



## PEACE HOUSE COMMUNITY

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# SUMMER 2024 NEWSLETTER



## Mission:

Peace House Community (PHC) nourishes its members' bodies and souls by providing a safe space for everyone. PHC enriches the lives of its members, volunteers and students by offering a place to belong for everyone who comes through its doors.

## COMMUNITY MEMBER SPOTLIGHT – MEET AHMED



*Photo by Josh Zuckerman*

Ahmed's road to Peace House Community was longer than most, but now that he has arrived, he is making the most of his time with us.

Ahmed was born in Somalia in the 1980s, but as war enveloped his country, his family came to the U.S. as refugees when he was 14. The trip involved seven days on the ocean, a four year stay in a refugee camp in Kenya, and finally a one way trip to Rochester, New York in 1992. With his father, step-mother, and step-brothers, he settled into his new life by tackling his first big task, which was learning English.

Ahmed began his lessons by signing up for something that most kids his age would have run from: summer school. "It was summer when they brought us here. The schools were closed, but they said 'Do you want to go to school?', and I said 'Yeah.' That's how I started out." Ahmed ended up doing three sessions of summer school, and he credits this with his academic success. Ahmed proved to be a quick learner. He finished high school and attended some college, which is impressive for

someone who didn't start learning English until he was in his teens.

Eventually, Ahmed married and began a family of his own. He speaks fondly of his kids, who are now 18, 17, 15, 14, 13 and 5 years old. In 2013, Ahmed gave in to his wife's wishes to move the family to Minnesota. "She had a twin sister here, and some of the family members lived here, and she wanted to be over here." He began working at a bakery, saved his money, and eventually bought a car and became a Lyft driver. He did well, earning up to \$80,000 a year by working 16 hours a day, stopping only to sleep and spend time with his family. "I was there for them, you know? I had them."

But the Covid pandemic interrupted his plans and set him on a different course. "The Covid situation happened, and I just kind of drifted off, and lost it, you know what I mean?" Ahmed began using drugs, which took him away from his family and brought him to the streets. He still talks to his family and helps out when he can, but for the moment he isn't with them.

About a year ago, he discovered Peace House Community. "I seen people just walking in here, and I'd be like 'What's going on here?' and just checked it out. And I seen people getting served food, and clothes, and all that stuff. When I saw that, I was like, 'Okay, this is the community that really helps you out when you need it. To me, it's like another home to me. That's what it is'"

*Continued on inside right page...*

# PEACE HOUSE COMMUNITY HAPPENINGS

"[Peace House Community] is a place that shares stories, tears and laughter, prayers, reflection, wisdom and change."

## IN MEMORIAM



**Dave Peterson, fondly known as "RV Dave"**  
Dave was a familiar presence at PHC for years, living in his Winnebago behind Peace House. He was a resourceful and intelligent man, known for his talent as an artist and woodcarver. Rest in Peace, Dave.



**Tressa Sulaz**  
Tressa Sulaz, beloved wife of Mike Hazard, known as Media Mike, was a nationally recognized fabric artist who found beauty in art, nature, and people.

*Photo by Media Mike Hazard*



## VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION EVENT

In May, our exceptional Volunteer Coordinator Jana Maltby organized a special event at PHC to honor our volunteers. Community members who contribute their time and skills to PHC joined 35 volunteers for the afternoon. The event featured engaging activities such as a unique icebreaker game, abundant food, and live cello music performed by volunteer Joe Schmidt. Jana also highlighted the remarkable impact of our volunteers, having served over 30,000 community members in 2023 alone. The afternoon culminated in a touching rendition of a song in American Sign Language by Jana's twin sister, making it a vibrant occasion of team bonding and heartfelt appreciation.



## CRETIN-DURHAM HALL STUDENTS

We said good-bye to the Cretin-Durham Hall seniors who had been coming to PHC as part of their service requirement. When asked what they learned during their time at PHC, they talked about how much alike we all are despite our living conditions and what we can learn from others when we have the opportunity to interact with one another. We had cake and ice cream to celebrate them and sent them off with signed cards, congratulations and best wishes for the future.



## UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME STUDENTS

We also had a visit from a group of students from Notre Dame. They were touring programs that serve homeless individuals and people in our neighborhood, learning about our community's support networks firsthand. After meditation and lunch, the students had some time to interact with community members and volunteers – chatting, playing games, and even beating Arnel at Connect Four!



