

# Leadership Profile: Tina Pagotto

Jordan Martin 23 January 2018

Bethesda Project seeks to find and care for the abandoned poor and to be family to those who have none. Tina Pagotto is new to the role of CEO, but she is not new to the Bethesda family. She began 12 years ago as the Development Assistant for the organization that currently serves 2,000 homeless and formerly homeless men and women at 14 sites throughout Philadelphia.

Tina did two placements in different departments through her master's program that let her see how Bethesda Project does casework and program development before moving on to the Housing Program and the role of COO before her current role. She brings an understanding of Bethesda Project that she hopes will help her make a difference for the men and women they serve.

The organization was founded in 1979 by Reverend Domenic Rossi and members of his prayer group from Daylesford Abbey in Paoli, Pennsylvania when they reached out to a group of women experiencing homelessness in Center City, Philadelphia. The group committed themselves to serving as family for the women. They rented them an apartment and provided companionship as they coped with mental illness and

healed.

The group bought a house with the support of foundations in Daylesford Abbey that became a permanent home for formerly homeless women. As the prayer group saw the need grow, they hired their first paid staff and began to expand their programs. Through partnerships with other nonprofits and local churches, the organization sought to provide the best care for homeless and formerly homeless adults.

Today, Bethesda Project offers a continuum of care to meet homeless men and women where they are. Their sites range from emergency shelters to supportive housing and independent living spaces. Case managers meet with the men and women and help them develop an individualized care plan. Once the plan is in place, case managers connect residents to services in the community that assist them in achieving their goals with an aim to help them become stably housed and increase their independence.

Tina says their mission is what makes them uniquely qualified to do this work. Their mission to be family for the abandoned poor calls them to actively seek out people needing their services. They have a department focused on community life, which focuses on connecting residents with other residents, staff, and volunteers. Their housing model sets guests up in a single site where they interact and form relationships with one another and staff rather

than setting them up in apartments on their own with staff checking in. Their mission also leads them to connect and serve people who have the most difficult cases and people who need family most, single adults experiencing chronic homelessness.

Tina is incredibly proud that as they have grown, Bethesda Project has stayed true to that mission. "We do what we say we will do for vulnerable populations," Pagotto says. As the organization grows under her leadership, she wants to keep that mission central. Fundamental to everything she does is also the core values of social work: service, social justice, dignity and worth of the individual, centrality of human relationships, integrity, and competence.

Tina strives to be a consistent and thoughtful decision maker as she leads Bethesda Project into a new chapter. She tries to cultivate a team of leaders with her staff by supporting and encouraging them to be thought leaders in their piece of the organization. She hopes her team of leaders will help her overcome the challenges that Bethesda Project faces over the next years like government contracts that don't keep up with the costs of administering programs.

She also hopes her staff can help her make her vision for the future of the Bethesda Project real. She hopes to attract young, engaged people in Philadelphia to the organization and grow the reserves. Tina also hopes that

they can gain more recognition. The church group that started Bethesda Project remained humble and true to their roots, working behind the scenes to serve the homeless across the city, but getting the word out about the work they do is essential to attracting the funding they'll need to be sustainable going forward.

Tina is also determined to make a dream the organization has been working on for years a reality, an engagement center that gives people a place to walk in and get connected to services. Small-scale and comprehensive, the center will welcome those taking the first steps to get off the street on the ground floor, while also offering short-term respite beds and permanent supportive housing above, all in one location. Bethesda Project continues to look for the ideal space for this project.

As they move into this next chapter, she also hopes to continue to grow partnerships with organizations doing similar work in the city and with unexpected partners. Bethesda Project has found a partnership with the Phillies very fruitful. The Phillies support Bethesda Project by hosting their biggest fundraising event of the year, volunteering in Bethesda's shelters, and even helping a client find employment.

"A resident of Our Brothers' Place heard that the Phillies were coming to serve their annual meal and took the opportunity to hand General Manager, Matt Klentack, his resume. Klentack helped get him a temporary job in the

kitchen that turned into a permanent position, something that has worked well both for the resident and the Phillies."

Tina expects to continue to have more flexible and innovative partners that will yield similarly rewarding results. They're in the early stages of a discussion to partner with another organization to bring gardening programs to their residents.

Their more traditional partnerships have also continued to develop. The City of Philadelphia has been a strong ally and the mutual referral partnership with mental health and recovery services in the area have become stronger due to this. A partnership with Project H.O.M.E. to open Connelly House and house 79 formerly homeless men and women has been extremely successful. Tina hopes all of these relationships will continue to blossom during her tenure as CEO.

Tina is well positioned to lead the organization into the future, her long tenure has given her an appreciation for what the organization does and represents, but also how the foundation can continue to grow. She hopes that expanding the donor base to include younger individuals and getting the word out about the great work Bethesda Project does will allow them to continue serving as family for those who need it most for decades to come.