

openhouse

a news update from st. stephen's human services SPRING 2011

LOOK AGAIN

We recently had a muralist spend some time in the shelter. She worked with some of the guests to build a movable mural that could be carried down the street. The men cut out cardboard silhouettes of themselves, painted them and wrote messages on them. One of the men, a senior citizen who is partially paralyzed, wrote, "We are not the problem. Look again."

Re-framing how we look at people living in deep poverty and without homes and re-thinking where the problem lies would be very helpful right now. I'm afraid that many people look at a person who is homeless



Mikkel Beckmen, Executive Director

with an internal value that says, "This person is the problem. This person is a burden." So in the spirit of this man's request to "look again", I wrote a list of all the ways folks experiencing homelessness were contributors this month.

- Men who spent years on the streets volunteered to build a Habitat for Humanity home.
- Some of the women at Kateri Residence are teaching bead-work classes at a church in the neighborhood.
- Men in the Shelter cook the food, wash the linens and clean the floors every night.
- Formerly homeless educators and performers speak to groups through our Human Rights Program.
- People testify in front of committees at the legislature.

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After Ten Years Outside



Gary participated in the Oral History of Homelessness Project and shared this story. Over 500 people experiencing homelessness throughout Minnesota have contributed to this project to document homelessness in first-person narratives. For more information:
www.OralHistoryOfHomelessness.org.

My name is Gary, I'm forty-one years old and last night I stayed at my apartment I got through St. Stephen's homeless shelter. I've been homeless about since 2000, ten years.

I became homeless when I lost my mom; I did a lot for her because she was ill. Then I lost my little brother and I sort of drifted away from people. Only my street friends really understood me.

I had my neck broke a few years ago. They said I was a miracle walking into the hospital. I lay down for x-rays and I couldn't get back up. After the hospital I went to stay with a friend but she was using me so I went back to the streets with the halo [brace] on, living under a bridge with my friends that winter.

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St. Stephen's Human Services

Housing

Housing opportunities for individual adults and families, including Kateri Residence for Native American women, our Rapid Exit partnership helping families and singles move quickly out of shelters, supportive housing in our Long-Term Homeless program, and Homeless Prevention for people in danger of losing their housing.

Employment

Employment support for single adults staying in south Minneapolis shelters as well as families leaving the Minnesota Family Investment Program.

Community Education & Street Outreach

Educational opportunities for the housed community to promote a greater understanding of homelessness, including through our zAmya Theater Project and A Day in the Life Program. For people living without shelter, and the community members concerned for them, we provide on-the-spot outreach and resources, including The Handbook of the Streets.

Shelter & Emergency Services

Shelter and advocacy for adult men in our Shelter. Additional emergency assistance is available to the community, such as clothing through our Free Store, help obtaining birth certificates, and representative payee service.

For questions about this newsletter or St. Stephen's Human Services, please contact:

Margaret Miles
Director of Development
612-870-2276
mmiles@ststephensmpls.org

St. Stephen's never sells or shares the contact information of its supporters.



It's a Guy Thing



Justin Dessonville delivers hundreds of new socks and underwear!

Perfect for every mom sending her son away to college: an underwear and sock subscription service! Manpacks is an online service that ships new men's underwear and socks to subscribers with whatever frequency they specify.

Justin Dessonville—a guy who admits to hanging onto his underwear and socks just a little too long (“until the holes look like leg holes”) is a Manpack subscriber. He found it so convenient that it got him thinking about guys who may never afford this kind of convenience.

This winter Justin approached Manpacks' owners with an idea. Together they concocted “Get a Pair, Give a Pair”.

In his blog Justin wrote,

The importance of proper clothing in a winter wardrobe cannot be understated. This is especially true for those who aren't able to find shelter. Socks give them an added layer of protection from Minnesota's harsh winters. This is why I'm teaming with Manpacks to help do something about that.

If someone purchased a pair of socks in response to Justin's blog, Manpacks donated a pair of socks to St. Stephen's Shelter. If they purchased ten pairs, Manpacks donated ten pairs. In the end, Justin's blog generated 118 pairs of socks, 120 pairs of underwear, and 118 white t-shirts.

St. Stephen's wants to thank Justin for this thoughtful idea and Manpacks for the great donation. The creative and compassionate ways people devise to help others will (we hope!) never cease to amaze. While Justin's fundraiser is complete, St. Stephen's has a Wish List with needed items on our website: www.ststephensmpls.org.

Save the Date!

Alliance of the Streets Italian Dinner

Great Food! No Speeches!

Thursday, May 19th, 2011
5:00-7:00 p.m.
Plymouth Church, 1900 Nicollet
Ave. South Minneapolis
Sliding scale \$20-\$30 per plate

For tickets contact Mike at
612-870-2283 or
mmenner@ststephensmpls.org

Delicious food prepared and
served by staff and clients!

Kateri Residence Open House

Free and Open to All

Wednesday, May 18th
Noon until 2 PM
2408 4th Ave South, near
St. Stephen's

Lunch, Traditional
Native Blessing,
and Artwork



Strengthening Our New Generation

Four years ago the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation launched a national initiative to help at-risk and homeless young mothers and their children.

