

Cathy Zall

Executive Director of the Homeless Hospitality Center

Catherine Zall became executive director of the Homeless Hospitality Center in 2007.

She is responsible for the overall management of HHC, including coordination with other providers, procedure development, strategic planning, high-priority project management, staff development, public outreach and fundraising.

Before beginning her work in New London, Zall served in a variety of social service management positions. Her experience includes almost ten years as the deputy commissioner managing New York City's welfare to work program.



Zall has an undergraduate degree from Brown University, an MBA from New York University and a master of divinity degree from the Yale Divinity School.

She and Michel Belt, a former HHC board member and retired rector of St. James Episcopal Church in New London, were recipients of the William Crawford Distinguished Service Award from the Eastern Connecticut Chamber of Commerce in November 2015. The Chamber recognized their leadership in improving the quality of life in our region. Read the press release: <http://goo.gl/k5OVGk>.

The Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness also recognized Zall with the Carol E. Walter Think, Be, Lead Change Award in 2014. Her acceptance remarks are below.

Cathy Zall – May 8, 2014

Acceptance remarks for the Carol Walter Award, CT Coalition to End Homelessness

It is such an honor to receive an award that helps us remember Carol Walter. Carol embodied all the characteristics we still need today in our battle to end homelessness. Carol was a dedicated student of homelessness bringing a passion for research and data to our work. Carol was a doer and never failed to try to do something good just because it couldn't initially be perfect. Carol was a tireless advocate for those we serve making their voice heard in places they could not reach.

We live in a culture that is increasingly hostile to poor people. At almost every turn I see evidence that, as a society, we are losing a sense of being responsible for each other. Becoming increasingly dedicated to individualism ... buying into the idea that any of us can make it on our own and that what happens to other people has no impact on us.

Even in a generous state like Connecticut, it is possible for people to drop like a stone from a life of relative comfort into almost desperate poverty that would shock citizens of other wealthy Western countries.

Putting on my preacher's hat for a moment, every one of us needs to become tireless advocates for what the gospel calls "the least of these" seeking reforms that make work, housing, health care and dignity available to every one of our neighbors.

But more specifically, we here today need to remember that we control the very limited resources that are available to put some kind of a safety net ... some kind of a floor under our most vulnerable neighbors. We and the resources we have are, in many cases, the only thing available to give some people hope.

We have, I propose, an almost sacred responsibility to use the resources we have in the most effective way possible. The work we do cannot be about us. It cannot be about what is convenient. It cannot be about just doing what we have always done. Our passion, as it was Carol's, has to be to think and experiment and learn and change to meet the needs of those we serve.

A few years ago a photographer and artist teamed up to capture images of individuals experiencing homelessness in New London and Norwich. To go along with their photos and paintings they invited their subjects to write reflections to be displayed next to their images.

One painting and poem comes to my mind often. The painting is a compelling portrait of an individual who, I am sorry to say, has been homeless in New London for way, way too long. Two words appear in the portrait "empathy" and "compassion". These (plus effectiveness) should be our mantras.

But it is the poem that I would like to end with. The person in this portrait calls himself "Antman". I keep meaning to ask him why he takes on that nickname but I think we might imagine some of the feelings that might lead to that choice.

Antman

I am homeless, living on the streets, sleeping on concrete.

Panhandling change for something to eat.

Looking for a bridge when the weather gets wet.

Just to stay dry, while I sit and cry.

I am losing my mind, talking to my imaginary princess.

She stands by my side and watches me cry.

"Nobody to talk to!"

With no direction, needing someone to show me

More than my dirty reflection.

I can't take it no more, R-U

The help I'm looking 4.

I'm living a lie, thinking

What's wrong is what's right. I'm serving time,

In prison in my own mind.

I try to keep this poem—and the teachings of the gospels—foremost in my mind as we work at HHC. Are we providing the help our guests are looking for? Are we doing the very best we can to help people escape the prison of homelessness? The answer of course is ... not yet. But reaching for that goal provides the energy we need to continue to do better.