



HomeStart

Spring 2022 | Rallying Together

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ICYCLE BREAKS RECORDS AS TEAMS RALLY TO SUPPORT DESTABILIZED HOUSEHOLDS

The day-of energy on February 17th at One International Place and February 18th at Kendall Center was incredible as **ICycle** veterans and first-time teams came together to ride in solidarity with our neighbors experiencing homelessness or threat of eviction. **227 ICyclists** from **20 teams** rode and cheered together knowing that their efforts had rallied **over 945 supporters** to raise **\$325,653** for HomeStart's work of helping neighbors in crisis to regain and maintain the stability of home. Thank you to everyone who participated, whether you rode, taught, volunteered, donated, or helped spread the word!

Because of these efforts, neighbors in crisis in our community will be able to find the help they need to rebuild their lives in the year ahead:

- For some, this will take the form of **court advocacy and financial assistance** to prevent families who've fallen behind on their rent from being evicted.
- For others, **supportive services** and urgent material support to stabilize formerly homeless individuals at risk of being pushed back into

homelessness.

- For others already experiencing homelessness, it has meant the ability to **find and move into the safety of a new home.**

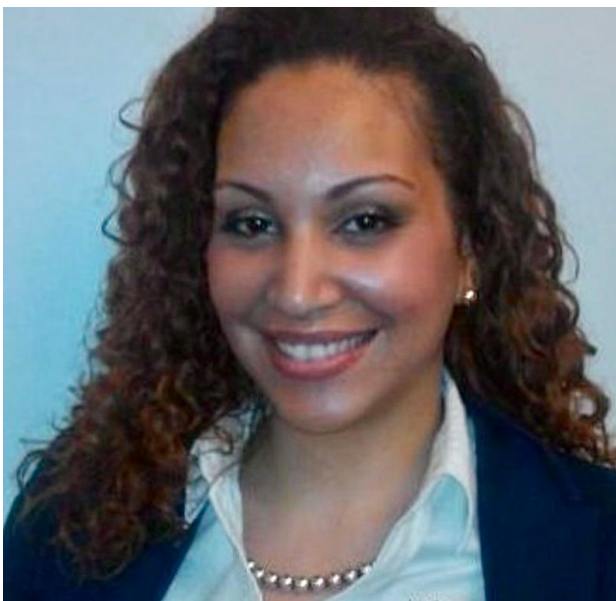
At a time when families and individuals who were already living paycheck-to-paycheck are being pushed into homelessness by the pandemic's economic disruption, thank you to everyone who rallied to respond!



If you missed out on participating in ICycle (or just miss it as much as we do!), enjoy these highlights shared by this year's ICyclists:



FROM THE FRONTLINES: "THAT'S HOW YOU STILL SEE THERE'S HUMANITY" INTERVIEW W/ GRISELDA MONTAS



If you were able to be at ICycle this past February, you already know what an incredible energy **Griselda Montas** brings to the team as Homestart's newest **Events Coordinator**. What you might not have known is that she's coming to the role after spending six years as a **bilingual (Español/English) HomeStart Housing Search Advocate**, serving the women visiting Rosie's Place. We sat down with Gris recently to reflect on her experiences as an Advocate and how a lifelong passion for advocacy continues to inspire her work:

What was your path to Homestart?

Helping my community has always been my passion. I've done it throughout my life thanks to my background, where I grew up: coming from New York as someone who's Dominican, being in 'the system'. My mom received welfare and we lived in rent-controlled affordable housing. Growing up in the system, it was always a desire of mine to 1) get out of the system, and 2) help people navigate through the system and be successful enough to eventually get out of that struggle, themselves. I got a really good job through the corporate world. You know, still helping out here and there in my community as best as I knew how and as best as I could. I decided to take a break just so I could be more available to my kids. My job was taking a lot and I was always traveling.

Once I decided to come back to the workforce, I wanted to do something that I'd always been passionate about. And that's when I saw the advertisement for HomeStart! **It was exactly what I wanted to do: a bilingual position, helping out with housing, being an advocate for my community.** I couldn't have... if I were looking for it, I couldn't have found a more perfect role. Let me just say that. The description was to a T.

You mentioned that you were excited to see that the position was for a bilingual Housing Search Advocate. Could you tell me more about that?

