



Saint Stephen's Way

2310 Lipscomb Street, Melbourne, FL 32901

A Community for Homeless Families with School Children

Spring 2019

NEWSLETTER

Issue #3

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OUR MISSION

Saint Stephen's Way provides affordable housing, along with supportive services, to homeless families referred by the Brevard School System.

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Crane Creek Building Plan: Forward Progress!

On 26 March 2019, the SSWay Vision Committee met with the developer, architect, engineers, and builders to discuss progress toward building the SSWay housing community on the Crane Creek property (described in SSWay Newsletter Issue #2). Erin Trauger, an accomplished civil engineer hired for the project earlier this year, gave the presentation. Supporting her, among others, were **Brian Bussen, project manager** and retired civil engineer, **Hugh Evans the land developer**, **Ken Lebron principal architect**, and **Scott Buescher the builder**; this article is based on interviews with these four.

At that meeting, "there was a sense of anticipation, even mild excitement," Brian observed. "Everyone got a clear view of what had to be done before we put a shovel in the ground." Hugh explained, "We have a concept plan that now needs to go into full engineering. Next is completing the engineering drawings and getting them approved by St. John's Water Management District, City of Melbourne—get all the permits, which is a 6-month process at least before construction starts." Erin was more conservative saying it could take as long as 12 months, but would most likely be sooner than that. Her next work is developing a drainage plan to control elevations on the property which includes wetlands. "Erin will engineer all the horizontal improvements," explained Brian. Erin is turning Ken Lebron's architectural drawings into civil engineering drawings. "Ken really pulled all facets of the building concept together!" Ken himself described what happens once all permits are in hand: "We'll ask for bids on construction for underground water and sewer lines, parking lots drainage, dry retention areas, and all the roadwork." Ken added, "Layout of the buildings has already been approved by Melbourne Planning & Zoning. Now we're working on the construction drawings from architectural and civil engineering drawings." Scott the builder and his team will do all the vertical construction. "We're doing the building at cost and have offered SSWay a 7% tax savings as a 501c3 charitable organization. We also hope to gain other discounts to bring the total savings to 10%." Asked about project phases, Brian replied, "Normally a project's phase lines depend on funding to determine how much to 'bite off' for each phase, which for SSWay means fundraising." About the pace of progress since January 2018 when John Farrell first met with the property owners, Brian remembered, "It proceeded like lightning!" In Ken's words, "The progress SSWay has made in the last year greatly exceeds what would normally be expected for a project like this—there's no doubt SSWay has been blessed!"

Everyone involved has a heart for this project. "I've always had a heart for this property," said Hugh, whose connection goes back 30+ years. "God put it on my heart that the timing would be perfect and an excellent opportunity to serve the under-served in the homeless community." Ken offered, "It's important that our community knows there is a real need for this type of housing, and for all of us fortunate enough not to have gone through homelessness, it's so important to help them and their children." Brian emphasized, the tremendous need for affordable housing to help families transition out of homelessness. "The need is beyond your imagination."

For Scott, "It really hit home when I heard that the Women's Center shelter takes on-ly women and young children, so at 14 years a son cannot stay there with his Mom—

he has to live somewhere else." Scott went on to say, "Donations to SSWay go to providing affordable housing to homeless families with school children to keep the whole family together. That doesn't exist today! It will give them a stable home and greatly benefit how the children perform in school. After all, the ones really getting hurt by this are the kids and it's not their fault." And from Hugh: "It's a great opportunity to set up something that can be life-changing for people that, for whatever reason, are homeless or living in substandard housing in Brevard county. The SSWay Program will give them help physically with a good place to live, give them a hand up to grow spiritually, and work with them in making their transition into more permanent housing and a better life." Brian pressed his previous point: "Based on my experience, most people have no concept of how many people around them are hurting to the point that they need a place of refuge where they can 'catch their breath.' SSWay will give them a place where they can concentrate on pulling everything together for a year or so." Overall, everyone is impressed with the team that has come together. Ken summed it up nicely: "It's an honor to be part of this and get the chance to work with wonderful people who have such a vision!"

How Will We Bring the Community to Reality?

Simply stated: 1) tell everyone about SSWay; 2) raise the funds needed; 3) build it.

