



# AMHERST COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

*Housing is THE Solution to Homelessness*

## ACC is Mooooooving!



*To 236 North Pleasant Street, Amherst MA. Look for the spotted cow!*

ACC is moving! Unitarian Universalist Society of Amherst has been our most wonderful and accommodating host for the last three years. On Oct. 1, 2017, ACC will be relocating to: 236 N Pleasant Street, Amherst. It is handicap accessible, on the bus route, and located in downtown Amherst.

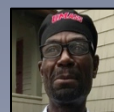
We invite you attend our Open House!

- Tues. Oct. 24 at 10 a.m.
- Sat. Oct. 28 at 4 p.m.

RSVP:  
[ACCinAmherst@gmail.com](mailto:ACCinAmherst@gmail.com)

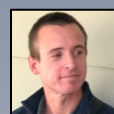
A tour is a must! Food and fun will be served. Take a photo with us outside by the "Cow"--on the corner of Hallock Street and N. Pleasant Street.

### IN THIS ISSUE



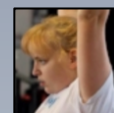
Greg shares his journey toward finding strength, peace, and passion.

1



Looking back, Thomas recounts the lessons he learned that helped him rise up from a rock bottom time.

2



Familiarize yourself with one of the newest faces in the ACC office, Sadie Mazur!

2



The people you'll see milling around your neighborhood on October 15 are legit and for a good cause—Shelter Sunday!

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### Amherst Community Connections

236 N. Pleasant Street, Amherst  
413-345-0736

Walk-ins Mon.-Friday 8:30 am-12 pm;  
by appointment 12-5 pm.

*"To empower, advocate for, and assist those in need"*

## Faith Moving Mountains: Gregory's Story

If you've ever walked around downtown Amherst, chances are that you've heard Mr. Gregory crooning down by the Unitarian Universalist Society of Amherst. The talented Baltimore native stopped by the ACC office one morning to share his journey out of the iron grasp of the streets and into the warm embrace of spirituality, community, and music. Greg,

at an early age, knew that he would eventually turn to the streets to hustle. "Seeing my mom struggle all the time made me want money. Selling drugs just became my way of life." He came to Massachusetts in 1992 in the hopes of a fresh start, but he found that old habits die hard, and that it was easier to hustle

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## Meet the Team: Sadie Mazur

Sadie discovered ACC through word of mouth from a friend and was immediately drawn to their commitment to community building and emphasis on empowerment and accessibility for disenfranchised individuals. From a young age, her parents instilled in her a strong sense of justice and empathy, which has stayed with her well into her adult years.

Amherst Community Connections' mission of providing resources to vulnerable community members with a holistic, sustainable, and personalized approach speaks volumes to Sadie, who truly believes that

long-term support and personal empowerment are the most powerful, yet underutilized, tools for success in life. Sadie hopes that her creative outlook, empathetic nature, and strong social skills will benefit ACC in its goals to raise awareness and advocate for the at-risk community. She believes that ACC will give her an opportunity to make real, long-lasting connections and enact tangible change locally. She just wants to help as much as she can and learn as much as she can!

Sadie's academic interests lie in equal and equitable access to education and care, health

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*Sadie is a new intern at ACC and does casework and social media*

## One Day at a Time: Thomas's Story



*"It can and will get better – maybe not today or tomorrow, but it will" - Thomas*

Connecticut-born Thomas was raised in the Pioneer Valley and he attended Amherst Regional Middle and High Schools growing up. He has experienced some difficult times in recent years, but he specifically recalls this past summer as a rock-bottom moment: he was struggling to keep his job, had lost his apartment, and was dealing with some personal challenges. When he wasn't staying on friends' couches, he was sleeping outside of an abandoned gas station in a makeshift bed. What followed was months of what he described as "the day-to-day grind" of searching for food and shelter and trying to stay afloat. Thomas cited resources like Amherst Community Connections and the Amherst Survival Center as having been critical at that time, with ACC helping him get the bus passes

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*KDSAP Amherst's urinalysis table at the 2016 Spring screening*

