

# PROVIDER PROFILES

## AMHERST SURVIVAL CENTER

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### About the Agency

Forty years ago, the Amherst Survival Center was created with the belief that no one in our community should have to struggle in isolation for daily survival, and that by helping one another we not only share our talents, but offer hope.

It began as, and continues to be, a place where people can give and receive, and where every individual is treated with respect.

Its mission is to connect residents of Franklin and Hampshire counties to food, clothing, healthcare, wellness and community, and to do so primarily through volunteer efforts. This keeps us rooted in community need and commitment.

More than four years ago, we moved into our new building, funded primarily by the community, to further serve our neighbors in a respectful environment.

The Center is well known for providing an infrastructure for our community's generosity and for facilitating our commitment to support one another.

Through donations of funds, food, clothing and household items, and especially time (from volunteers), the Center offers a range of services to approximately 6,000 people a year.

Its annual revenue comes primarily through individual donations, but it also receive foundation and business support. Generous in-kind contributions of food (from businesses and food drives) and clothing (from community members) help to supply its food and nutrition programs and the community store.

### Programs allow people to give, receive

The Amherst Survival Center started as an exchange for clothing, a meal and conversation.

Forty years later, it offers a range of services open to everyone, all under one roof, provided by a staff of two full-time and nine part-time people, and 225-plus volunteers every week.

The organization's current strategic direction is to engage the community to reduce the effects of food insecurity in local neighbors.

Its commitment echoes the original mission: to create an environment where people can move beyond a condition of need, and where everyone can share resources, information, concerns, experiences and expertise.

The Center fosters and celebrates a community where we accept, support and rely upon one another. With the exception of the Food Pantry, the mission-driven programs are open to anyone who comes to the Center. The Pantry is limited to residents of 13 surrounding towns.

Programs include: a community meals program (daily lunch and weekly dinner prepared and served by volunteers); a food pantry, which includes a special program for families of school-age children and the availability of personal care items including children's diapers and pet food; a mobile food program; a senior mobile program; a fresh produce/baked goods daily distribution; a food recovery team (volunteers who go out and pick up donations of food from supermarkets, businesses and farms every morning the Center is open); a free community store (with clothing and household items); a free walk-in health clinic (operated by medical volunteers); a job search assistance program; and a roster of community programs (field



Volunteers keep the food pantry stocked at the Amherst Survival Center.

trips, music performances and weekly movies).

The Center also hosts community partners. Examples include the Food Bank of Western MA offering help applying for SNAP, Health Care for the Homeless offering help getting health insurance and Eliot Homeless Services offering housing case management.

The volunteer program is open to all, and many volunteers have also at one time been program participants.

Though most of the 6,000 visitors a year are housed but struggling with making ends meet and food security, some visitors are experiencing homelessness.

For these individuals, the Center offers a private shower, a free self-service laundry facilities and private lockers. They can also receive a modified Food Pantry distribution.

Everyone is welcome and participants are men and women of all ages from across Hampshire and Franklin counties, individuals and families, immigrants, students, employed and unemployed, housed and experiencing homelessness ... all of whom are struggling with food security.

### Executive Director

Mindy Domb has been executive director of the Amherst Survival Center since June 2013. In her four years at the Center, she has helped to maintain and expand community programs in the Center's new building.

During this time, the Center has also become more involved with advocacy activities through expanding its social media presence, securing a bus stop at its new building and increasing opportunities for participants to share their concerns and insights.



Mindy Domb

It has initiated new programs, including Kids Boost food program and a communitywide diaper coalition and distribution; increased the amount of food distributed; enhanced food recovery efforts; expanded its volunteer program and developed a multiyear strategic plan.

Prior to this position, her experience was in public health, government, community coalitions and development. In these positions, she worked to address the needs of underserved communities and individuals in crisis, build the skills of the health and human service workers who assist and support these individuals, and develop collaborative programs to address social determinants of health and personal change. She has been a congressional aide in New York City, an HIV/AIDS activist and community organizer and trainer. Domb has completed graduate coursework in adult learning at Teachers College and has a bachelor's degree from Barnard College.