Our strategy is comprehensive,” explains Eddie Struttmann, the founder and President of SSWay, “but at its core, **we need to raise awareness of the severity of homelessness in our Brevard County School system and the adverse effects it creates for the families and students.**” By executing a well planned and orchestrated Public Relations effort, “we are exposing the problem and communicating our resolve to help these families.” Leading the charge is John Farrell, Executive Director, who has been presenting SSWay’s Master Plan slide set to an ever-expanding list of organizations and community leaders. (To view the Master Plan slides, go online to <https://www.ssway.org/master-plan>.) **From January through March this year, John had 15 different meetings to spread the word and recruit assistance with fundraising.** “Our goal is to solicit companies, churches, individuals, and to do grant writing to gather funds. We are doing presentations in Brevard County, mostly south and central.” On 26 March, John presented the Master Plan to the Brevard County School Board’s “Students-in-Transition Committee,” which oversees the program for homeless students. “This committee includes Lisa Keysor,” (see “Meet...” article below) “and people connected with the school board for various specialties.” Some of those present included representatives from local agencies involved in supporting homeless families. “I only had 15 minutes for the presentation,” remembered John, “but they asked questions that went on for 30 minutes, developing great interest. It came up that ‘Maybe we can help with fundraising at the local school level.’ I’ll be meeting again with this committee in April and hope to do other things like share SSWay information with parents, as well as support their efforts to organize fundraising.” That is only one example of the many meetings John has had and will have in the future. “We will follow-up to work with groups who want to help.”

Fundraising started long before this year, but now it’s accelerating. Eddie is proud to report, **“Through the generosity of individuals, local grants, local churches, and the Indianantic and Melbourne Beach Rotary clubs we are close to 30 % of our first goal to begin and complete the first phase of construction.** The developer and general contractor feel we will have shovels in the ground early Spring of 2020, and **the first phase budget is \$2.5M.** After phase one we will need approximately \$2M each year for the following 3 years to build out the community in its entirety.” That means the full building project requires around \$8.5M. “Other than the funds themselves,” Eddie continues, **“we are looking for one individual that understands our mission, shares our passion and resolution, and has a circle of influence to be our fundraising leader.”** For those hearing about SSWay for the first time, Eddie offers, “Think about your own family, the joyous experiences you had with your children or as a child. Now think of these families who struggle daily just to exist, and how they are deprived of simple joys of being a family—sitting around a dinner table, having a bed to lay their head upon. I would ask you to open your heart and in some way, in any way, help us bring dignity and normalcy to these school children and their families.”

Meet the New Brevard Public Schools Homeless Liaison

Lisa Keysor is completely honest—“This is my third official day on the job!” After earning a Bachelor’s Degree in Social Work, Lisa began her career in education as a guidance counselor and classroom teacher in Exceptional Education, which helps students with special needs. “In the past 5 years I worked under a grant for the Teenager Parent Program, which provided home visits to teenage students who are pregnant.” After that, Lisa worked in Student Services on attendance and truancy matters. About her new position, Lisa said, “I’m still learning. My priority is to learn about the job so I can make sure everything Sally Shinn (former Homeless Liaison—see Newsletter #2, top of p. 2) had going continues, that nothing drops.”

“There are different types of homelessness,” Lisa explained. “Identification of homeless students was done well under Sally because a student may be living with a family member other than their parents but could still fit the school’s definition of homeless.” Students so identified are provided assistance to ensure they are not left out of events so important to the full school experience. This includes things like summer programs for students, and helping them attend Grad Bash and Prom. We all know what Prom is. Grad Bash 2019 is a trip for Seniors to Universal Studios arriving at 4PM and departing at 2AM, with full access to both parks and special Grad Bash activities. At \$120 per student, you can see how students dealing with homelessness need assistance to attend and be a regular part of such memorable events.

Lisa thinks SSWay is wonderful. “It’s great that they’ll be using Brevard County Schools for referrals. It will be a tremendous support for our families.” The need is so very present and real. “It’s very hard to find affordable housing in Brevard. Moving from place to place with no stability puts a huge burden on families, and applying for aid also adds more stress. This stress affects the children—they don’t know from one night to the next where they will stay so they don’t even show up for school. **SSWay’s housing and services will help families become functional and stable again—that’s priceless!** It will greatly reduce stress so families can enjoy their life together, and the kids can focus on school. Thank you for this!”

Lisa is excited and looking forward to working with everyone and getting connections within the community. **“These families are already beaten down, tried everything, and they need hope. SSWay will give them hope!”**

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