Minneapolis' Strengthening Our New Generation (STRONG) program was the only project funded outside of California. With partner Rueben Lindh Family Services, St. Stephen's has provided holistic services to 163 mothers under 25 years old and their 282 children.

The goal of the initiative is to ensure healthier futures for families, but moreover to foster lasting change in the way that housing/homelessness and child development are connected.

St Stephen's provides the housing resources and management. Yet a unique feature of this collaboration is



Housing Specialist Margaret Jones, right, with a program participant & children

that all staff are cross-trained, so that St. Stephen's staff can also address the other needs of those they are working with. In addition to housing advocacy, services include parenting and early childhood education, legal advocacy, substance abuse treatment, employment assistance, child and adult mental health services, and

family social activities.

The program's results have been stellar. Mothers report that gaining permanent housing reduced overall stress and helped them improve relationships and focus on other priorities, like pursuing better employment and educational opportunities. Participants also report wanting to "become better parents," often saying that they never "learned how to be a parent" because they grew up in challenging environments or in the child welfare system.

Finally, mothers describe positive changes in their children, including developmental, emotional, and academic improvement.

Funding for this four-year initiative comes to an end this spring; however we are pursuing new resources to sustain this important work.

Program Participants Give Back

By Dan Struck, Volunteer Coordinator

Anyone who has volunteered knows the profound impact that it can have, both on the volunteer and on those being helped. As Volunteer Coordinator at St. Stephen's, I have the privilege of seeing this impact every day. One of my greatest joys has been seeing the empowerment that program participants feel through our new Giving Back Volunteer Program.

Last fall we began offering recurring volunteer opportunities for people in our programs. The response has been overwhelmingly positive. We've had several outings to Habitat for Humanity to build or restore homes and Feed My Starving Children head-



Program participants built housing for others and packed food to be sent around the world to starving kids.

quarters to assemble food packets formulated especially for starving children around the world. One gentleman, who had been homeless for years, said he was deeply moved to be able to put his skills as a trained carpenter to work on homes for others. Women living in our transitional housing for women recovering from addiction talked about how meaning-



ful it was to help others because they had benefitted from so much community support.

Not only are client volunteers enjoying the usual benefits of volunteering (meeting new people, learning a skill, increased self esteem), they're sending a profound message: whether housed or homeless, rich or poor, we all have something to offer.

EDUCATION IS LIBERATION:

St. Stephen's Human Rights Program succeeds on the strength of its Educators. The Educators are people who have experienced homelessness who speak to community groups, give tours of homeless services, and work on public policy issues. We sat down with a panel of them to talk about their role.

Why are you an educator?

Freddy: It gives me something. When you give back you're also giving to yourself.

Robert: There're a lot of stereotypes of how homeless people are and to be part of dispelling that is really important to me.

Jessy: I tell about the traumatic crap that I survived. And they can see me as a person in front of them. It's important to show that you can come through that and still want to help other people. And still look good.

Simone: I'm learning how to break

cycles in my family. This is our turn to break those cycles. I do this to lay a path, a foundation for my son. My son is my legacy. I tell him, "I don't want you to ever be afraid of anything or ashamed of anything. Because when you get older someone's going to remind you that you were once homeless with your mama. You hold your head up; your mama didn't hold her head down." I heal from doing this. I can finally liberate and heal when I let somebody understand my situation.

Freddy I have a way of making people feel safe. I was taking a group out on A Day in the Life and they were very obviously nervous. I told them, "This day is going to be just fine, but you're going to see some things you may not understand, someone might say something disrespectful, but just be open, take it in as part of the experience and at the end of the day we'll process it all.



Educator Freddy, Educator & Community Organizer Robert Fischer, Human Rights Program Manager Cathy Heying, and Educators Jessy and Simone

What can people do to help?

Jessy: Compassion is key. Don't dehumanize people.

Freddy: When people come and volunteer--like people who serve meals--they serve and then they stay in the kitchen instead of coming out into the dining room and interacting with people. Please just interact with people and you'll get something back—a story, or some knowledge you didn't have before.

Robert: I think it has to be done at a policy level initially, engaging policy-makers. That means us, but also getting people to communicate with their legislators, "Were people of means and we think when everybody does better, everybody does better."

Some people are surprised we have educators who have experienced homelessness, as though you should be ashamed to share your story.

Freddy: I went through my entire life being ashamed, being embarrassed for who I was. I don't live with that anymore. Matter of fact, it gives me strength to express my life to someone else.

Robert: I have experienced that shame, especially at first speaking to groups of the "haves." I had this



Students from St. Olaf prepare for A Day in the Life, an experiential learning opportunity where groups are given tours by Educators and share lunch and conversation with people who are experiencing homelessness. For more information contact: Kenza at 612-879-7623

ST. STEPHEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS PROGRAM

sense that somehow I had failed because I had experienced success and then lost everything. But it's now about me. It's about the social issue and improving the human condition--so much bigger than my failing. I don't have that shame anymore. It's pride.

Jessy: I don't have a problem telling anybody anything about me because if I feel ashamed of something I've learned from, then I haven't really learned from it. And if someone else can learn from my misadventures, more power to them.

