wrought-iron fences, and by 5:30, it's probably the busiest place on the block.

Adam Campbell and Caliph Johnson have made their way down four flights of squeaking spiral staircases and a maze of corridors and doorways that lead to the ground floor kitchen, where they start cooking chowder, oatmeal and grilled-cheese sandwiches. In a few minutes, the heat from the industrial strength stove and grill spreads throughout the long room. By the time three Boston College volunteers arrive at 6:00, the men have opened the kitchen door, letting in the crisp morning air and signifying that the Haley House is open for breakfast. Campbell and Johnson are leading the 6:00-9:00 shift this morning, and together with the student volunteers, they will provide over 100 homeless men with food. Their efforts are important; the Office of the Mayor identified 6,335 homeless people living in Boston last year, a substantial increase over the previous year's number.

The soup kitchen provides ten meals a week to homeless men, but a typical day at Haley House reveals that the staff provides much more than food.

The top four floors of Haley House are Campbell and Johnson's home; the bottom

two their place of work. They are two members of a 9-member intentional residential community – a group of people who have pledged to work and live side-by-side with the poor.

For community member Anna Clark, living and working at Haley House has been a transformative experience.

“Rather than 'going home' from the issues that emerge, this is my home, and I want it to be a joyful, loving place of peace and conscience,” Clark said. “I’m inspired to act in ways I otherwise would have had the privilege of retreating from. It’s a more integrated life, and a good one.”

Clark has been a member of the residential community for almost two years. After graduating from the University of Michigan, Clark, searching for a way to “integrate [her] beliefs about social justice into a way of living” found Haley House on the Internet, came to Boston, and fell in love with the Haley House environment.

“I’m lucky enough to have regular exposure to people I consider modern-day prophets, people who make nonviolence a constant active part of their lives,” Clark said.

The community members work an equal number of meal shifts and participate in other tasks in the house, such as organizing volunteers or picking up food donations. Pledging to live a simple life of voluntary poverty, they bring few material possessions with them and share bedrooms and bathrooms. But the residential community at the Haley House is no monastery. On the organization’s Web Site, information about living in the community ends with the following: “We work hard, but we also play hard, and we laugh a lot!”

High spirits abound during the community’s weekly dinners. There, a large

number of people – tonight it's 14 – consisting of former community members, neighbors, volunteers, and relatives – gather around the long table in the common room upstairs, a pretty space with high ceilings and a brick fireplace. A guestbook is full of handwritten compliments from visitors from Wyoming to Spain who've stayed at Haley House for an afternoon, a week or a year. On the walls are framed pictures of community members participating in anti-war protests.

A black-and-white picture propped on a ledge shows the community in the 1970s: women in huge glasses, men with long hair, and two blond-headed boys. Just as each man served by the soup kitchen has had his own path to homelessness, the people in the picture and the people gathered around the table have found their own ways to Haley House's unique lifestyle. There's Judy, a community member in her 50's who gave up her home in Syracuse and a corporate job to move into Haley House two years ago. There's Katie, a Boston University graduate who helped run FYSOP, BU's first-year service organization that sends students into Boston to do volunteer work in a variety of issue areas (Haley House is one of the sites FYSOP regularly visits). Next to Katie is Breese, her boyfriend [check this fact]. They met at Haley House when Breese came to eat breakfast. Caliph Johnson sits at the end of the table. He and Danielle joined the community when Danielle was eight months pregnant. Their baby, a tiny boy who always seems to be smiling, has spent his first couple of months enveloped by the community of Haley House, where there's always someone eager to hold and play with him.

Everyone new to the community is welcomed with a hug and a smile. Dinner, made by one of the former community members, is homemade pizzas and peanut butter stew. The atmosphere is that of a huge, friendly Thanksgiving dinner, and the room

seems full of personalities, present and past. A sign next to the fireplace reads "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

At 6:00 a.m., as he has probably done most days for the past two-and-a-half years, Adam Campbell sets a small boom-box on the main counter. The sounds of Bob Marley drift out onto the street as men begin to come in.

*"Good friends we have, Oh, good friends we have lost along the way,
In this great future, you can't forget your past."*

Haley House's past remains a living part of its present. Haley House was born in 1966 when Kathe McKenna, just out of college and living in Boston, invited several homeless men to sleep on cots in her basement apartment. She had been inspired by the Anarchist Catholic Worker Movement, founded by Dorothy Day in 1933, which is grounded in the belief in the God-given dignity of every person, regardless of his or her economic situation. Haley House is one of 185 Catholic Worker communities that remain committed to nonviolence, voluntary poverty, hospitality and compassion toward the homeless. Spirituality, rather than adherence to a specific religion, seems to be the guiding thread among the residents.

McKenna eventually raised her children in and around the Haley House community, which made for "a wonderful eye-opening childhood." Her sons were the two little blond boys in the picture. Today, as she sips coffee in the kitchen, next to a colorful mural depicting Haley House and the surrounding neighborhood, she seems proud of what she has helped create.

Since the late 1960s, the demographics of the homeless in Boston have changed.

During the late 1960s, there were hardly any homeless women (the main reason why Haley House only serves men).

Most of the men were white elderly alcoholics; about 90 percent were veterans of World War II. In the 1980's, during the crack epidemic, the homeless population shifted to be comprised almost entirely of African Americans, drug addicts and Vietnam War veterans.

"We all form our own opinions about why the poor are poor," she said. "Some people say it's the poor peoples' fault, that they're lazy. Some pity them and want to take care of them. We take a different approach."

Interacting with different types of men over the years – some who have been coming for more than 20 years – has solidified McKenna's convictions against violence.

