



ANNUAL REPORT 2013



**“HOPE LIVES HERE”
WHAT A GREAT SUCCESS!**

Thank you to all who made our vision a reality

WHAT WE DO

The Sierra House Transitional Program is a structured two-year program for homeless young women and young mothers between the ages of 18 and 25, who are victims of abuse, neglect, or aging out of the foster care system.

The goal of the Sierra House Transitional Program is to prepare these young women to live independently within the community at large. During the two year program, participants learn a basic set of life skills, including management of daily activities, goal setting, how to interact with prospective employers, and financial skills. It is expected that program graduates acquire stable housing away from people currently using drugs and/or in trouble, reunify with their families including their children, assume responsibility for managing their time, and attain credentials to apply for higher education or employment. Upon successful completion of the program, each resident is expected to:

- ▶ Possess a high school diploma or GED;
- ▶ Have clearly defined career and/or academic goals;
- ▶ Be enrolled in a college, job-training program, and/or other forms of post-secondary educational programs and/or be employed;
- ▶ Have satisfactorily completed all on-site educational, parenting and personal development programs;
- ▶ Know how to maintain clean, orderly living conditions;
- ▶ Connect with other community and social support services needed for a healthy lifestyle and to transition to independent living (e.g. counseling, subsidized housing, drug/alcohol rehabilitation, Educational Opportunity Fund Program, etc.);
- ▶ Where appropriate, reunify with family; and
- ▶ Graduate with permanent housing equipped with the skills to live independently and productively in the community at-large.



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11 South Maple Avenue, East Orange, NJ 07018 | Phone: (973) 678-3556 | Fax: (973) 678-2721
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A Message from the President...

For the last 12 years, Sierra House has provided housing, education, and important life skills to young women who have been displaced. With the help of volunteers, employees, and supporters, Sierra House has changed the fortunes of many young women. Our first priority is to instill a sense of self-worth and ensure the residents feel they are welcome and have a home where people care about them.

In 2013, we saw many success stories that we are happy to report. Our statistical recap shows, forty-three percent of our residents enrolled in GED, college, or post-secondary educational programs. Thirty percent of the women of Sierra House secured employment. Seven percent of residents received a High School Diploma. And most endearing, three women had their children returned to them from the New Jersey Department of Children and Family Services. There has also been an increase in life skills and personal development classes for the residents. Additionally, Sierra House was able to present the play "Hope Lives Here", our first theatrical production and a profitable fundraiser for the organization. The production was a great success and provided an enjoyable evening for all supporters.

We made significant progress in 2013. I want to thank all of our board members who give their time and resources to change the lives of the residents. A special thank you also goes out to the staff and those who provide goods and services for the residents at Sierra House. You are the foundation that helps our organization provide the women who depend on us with the motivation to continue their growth. The program has been a success due to your tireless dedication. Please keep up the great work.

As Sierra House concludes a successful 2013, it is our goal to become more visible and encourage more people to become involved in this worthy cause. Our desire is to do our part to help remedy the scourge of homelessness plaguing our society. On behalf of the organization, I encourage all of you to continue the momentum of 2013 and build on it for a successful 2014. I challenge you to increase your level of contribution. Your hard work is appreciated and we look forward to continuing this great work.



Gilbert Ross
President, Board of Directors





Keely Freeman, Founder

It is inevitable to live in our country without witnessing the pain of homelessness on our streets. The statistics are frightening: in New Jersey alone there are 11,818 homeless people (NJ Point in Time Count 2014), and a much larger percentage of residents go through each day without enough money to pay for adequate food and other basic necessities. Women account for nearly half of the homeless population and children make up about one-third. Over the course of a year, the total homeless population is estimated to rise from 11,818 to 25,612. Essex County, where Sierra House is located, has the second highest number of homeless people in the state, accounting for 14.7% of the state-wide homeless population, up from the 2012 figure of 13%.

Sierra House is a transitional home that was created to address the needs of homeless young women and their babies living in the state of New Jersey. Our mission is to improve the prospects for individual achievement for at-risk youth and homeless young women through housing, education, and community services, and thereby also contributing to the long-term stability of our community.

Participants in the program are economically disadvantaged and face barriers to employment, education, income, and health when they come to the Sierra House. At intake in 2013, 45% of Sierra House's residents had children upon entering the program. Most program participants were in need of food, and only 19% had applied for public assistance, including food stamps. All participants were homeless, 61% were unemployed, 29% had not earned a high school diploma or a GED, and many needed basic skills development, including further education, life skills, parenting skills, and financial management skills. Despite these huge challenges, Sierra House has prepared these young women for self-sufficiency. Since its inception, Sierra House has served 150 women and children. This is only possible through donations and people like you. On behalf of those that we serve, our staff, and board of directors, we say thank you!

