

## Welcome, Louis Gill A Q&A With Our New CEO

Just one week before stepping into his new role at Columbus House, Louis took time from his cross-country drive from California to Connecticut to talk with us. He and his family were en route to their new home in New Haven. Our conversation reflected the deep compassion and clarity of purpose that have defined his decades-long career in homeless services. As Louis puts it, **“This is heart-centered work. At its core, it’s about care and compassion.”**

**What inspired you to move into homeless services?** “I actually never intended to,” Louis admits. “I thought I’d work in youth programming – after-school, recreation, that sort of thing.”

But life had other plans. After a family move, Louis took a job at the Bakersfield Homeless Center – and what he thought he knew about homelessness changed immediately.

“I expected to see men dealing with addiction and mental health issues. What I found was a young mom with a baby. I was really taken aback. The system in Kern County wasn’t built to serve women or children, and that’s where my team and I began our work.”



United in purpose, former CEO Alison Cunningham visited Columbus House to meet with new CEO Louis Gill to discuss their shared mission to serve those facing homelessness.

That “temporary” job turned into more than 20 years. “It’s a privilege to accompany people through very difficult times. If you help someone feel less alone, that’s the beginning of change. **I fell in love with the fact that I could dedicate myself to trying to help.**”

**What drew you to this new opportunity?**

This move is both professional and personal. “My wife’s family is from Connecticut. After we lost her father last year, we came out for the burial and fell in love with the state again. Kate asked if we could live near her family for a while, and I said yes. It’s a small thing to do for your best friend.” *...continued on page 2*

## Penelope’s Lemonade Stand Pours Out Kindness – \$19,000 Raised!



After hosting her 5th Annual Lemonade Stand on April 27, 2025, Penelope stopped by Columbus House with her mom, Pam, and dad, Mike, to deliver the proceeds – over \$4,000 raised this year to support our neighbors facing homelessness. CEO Louis Gill was there to gratefully accept the donation, bringing Penelope’s five-year total to an incredible \$19,000. Local social media influencer Jimmy Robinson (@jimyoofficial) even visited Penelope’s stand to cheer her on and spotlight her efforts with his followers. Penelope’s compassion and commitment continue to inspire us all. Scan the code to learn more about Penelope’s fundraising story at [columbushouse.org/penelope!](https://columbushouse.org/penelope!) ■



# You Helped Provide Critical Support to 56 Families This Winter



A staff member's daughter helped get our Family Triage Center ready with supplies just before it opened in December.

From December 2 through May 4, Columbus House transformed a warehouse into a temporary shelter for families facing homelessness. Donations of food and necessities, like children's clothing, diapers, and hygiene items, from supporters played a critical role in creating the Family Triage Center. In five months, the center served 56 families – 141 people total – including 81 children and 60 adults.

In just five months, the Family Triage Center served 56 families – 141 people in total – including 81 children and 60 adults.

While the goal of the program was to help families transition off the street and into longer-term shelter where they could continue working on housing plans, 65 people made that critical move, and one family – a young working mother with her two small children – secured their very own apartment.

Family homelessness rose 16% in Connecticut from 2023 to 2024. Thanks to your support, Columbus House was able to adapt quickly to this growing need, opening the Family Triage Center and offering life-saving services to those with nowhere else to turn.

Because of you, families found more than a warm place to rest, they found stability and a path forward. ■

## Welcome Louis... continued from page 1

Professionally, Louis was drawn to the mission. "I've missed being close to the work. At my last job, I had broader responsibilities and less direct involvement. I missed the relationships, the chance to know people. So, Columbus House looked perfect."

He also noticed something symbolic: "The tagline at Columbus House is 'The Way Home.' At Bakersfield, our tagline was 'A Way Home.'" He says, "When things line up, things line up."

## What do you see as the biggest opportunities – and challenges – ahead for Columbus House?

"Housing is both," he says. "It's the solution, but it's also incredibly expensive and often resisted." He adds that meaningful employment is another critical piece: "We need transitional work – jobs that give people a reference and a step forward."

Louis also sees potential in expanding healthcare partnerships. "I think we need to look at expanding respite care – something that is absolutely needed – and our relationships with hospitals," he says.

Still, he remains realistic about the path ahead. But Louis is realistic: **"We're going to have to take risks. Some things won't work. That's okay – as long as we learn from it."**

## Outside of work, how do you spend your time?

"With my family," he says. Louis enjoys time with his wife and kids, walking trails, and working on the house. He also enjoys connecting with his faith community, "It's



On May 20, Columbus House joined The CT Community Nonprofit Alliance and hundreds of statewide partners to rally support for our vital services at the State Capitol. Pictured: (l-r) Jennifer Paradis, CEO, Beth-El Center; Sarah Fox, CEO, CCEH; Louis Gill, CEO, Columbus House; and Hebe Kudisch, Chief Program Officer, Columbus House.

something that provides me with peace and strength and reminds me why we're here – to love and serve others."

## Can you share a client story that still motivates you?

"A woman in one of my nonprofit management classes asked if I remembered her. She'd been a single mom in our shelter, escaping a violent relationship.

We had childcare, helped her find work, encouraged her to go back to school – then lost touch.

She told me, "This is my last class. I'll have my MPA. Because your folks were there, it was possible."

It was beautiful."

As he settles into New Haven, Louis brings not just experience and leadership, but heart. And that's what makes the way home possible – for all of us. ■

*Learn more about Louis and his decades of experience in homeless services at [columbushouse.org/louis](http://columbushouse.org/louis).*



# From Heat Relief to Hearty Meals – How to Help This Summer



Orange Congregational Church in our New Haven Shelter kitchen.

