

THE MAD HOUSERS

534 Permalume Pl., Atlanta, GA 30318 · (404) 806-6233 · www.madhousers.org

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Reaching Out for Outreach	1		
Shelter 2.0 Fundraiser	1		
Volunteer Interview: Caroline Burnet 2			
From the Blog			
Client Interview: Jerry W.	3		
How You Can Help			
Mad Housers VISA Card			
Design Evolution: Upwards!			

LIPCOMING EVENTS

- Saturday, July 11, 9am:
 Shelter deploy, Warehouse
 534 Permalume PI, Atlanta
- Saturday, July 17, 12pm: Client Outreach Conference 1599 Clifton, Atlanta
- Thursday, July 24, 6:30pm General Meeting Java Monkey
 205 E Ponce De Leon, Decatur
- Saturday, July 24, 5pm
 Shelter 2.0 demo/fundraiser
 Warehouse
 534 Permalume PI, Atlanta GA
- Saturday, July 11, 9am:
 Panel build, Warehouse
 534 Permalume PI, Atlanta



SHELTER Q.O FUNDRAISER



Shelter 2.0 (www.shelter20.com) is an innovative shelter built entirely from precision-cut plywood using a computer controlled router. Robert Bridges, one of the designers of Shelter 2.0, will be coming down with a donated shelter to demonstrate the ease of assembly of these amazing shelters. We're using the demo to also hold a small barbeque fundraiser — come on down!

When: 5-9pm, July 24, 2010

Where: 534 Permalume PI, Atlanta, GA 30318

REACHING OUT FOR OUTREACH

NICK HESS

Mad Housers builds around 18 shelters a year - and no more. Basically, we have too few volunteers doing too much work. In response, we've decided to try something new.

What separates the Mad Housers from traditional sheltering organizations isn't the construction, but the outreach. We find our clients and help them *where* they are, *as* they are. This outreach is critical to our

mission - and the most difficult part of what we do. However, the bulk of our efforts is spent on construction, not outreach. True, the construction takes time and effort, but it's a well-known process that's been refined, tested, and documented extensively. So, starting this year, we're going to focus more on outreach and work with

going to focus more on outreach and work with others to provide construction. For years,

outside groups - Scout troops, churches, service organizations, grade school and college classrooms, and the like - have offered to build structures. Generally, we've fit them in when we could as a sideline to our main operations. Now we hope to make these groups a central — but not exclusive — part of our production.

Hopefully, this will have several positive effects. First and foremost, it gives us more time to work on the outreach side of the equation - finding new clients, supporting existing clients, and getting services to our clients to help them leave the huts.

Second, this expands the educational and advocacy aspects of our mission, as groups of new people are exposed to our ideas and methods. Third, these outside groups can themselves be a source of referrals for clients, volunteers, and donors. What's the downside? Well, if you're only an occasional Mad Houser volunteer, there will be fewer Housers-only builds to attend. Now, there will never be a time where we don't build! But from our point of view, building by itself is not enough. Ultimately, our job is not to build, it's to help. Shelter without people is just a shell.

The Board started discussing this idea back in May, and developed it over the course of several meetings spanning several months. It was passed around Thanksgiving. It's a pretty radical step for us, since we've always have been focused on building shelters, but we realized that it's more important that huts are made than we make the huts. If this works the way we hope it does. it'll be well

worth the change.

This is not a decision made casually, and it will not be implemented abruptly. Over the next few years, we plan to gradually expand the total number of shelters built, and increase the percentage of those shelters built by outside groups. Our first few joint efforts are bound to be a little chaotic. But there's a time to stop planning and simply go forwards and learn along the way - and as anyone who's attend a build knows, we're not afraid of making mistakes! We'll learn, and improve, and in a few years we'll be helping more people in a better fashion.

VOLUNTEER INTERVIEW: CAROLINE BURNET

BY TRACY WOODARD

Caroline has brought tremendous dedication, energy, and focus to the Mad Housers, and we're lucky to have her as a volunteer. We sent her a few questions over email.

What's your favorite thing about Mad Housers events?

Undoubtedly the camaraderie among the volunteers. Each Mad Housers event brings forth such a diverse group of people, all with various backgrounds, interests, and personalities. Yet any tension these differences might prompt are more than nullified by the group's common desire to help. It's one thing to be compassionate towards a cause, but guite another for someone to actually be willing to take a proactive approach. To put their time and efforts where their sympathies lie.



