



LIVING LIFE

for a change



MAY/JUNE 2005

Be Thankful!

Near Christmas, my co-worker said, "Let's have a special party just for the ladies while the kids are in school." We decided on homemade goodies, singing some Christmas carols, poetry and simply enjoying each other.

Toward party's end, a CCO staffer asked the ladies to take time to give thanks for something that happened this past year. "Wow," I thought, "Is thankfulness too much to ask? These ladies have no homes, have suffered broken relationships and difficult situations with their children."

But was I surprised! Nearly every lady gave thanks. "I'm thankful that my children are healthy and not lying in a hospital bed somewhere," one woman said.

"I'm glad to be in this shelter and have the opportunity to start over again," another lady said. She felt that if she hadn't come to the shelter she would be making the same mistakes over and over again. "Now I'm seeing things differently. The future looks much brighter to me!"

A third woman's words really hit me, a mother myself, deeply. "My little girl said to me, 'Mommy, I don't care if we have any presents this year. I'm just glad we are still all together – you, my brothers, and me.'"

Would I myself be thankful being in a shelter over Christmas? Would you, I wonder? I don't know. But the sharing of these women was pure gold, a gift beyond price.

- Colleen Baznik



Volunteers from Kraft Foods "suit up" in preparation to serve meals to our dinner guests and shelter residents on Martin Luther King Day ("Volunteers," page 4).

My Experience at Cornerstone

by Sheila Curtis

WHEN MY DAUGHTER AND I came into Cornerstone Shelter, it was 4:30 a.m. Entering the large first floor, we were led to the elevator and went upstairs to the second floor. The elevator doors slowly opened, I thought to myself, "Oh my God! Where are we?" There were bunk-beds, women and children everywhere.

That morning, my younger daughter Lauren and I slept on a couple of cots. Once we were both tucked in (for the few remaining hours of darkness), I turned my back to her, snuggled up into a ball and cried myself to sleep.

Finding myself homeless and without employment was very overwhelming to me. I previously lived in West Palm Beach. We had an apartment, car and I had a job (which I willingly gave up) to relocate back to Chicago (my birthplace). A relative offered me the opportunity of living in her apartment until I found a job and a place to stay. So, I decided I was going to come back home to Chicago, the city that I loved.

After living with the relative for about five weeks, she wanted me, my three children and our dog to leave. I'm not quite sure why, but whatever the reason, it left my family and me without a place to live.

My life has been a very busy and chaotic one at times. After my mother died when I was seventeen, my life began spiraling downward. For more than ten years my life consisted of struggling with depression, alcohol and drugs. Just before I was about to totally ruin my life; God gave me my first child, Ashley! He knew that I desperately needed someone to love and someone to love me. (Continued, page 2)

Go!Go!Go! TeamCCO athletes!

Continued from page 1

The gift of my daughter Ashley and the grace of God turned my life around.

After being forced to go into a shelter, initially I thought that moving back to Chicago was the biggest mistake of my life. Instead it became one of the most spiritual and beautiful times of my life.

Was it tough? Yes! Yet regardless of what situation brought the many ladies who lived with us in the shelter there, each and every one of them was special. Each one of them inspired me in one way or another.

My case manager, Marguerite Brown, was not only helpful in assisting me with employment and housing; she was always willing to listen with a caring and understanding ear. But there were days when I felt like I just wanted to give up. Colleen Baznik, the Chaplain of Cornerstone shelter, would take my hands and pray with me. On a daily basis, our "house mom" Rachel Shaw did her best to accommodate all of our varied needs in a timely manner.

I lived at Cornerstone Shelter for three months. After leaving Cornerstone, I was blessed to receive transitional housing through CCO's Leland House Project. This is where my family and I currently live. Being at the Leland house is giving us the opportunity of living in an apartment at a nominal rate and assisting me with saving money in order to obtain permanent housing.

By the grace of God I have a degree in Human Services which I attained at the age of forty. I believe that you're never too old to pursue your dreams. Currently I am working for the Housing Resource Center (Uptown area). Once homeless, now I am assisting people with housing!

