



*Housing with compassion...  
Development with a vision*



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## **Hudson River Housing's River Haven Commemorates Thirty Years of Providing Youth with Safe Haven**

Poughkeepsie, NY ~ Celebrating its thirtieth anniversary in April 2010, River Haven Runaway and Homeless Youth Program has provided safe shelter and services for thousands of Dutchess County's at-risk youth.

River Haven was created in 1980 by Saint Francis Hospital in response to homeless teens flocking to the emergency room in search of refuge and help. Patrice Kellett, Director of Support Services, who has been with the program since its opening thirty years ago states, "We set up the program within the parameters of the federal and New York State Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, which established a framework of services designed to alleviate the significant risks faced by runaway and homeless youth, to address their immediate needs, and to assist them in reuniting with their families and/or establishing other suitable plans for their future." Donna Menconeri, Supervising Case Manager, who has also been with the program for the full thirty years states, "We utilized existing models and incorporated core values, which included taking a non-judgmental, strength-based approach to service delivery that respected each young person and their family's right to identify their service needs and create their own goals, with our guidance."

"You lived with the beeper attached to you," Donna Menconeri says, referring to the days when she and Kellett were on call 24 hours a day to respond to emergencies. "We dreamed of opening a shelter."

In 1985, a five-bed shelter was established. In order to operate, the existing skeletal staff had to stagger its work hours; a live in-couple covered the weekday overnights, and minimally paid Residential Counselors were eventually brought on to cover the weekends. Peter Menconeri who joined the staff in 1986, recalls, "Things like furniture, dishes and towels had to be solicited from the community, friends, and family members." "I spent a lot more time there than anywhere else," says Kellett, adding, "It was almost impossible. I don't think I would have attempted it if I hadn't been in my twenties." The shelter was filled to capacity on the first night, They went on to house about a hundred young people each year.

Since its humble origins, River Haven has grown and evolved into a twenty-four crisis center and 12-bed shelter that not only provides a secure alternative for vulnerable youth, but also works to divert young people from court involvement and out-of-home placement. Over the years, River Haven has expanded its services to include a Street Based Outreach Team that goes all over the county, reaching out to at-risk

youth and linking those in need to safe shelter and services. Soon after opening the shelter, River Haven recognized a population of older, homeless, disenfranchised youth who needed longer term services than the shelter could offer in order to make a successful transition to independent living. In 1986, beginning with a part-time counselor, River Haven launched an Independent Living Support Program to work with 16 to 21-year-old homeless youth. Today, the Independent Living Support Program provides individual case management services for 185 youth every year, and River Haven's Transitional Living Community offers supervised transitional housing for 10 youth as they prepare for self-sufficient adulthood.

Not unlike the youth it serves, River Haven itself (in a fitting analogy) has been cut adrift, not once but twice. A funding crisis in the late 1980's forced Saint Francis Hospital to sever the program, but not before taking steps to ensure its future. In 1991, the Dutchess County YMCA became River Haven's sponsoring agency, and in 1992 River Haven moved off Hospital grounds to a larger site provided by the First Lutheran Evangelical Church of Poughkeepsie, on a rent-free basis. Then, amid the Y's own financial difficulties, River Haven joined Hudson River Housing's continuum of services for the homeless in 2000.

Hudson River Housing develops and manages affordable and homeless housing in our community. Hudson River Housing was created in 1982 to address the emerging issue of homelessness in Dutchess County, and is now a large, multi-service provider of housing and other services to a wide range of underserved populations. In 2009, Hudson River Housing provided services to over 2,500 individuals and families.

Thirty years later, River Haven continues to provide vital services to youth. Over 90 young people were provided with shelter in 2009. "It's amazing how much things stay the same," says Peter Menconeri. "The problems the youth come in with are still essentially the same as they were thirty years ago."

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Hudson River Housing (HRH) has substantial experience developing and managing affordable housing in the community. HRH was created in 1982 to address the emerging homeless problem in Dutchess County, and is now a large, multi-service provider of housing and other services to a wide range of populations. The expertise of Hudson River Housing is increasingly relied upon to inform local planning related to housing, community development and homelessness. Since its formation, Hudson River Housing has developed 37 affordable homeownership opportunities, nearly 300 apartments and 9 commercial spaces. For more information, please call (845) 454-5176 or visit [www.hudsonriverhousing.org](http://www.hudsonriverhousing.org).

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