

## United States Department of Agriculture

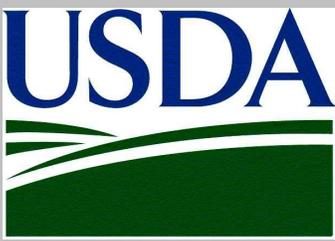


Left to Right: Sue Knight, Rachael Phillips-Barnes, Kim McCracken, Rick Ellsmore, Beverly Mason, Karen Jameson, Kathy LePorte, Daphne Feeny, Ryan DuBois, Lauren Bizzari, and Martha Stone, Cross Roads House Executive Director

### **USDA Employees Volunteer at Cross Roads House for the MLK, Jr. Day of Service**

By Ryan DuBois

In recognition of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, USDA staff participated in a volunteer event at the Cross Roads House in Portsmouth NH. This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> year in a row this day of service was held at Cross Roads House on MLK Day, with nearly triple the attendees than last year. Karen Jameson, Beverly Mason, Daphne Feeny, and Kathie LaPorte of the Concord, NH Rural Development (RD) office were welcome additions. Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) attendees included Rick Ellsmore, Kim McCracken, Susan Knight, Rachel Phillips-Barnes, Ryan DuBois and, friend of NRCS, Lauren Bizzari, an employee of FB Environmental. Special thanks go to Rachel Phillips-Barnes, NRCS Black Special Emphasis Program Manager for organizing this opportunity again.



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Martha Stone, Executive Director for the Cross Roads House, kicked off the volunteer event by explaining how Cross Roads House was much more than a warm safe place for people to get a good meal and a night's sleep. The Cross Roads House organization provides many services including: job search and vocational training, life skills such as budgeting and parenting, assistance with finding permanent affordable housing, and student and adult tutoring and GED preparation.

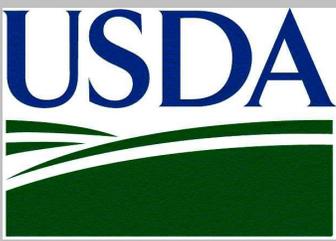
They also partner with agencies to provide additional services such as medical and dental services through Families First Health and Support Center and Healthcare for the Homeless, mental health through Seacoast Mental Health Center and substance abuse services through Alcoholics and Narcotics Anonymous.

An introductory video was also shown which highlighted success stories from the Cross Roads House, testimonials by former residents, and the many causes of homelessness. One of the main points from the video was that there are countless ways an individual or a family can become homeless and that it really can happen to anybody.

Burkholder, the maintenance coordinator, who assigned a couple volunteers to organize the food pantry's holiday donations. These volunteers executed a first-in-first-out process whereby expiration dates were checked and food items were placed on shelves to maximize the lifespan, by making the older items accessible to the chef and volunteer cook staff. The rest of the volunteers donned gloves and were armed with rakes, brooms, and plastic bags. Luck was in our favor as the sun was shining and the temperatures were comfortable with a jacket and hat. "A lot of stuff collects around during the winter months. The timing of your visit could not have been more perfect with the recent thaw", said Jim Burkholder. Like an army, we swept across the grounds picking up assorted debris and trash filling 4-5 large trash bags.

After Martha's visit, we were transferred to Jim



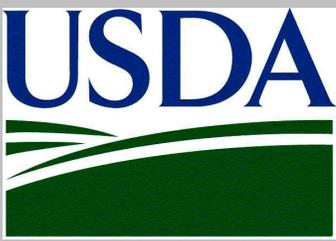


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Cross Roads House is a clean and safe facility, providing a means for residents to get a fresh start by providing them with dignity, resources, and a supportive community and staff. The recidivism rate is currently at 11%. One of the major reasons for the low return rate is due to the case managers which get assigned to each resident. These staff tailor the resources needed to the individual or family. They also follow up with former residents after they have secured housing and employment to ensure that they are continuing to make progress. It is a true community feeling at the Cross Roads House, with the residents all pitching in around the building, through cleaning, laundry, organizing, etc.

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday celebrates a life and legacy of a man who sowed the seeds of hope and healing in America. As a nation we commemorate the timeless values he preached: values of courage, truth, justice, compassion, dignity, humility and service. This volunteer day embodied the life and mission of Dr. King. It benefited the staff and residents, but also benefited the volunteers as they were able to perform a good deed for others and share in the feelings of community, compassion and kindness which were all qualities that Dr. King embodied throughout his life.





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