

# Open Door

**A Publication of the Amherst Survival Center**

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**Amherst Survival Center**

March 2008

## ASC Opens Free Health Clinic

Over the past six months, the Amherst Survival Center (ASC) has launched a **Collaborative Health Initiative** that includes our flagship Free Health Clinic, a Salvation Army voucher program, administered by board member Kay Fite, that helps patients with prescriptions and other basic needs, counseling for the homeless through collaboration with Eliot Human Services, and access to Massachusetts' free and low-cost medical insurance in conjunction with Health Care for the Homeless.

The Free Health Clinic, open Mondays from 11-1 and Tuesdays from 2-3, was brought to life by ASC board vice-president Greg Kline. It is staffed by Drs. Susan Lowery and Daniel Clapp, well-known local physicians with a wealth of experience in community medicine. The doctors provide basic care, write prescriptions, and refer patients for other services when necessary. No appointment is needed.

Response to the Clinic at ASC has been overwhelmingly positive. "Many people who come to the Survival Center for free meals and clothing haven't seen a doctor in decades," reports Tracey Levy, ASC Program Director. "These programs tell consumers that, yes, you can take care of yourself. You don't have to wait for a crisis that will land you in the Emergency Room."



Dr. Susan Lowery

## Feinstein to Divide \$1 Million to Help Fight Hunger

Retail food prices have increased by 4.6 percent since January 2007, making this the most expensive year for food since 1990. Escalating costs affect individual families struggling to make ends meet as well as the food pantries and soup kitchens working hard to help them.



*Grow your investment!*

Fortunately, for the tenth straight year, Alan Shawn Feinstein has announced a matching grant of \$1 million to be divided among anti-hunger agencies to help meet the growing need ([www.feinsteinfoundation.org](http://www.feinsteinfoundation.org)). When you donate money or food items to the Amherst Survival Center during the months of March and April, your contribution will be matched proportionately by the Feinstein Foundation from a minimum of \$250 to a maximum of \$50,000.

Please consider contributing to the Survival Center no later than April 30th to help us multiply your donation through this generous offer of the Feinstein Foundation. We'll report our results to the Foundation and in July will learn how much your contributions have generated.

As always, we're grateful for your support! Help us meet the Feinstein challenge!

## Thank You to Sinauer and Associates

Sinauer and Associates, a small textbook publishing firm in Sunderland, is a special friend of the Amherst Survival Center. Not only do Sinauer employees make a generous annual financial contribution to our organization, but they also provide many hours of technical expertise to the Center. We are especially grateful for their information technology support, their help with graphics for our new

outdoor signage (coming soon), and their assistance with the design of our new logo. We are deeply indebted to this local company for their strong commitment to the local community and their ongoing support of the Amherst Survival Center.



## Sponsors and Food Donors

Next time you're out shopping, please keep in mind these generous sponsors and food donors who make our work possible. We are very grateful for their support!

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## Food Stamps Coming to ASC

People are often shocked to learn that Amherst is counted among several municipalities in the state with the highest concentration of hunger and poverty (Project Bread 2006 *Status Report on Hunger in Massachusetts*). One reason for this is that while the federal Food Stamp program has long been acknowledged as one of the most effective ways of combating hunger, access to Food Stamps from Amherst is prohibitively difficult. Since the closing of the DTA (Welfare) office in Northampton, applicants are required to travel to Holyoke to receive Food Stamps. Many cannot, however, since there is no functional public transportation to get them there.



For this reason we are very grateful for a generous grant from **The Amherst Club**, which will allow ASC to become one of the first agencies in the area to offer Food Stamps locally on-site through the Massachusetts Virtual Gateway. During the month of March we will be setting up the technology, training volunteers on the Gateway, and doing outreach in order to launch in early April. The program is a major step in the fight against hunger in Amherst and thirteen surrounding communities. Stay tuned for more information when the program opens next month.

## Donations Recognizing Friends and Family

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# THREATENED CUTS FROM TOWN OF AMHERST JEOPARDIZE COMMUNITY

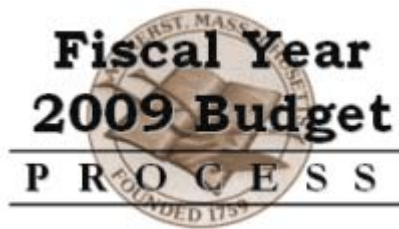
There is broad recognition that a long-term community development plan is critical for Amherst this year. It is surprising, therefore, that the proposed FY09 budget might eliminate almost all town support for vital human services.

