

During Black History Month this year, CTI will be publishing profile features of local Black leaders to celebrate #LowellBlackExcellence. Check back regularly throughout the month as we hear from our leaders in their own words about their experiences, perspectives and wisdom as Black leaders in our local communities.

**ISAIAH STEPHENS, PROGRAM DIRECTOR**

**Lowell Transitional Living Center**

193 Merrimack Street, Lowell, MA 01852

Interviewed by: **Tyler R. Bastys, Financial Career Coach  
Community Teamwork**

- **What does Black History Month mean to you?**

Black History Month to me has always been a chance to reflect on where we are as a society in terms of equality. Many issues that were happening during the Civil Rights Movement are still happening now. MLK spoke about income inequality, police brutality, and many other issues we are still having today. Black History Month is also a chance to reflect on where we would like to be in the future.

- **What can our community do more to recognize Black History during this month and during every month?**

Bringing more people to the table and ensuring their voices are heard while putting forth plans to improve the lives of everyone and not just the lives of those at the top of the food chain. I think bringing more people of color and other members of marginalized communities to the table so their voices can be heard. Black people, other people of color, LGBTQ+ people; everyone should have a seat at the table. I think the world as a whole is seeing that you can't have a table full of old white men calling all the shots when most of those decisions affect marginalized communities most.

- **How did you begin your work here at Lowell Transitional Living Center?**

I was an art student in college, and my mother was laid off from her job and became homeless. She couldn't find work, and became a client at LTLC. This led me to begin volunteering at the shelter. Through the case management team and staff at LTLC, my mother received a housing voucher and became housed. I was so grateful to see my mother move from the lowest point in her life to eventually moving out of the shelter and becoming a productive member of society again.

Once my mother got housed, I had been enjoying the work so much that I applied to work at LTLC as a Program Advocate. After about a year, I was invited to become a Case Manager and held that role for a little over two years. After that, I became the Triage Manager for just over two years. This past October, I was invited to take over as Director of the facility.

- **Why do you do what you do?**

The feeling of seeing a person go from rock bottom to receiving keys to an apartment is such a great feeling. I do this work because I like helping people and coaching clients along this rough and rocky road of homelessness. It's not easy being homeless. There is a lot of stigma surrounding homelessness. Not every homeless person is an addict or mentally ill. Most of our clients are simply victims of an aggressively capitalist society. For example, a person on Social Security may only receive approximately \$800/month, so that person can't afford \$1700/month rent. My aim is to assist our clients in moving on to a brighter future in their lives.

- **What are your goals for 2023?**

We are doing all we can behind the scenes to find and acquire more housing in our area for homeless individuals. The housing stock is very low right now, so it's not easy, but we are doing our best to purchase more properties and get some more people housed. We find that permanent, supportive housing helps our clients avoid falling back into the cycle of homelessness.

- **Are there any other messages you would like to share?**

I think there is a lot of misinformation and stigma in regard to the homeless population. The longer people are homeless, the more difficult it is for them to see themselves outside of homelessness. One quote that resonates with me is:

“They are just as we would be under similar circumstances.” - Abraham Lincoln

Most people are only one or two missed paychecks of becoming homeless themselves. Our people don't have resources or support, so they end up here at LTLC. I think the world could be more compassionate and patient when it.

#CommunityLeader #Leadership #Appreciation #BlackHistoryMonth #BlackLivesMatter  
#DElatCTI

ISIAH STEPHENS, PROGRAM DIRECTOR - Lowell Transitional Living Center  
By Tyler R. Bastys, Financial Career Coach - CTI

What does Black History Month mean to you?

It's a chance to reflect on where we are as a society regarding equality. Many issues that were happening during the Civil Rights Movement are still happening now. MLK spoke about income inequality, police brutality, & many other problems we still have today.

What can our community do to recognize Black History this month & every month?

Bringing more people of color & other members of marginalized communities to the table & ensuring their voices are heard to improve the lives of everyone & not just those at the top.

How did you begin your work at LTLC?

I was an art student in college, & my mother was laid off & became homeless. She became a client at LTLC. This led me to volunteer at the shelter. With the help of the caseworkers, my mother received a housing voucher. I was so grateful to see my mother move from the lowest point in her life to moving out of the shelter to become a productive member of society again.

I enjoyed the work there so much that I became a Program Advocate. After a year, I became a Case Manager & held that role for two years and then the Triage Manager for two years. This past October, I was invited to take over as Director.

Why do you do what you do?

I like helping people & coaching clients toward a brighter future. There is a lot of stigma surrounding homelessness. Not every homeless person is an addict or mentally ill. Most of our clients are simply victims of an aggressively capitalist society.

What are your goals for 2023?

We are doing all we can to find more housing in our area. The housing stock is low, but we are doing our best to purchase more properties to help our clients avoid homelessness.

Are there any other messages you would like to share?

There is a lot of misinformation & stigma regarding the homeless. The longer people are lost, the more difficult it is for them to see themselves outside of homelessness. I think the world could be more compassionate & patient when it comes to homelessness.

#BlackHistoryMonth #BLM #DEIatCTI #LowellBlackExcellence