I must say, I don't regret coming to Cornerstone. My life has been changed for the better. I see life in a different way. Instead of seeing the negative, I see the positive. I look for the possibilities! There is always something good in everything and in everybody. To Sandy Ramsey, Director of Cornerstone, I want to say "thank you for sticking out the tough battle to keep the shelter going. Your persistence and hard work has helped so many people." Cornerstone Shelter and the Leland House staff have truly made a difference in the lives of me and my family. To all of you I say "THANK YOU!"

I VIVIDLY REMEMBER the first marathon I ever saw. The year, 1972, the place, Munich Germany. In an astonishing feat, Frank Shorter won the USA an Olympic gold.

Watching on television, I was more than impressed. Unlike other Olympic events, the marathon seemed truly beyond mortal imagination.

Twenty-six and two-tenths miles? Mind-blowing. If anyone had told me I would one day run not one, but two marathons in a single year, I'd have laughed in their face. I've just never been known as the "serious" athlete.

Three or four years ago, as part of a regime to lose weight, I began walking, then running. Long story short, in 2004, I did run two marathons. No one was more astonished than I was!

If I can do it, anyone can. And that brings me to this! This year, CCO has allowed me to enlist all the runners and want to be runners out there for something wonderfully exciting — The Oct. 9 2005 LaSalle Bank Chicago Marathon. Each **TeamCCO** runner raises pledges and donations for the Cornerstone Community Outreach shelters! In addition, LaSalle Bank graciously accepted **TeamCCO** as an official charity (see their website, www.chicagomarathon.com for more information). Talk about a great way to motivate one's training, and yet another reason for the rush of joy upon finishing a marathon!

TeamCCO's website,

www.teamcco.org, has links for both runners and their supporters. From our main page you can read about the runners already signed up to run the marathon for **TeamCCO**, sign up to run yourself (and set up your own do-



nations page!), or make a contribution in support of a runner. This is our first year, but we are hoping to see **TeamCCO** become an integral and fun way to support Cornerstone Community Outreach in our efforts to aid the poor and homeless.

Spread the word. Running is a rush, healthy, and almost anyone can do it—youth groups, married couples, co-workers, corporate sponsors! Don't forget to order an **official TeamCCO t-shirt** and to read more about this unique fundraising effort online at teamcco.org. (Or email: teamcco@jpusa.org for more info.)

- Jon Trott

Did you know?

77% of emergency shelter providers surveyed reported that they turned away requests for shelter this past year, primarily due to a lack of resources.

(Based on extensive surveys conducted by studentsagainsthunger.org)



Friends in front of CCO Shelter.

Touching and Being Touched ~ Life's Moments at CCO



Beverly, a long-time friend from the neighborhood.



Andrew Winter, our financial officer, is too busy to stop for pictures.



Christmas 2004, clients and staff sat for great food prepared by Leland ladies. Northbrook and Hinsdale Covenant Churches provided presents and cookies. The fragile lives of women and children found comfort as we sang "Joy to the World."

Humans Are Not Homelessness

Recently
I heard someone say
how some people are "afraid of the homeless."

What to do when approached by the homeless, how to deal with the homeless, how to not have the homeless where they shouldn't be?

The term "homeless" now stands for a problem; gloss over the fact that what is under that term is human beings.

To say
someone is afraid of the homeless
is to say they're afraid of other human beings.

To say
the homeless are a problem
is to say other human beings are a problem.

Homelessness is
suffered by human beings
as humans suffer from cancer or depression.

Humans are not cancer,
they are not depression,
they are not homelessness.

They are humans.

Sandy Ramsey

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Cornerstonecommunityoutreach.org
(ccolife.org)

Mailing Address Line 1
Mailing Address Line 2
Mailing Address Line 3
Mailing Address Line 4
Mailing Address Line 5

L i v i n g L i f e f o r a c h a n g e

The Joy of Imperfection *Sandy Ramsey, CCO Director*



I enjoy having a quiet time early in the morning before I start my day. As I read and drink coffee, I am thankful for the quiet, the ability to think about and pray over the day. I look for these perfect “rest and rejoice” moments.