Before taking this drastic step, we encourage Amherst residents to take stock of the crucial role this support plays in effective community development.

How does a family living in Amherst and earning minimum wage survive when a full-time income of at least \$20 an hour is required just to meet basic needs? Since most local businesses cannot support wages at this level, human service agencies step in to fill the gap. These agencies, by providing access to food, clothing, health insurance, and other vital supports, make the difference in sustaining the local workforce, while taking pressure off school guidance counselors, reducing the number of emergency ambulance calls, and lessening dependence on the police to keep order.

The proposed cuts would jeopardize the services of a number of vital organizations, including the Amherst Survival Center, Not Bread Alone, Family Outreach, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, the Center for New Americans, and the Men's Resource Center. While the town may save the relatively small amount of \$66,000, the individuals and families who depend on local human services will be drastically affected.

At ASC, the threatened cut of \$16,725 translates to **1000 boxes of food**, nearly a third of the more than 3,000 fifty-pound boxes of food distributed annually to individuals and their families who meet the federal government poverty guidelines. This would be on top of the \$16,725 that the Center lost last year when the town voted to cut the human services budget in half. No other town service or program was cut this drastically last year or this. If these cuts become a reality, reduction of services is inevitable.



There is no practical replacement for public support of human services. The Town Manager has proposed shifting the burden for funding human service agencies to Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds. Amherst only irregularly qualifies for these special funds, however. So while this plan to find alternative funding has been developed in good faith, it results in a "soft money" approach to funding with no guarantee that support would be available on a regular basis to sustain vital programs.

Others have suggested that the public will step up and replace town funds with individual private contributions. Am-

herst residents are, in fact, extremely generous in their support, but no human service agency can rely on highly variable private donations alone. As Independent Sector, the leading coalition of US charitable organizations, affirms in its report called *Building Value Together*, "Reliable, predictable, and flexible support is the lifeblood of non-profit organizations. It provides the working capital that every organization needs to carry out its mission and respond to new challenges and opportunities." Town funding, though it comprises just a fraction of most agency budgets, has provided that unique and critical support.

The threatened cuts would be especially devastating at a time when the need for services is increasing. In 2007, we saw the greatest increase in food prices since 1990, and the ever-growing cost of heating oil has forced many local families to make the unspeakable choice of "heat or eat." Trying to balance the town's budget on the backs of the town's most vulnerable citizens, two years in a row, seems both unjust and short-sighted.

Please consider contacting your local Town Meeting member and Select Board members to register your concern about this proposed budget cut. Town meeting members have the power to revise this budget, and they must consider the full impact of community services in Amherst as they cast their votes on the budget this spring.



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**AMHERST SURVIVAL CENTER, serving primarily Amherst, Belchertown, Hadley, Leverett, Pelham, Shutesbury, Sunderland, Whately, South Deerfield, and Deerfield.**

**STAFF**

Cheryl Zoll, Executive Director  
 Tracey Levy, Program Director  
 Linda Brooks, Kitchen Coord.  
 Blaire Robey, Operations Manager  
 Kara Schnell, Bookkeeper

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**HOURS OF OPERATION**

Monday, Tuesday, Friday  
 11:00 AM-3:00 PM  
 Thursday 11:00AM-7:00 PM

**LUNCH SERVED**

Monday, Tuesday, Thursday  
 and Friday  
 12:00-1:00 PM

**SURVIVAL CENTER LAUNCHES NEW LUNCH PROGRAM:**

***If These Walls Could Talk***



The Survival Center is launching a new program for the general public that aims to educate community members about the work that we do. Every two weeks on a Wednesday, ASC board members will host a luncheon program that includes a free lunch and a succinct “show and tell” about ASC activities. The program takes less than an hour and includes several short presentations from staff and board members, a tour of our facility, the opportunity to hear a consumer’s story from the consumer, a short video featuring some of our consumers, and an opportunity for you to ask questions and to provide feedback to us about our program.

If you are interested in attending a free luncheon presentation (during which you will not be asked for a donation), please contact our board president, Ruth Wade (256-8876), for the upcoming dates of these Wednesday noon-time presentations. They’re a great way to learn more about our community and the people we serve.