And if nothing else, the Mad Housers volunteers eagerly exemplify the latter. I feel that's what makes the events so refreshing and invigorating to be a part of.

Were your expectations changed after your first event?

I wouldn't say my expectations were necessarily changed after my first build per se, but my awareness was certainly raised. While I had an understanding of the problem of homelessness, its magnitude and degree of severity didn't truly hit home until I walked through the camp and got an unfiltered view of the lifestyle. Only then did I truly grasp what these individuals contend with on a daily basis. I'm out there sweltering in the afternoon summer heat, yet realize I only have to put up with it for a few hours. Our clients, in turn, have to deal with it (and much more) the entire day. And the next day. I had to dismiss these overwhelming notions and instead find solace in knowing we were making a difference to this one particular client.

What new skills have you learned?

Aside from how to properly square a panel?...(and I'm frankly still working to master that one!). Foremost, being resourceful. Despite our fairly meticulous deploy supply checklists and panel construction blueprints, and the vast experience of our build leaders, often our best laid plans go awry. Site logistics prove less than ideal. Materials are forgotten. Weather doesn't cooperate. You learn to adapt, think on the fly, and identify creative solutions and substitutions. You find a way to make it work and get the job done. As a self-described perfectionist, it was admittedly a bit of a foreign approach at first, and one I've had to grow accustomed to.

How do you feel about working with homeless clients?

I actually find it rather humbling. The government has gone a long way to construct the problem of homelessness as one that's the fault of the individual, thereby relieving themselves of any responsibility to provide aid. As a corollary effect, it has also fostered a society that stigmatizes the homeless as indolent and undeserving. This negative public perception becomes yet another hurdle for them to navigate. But in working with homeless clients, I have found I largely come away not only with this

stereotype negated, but also with a reinforced respect for these individuals. Based on my interactions with them, their resilience and positive attitudes are as uncanny as they are inspiring, particularly in the face of their current circumstances. Not surprisingly, they have certainly altered my own perspectives as a result. My priorities have shifted, and my appreciations have deepened. The clients express such gratitude to the Mad Housers after we hand over a shelter to them, but paradoxically I feel I owe them as much thanks, if not more, for the impression they have made on me.

If you could improve on an aspect of homeless living, outside of shelter, what would it be?

Generally speaking, it would be to alter the public perception of homelessness. I'm of the belief that any one of us is guite potentially a series of misfortunes away from being homeless ourselves, be it a sudden illness, natural disaster, or what have you. But rather than acknowledge that frightening possibility, people would rather take comfort in distancing themselves from the situation by demonizing the homeless. Obviously this isn't a mindset conducive to providing support to help eliminate the problem. Instead it often manifests itself in "quick fix" legislation enacted to remove homeless individuals from public sight while doing nothing to address the underlying causes. Criminalizing the symptoms while spreading the disease, if you will. I feel a greater awareness and more compassionate view of their plight would promote an increased provision of resources aimed at reducing the barriers homeless face in becoming self-sufficient. Improving access to such things as education, healthcare, and legitimate income would strengthen their ability to enhance their long-term quality of life. But this requires that society invest in the notion that ending and preventing homelessness is a collective responsibility. Until then, sympathetic individuals can only commit to do what we can from a grassroots perspective, such as providing shelter one build at a time.

If you had to monitor a newbie during a build, what kind of advice would you give?

Probably just to grab a hammer, delve in head first, and soak in all aspects of the experience from construction to client interaction to the synergy of the volunteers. After all, there is no better way to learn than by doing. Mistakes are inevitable and expected, and also often the best teacher, so don't let the threat of screwing something up be a deterrent to active participation. Beyond that, I would advise that they not underestimate their contribution. Every pounded nail, driven screw, and paint stroke helps.

FROM THE BLOG



October 2009: Bees! We had some 55 gallon drums by our loading dock that were donated to us by a local bakery. Unfortunately, a couple were missing bungs and they'd contained sweeteners. Hilarity ensued.

CLIENT INTERVIEW: JERRY W

By Jason Marshall

Jerry was one of the nicest and most resourceful clients we've ever built for. After losing his original camp to a fire, he discovered another camp nearby. However, it was full — but he referred them to us anyhow and continued searching for a spot for himself, never losing hope.