## CATHERINE MAMER IS THE STATEWIDE OUTSTANDING VOLUNTEER!

We're proud to announce that PHC's own Catherine Mamer has been selected as the statewide outstanding volunteer through the Minnesota Social Service Association! Catherine has volunteered with Peace House since 1986. She still comes to Peace House once a week and also attends board and committee meetings. According to Marti who nominated her, very few individuals of her age would bother coming to PHC because they might feel intimidated or uncomfortable around the community members. However, Catherine embraces all of them and makes sure each person feels welcome.



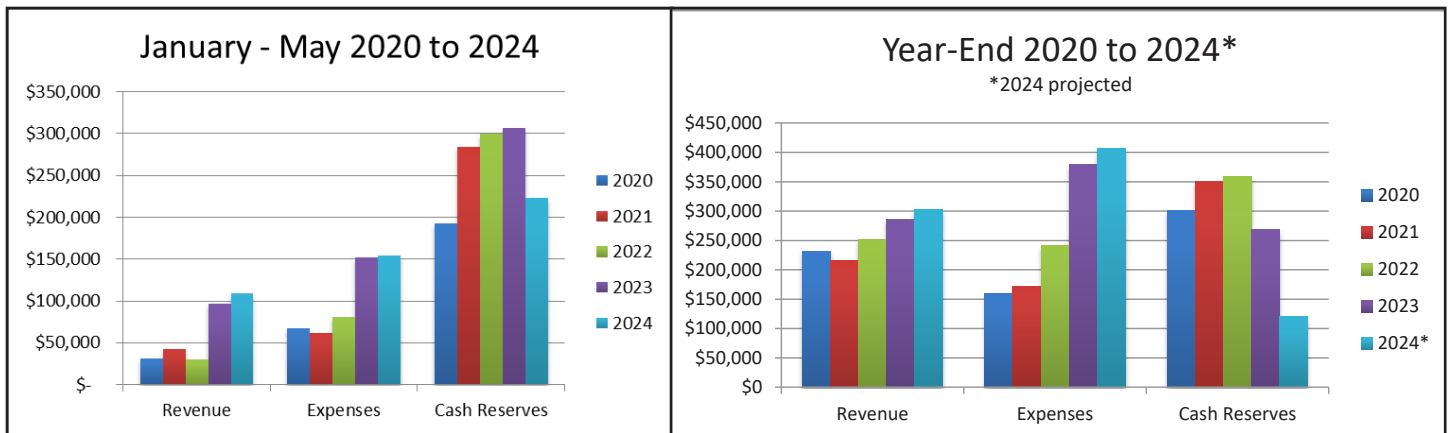
## WELCOMING OUTSIDE GUESTS TO PEACE HOUSE COMMUNITY

PHC continues to bring outside guests to join us for meditation sessions at PHC. Both community members and volunteers have valued the chance to explore new programs and engage in discussions. Since the beginning of this year, we have welcomed Inspector Jose Gomez of the 3rd Precinct on two occasions, as well as guests from the Hennepin County Sheriff's Department, representatives of the proposed Black Cultural Center, Ventura Village, and zAmya Theater.



## DO YOU HAVE A SPECIAL TALENT?

Local artist Jim Ayers has been teaching an enthusiastic group of community members on the process of woodcarving. Do you have a unique skill or talent like Jim's? We have other volunteers who lead art projects, provide haircuts, repair bikes, offer back and neck massages, tackle simple maintenance tasks, or lead writing groups. If you're interested in volunteering at PHC, we encourage you to visit our website at [www.peacehousecommunity.org](http://www.peacehousecommunity.org) and click on the Get Involved tab. You can also reach out to Jana, our Volunteer Coordinator, at **651-494-4988** or [jana@peacehousecommunity.org](mailto:jana@peacehousecommunity.org). Join us in making a difference!



As you can see, Peace House Community’s supporters have grown our resources consistently over the last five years. Unfortunately, the cost of our operations has outstripped our revenue over the last two years by a significant amount. While we have the funds to continue operating for 18 months at our current rate, we expect to make difficult decisions in the second half of this year regarding the services that we will be able to offer in 2025 and beyond. We are not panicking, and we don’t want you to panic, but we want everyone involved at PHC to recognize that our current finances are unsustainable. Please consider any ways you can help PHC address this situation. Thanks in advance for any solutions you come up with.

