

HOMeward

WINTER 2019

Meet a fighter—and a winner

When you first meet Kara Demindes, you're struck by her unshakable resolve. Born at just 24 weeks, Kara spent the first nine months of her life in the hospital, fighting to survive. "I held on," she says. "And I'm still holding on today."

Kara's early years were shaped by a three-month stint in a psychiatric hospital and by her mother's struggle with substance use. Kara can tell you the addresses of all the places she lived in West Baltimore. And the names of nearly a dozen public schools she attended—including a few where she was expelled for fighting both students and teachers. "Even though I had places to live, I wasn't mentally or financially stable at all," Kara explains.

"I had so much anger inside and resentment toward my mother, and I didn't know how to express it."

Kara fended for herself as a child, defended others against bullies as a tween and carried her fiery spark into early adulthood. A prime example? Even after becoming a mother at 16, Kara insisted on remaining in school to earn her high school diploma.

At 32, Kara is finding healthy ways to channel the fight. She has her first stable home in years and regular sessions with her therapist.

For the first time, Kara feels in control of her environment. And like many parents, she's learned that to make life better for her kids, she needs to start with herself. "I was never given the information on how to show somebody love and affection because it was never given to me," Kara says. "I've learned a lot of coping mechanisms that make it easier for me to think before I react."

You've probably used some of Kara's tips, too: pause and



Kara is fighting for a healthier future—thanks to you.

take a breath, go for a walk, call a friend.

"I've been through a lot," Kara says. "A lot of people gave up on me. Even my mom gave up on me at times. But I kept going. Now I'm in a much better space than I've been in my whole life."



Hear more stories like Kara's
at The Chocolate Affair
on Saturday, February 2.
www.chocolateaffair.org

Little teeth are a big deal



Helping kids learn to brush means a lifetime of healthy smiles.

Dentists recommend brushing your teeth for two minutes. That can seem like an eternity for a kid. Just ask Dr. Parita Patel, Dental Director at Health Care for the Homeless.

“I always start by asking kids about their favorite food,” she says. “They usually say something like pupusas or hot dogs or pizza. And I tell them, ‘You want to be able to eat that when you’re older, right? You’ll need your teeth to chew, so start taking care of them now.’”

Taking care of your mouth from that very first baby tooth on is important, but for families we serve, dental care is out of often out of reach.

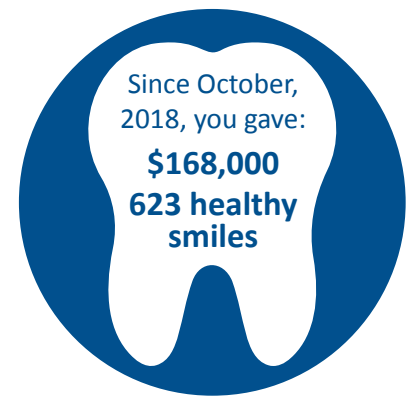
“Over half of the families we see do not have insurance,” says Dr. Iris Leviner, Director of Pediatrics and Family Medicine. “We see a lot of dental issues and definitely some urgent needs. Most of our clients wouldn’t be able to get dental care at all without our program.”

Tooth decay is one of the top health issues facing kids in the U.S. Untreated cavities can lead to fractured teeth and infection. Children with decay in their baby teeth are much more likely to have similar problems with their adult teeth.

Our dental and pediatric teams joined forces (and expertise) to give 1,000+ children preventive dental care and nutritional counseling in 2018. During well-child checkups, we apply fluoride varnish, a simple procedure that strengthens teeth and prevents decay.

“Combining well-child visits with dental care just makes sense for these families,” Parita says. “When you teach a child the importance of brushing, flossing and healthy eating, that’s something they can keep with them when they are adults and later when they’re parents themselves. It’s very powerful.”

You make us smile!



DONATE MONTHLY

Join **heartbeat**—a group of committed monthly supporters—to build a future without homelessness one month at a time.

giving.hchmd.org/heartbeat



VOLUNTEER

You can make a night on the street a bit more manageable for our neighbors without homes. Assemble and donate survival kits this winter.

www.hchmd.org/fulfill-our-wishlist



CONNECT

On March 2, rock out at the MammoJam Music Festival and support cancer screenings for women like Mary (pg 3).

Tickets at
www.mammojam.org



Amber and Lilian help women overcome fear to get life-saving cancer screenings and treatment.

Don't face cancer alone

Mary* was worried. She didn't have time to be sick. And she couldn't leave her kids at the local shelter to find out why she wasn't feeling well.

"If you're in a shelter, you can't control when you go to sleep, when you wake up or when you eat," says Amber Richert, DNP, Nurse Practitioner. "When your health is another thing you can't control, it can be really scary."

One way that your support helps women take control of their health is by making preventive care like cervical cancer screenings available at each visit. For Mary, that meant that our mobile clinic came to the shelter where she was staying, and she got the answers that may have saved her life.

Mary's screening came back abnormal, as it does for more than one in five of our clients (nearly double the national average). She had to see a gynecologist for a follow-up exam to determine whether she had cancer.

No one looks forward to going to the gynecologist, but for women with a history of trauma and a lack of trust in traditional health systems, it can be particularly frightening. That's where community health workers come in.