We caught up with Jerry a few months after he was able to leave his hut and did an audio interview.

How'd you hear about the Mad Housers?

I knew of the shelters that were over by the Bankhead station and then I just heard of it by word of mouth and then one night looked it up on the Internet, and from the Internet then I was able to get the number to Nick.

So I had a camp that was out at Indian Creek and well then some guys messed up the camp, started a fire and stuff like that so we had to leave. I was staying in a shelter, I was getting vocational training and I was trying to find a job and we left I had to leave there.

But time was running short for me so I gave Nick a call and then he said that we were gonna get together set it up and it was like either that weekend or it was the next weekend and all the Mad Housers had got together and prefabbed a place

I had picked out a place because I was going to a doctor up that way and one day I was walking to the doctor's and I had a little time to kill so I saw this stream, started walking up the stream and that didn't lead anywhere but after I got out of the doctors I went in the opposite direction. and I saw this beautiful spot and so I used to go up there even when I was staying at the shelter, just to go and be alone because being in the shelter you got all these -- you got so many people. You have all this commotion going on and everything so I just would go up there just to sit and think and just hang out

How long were you homeless before you got the hut?

Okay, I was homeless, let's see, it was about two - it was somewhere about five years. It was about five years and I was in different shelters, some of 'em good some of 'em not so good. And I had a job when I was in one shelter and I was gonna move to Marietta... It was a temp service and my time ran out with the temp service and so it was kinda good that I found out when I did before I had taken the apartment and put my, y'know, I put a deposit down but I got that back before I was actually moved in.

Before you started going to shelters, where were you staying?

Well, after I first lost my job, I had money in the bank. And so I was able to hang on for about two years with the money in the bank that I had. And then after that, I had gotten a job at a local hardware store and right across the street was a rooming house. It was very convenient to work and it wasn't that bad except the people that were living there, they were, uh, into drugs and theft and people moving in, moving out and so I left the hardware store and then I just started walkin', and I didn't know where to go and so finally I made it downtown. I ran into a friend, and from there I just started to learn where to, where to stay. For awhile I was sleeping out in front of the Central Presbyterian Church¹ and then I met people that were in the same situation that I was and they started telling me things, and from there I kinda figured it out on my own.

How long did you stay in the hut?

I would say about four months.

And that was the only time you stayed in a hut?

Yeah, in that hut, and before that I had a tent at another campsite.

You're staying in a hotel now. How did that come about?

Well, the money that I had was from when I was working and I was staying at the shelters became exhausted. I said well, I need to apply for food stamps. I went down for food stamps the food stamp people told me that I couldn't get food stamps because I'm getting social security. And I said "whaaat?" I didn't understand what they were talking about.

At first I thought maybe it was some kind of identity theft or something like that. So I had gone down to Social Security and they told me that yes indeed I did have it, and I had been receiving it for about six months. So these checks had accumulated, which was great because I didn't even expect to get the Social Security that I had applied for. I didn't really follow through with it, didn't think it was gonna happen, all the people I had talked to, I was going to Samaritan House² at the time, and these people were applying and applying and waiting years and years and all that, and I said well, if they can't get it, I'm not gonna be able to get it, 'cuz I considered them to be in a worse situation than I was...

It turned out that it was less complicated than I thought it was going to be. And once I got the money, then I moved in over at the [hotel], because I didn't have to come up with really security deposits or anything of that nature, so I had the electricity, I had the water, I had the bed, and all that and I didn't have to come up with all these security deposits. Now I'm looking for a more stable place that I can probably live in for the rest of my life.

[pause in recording. Afterwards, Jerry reminisces]

I used to hitchhike around the country back when I was, oh, in my early 20s, and I enjoyed it! I didn't have much money or anything and I was living in Santa Rosa and then when I left there then I hitchhiked along the coast and then did some backpacking up along the coast and then got to Vancouver and took the train as far as it would take me. The train took me to, let's see, I think it was just outside of Calgary so then I had to hitchhike the rest of the way. Jerry Garcia had picked me up and he got me a steak meal and all that - at the time, I didn't know it was Jerry Garcia. But I made it back to Niagara Falls, and from Niagara Falls back down to Buffalo.