I was always a translator for my community. Since I was a young girl, I was always filling out applications, going with my aunts to their appointments—doctor appointments, housing appointments, talking to people on the phone. My mom always thought that it was so important for us to write and speak Spanish as best we could because we're part of the community and we need to learn it. My dad said we lived in America so we didn't need to know Spanish. And it's so funny, because I've used both languages all my life. I'm so grateful for my mom when it comes to that.

Let me tell you, one thing that made me decide to do this is the level of unfairness people get met with when they don't speak English— even by people who know their language!

So, there would be times I'd go to an appointment with my mom and I'd see people there without a translator and I could just see that the people who worked there.... the way they treated them... they could be so rude until I came up with them and went, "She's just asking you one question. Why are you making it difficult for her?" I just don't get it. Especially when they speak the language themselves! Does it say somewhere that you can't speak Spanish in a professional environment? Even to help another person out? And, for the most part, it was these older women who were just seeking help. They don't understand the language— they couldn't even write, they were not educated in that way. It's not their fault, it's just the challenges they've faced.

What does your work as a Housing Search Advocate look like?

I have my 25-30 official clients (separate from one-off walk-in clients), where we're able to build a relationship deep enough that I can come with you to view the units, I can talk for you at a meeting with the landlord, I can come with you to your screenings— anything that has to do with housing, I'm available. I know it's difficult for them to go see the units so I'll just pick them up in my car from Rosie's Place and bring them to the showings.

I noticed that when clients would go to visit the landlords by themselves they wouldn't be getting the same respect as if they were going with me. Which is not okay.

And then little things here and there that pop up that are affecting them getting housing. So, for example, if I need a doctor's note documenting a disability for a Reasonable Accommodation request, I can go with them. I don't need to, but I can and I have gone with them to the doctor to ask for the specific letters we need. Especially if they can't communicate in English. Little things like that, that go a long way.

Once I'm able to house them and it goes through, we have a truck company, furniture bank referrals. I'd go with them to the furniture bank, help them pick out their furniture, go with them to their apartments, and help them set up their apartments. Then I'd wait a bit to see if they're settled and then go through the process of referring them to HomeStart's Stabilization program.

From there, they'd get their own long-term case manager who does house visits, making sure they're paying their rent and other bills, coordinating with their medical team, and really building relationships with them to make sure they're able to stay housed.

What are the biggest challenges you face?

Rental prices are getting away from us as a city. When you're paying first month's rent, last month's rent, and then a broker's fee* on top of that and rent is \$2,200, that's a lot of money to pay for a person to move into an apartment! Also, finding real estate owners who care deeply about people and understand that a great tenant might not have a background that they would expect. There is so much more to a person than their credit score! Fortunately, we build relationships with landlords—which is the number one thing that's helped me be successful— but it is often a challenge to find those landlords and brokers who are both good business people and have a heart to consider untraditional backgrounds!

*** Increasingly, property owners who rent units in our clients' price range are using brokers and requiring that the tenant cover the extra fee. The only way for our clients to be competitive as potential tenants is for HomeStart to cover these additional fees as part of assisting clients with start-up costs. Public funding can't be spent on broker's fees, so our clients rely on donations to HomeStart's Community Housing Assistance Fund to cover these and other un-funded start-up costs.**

INCREASE THE POOL OF APARTMENTS THAT OUR CLIENTS CAN MOVE INTO BY DONATING TO THE COMMUNITY HOUSING ASSISTANCE FUND

What do you enjoy the most?

Once they get that key! Even just telling you is so emotional...*[tearing up]* for them, for me... helping them to get there. A lot of them have been homeless for such a long time and for them just being able to go and sign that little paper and get their key... and then use that key to see the unit... I see them just light up. It means that they're going to be sleeping in a safe place that's a place of their own.

Every person, for the most part, who comes in to me, whether it's a client or it's a walk-in, they tell me, "I just want a place of my own." Everybody just wants a little something that's theirs, you know? They just have a little space where they don't have to think about where they sleep at night! That they don't have to leave me by 2:45 so they can get a bottom bunk. Because they're elderly people. Mhmm. It's so crazy, I've been doing it for so long and it still gets me emotional... So yeah, I guess that's why I'm not burnt out.

Do you have a favorite memory?

I have so many! I think it's probably... I can't even say one. I think just grabbing coffee with them before an appointment or a screening. Taking a client out to eat. You know, I've done little things like that. You have conversations, "Oh I've never had this...! Oh, I've heard of this restaurant..."