## SALUTING THE CARING FORCE

### Laura is helping people find their way

C.M. Laura, a Positive Prevention Peer Navigator with **Victory Programs'** Mobile Prevention Team, has a wide range of tools to choose from to reach the people who need him most.

Whether it's his vibrant personality, being able to connect with people in Spanish or English, his ability to use his story to inspire others, or knowing when to step back and just listen, Laura understands the mission of Victory Programs and the Mobile Prevention Team and is the perfect representation of that in his work both inside the organization and outside.

"I've always wanted to make an impact on people's lives and help others like myself," Laura said. "When I'm at work I'm a peer navigator, but at the end of the day I take off my badge and I'm just another peer in the city impacted by the same issues as my clients."

Peer navigators use a person-driven approach in empowering, educating and supporting high-risk individuals receiving prevention and education services. Laura helps provide links to care and will accompany clients to testing, medical or other social service appointments as needed to promote sense of empowerment for a client to become active in their own health care.

"C.M.'s passion and dedication to this field and the clients that he works with can be seen every day through his work," said Meg von Lossnitzer, Deputy Director of Victory Prevention Services. "Those that work with him know he is someone they can trust and who they can connect with as a peer. This allows him to navigate them to services and other providers



Victory Programs' C.M. Laura knows when to talk and when to listen.

that they had not connected to in the past."

He works to provide health education and risk reduction strategies to clients, including topics such as retention in care, adherence to treatment and/or medications, STIs, viral hepatitis, substance use, etc.; promotes an ongoing dialogue about HIV-related concerns, respectfully responding to inquiries regarding services; and refers clients to services both at VPI and outside of the organization.

Laura also nurtures collaborative opportunities with community partners.

Currently taking courses at Bunker Hill Community College, Laura has completed trainings from Justice Resource Institute, the Boston Public Health Commission and through the Boston Alliance for Gay and Lesbian Youth.

### Thriving in Springfield thanks to Lopez

Marysol Lopez always has time to listen to the kids who want to talk.

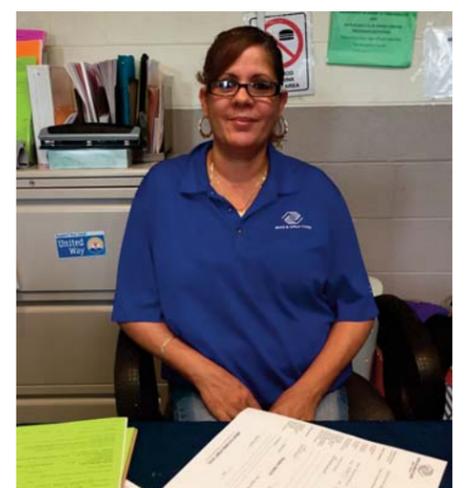
"Seeing the kids every day and talking to them about their day, and helping them with what they are working on at school and in the club brings me great pride in what I do," said Lopez, the Membership Coordinator for the **Boys and Girls Club Family Center** in Springfield. "There are a group of five to seven kids that come to see me throughout the week just to talk. They tell me about any problems they are facing from other kids being mean to them, to working on school projects or even a project here at the Club.

"I enjoy being someone they can trust and come to, just to be someone they have to talk to."

Lopez, who has worked in human services for more than 22 years, is passionate in her work. She enjoys helping those who can't fully take care of themselves and also educating the community. Lopez strives to give people a sense of independence when they are in a place where they are not able completely to do so for themselves.

At the Boys & Girls Club Family Center, Lopez also enjoys assisting families with childcare in the urban communities, helping people at a time when they are searching for a job or going back to school.

In her time as the Membership Coordinator at the Boys & Girls Club Family Center, Lopez has been instrumental in increasing the attendance of



Marysol Lopez is a trusted resource for youths at the Boys and Girls Club Family Center in Springfield.

youth served in our Pre-School and After-School Programming, as well as the organization's Evening Teen Programs.

Because of her hard work and dedication, BGCFC programs are at capacity on every level. It is a true testament to Lopez's dedication to families, youth, the local community and especially the Boys & Girls Club Family Center, said Executive Director Keshawn Dodds.

"We are truly lucky to have her in our organization and on our staff," said Dodds added. "With Ms. Lopez in our family, we know that the Boys & Girls Club Family Center will continue to grow through the years."