Simone: I was at a parent gathering at my son's school and this lady asked where I lived and I said "PSP, it's a family shelter." And she started whispering. And I said, "You don't have to be quiet. I'm not ashamed of it. In order to get from where I was then to where I am now I had to learn some humility, I had to be put in a situation, find faith, and believe in something other than my stupid judgments. So don't tell me to be ashamed of what's given me some pride about my life."

Is housing a human right?

Robert: We talk about these inalienable rights: life liberty & pursuit of happiness. But the person in the homeless cycle is not liberated, not free. They become basically a slave to the system, a process that's so much bigger than they are.

Jessy: I think if we think of access to the internet as a human right, then we could think of access to housing as a human right.

What is most important for people to take away from their time with you?

Freddy: If everyone had housing there would be less crime, less addiction, less need for services, no panhandling.

Jessy: It would help the economy. People in housing means more people able to work, which means more people spending money.

Simone: How many people come into the shelter where I live because of a foreclosure? How can that be good for any community? Housing people is good for everyone.

Robert: This is a solvable issue. We're all on these journeys and they all influence and affect each other and if we judge instead of encourage each other, the chance of things getting better is less and less. Let's focus on what we have in common.

A Public Policy Success

In January newly-elected Governor Dayton signed Minnesota on to early Medicaid expansion. This means that within a few months, tens of thousands of low income Minnesotans will have improved healthcare coverage.

Last year St. Stephen's, with community partners including many people experiencing homelessness, worked hard on restoring General Assistance Medical Care (GAMC) after Governor Pawlenty attempted to move enrollees to a more demanding and costly health plan.

Two of the formerly homeless individuals who worked on the GAMC



St. Stephen's Educators, Freddy and Gary on right, behind Governor Dayton as he signs early Medicaid enrollment

campaign were invited to speak at Governor Dayton's signing.

Gary, a Vietnam vet, lost his job after hurting his back in a car accident. He relied on health care assistance while waiting for VA benefits.

Freddy, who is losing his eyesight to glaucoma, has been waiting for two years for approval of disability benefits. Both Gary and Freddy have experienced homelessness as a result of their health issues.

Freddy and Gary wound up not speaking due to lack of time when the Governor invited protesters to speak, but both men met the Governor and were given pens that he used in the signing.

The enhanced Medicaid plan will dramatically improve coverage rules for adults with mental illness, allow people to use the clinic of their choice (recent GAMC changes limited care to four hospitals in the state) and possibly include dental care. All the details have yet to be worked out, but implementation will begin March 2011.

THIS WINTER AT ST. STEPHEN'S...



Kateri Program Coordinator, Chanda Hadlock, and Kateri Resident, Lynn Tiger, with Senator John Marty after testifying against a legislative proposal to cut Health and Human Services programs.



Several podiatrists provided shoe care and hundreds of pairs of shoes (courtesy of RedWing Shoes) for people experiencing homelessness.



Shelves stocked with blankets awaited the opening of a temporary 50-bed shelter at River of Life Church and operated by St. Stephen's. The shelter will remain open through April.



Assistant City Attorney, Lois Conroy, provided training for St. Stephen's staff who accompany program participants to court to help them navigate the judicial system and improve their lives.



Minneapolis College of Art & Design grad-student Greta McLain worked with guests in our shelter to create a "movable mural" featuring stories painted by the guests.



As he has prior holidays, Governor Dayton visited to serve pancakes and wash dishes at St. Stephen's Christmas Day Breakfast for people experiencing homelessness.

- Voluntary support groups in our Ending Long-term Homeless programs are so full that we have to keep adding more groups.
- Like the fellow who told us, "Look, I *want* to pay taxes!" people fill our Job Resources room to work on resumes and applications so they can contribute once again to a strong economy.

It's ironic that as I write this letter to you giving you a different way to view "the problem" of homelessness, folks in the legislature are offering policies that once again view homeless people as the problem. They are suggesting stripping homeless folks of their voting rights and de-funding many of the remaining programs that work to end homelessness--and that actually save taxpayers lots of money. Re-examining where the problem lies will hasten our efforts to end homelessness.

Look again.

It's hard to leave my friends because I'm worried I'm going to come back and find them froze. I care about my friends a lot; I bring them food, take their clothes home and wash them.

I'm just trying to work on myself so I won't be out there again. I go to my St. Stephen's class. I got a good case manager helping me do things instead of drinking all the time.

It's nice to be able to go home when you want, get up when you want, cook your own food, do your own laundry and hang it up in your own closet.

I'm a good person. I like to volunteer. I just got to quit coming into town to see my old friends so much. Soon as I quit drinking I'll probably like myself better.

We Met Our Match!

Your donations met the Frey Foundation's \$75,000 matching grant challenge, raising \$150,000 for St. Stephen's Human Services!

Thank you for your support!

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EMAIL NEWSLETTER OPTION!

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If you would prefer this option, please cut out this notice and return it in the envelope enclosed OR email mmiles@ststephensmpls.org.

Your name _____

Your street address _____ (so we can find you on our list)

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ending homelessness

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