## Event Alert: Free Kidney Screening at UUSA!

On Saturday October 28<sup>th</sup> at the Unitarian Universalist Society of Amherst (UUSA), the Amherst College chapter of the *Kidney Disease Screening & Awareness Program* (KDSAP) will be hosting a free kidney screening open to all community members from 1-5pm. This is the third screening they have hosted in collaboration with Amherst Community Connections since getting their start in 2015. Through the screening tools and physician consultations they've offered, dozens of individuals have been able to detect early markers of kidney health issues, and even more have received information about accessible community health resources and ways to maintain their kidney health. Kidney disease has no symptoms in its early stages and often goes undetected until it is advanced. It claims more lives every year than breast or prostate cancer.<sup>1</sup> KDSAP was just one of many responses that arose in order to address the growing national kidney disease epidemic, relying on the power of health information and advocacy at

the community level to help tackle such a big health issue. "We want to provide the opportunity for people to be educated about the risks of Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD), says Tim Offei-Addo '19, one of the co-presidents of KDSAP Amherst. "The education of the public will lead to healthier eating habits and will decrease the prevalence of CKD. Hopefully the little that we do in the Amherst community will have effects further down the road."

Amherst College was the fifth chapter to join the national movement, and eleven more institutions have since begun their own chapters of KDSAP. It is part of an ongoing trend of student-led advocacy through community partnership and service, now more important than ever as college tuition prices soar and higher education feels increasingly inaccessible and oftentimes becomes detached from

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**(Continued)**

its surrounding community. Tim shared that sentiment, citing, "The community service aspect of KDSAP has by far been the most rewarding for me...As a student at Amherst, I sometimes feel isolated from the outside world. Working with KDSAP has allowed me to interact with the greater Amherst community...Whether it has been volunteering at a soup kitchen like Not Bread Alone, or putting on a screening on with Amherst Community Connections, it has always been wonderful interacting with the people who live in Amherst."



Tim and the rest of KDSAP Amherst hope to continue breaking down the barriers between the College and the town through their collaborative efforts. You can catch them from 1-5pm on October 28<sup>th</sup> at UUSA for your free kidney screening – and all you have to bring is yourself! Bus passes and a list of local free clinics are also provided for all participants. KDSAP Amherst hopes you will join them for a day of reclaiming agency over community health and partnership!

*Written by Beselot Birhanu*

**Meet the Team  
(Continued)**

communication and health literacy, mental health advocacy, women and children's health, and expressing oneself through the arts. Sadie's professors, employers, and friends recognize her as a hardworking woman with diverse interests, a professional and personable demeanor, and a simple zest for life.

Outside of school and work, Sadie spends most of her time at Pioneer Valley Crossfit, where she has been a dedicated athlete since September 2016. You can also catch her honing her roller derby skills at the local skating rink on Tuesday nights, practicing a variety of instruments in her apartment, cooking (and subsequently burning) various recipes, fawning over strangers' dogs, and spending good, old-fashioned quality time with loved ones.

*Written by Sadie Mazur*

**OCTOBER  
EVENTS**

**Wednesday, 10/4, 10-11:30 a.m @ NEW ACC Office, The Secrets in Your Breath, Julie Gertsman**

**Wednesday, 10/11, 10-11:30 a.m @ NEW ACC Office, Senior LGBTQ and Challenges, Helen MacMellon**

**Sunday, 10/15, Shelter Sunday in Amherst, Neighborhood Canvassing for the Homeless and Hungry**

**Wednesday, 10/18, 10-11:30 a.m @ NEW ACC Office, Affordable Housing Opportunities in Amherst, Pam Parmakian**

**Wednesday, 10/25, 10-11:30 a.m @ NEW ACC Office, Sing Along Gospels and Blues, Robert Hicks**



### One Day at a Time (Continued)

he needed to get around each day. He later found a part time job and began the routine of working and saving all of his money, all while not having a place to call home. Even with all of his progress, Thomas said that ultimately, “when you don’t have a secure place to sleep at night, everything else is just so much harder.”

After about 3 weeks of making countless phone calls to try to obtain stable housing, Thomas finally got a call back for an RSO house and was accepted on September 3rd. Thomas shared that it has become increasingly challenging to find affordable housing in the area as a local and low-income individual, as landlords spike rent prices for incoming students of the Five College Consortium – he feels lucky to have even come across the room he found. “It was so tough and I just had to look for myself. I can’t even imagine looking for housing as a family.” Resources like Amherst Community Connections are more important than ever in providing support and access to resources like housing for the community.