"Wars always create victims," McKenna said. "It's debilitating to kill another human being."

War, McKenna believes, can make a person more susceptible to drugs and alcohol as well, which contribute to a cycle of social and economic self-destruction.

"If you spend enough time in the kitchen, you learn there's an exception to every 'rule' you think you know about the how's and why's of poverty," Clark said.

The Haley House staff doesn't just want to give the men food; they want to give them a way out of homelessness. Today the nonprofit includes the soup kitchen, elder meals, two bakeries, low-income apartments, a farm, and a street magazine that the homeless can write for as well as sell on the streets. Each of the offshoots of the soup kitchen is designed to help people out of homelessness in a peaceful, empowering way. Wayne, a native of Kenya with a degree in architecture, first came to Haley House as a

homeless man in need of food. Today, he is the manager of one of the Haley House-sponsored apartment complexes. Haley House staff has helped people out of homelessness, through a combination of efforts like these and through the sense of dignity that flows through all the work that he has done.

By 7:00 a.m., the student volunteers rush back and forth, filling bowls full of corn and potato chowder, garnished with a pinch of dried parsley, scooping hot sandwiches off the grill, and stirring oatmeal. Unlike most shelters, in which people are shuffled through a cafeteria-style line, Haley House volunteers take orders from the men and serve them restaurant style.

Chen Lim, a senior psychology major at BC, started volunteering at Haley House as part of a class on social justice, but she'll be returning next semester even when the class is over. Haley House depends heavily on its volunteers to be able to serve as many people as it does.

"I have to volunteer," she said. "I can't look around at the world and how it is and not volunteer. And I love coming here and seeing the same guys and having them recognize me."

She has also seen Haley House's role in transitioning men out of homelessness.

"I was riding the bus back from volunteering at the Haley House bakery, and I had all these baked goods with me," she said. "The man driving the bus asked me where I got them, and when I told him, he said that he used to go to the Haley House. It made me really happy."

Amidst the clattering of plates and bowls, Lim and the other volunteers greet the men, especially the regulars. There's Batman, a friendly middle-aged man who is literally

a walking encyclopedia of movie facts. Today he's discussing the actors in *Gone with the Wind*. There's Bethany, a tall, smiling man who is singing about "pink and yellow lizards." When Chen hands him his meal, he looks at her seriously and says, "I like you."

At around 8:00, when a few men start yelling at each other in the back of the room, Campbell quietly approaches the sitting area and stands where the yelling is occurring, not saying anything, just being a calm presence.

Haley House is the only soup kitchen in Boston that doesn't station an armed guard at the doors to check for weapons. This decision is in keeping with the idea of the staff setting an example of nonviolence, but it doesn't always come easily.

"I've dreaded the hardest lessons – for example, my nonviolent responsibility for action when there is a fight in the kitchen, when really I'd rather just run and hide," Clark said. "I think the key to all of it, though, is concrete experience, and face-to-face work, conversation and exposure to a wide range of people."

The human face of Haley House makes it a popular destination for homeless men willing to respect themselves and their fellow men.

"A lot of the men take this place as a step up," William Collins, a homeless man who lives at the Long Island Shelter and volunteers at Haley House. "Most shelters are like jails. Here, the men can show that they are responsible, that they are human beings. Most times, they settle arguments among themselves."

Collins, who wasn't supposed to volunteer that day, stepped in anyway because he thought the place needed an extra hand. While he works, he tells Lim stories about his mother, "who was a great cook—except for pies—she couldn't make a pie to save her life."

Volunteers are encouraged to take a break from serving food to sit down and eat and talk with the men.

"We get it in our heads that these people are not like us, because they are homeless," Lim said. "But they all live in the same world that we do."

A little after 9:00 a.m, the last man, whose pink satchel, scrawled with words in permanent marker, has a boom box and a pair of sneakers tied to it, leaves Haley House. He will probably head to the Boston Public Library or to the Boston Common, where most of Boston's homeless end up during the day. At night, they'll sleep on the street or go to the two main homeless shelters in the city: Pine Street Inn or Long Island Shelter, located on Boston Harbor. Haley House serves breakfast every morning except Saturday, so most of the men will be back the next day.

Cleanup begins after the last men leave. Everyone helps load glass plates, bowls, cups and utensils into three huge sinks, where they are washed, disinfected and dried by hand. Then they sweep and mop the long room from one end to the other. Formula 409 is used liberally at Haley House, and by 9:30 a.m, the place is clean again, and quiet.

"This place gets dirty, then it gets clean, then it gets dirty again," volunteer Joe Terry said. "Dirty and clean, dirty and clean, over and over and over."

Already, Soula Pefkaros, who has lived in the community the longest of any of the current residents, is getting ready for this afternoon's elder meal by spreading dough onto a metal tray.

To the volunteers gathered at one of the tables in the dining area, Johnson presents a topic for reflection: "a time when you experienced nonviolence." The reflection period is a hallmark of the volunteer experience, and allows volunteers and residents to share

their experiences during the shift.

Some of the answers are literal, like watching the men settle arguments by themselves or how so few of them, despite being hungry, ask for more than their share.

But for Lim, nonviolence that day was implicit in a small act of kindness by one of the men.

“When Bethany looked at me and said ‘I like you,’ I felt so special,” she said. “I couldn’t stop beaming.”

The staff wants social justice to be a part of everyday life.

“We want to give the guests a sense of dignity, a sense that they are responsible for their actions and that they don’t need police waiting for them to make a mistake,” Campbell said.

Back in the kitchen, there’s a tiny whiteboard on the refrigerator, where someone has written the phrase “Ain’t it rich just to be alive?”

Surely, the occupants of Haley House would agree.