Lilian Amaya, Lead Community Health Worker, walks clients like Mary through each step of the process, answering questions and going with them to their doctors' visits.

"A lot of our clients are extremely overwhelmed as soon as they step in the hospital for the exam," Lilian says. "They don't always have support networks like friends and family to go with them. They tell me, 'If it wasn't for you helping me, I never would have come.'"

In 2018, you helped 1,200 women (250 more than the year before) get cervical cancer screenings—and the step by step guidance they needed to regain control of their health.

*Mary is a pseudonym.

Know your status

*HIV/HCV Care Associate
Adrienne Washington talks
testing and education*

Q: Why is it so difficult to talk about HIV and Hepatitis C (HCV)?

People are ashamed or afraid of judgement. When I ask if clients have ever had any sexually transmitted diseases, they hesitate. I tell them everything is confidential and reassure them that even if the test comes back positive, they're not alone.

Q: These conversations seem so personal—are people comfortable talking about sex, drug use and infections?

I think people have had questions about these topics for years, and nobody has answered them. The first time I went to House of Ruth, seven women starting asking me questions and got tested. At another site, 15 people came to see me. I try to uplift, empower and let them know that where we are is not all that we are.

Q: How many people have you tested since you started a few months ago?

I've tested 122 people. When we do the test, it's like they're able to breathe—they feel empowered. Then I'm able to offer ways for them to engage in sex more safely. If they are positive, I help them get treatment.

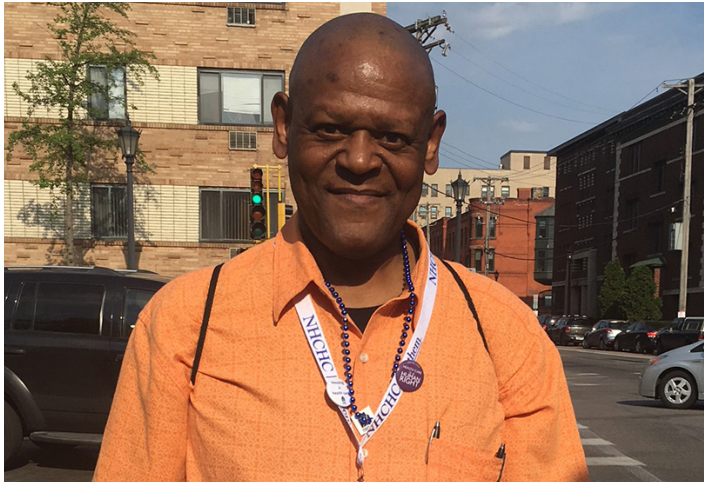
Q: How can the Health Care for the Homeless community help?

In the U.S., an estimated 2.4 million people live with HCV infection and 1.1 million with HIV infection. All of us are at risk. If you haven't been tested, ask your provider for the test. Know your status, take control and start getting better!



*Slow the spread of
HIV and Hepatitis C:
<https://gettested.cdc.gov>*

Brandon leads by example



When Brandon speaks, everyone listens.

Brandon Berryain doesn't want his position on our Board of Directors to be a status symbol. For him, it's an opportunity to ground the Board with his lived experience and encourage other clients to get involved. Brandon says, "As much as being a leader matters, it's being an example that matters more."

Brandon's understanding of strong leadership started at an early age. He watched his dad make his way from custodian to supervisor at the water plant. He remembers marching to the Baltimore Harbor atop his dad's shoulders

after Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated. From his mom, a teacher who dedicated herself to helping those in her community, Brandon learned compassion. His parents' example lit a fire in him that has never gone out—even when things didn't go as planned.

For 20 years, life was tough. Brandon lost both of his parents. He struggled to survive without health care or housing. But when Brandon came to our downtown clinic in 2010, he says, "The stars aligned."

Since then, Brandon improved his health, moved into his own home and reconnected with the passion for justice that his parents instilled in him all those years ago.

Now, Brandon is gearing up for his eighth Lobby Day, picking out his outfit for our Chocolate Affair and preparing for year two on our Board of Directors. President and CEO Kevin Lindamood says, "When Brandon speaks, everyone listens. He is driven, deeply empathetic and persistent in reminding the Board of the impact their decisions have at a human level. Brandon has played an integral part in growing client involvement across the organization."

Follow Brandon's example, and make 2019 the year you connect more deeply with our work:

www.hchmd.org/join-us



LOBBY DAY | THURSDAY, MARCH 7

Our clients understand what's wrong. Stand with them in Annapolis!

RSVP at www.hchmd.org/lobby-day.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

THE CHOCOLATE AFFAIR

Saturday, February 2

Join us for a vibrant evening to end homelessness, featuring dishes from Baltimore's top chefs and a deeper dive into stories like Kara's (pg 1). Tickets at chocolateaffair.org or call 443-703-1345.

CLINIC TOUR

Thursday, February 14

Your chance to see our downtown clinic in action. Tour starts at 9 a.m. RSVP to tours@hchmd.org.

CLIENT ART SHOW

Thursday, April 25

Enjoy a free gallery-style evening of art and community. Select artwork will be for sale (cash only). 5-7 p.m. RSVP at www.hchmd.org/client-art-show.