Of the total population served:

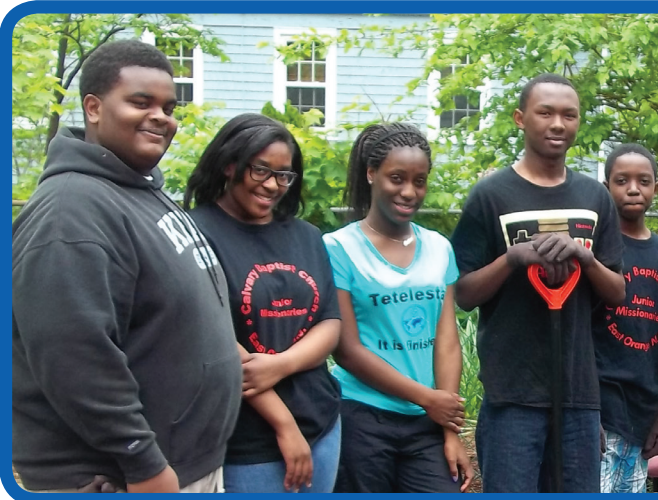
- 102 were adults and 48 were babies
- 20.75 years old was the average age of the adults served
- 2 years old was the average age of the babies served

Of the total population of women served the demographics are as follows:

- 6% were Hispanic (8 adults and 2 child)
- 3% were Non-Hispanic White (2 adults and 2 children)
- 90% were Non-Hispanic Black (93 adults and 43 children)

How they learned of Sierra House:

- 39% were referred through word of mouth
- 23% were referred through a community organization
- 2% were referred by a teacher or social worker
- 12% were referred by other means
- 15% discovered Sierra House through unknown sources



At intake (before being enrolled):

- 70% had earned a HS diploma or a GED
- 24% had not earned a HS diploma or a GED
- 6% were unknown
- 2% were enrolled in high school or a GED program and/or post-secondary education/job training
- 80% were unemployed
- 20% were employed
- 5% were receiving unemployment benefits
- 47% were mothers

While living at Sierra House:

- Of those who earned a HS diploma or GED, 61% enrolled in college or other postsecondary programs
- Of those who were unemployed, 38% became employed
- Of those who had not earned a high school or GED, 29% received their HS diploma or GED
- 32% were connected to community resources, including housing, public assistance, financial aid, etc.
- 3% became pregnant
- 14% were terminated for non-compliance
- 86% transitioned to self-sufficiency

We are proud of our 2013 accomplishments and strive daily to improve the services that we provide.



Sierra House 2013 Highlights



NASW Day at Sierra House

In July, the National Association of Social Workers spent a day with Sierra House residents. Together we enjoyed a barbeque and great conversation.



Dr. Martin Luther King Day

Sierra House celebrated Martin Luther King Day with Joi's Angels, a local food pantry. The event kicked off with a poem followed by black history trivia and ended with a lunch prepared by our residents.



Shopping at Payless

As the year ended, Sierra House residents shopped for new shoes, which was made possible by shoe gift certificates from Payless Shoe Store.



Yoga at Sierra House

Each month Sierra House residents enjoy complimentary yoga classes facilitated by Jessica Haim. Thank you Jessica and Brian for making this possible.



Fred Jenkins' Dedication

Sierra House was proud to dedicate and rename our living room in loving memory of Fred Jenkins, a former Board of Directors member. Although Fred is no longer with us, his memory and contributions will be remembered.



Spring Gardening Event

On May 18, 2013, Sierra House held its 6th Annual Spring Gardening Event, where volunteers and our residents worked together to plant flowers, clean the grounds, pick weeds and add mulch around the property. Each year this event helps to teach our residents to roll up their sleeves and add beauty to the community through landscaping.

2013 Highlights Continued...

Facility Updates

Sierra House is happy to report that it has been able to make much needed repairs, including install a fire light to increase fire safety, repair the gutters, install new flooring, and repave the driveway. We thank the Hyde and Watson Foundation and the NJ Department of Community Affairs for making these necessary repairs possible.



NOBWLE

Thanks to NOBWLE, Sierra House residents were able to learn about careers in law enforcement and how to navigate within a corporate environment. National Organization of Black Women in Law Enforcement (NOBWLE) prepared a delicious meal and talked with our residents about their struggles and successes.



SHU DOVE

In the fall of 2013, Sierra House welcomed students from Seton Hall University Division of Volunteer Efforts (DOVE) Program to work closely with our residents on fall clean-up projects. These fall clean-up projects consist of raking, weeding, and preparing for the winter.



Girl Scouts visit Sierra House

All throughout the spring, summer, and fall months, Sierra House residents enjoyed weekend barbeques and outdoor activities in the comfort of beautiful outdoor tables and chairs. Thanks to the Girl Scouts of America for purchasing and installing this gorgeous outdoor furniture.



Christmas with Jack & Jill

Sierra House residents brought in the Christmas holiday season with gifts and games sponsored by Jack and Jill teens. The teens raised money and purchased personalized gifts for each resident.

Thank You For Making This A Great Year!

“HOPE LIVES HERE” WAS A GREAT SUCCESS!

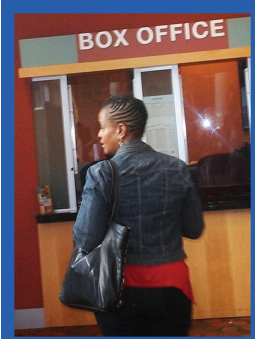
Thank you to all who made our vision a reality

Last year, Sierra House produced a play entitled “Hope Lives Here.” Over 800 people attended the event, which took place at the South Orange Performing Arts Center in South Orange, NJ.