So anyway, I was kinda used to doing things on my own. So when I hit the streets it was like it became second nature to me to do these things. I mean, I've always been one that's been prepared, I knew how to get the proper kind of clothing, to get the blankets, how to sleep on the ground with cardboard, and food was easy enough to get, you had to do some walking to get it, but there were enough places that were giving out food. Now I understand that it's harder for people to get food than it used to be, they had to cut back on all those benefits that you used to be able to get. And there were times that you just didn't have any money and so you couldn't get to where you needed to be but I always seemed to find a way, unlike a lot of the homeless people, they didn't do much for themselves. I kept going to all these different programs, and so I was able to keep clean.

I was at Samaritan House and when you became a member there they would help you find a job but they also gave you clothing, they also had breakfast in the morning and you had - you were able to take showers. So they were a big help, and then my time limit ran out on that, then I went to the Cafe 458³, and they helped - they didn't have the showers, but I was taking showers over at the Gateway⁴, but they had lunch, and they had MARTA tickets.

(Continued on page 4)

(Jerry W, Continued from page 3)

Actually, that's how I began to apply for my Social Security. They says well, that's what the program's about, this'll apply for Social Security. Well OK, so I applied - I didn't there was a chance in hell that I was gonna get Social Security. But they kept pushing me, you need to do this, do this, otherwise I'm not meeting the requirements that they're asking for.

Now that you have the Social Security, do they plan on giving you that for any length of time, or is this for the rest of your life or is it just a certain amount of time that they give it to you?

This'll be for the rest of my life.

So what things have you been able to keep personal possessions since becoming homeless originally?

Actually, I lost everything. I had a large, expansive tools - you know, grinders, sanders, all the hand tools, I was a plumber once before this, so I had all the plumbing tools. Then I was an orthotic prosthetic technician, and I had all the tools for that, I had uh, - oh, I'm telling you.

Do you mind if I ask you what you do now on a typical day now that you're having a stable place to stay?

Uh, right now, I don't do a whole heck of a lot. I mean, I go grocery shopping; I have to go downtown to see different agencies...

Are you being provided with like mental health, a psychiatrist or anything like that?

No, no, I can get that but right now I'm taking an antidepressant, Lexapro.

How's that working for you?

Well, it's all right except it leaves you kinda with a limp noodle.

Yeah, a little spacey

No no no no, I mean, you can't get it up! So when I first started me on that, with Zoloft, then I said, no, I don't think I want it. But now, seeing that I'm a man of a certain age *[laughs]* -- well, I'm not using it anyways, so it's better to have my mental health.

How long have you been suffering from depression?

Well, at first I didn't think I was, you know? But now, in reflection, looking back on this, it actually started a long, long time ago... and that would be... that would be 95? I mean, I always considered myself pretty happy. But I was going to work and I was mopey and this and that and my mood swings and all that kind of stuff. It would be going back to I say somewhere around 1990, somewhere like that, 1990.

Are you making any social connections now, any friends?

Not really, that's kinda of a void for me. But I do, I had a couple of friends over here where I'm staying at the motel, but they had moved out. I still got one friend that's here, and we'll get together, we'll play cards, watch movies, things like that.

So what're you looking forward to in the next couple of years?

Well I don't get out as much as I should, but I had stopped and got some glasses from the Lighthouse⁵, which is an organization that helps people with glasses and vision exams, and right down from it is the VA hospital. So I picked up the form to volunteer at the VA hospital. So I'm gonna do some volunteer work and this way I got a purpose and someplace to go every day and then I'm gonna meet people...

I got a friend that was staying here that turned me onto the place, and he wouldn't wake up until 1 o'clock in the afternoon. And so I said I'm not gonna let that happen to me, so I was gonna apply for volunteer work at the Zoo because I like animals and I watch Animal Planet and all that kinda stuff, but at the time I didn't have anyone reliable enough as a friend that would be, that was working, that had a residence, everybody I knew were friends that I had made on the street. And so I really had no place to put any of that -- so anyway, I just let it go, I got lazy and I just let it go

One last thing. Is there anything you'd like to tell people in closing?