There's this one lady who'd just come from Puerto Rico. One day we had to get a doctor's note for her and we were there for freaking hours. I had not eaten. She had not eaten. I was like, "OMG, want to go check out Alex's Chimis?" She was like, "You'd take me out to eat??" And I was like, "Yeah- You haven't eaten. I haven't eaten. We need to eat. Come on!" We went to the restaurant. It wasn't anything fancy, just this spot where they had this really good Spanish food that we'd talked about. You know- She's Puerto Rican, I'm Dominican. And you know, it was so cute. **We sat there and we talked. Not about work, just whatever. Sitting there, grabbing coffee, you learn so much about these women, you know?** I think those were my favorite moments aside from housing them.

One of my clients, this lady had a master's degree in her country. She came here and she found herself homeless. That's why I say, you can never judge people. I had another one who used to be a cop in her country and then she came here, found herself homeless and in shelter. She said, "I would have never thought me living comfortably in my country and doing work for my community would bring me to this." And after that, we had conversations and she would tell me, "But it's meant to be because I've met so many people. And I have helped so many people. And I've touched so many people." **So, even for you to be in this situation and for you to be helping other people in the situation you're in, that's incredible. To have the energy to be homeless -to not know where you're going to sleep!- and to still want to help other people...** I've met a lot of wonderful women. You meet all kinds of people everywhere, but I've met a lot of wonderful women.

Even though it's crazy, a lot of them get their apartment and they're still at the shelter eating breakfast, lunch. I'm always seeing them. And it's to see their FRIENDS! They meet so many people. **And let me tell you, a lot of them even lend out their space once they're housed for showers, for people to eat something, for them to not have to be in the streets and just to have somewhere warm to be during the day before they have to go and get their bed. You meet so many selfless people. Even though most of my women didn't have anywhere to go, nothing to fall back on.**

Not even just my clients, I mean the population I've worked with. It's so cute how they help each other. They wait for each other. Someone will go up and go, "Gris? Are you seeing any people today, because she just moved out here..." She won't even know the person. They won't even know them and they're bringing them into the shelter because they know about the resources and how they can help connect. It's the best, how that community helps each other. I mean some people are... but for you to not have anywhere to sleep!? But they'll go to each other, "Will you wait for me?" or, during a walk-in, "You better go if you want to get a bed in time!"

The friendships that they build. The bonds that they build. Because it's like teamwork. "You'll go here- I'll take you to pick up the application." People who aren't family. People they just met. That's how you still see that there's humanity. Definitely. I didn't see that as much in the corporate world, you know? Everyone seemed more individualistic and isolated. Not that you don't find that sometimes at the shelter, but it's a totally different vibe.

Let's close out with some fill in the blanks!

I am passionate about Helping out my community And making a difference

Here's what I'm currently reading, watching, or listening to..... You don't want to know! Stuff that gets my mind chillaxed, like 90 Day Fiancee. The last book I read was Trevor Noah's book, *Born a Crime*. I listen to music and want to get into podcasts about women's-empowerment, health information, and strengthening. I like to know a little about everything.

In my spare time, I like to..... Travel. Spend time with friends and family. And to dance! Anything except to relax. I'm not a big relaxing person.

In 10 years, this is the change I hope to see..... For us to be able to house people more easily- SOME kind of housing regulation, rent control. There's no regulation- people can put whatever numbers down for a rental price, regardless of if people can afford it. Affordable housing- real, fully affordable housing, not just small set-asides. I want to see the city do more- regulation of the housing market. People shouldn't be getting price-gouged while they're just trying to have a place to live.

The views and opinions in this interview don't reflect HomeStart's endorsement as an organization. They reflect the insights of the person interviewed, shaped by their personal perspectives on the frontlines of HomeStart's work.

MEET HOMESTART'S 2022 BOSTON MARATHON® TEAM

Have you ever wondered... What inspires a person to commit to months of intensive daily training culminating in running a 26.2 mile marathon?!

That's exactly what Dietmar Serbee and Larry Tobin chose to do when they agreed to run the 2022 Boston Marathon as a fundraiser to help neighbors in crisis obtain and maintain the stability of home.

Take a moment to meet Team HomeStart's Boston Marathon runners and be inspired as they share what it is that moves them, early morning after early morning, to get up and run.