## COMMUNITY MEMBER SPOTLIGHT - Continued from cover...

But just as learning English had its roadbumps, so did settling in at PHC. Marti, the Director at PHC, remembers often having to tell Ahmed to leave because he would use drugs in the building. On one of the cold days this winter though, Marti saw a change. “We had just told one of the other community members to leave because he was using drugs in the bathroom. He was barely conscious, and he wasn’t dressed for the weather. I was talking with the other staff about how to make sure he was safe, and Ahmed and another guy overheard us. He said, ‘Don’t worry. We’re watching out for him. We’ll make sure he’s okay.’ That was a huge relief.” It wasn’t until a few minutes later that Marti realized who had spoken to him. “It suddenly hit me, here was Ahmed, who had been one of our biggest problems, and now he was taking responsibility for other people’s lives and freeing us up to get other things done.” By the time Marti made the connection, Ahmed and the others had left, but the next day Marti made sure to pull Ahmed into his office. “I think he was worried that I was going to get on his case for something, but I told him how grateful I was and how much of a change I saw in him. He said he was working on turning his life around, but he knew he had a long way to go. It was really ... I don’t even know the best word for it ... exciting and humbling and encouraging all at once.”

Ahmed sees the changes too. When asked about it, he replies, “Before, it was like I lost it, because I jumped into something that I’m not supposed to be in. I looked at it and seen I’m moving where I’m not supposed to be moving, you know? And I see myself, that I’m in a dark hole, so I had to turn back. That’s not what I’m meant to be, you know what I mean? That’s not who I am. So, I’m supposed to be totally different. I got into that situation, I cannot see my kids, my family. It’s like I’m chasing something that I’m not supposed to be chasing. That addiction is really f\*\*\*ed up. Sorry for my language, but it really hurts. You don’t work. You don’t have nothing, and you don’t know where to get what you need to get, you know what I’m saying? And it’s really hard. So before it gets too much, or my situation gets too late, so that it wouldn’t lead me anywhere else ... that’s one of the reasons that I looked at myself and had to back up. If you get into the situation, you end up going to jail. You don’t want to do that. That’s not what needs to happen.”

Ahmed still faces challenges. His father died unexpectedly in late May. He still isn’t back with his family. But despite the challenges, Ahmed is still grateful for what he has. “I’m so glad to be here [in the U.S.], and having the opportunity. It’s amazing, you know? We don’t get the opportunities over there [in Somalia].” He is also thankful for what PHC and its supporters offer him and his friends. “I appreciate what you are doing for us people, and doing the community help. We really appreciate it, you know? I want to thank you for what you’re doing. It helps a lot.”



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## DIRECTOR'S CORNER

This will be the least enjoyable Director's Corner I've written since I joined PHC. As always, I want to thank all our supporters for making everything at PHC possible, but I also need to let you know about our current financial struggles.

Coming out of Covid, PHC was financially comfortable. We had a balanced budget (or at least very close to balanced), and we had enough financial reserves to cover over three years of operations. Unfortunately, the after-effects of Covid have changed that. More people needed our help, which led us to add staff. We raised our starting salary by 25% to attract qualified staff. We needed more supplies, and inflation compounded the problem. In short, we are spending much more than we are bringing in.

Last year, we used \$100,000 of our financial reserves, and we budgeted the same amount this year. If we continue at this rate, PHC will run out of funds in about two years. We own our building and land mortgage free, so we will have a few options at that point, including closing, merging with another organization, or mortgaging the property. Obviously, none of these is desirable.

The Board of Directors and I are examining as many options as we can think of, both to increase our revenues and to cut our expenses. We know we have been entrusted with a wonderful resource for the community, and we are determined not to be responsible for it disappearing.

As we work through this challenge, we ask you to think creatively about how you can help PHC. Whether you pray for PHC, or can find new ways of letting others know about our work, or put us in touch with companies or foundations that would fund our needs, or help us find the supplies we need for our community, every little bit will help.

As I said at the start, everything that PHC does is made possible by our supporters. We've provided a place to belong to those who need it since Rose Tillemans founded PHC 39 years ago. While I am concerned about our finances, I know the value PHC holds for both our community and our supporters, and I am confident that together we will find a way of keeping PHC's doors open. Thank-you for all you have done, and all you will do.