As the weather heats up, many of us are reaching for sunscreen and cold drinks – but for those experiencing homelessness, summer brings real challenges. Can you give us a hand gathering warm-weather essentials?

Another great way to give back is by sponsoring a meal at our New Haven Shelter. A \$450 gift covers dinner for 100 clients, and you're welcome to bring dessert to make it extra sweet. Come serve with us from 4:30 to 6:00 PM – it's just 90 minutes and perfect for families, teams, or community groups.

To donate items or sponsor a meal, contact Sheree at [sdimario@columbushouse.org](mailto:sdimario@columbushouse.org) or 203-401-4400 x138.

Thanks for helping make summer a little brighter for our neighbors. ■

## Summer Needs for Our Neighbors

- Bottled water
- New ankle socks
- New t-shirts & shorts
- New underwear
- Sunscreen
- Insect repellent

Find additional items at [columbushouse.org/wishlist](http://columbushouse.org/wishlist)

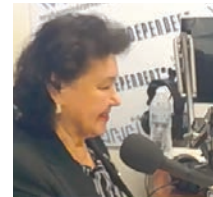
## Five Stars for a Fresh Start



“Great place. I didn't actually stay there, but I had a case worker, Teresa. She was amazing. She helped me get housing. I will always be grateful to her.”

Thanks to their determination, their case manager's compassionate guidance, and your support, one client shared this heartfelt online review after accessing services that helped them move on from homelessness and begin building a stable, brighter future.

## The Great Give: Goal Surpassed!



Thanks to 159 generous supporters, we raised nearly \$29,000 during The Great Give, exceeding our \$25,000 goal, and exceeding last year's total by \$12,000! Plus, The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven will be matching a portion of each gift! As CEO Louis Gill said in his WNNH Great Give Radiothon interview, “Thank you to everybody that has been a donor...we promise to put it to good use and make sure that people and families are safe.” Watch the interview at [columbushouse.org/greatgive](http://columbushouse.org/greatgive). ■

## Chocolate To The Rescue...continued from back

participants and past winners, Sweet Sage Bakery and MELT Chocolatier, who earned top honors. Sweet Sage won Critics' Choice for Most Amazing Chocolate Flavor with their After Dinner Chocolate Mints, while MELT claimed People's Choice for Most Amazing Chocolate Flavor with their Peanut Butter Butter Crunch.

A lively silent auction added to the excitement of the afternoon, and we were grateful for the remarks from our emcee, Jim Masters, as well as the expertise of our judges: Priscilla Martel, Christopher Prosperi, Ani M. Robaina, and Linda Zimmel.

We want to extend our heartfelt thanks to all of our guests, volunteers, vendors, auction donors, and sponsors who made this event possible. Your generosity is vital in helping us provide critical services to families facing homelessness at the Middlesex Family Shelter. Together we are making a lasting difference. Scan the



Katie Donovan of Donovan Family Confections with Judges Liasson, Vincent Contrucci of Quinnipiac University, presents her award-winning bonbon to the judges at Chocolate to the Rescue: (L-R) Ani Robaina, Priscilla Martel, Christopher Prosperi, and Linda Zimmel.



code or visit [www.columbushouse.org/chocolate](http://www.columbushouse.org/chocolate) for participants, sponsors, a link to photos, and more! ■



## Save These Dates!

Sunday, August 30, 2025  
**Home Run for Heroes**

Sat-Sun, October 4 & 5, 2025  
**Celebrate Wallingford**

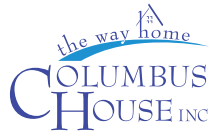
Thursday, December 11, 2025  
**Annual Meeting**

For the most up-to-date information on these and other events, visit [columbushouse.org/events](http://columbushouse.org/events)

## Looking to Volunteer?

There are plenty of ways to help! Visit [columbushouse.org/volunteer](http://columbushouse.org/volunteer) to learn more.

[www.columbushouse.org](http://www.columbushouse.org)



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## Stay Connected!

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# \$20K Raised at the 22nd Annual Chocolate to the Rescue

“It’s always an honor to be asked to return as host and support the good work of Columbus House.”

– Jim Masters, TV & Radio Personality and Chocolate to the Rescue Emcee for 12 past years

On March 30, 2025, over 100 guests gathered at the Crystal Ballroom in Middletown for the 22nd Annual Chocolate to the Rescue event in support of the Middlesex Family Shelter. We are excited to announce that this year’s event raised nearly \$20,000 to assist families facing homelessness in our community.



Donovan’s double-award-winning Strawberry Balsamic & Chevre Bonbons

A special congratulations to Donovan Family Confections, a first-time participant, who took home both the Critics’ and People’s Choice awards for Most Creative



2025 Chocolate to the Rescue Participants with Emcee Jim Masters (back right). Participants include (back row L-R) MELT Chocolatier, Sweet Sage Bakery, LiLu’s Customized Catering, Donovan Family Confections, (front row L-R) Perk On Main, Bear’s Smokehouse, and Sweet Harmony Cafe & Bakery

Chocolate Creation with their Strawberry Balsamic & Chevre Bonbon. This bold and unique combination of strawberry balsamic pâte de fruit and chèvre vanilla bean ganache was a true standout.

We also celebrated longtime...*continued inside on page 3*

**Inside:** Welcome, Louis • Penelope Does it Again • Family Triage Center • Summer Needs • And More!