Yes, that the Mad Housers... that when they, when the hut was built for me, and it was a very nice hut, and all the work that went into it and all the generosity, that I was very thankful, because -- I had more than a lot of the other people that were on the street. The people that were on the street, they were sleeping y'know, under doorways, this and that kinda stuff. Now I had a place to go. And I never wanted to sleep downtown because I was afraid that somebody always would be walking up on me. Now with the hut, I could go there, and I felt safe. I didn't think anyone was gonna walk up on me, and nothing was gonna - I wasn't gonna get robbed

Y'know, you take off, you're living on the streets or in the shelter, take off your shoes your shoes may not be there in the morning, your backpack might not be there in the morning. There, I was safe. I was protected... it was a blessing.

Appreciate your time, and thank you for doing the interview.

No, thank you guys for everything that you've done. You don't ask anything in return, and you keep saying "thank you" to me, and I'm going wait, what're you saying "thank you" to me for, when you guys have done it all yourselves?

FOOTNOTES

Jerry spoke of so many good organizations besides just the Housers, we thought we'd give them a shout-out:

- 1 Central Presbyterian Church (http://www.cpcatlanta.org/) Runs Central Night Shelter, a winter emergency shelter, in downtown Atlanta, a mere block away from the Capitol Building.
- 2 Samaritan House (http://www.samhouse.org/) Fantastic group off of Edgewood, works to help stabilize and reintegrate homeless back into society. Recently merged with American Enterprise Center to become the Atlanta Center for Self Sufficiency (ACSS)
- Café 458 (http://www.samhouse.org/programs/cafe458.cfm)- A program run by Samaritan House, "Café 458 provides daily meals, case management, and support services which help our guests achieve personal goals that lead to self-sufficiency. Most clients served by Café 458 have a history of mental illness, substance abuse addiction, and/or physical disabilities that prevent them from working full-time." One interesting detail: on Sundays, Café 458 becomes a volunteer-run brunch spot whose profits directly benefit the program... And it's delicious!
- 4 Gateway Center (http://gatewayctr.org/) Atlanta's one-stop shop for "ending homelessness in metro Atlanta through partnerships with like-minded individuals; service agencies, and; business, civic, academic and faith-community leaders." It's a good program, but many of the Mad Housers clients are simply unable or unready to "commit to programs designed to meet their individual needs such as mental health support, substance abuse counseling, sustaining employment, or job-readiness and training."
- 5 Georgia Lions Lighthouse Foundation (http://www.lionslighthouse.org/) . Not to be confused with Lighthouse International.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

BY ANDY D

"Wow. This all sounds great, but what can someone like me do to help?" you're thinking. (Well, we assume that's what you're thinking.)

Sometimes we bump into folks who assume that we must be geniuses at this stuff, that we've all got PhDs in shelter-building, were born with silver drill-drivers in our hands, and that potential volunteers who know nothing about building, don't have a lot of free time, don't like the cold, don't like the heat, don't like the outdoors, don't like the indoors, or have two left thumbs just can't help out.

Nothing could be further from the truth. There are plenty of ways that you (yes, you!) can help.

Donate time

The Mad Housers is known for building and giving away small, lockable, weather-resistant huts to homeless folks in the greater metro Atlanta area. So obviously, we've already got some great roll-up-their-sleeves volunteers who help build these things. However, many hands make light work and, in addition to actual construction, there are countless behind-the-scenes activities that take us from initially identifying a potential client to eventually handing him or her the keys to their brandnew shelter.

While those tasks are far too numerous to list here, suffice it to say that if you don't know which end of a hammer to hold (or don't care to learn), there's still plenty that you can do to help out.

The best way to discover what's going on and what needs doing is to simply show up at our next general meeting. The details of our current-month activities (like our

charitable organization. All donations are tax-deductible.

general meeting) are always on our website's calendar. Alternatively, drop a note to madhousers@madhousers.org, telling us what you'd like to do to help, and we'll see if we can make it happen.

Bottom line: if you want to help, that's

Bottom line: if you want to help, that's about the only requirement we have for volunteers. (Well, that and minors have to be accompanied by a parent or legal guardian.)

Donate materials

If you recently finished a project around the house and have some materials left over, head on over to the "Donate" link on our website (www.madhousers.org) to see what extra stuff you've got that we might be able to use. We love being able to reduce, reuse, and recycle!