Larry Tobin

I'm running to to raise money for HomeStart because of the crucial work they do, which I also have a personal connection to.

In addition to working with households facing eviction to help keep them safe in their homes and providing stabilizing supportive services so that formerly-homeless families and individuals can thrive, Homestart works to get unhoused people in Boston their first home (post-homelessness) to break the cycle.

A dear friend of mine benefited



from this type of program in 2004 and it completely transformed his life, from self-medicating with alcohol and other substances under the Charlesgate overpass to being housed and healthy and happy.

He's been a friend since 2005. That fall while a Freshmen at BU, a friend and I approached a few people who were panhandling around BU asking if they'd like to join us for lunch in a BU dining hall. We were 1% social justice warriors and 99% trouble-makers looking to ensure BU didn't make \$\$ on guest meals they forced us to buy. Little did I know that lunch would launch a hugely important relationship.

Since 2005, he and I have spent some Christmas and Thanksgiving dinners together, I've become his

health proxy, and I've been blessed to see him build a totally stable life in an apartment with part-time work after 25 years of drinking himself to verge of his death bed. We typically speak multiples times each week.

The only reason my friend has been able to remain sober is because he has a home. And he only has a home because someone intervened and helped him to help himself 19 years ago.

There is something particularly meaningful knowing that he will watch me run by (*probably walking at that point) in Kenmore—it's the location we met nearly 17 years ago and prior to that it's the location he camped out for the better part of 25 years until organizations like Home Start stepped-up to help.

They do amazing work and I'd be really grateful for your support!

**SUPPORT LARRY AS HE RUNS TO HELP UNHOUSED NEIGHBORS
BREAK THE CYCLE OF HOMELESSNESS AND REBUILD THEIR LIVES**



Dietmar Serbee

Hello Friends -- I need your help!

I'm taking part in 126th Boston Marathon to raise money for HomeStart, who does great work for a cause that's very close to my heart— ending and preventing homelessness.

They make an meaningful, tangible impact in the community: To date, HomeStart has permanently housed more than 14,000 people out of homelessness and prevented more than 4,000 households from being put out through eviction—

with 95% of those households remaining securely housed even 48 months after the intervention.

HomeStart helps on three levels:

Eviction Prevention: Intervening to prevent families and individuals from experiencing homelessness by way of eviction through court advocacy and financial assistance.

Housing Search: Assisting families and individuals who are staying in shelters or living on the street with the process of finding and moving into a stable, affordable place to call home.

Housing Stability: Providing wrap-around case management and supportive services to help formerly homeless clients maintain stable housing connected to a community of support.

If you can, please donate to my fundraising project on GivenGain!

Thank you!

**HELP MAKES STRIDES TO END
AND PREVENT HOMELESSNESS IN
OUR COMMUNITY**

DORCHESTER BREWING COMPANY TO DONATE \$1 FROM EACH BREWERY-EXCLUSIVE 'RENEW WIT' TO HOMESTART

Spring weather is here, and at Dorchester Brewing Company that means *wietbier*. If you visit DBC's tap room at 1250 Mass Ave, try out their new *wietbier*, 'Renew Wit'— \$1 from each pour will go to HomeStart throughout the month of March!

Dorchester Brewing Company rode as a team at ICycle this year for their very first time. Soon after, they reached out to share that they'd been so moved by learning about HomeStart's work that they wanted to dedicate proceeds from one of their limited-run seasonal beers to the cause! Named in honor of HomeStart's [Renew Collaborative](#), 'Renew Wit' is described as "an approachable wheat beer with notes of tangerine and candied orange."

If you end up going, tell them 'Hello' for us!



RENEW WIT
AN APPROACHABLE WHEAT
BEER WITH NOTES OF
TANGERINE AND CANDIED
ORANGE

WITBIER, 4.3% ABV

DORCHESTER
BREWING CO.

\$1 FROM EACH POUR GOES TO HOMESTART 

News & Views:

- [Advancements in COVID Science Have People Experiencing Homelessness to Thank](#)
- [Predominantly BIPOC Neighborhoods Had 2x More Eviction Filings Than Mostly White Neighborhoods](#)
- [MA to Spend \\$800,000 of Eviction Relief Funds to Investigate Applicants](#)
- [AG Healey Expands Grant Program to Address Affordable Housing Crisis in Massachusetts](#)
- [The Impact of Housing Instability on Children's Health](#)

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