Homelessness among youth is a taboo subject and the goal of “Hope Lives Here” was to bring the issue to light, as it is often not what you think. This eye-opening dramatization, which was written by Keely Freeman, with musical direction by Kathy D. Harrison, tells the real-life stories of homeless young women and mothers raising their babies while living at Sierra House.

The goal was to raise awareness of the issues faced by homeless young women and educate the public about homelessness and the need for transitional homes like Sierra House.





COMING SOON!

Sierra House Cookie Dough makes it easy to enjoy the amazing taste of homemade cookies without the time and mess of baking from scratch. Our cookie dough is made from all-natural ingredients with no added preservatives. These scrumptious cookies are a treat that everyone will eat up! Sierra House Cookie Dough is special because each of our unique and exclusive flavors is inspired by the wonderful women of Sierra House. We offer four original recipes: Sierra Chip, Sierra Delight, Hidden Treasure, and Acadamia Nut. Try all four varieties today!

Hidden Treasure Oatmeal Cookie

The “Hidden Treasure” is a moist oatmeal raisin cookie enhanced with brown sugar and molasses. This cookie is rich in flavor and tantalizing to the taste buds. After one bite of this amazing cookie, you will want to eat more and more.

Inspiration: This cookie was inspired by the hidden skills and talents that Sierra House brings to the surface of the young women that we serve. Everyday new skills and talents are discovered.

Sierra Chip Chocolate Chip Cookie

The “Sierra Chip” chocolate chip cookie is very decadent and savory with bold chunks of chocolate. Although each cookie may look the same, no two cookies have the same exact number of chocolate chunks. This cookie will demand the attention of your taste buds and melt in your mouth.

Inspiration: This cookie was inspired by the individuality of each young woman who lives at Sierra House. Just as no two cookies have the same exact number of chocolate chunks, each of our young women, ultimately has their own special make up.

Sierra Delight Chocolate & Peanut Butter Chip Cookie

The “Sierra Delight” is a scrumptious chocolate cookie with peanut butter chips. Each cookie merges two distinct flavors giving you a double taste of sweetness. In every bite, you will enjoy a unique blend of its chocolate and peanut butter flavor.

Inspiration: This cookie was inspired by the exceptional ability that the women of Sierra House possess to surpass expectations. Just like the “Sierra Delight” Chocolate Chip & Peanut Butter Cookie, our residents will not settle for just being average.

Acadamia Nut Macadamia Nut Cookie

The “Acadamia Nut” is a delicious blend of macadamia nuts and white chocolate chips that will make your mouth say, “Ahhhh”. Each cookie has a mouth-watering nutty taste that will appeal to your taste buds.

Inspiration: This cookie was inspired by the emphasis that Sierra House places on academic advancements. Each resident is encouraged to reach their highest academic potential and to succeed, while realizing that along the way they can still have fun.



JUNE 1, 2013

THE SATURDAY STAR

Sierra House Introduces A Way to Close the Funding Gap

East Orange, NJ (June 2013) – For a long time, fundraising has been perceived as a gap-filler for non-profits seeking a short-term fix to “keep the doors open” during an economic downturn. In today’s world, non-profit organizations such as Sierra House realize that developing successful fundraising strategies is a smart business choice that ensures long-term sustainability for non-profit organizations and the people who depend on their services.

Over the past ten years, cookie dough has been the most successful fundraising production in America and has helped many organizations stay afloat in desperate times. In 2009, Keely Freeman, founder of Sierra House, created Sierra House Cookies as a way to generate revenue to help support programs and general operating expenses for Sierra House. Because she was not a baker and wanted the cookies to be unique and something consumers would remember, Ms. Freeman partnered with a local baker who created a kosher dairy, all-natural cookie dough line for Sierra House Cookies.

The most unique thing about Sierra House Cookies, LLC is that it fulfills two charitable purposes: it benefits Sierra House, which helps homeless young women and their children, and it raises funds for the participating organizations, which will keep up to \$5 for each box of cookie dough sold. This is especially important at a time when economic conditions are leading to funding shortages, scarce resources, and shortfalls in charitable giving.

This month, Sierra House is introducing this valuable fundraising tool to other non-profits, including schools, sports teams, and community groups, as a way to sustain themselves by selling cookie dough. “Cookie dough sales are a fun and highly effective way to raise money that brings families together, and raises community awareness about your organization,” says Sierra House founder, Keely Freeman.

Our Supporters

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New Hope Baptist Church Soul Care
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Own a Business or Know Someone Who Does?

Allow Us to Park Our Clothing Donation Bin in Your Parking Lot
And You'll Be Helping At-Risk Young Women Live a Better Life.



How Can You Help Support Sierra House?

► **Host a Donation Bin**

If your business or organization has property in a visible, high-traffic location, you can show the community how much you care about people who are less fortunate by placing a clothing donation bin on your property.

*If you are interested please contact us at (973) 678-3556
or via email at contact@sierrahouse.org*



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