Donate money

Even with a team of dedicated, enthusiastic volunteers, we still need green to buy materials, to give at least something to our awesome landlord, to hydrate and feed the volunteers who help at builds, etc. While it

would be nice if this need for money could be magically taken care of, we've yet to find an effective enough magician. So, in the meantime, we welcome all monetary donations, big or small. (As a 501(c)(3) organization, your cash and materials donations are tax-deductible. We're not tax accountants, so check with yours before you do anything crazy, like donate your entire 401(k) to us).

Buy and proudly display our stuff

Also on our "Donate" page, we've got some stylin' T-shirts, bumper stickers and additional goodies.

Maybe your Mad Housers coffee mug or lunchbox will prompt questions from a colleague and you can share with him or her what we're up to. At worst, you'll be the happy owner of a functional hot-beverage or sandwich holder. At best, you'll inspire someone to ask you, "what can I do to help?"

Don't be a stranger!

MAD HOUSERS VISA CARD

The Mad Housers is 100% volunteer operated, and receives no grants. Instead, we rely entirely upon individual donations to fund our operations. However, working solely off of donations means that we're never quite sure when, or if, money comes in. One of our more unusual attempts to broaden our sources of income is the Mad Housers branded credit card. Using Capital One's "Card Lab" program, we designed an "affinity" Visa card, which automatically donates a small percentage of



all purchases made with the card to the Mad Housers. It's a painless way to support the Housers, and it gives us a steady trickle of donations throughout the year, helping to stabilize our revenues so we can spend less time fundraising and more time helping others. If you're interested, check out

http://madhousers.org/donate.shtml for more information.

FEEDBACK FORM

ш	I'd like to volunteer	Name	
	I'd like to make a donation: \$		
	I have materials to donate	Address	
	I'd like my donation to go to the Athens chapter	City, State & ZIP	
	I know someone who needs shelter	Phone Number	□ Call me
	I know a campsite	Email Address	□ Add me to your email list
	Please remove me from your mailing list		·
You can use the back of this form for additional details. Mad Housers. Inc. is incorporated as a 501(c)(3)		Send all correspondence to: The Mad Housers, 534 Permalume Pl., Atlanta, GA 30318	

DESIGN EVOLUTION: UPWARDS!

BY NICK HESS

In our full-size hut design, the loft serves two important functions. First, it keeps the walls from twisting out of square as they rise upwards. Second, it nearly doubles the amount of floor space in a hut, giving the client more room for sleeping and storage.

However, the loft's space is nearly unusable in the classic hut design. The problem lies in the roof gables, which are low equilateral triangles six feet at the base and two feet high in the middle. They sit atop the eight-foot high front and back walls of the hut, bringing the hut's height to ten feet at the crown. This leaves very little headroom up top – not much more than a dark, stuffy crawlspace. We try to compensate by dropping the loft as low as we can, but we gain only a few inches up top at the cost of turning the lower area into a cave. What to do?

We could raise the height of the gables. However, the gables are nearly as tall as they can be and still have the roof be covered by a single sheet of plywood – the best we could get as about another 7 inches, and we would lose our roof overhang, which is not worth it.

The other approach would be to abandon the gabled roof design altogether and go with a 'shed' roof – a single slope from one side to the other, instead of two slopes coming from the middle. This is the basis of the 'hi hat' design, which we started prototyping back in 2008.

Instead of the roof going up two feet and



Tall

then back down, the hi hat design keeps going up until it's four feet high on a side. The high side is covered with the "topper" panel, which provides substantial light and ventilation via a row of windows on top. This makes the loft much more pleasant and useful for our clients, and also allows more headroom downstairs.

However, Atlanta's unusually wet 2009 summer revealed a design flaw: the roof leaked. We determined that the likely culprit was water wicking in from the high side of the roof. This could be patched by adding overhangs, but it's a clumsy process, particularly at 12 feet up.

The solution came from a discussion with



Taller

some architects from the Atlanta chapter of Architecture for Humanity (http://afhatlanta.org/). We changed the roof profile from a shed roof to a 'saltbox' roof, which rises up until nearly the top, then drops down sharply. Thus both sides, the low and the high, have a downwards slope, keeping water from intruding.

We're still tweaking the design for these new roofs, and learning the idiosyncrasies of working with an asymmetric roofline – for instance, it turns out that the relationship of the door to the high side is important. But each new hi-hat we build is a little better than the one before. Look for the blueprints on our website soon!