Thomas came into ACC after seeing a sign on the street that offered various resources, like help finding permanent housing. Since his first visit, he has stopped by at least once or twice every week to follow up on other applications and goals he has set for himself. When asked about where he found the strength and courage to push onwards even in his most challenging of times, Thomas said he kept in mind everything he had lost and how much he wanted it all back. “It can and will get better – maybe not today or tomorrow, but it will.” He also spoke on the importance of honesty in his journey, with himself and especially with others who are in a position to help. He had to confront his needs and acknowledge that nobody can do it all by themselves. Thomas plans to continue working two jobs this year to save up enough to buy a car, and eventually aims to finish his Associate’s Degree and go on to study journalism and pursue his passion of writing. Thomas is thankful for all of the support that groups like ACC have provided, and is excited to see what the future holds for him as he continues to take it one day at a time.

*Written by Beselot Birhanu*

### Faith Moving Mountains (Continued)

and use without his mother close by. Eventually Gregory connected with a young man who got him involved with a church’s Teen Challenge program, which helps people recover from various addictions through faith. “That program gave me a sense of direction. They didn’t medicate us with medicine; they gave us spiritual medicine.” It was here that he developed the clarity and spirituality he needed to become the mentor, leader, and advocate he feels he was always meant to be.



*“I believe in doing something for the worth of it, not the wealth of it” -Greg*

Greg discovered another part of his own support system at ACC, having received help writing a résumé at the office last week and gotten a job the next day.

Greg has lived substance-free for over 20 years, is holding down two jobs, and continues to grow in his faith and passions: music and poetry. Not only does singing help Greg relax, but he also loves seeing the joy it brings others. Poetry allows him to tell his story, and helps him process the things going on in the world around him. Greg hopes that his testimony encourages others to find the strength, peace, and passion to move the mountains within their own lives.

*Written by Beselot Birhanu*

## Amherst Shelter Sunday: Raising Funds for the Homeless and Hungry

No worries — if you see groups of people young and old milling around your neighborhood on a Sunday morning soliciting funds, they are legit and for a good cause. Shelter Sunday is coming! It has been going on since 1989. For the past 20 years, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of October, community volunteers and UMass students go door-to-door raising funds and awareness about homeless and hunger in the community.

Amherst Community Connections, along with Craig's Place Shelter and Not Bread Alone Soup Kitchen,

are the beneficiaries of your wonderful contribution. Won't you reach deep into your pocket to help the poor? Checks can be made out to **Shelter Sunday, PO Box 264, Amherst, MA 01004.**

See you in the neighborhood on Sunday, October 15, 2017!



### ACC'S MISSION

ACC's mission is to empower, advocate for, and assist those in need. We strive to provide help with issues affecting individuals' abilities to lead a stable and productive life. We can assist in...

- Disability Applications
- Housing & Job Searches
- Free Cell Phone Applications
- Food Stamps & Fuel Assistance
- \$ for rent, meds., utilities, etc.
- SSI/SSDI Benefits
- Debt/Credit Issues
- CORI issues *and more!*

## A Big Thank You to Our Interns

I want to welcome our new interns this semester and thank them for the work they are contributing to this organization! I am so grateful that you all are here to serve the people of this community. Without you, we would not be able to have the same magnitude of impact that we do today. In a year, we serve around 500 unique households in about 4,000 visits to our One-Stop Resource Center. Because of you, people are able to keep their homes, climb out of poverty, and find housing and employment. As our interns develop their field of interest and gain real-world experience, the people we serve are coming out stronger and more hopeful.

Since beginning the internship program at ACC in 2015, the capacity of the organization has greatly increased. In the spring of 2017, for instance, our unpaid volunteers and interns from colleges around the area have contributed 180+ hours/week. This translates to the output of work done by 4- 5 full-time staff equivalents. In other words, the work these volunteers put into the organization is equivalent to \$200,000 — over 6x our budget! As a result, the capacity of ACC has grown more than six-fold. Because of our dedicated volunteers and interns, ACC is able to do more good for more people in our local community. Thank you volunteers and



**Hwei-Ling Greeney,**  
*Founder and Executive  
Director*

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CONNECTIONS**

236 N. Pleasant Street Amherst, MA  
(413) 345-0737