But what of moments where everything isn't right, or in order, or perfectly soothing? Recently, I was in our church service. I usually get a little selfish when it comes to church, wanting to reflect and relax as I enjoy the service.

I arrived a little late to be met by one of the women our social outreach program and church has worked with over the years. My friend, Mary, smelled of stale alcohol but this was one of her good days. As we played musical chairs, struggling to get seated before the service began, she happily introduced me to some people she knew who were sitting right behind us.

“This is Tom and Emma, they're homeless too, they live in the park,” she announced loudly. They didn't seem to mind and with big smiles on their sunburned faces, shook my hand. Two men came in from the local half way house. They boisterously exchanged

greetings with the rest of us in our section before taking a seat. Mary, acting as hostess, promptly gave them a songbook.

In front of us, a fellow community member was hosting her visiting mother who was busy talking with her grandchildren. Next to them sat my neighbor and her husband. As the music began, Mary began to sing heartily. Normally I had not heard her sing like that, but today she had an audience of people she knew and she seemed to be trying to lead the way in how worship should be done.

The two men from the half way house took turns getting up and wandering, singing happily off key. My neighbor joined in with enthusiastic hand clapping, her husband's arm encircling her shoulders as if he was trying to keep her from floating upward with the music.

As the strains to the hymn filled the air and we all sang together from all walks of life, all ages, all backgrounds, “All for Jesus, I surrender...” I experienced a deep inner calm and happiness. In the midst of imperfect conditions, everything was as it should be. This moment was peaceful and relaxing without the trappings of perfect circumstances or right, easy answers.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

Your faith, hard work, creativity, and prayer make our work possible. We could not have made it without every one of you! Painting, pounding nails, serving food, mopping floors, praying, or giving financially, **you have been a partner with us.** Please forgive us if we missed your name or organization in the following list of donors.

All Saints Orthodox Church (Chicago)	School (Princeton)	Walter Hirsch	Misenheimer	Steven Rye
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Group Volunteers

Thanks to You, we can do what we do!

An 18 year old student.
A 37 year old carpenter.
A 13 year old swimmer.
A 51 year old housewife.
A 92 year old grandpa.
(Now, look in a mirror.)

What Do They Have in Common?

They can all be
volunteers!

Interested? Fill out the below
coupon, or phone or email 773-
303-0119 / ljackson@jpusa.org

Brian Gill, a high school student, more than completed his required 40 hours of service learning hours by volunteering 105 hours working in the kitchen this summer. Tracy Nuemark, a teacher and member of **Willow Creek Community Church**, has faithfully come and volunteered on Wednesdays for nearly 3 years to keep our kitchen in tip-top shape. We are grateful to **Willow Creek Community Church** for their ongoing service and contributions for those families and women who find themselves homeless and in need.

Several groups have taken on the enormous task of planning, providing, and serving a meal here at CCO. The **Culver Academy Alumni Club** organized their 6th annual neighborhood holiday dinner, serving not only our CCO clients, but also many from our neighborhood who might otherwise go hungry. Many CAAC members donated food or money to make this feast possible.

The First Congregational Church of Western Springs has blessed us with a Sunday Dinner several times. Their unique approach involved 50 members of their church contributing parts to the meal. **The Korean Martyrs Church** has also contributed to Sunday meals by taking

over our kitchen and making Italian Beef sandwiches. **Calvary Chapel of Elk Grove Village** hosted their annual Christmas feast the Saturday before Christmas, and blessed CCO families with holiday gifts.

The **Jacqueline Vaughn Occupational High School**, for the fourth consecutive year, has brought developmentally challenged students to CCO to hone their skills in janitorial and food services. Students from the **Northside College Prep School** and **Loyola Academy** did successful clothing drives and then came to volunteer. **DePaul University** students held a costume party for the kids and **The Center for Student Missions** organized a day of children's activities.

The **Jeta Spa** in Chicago, for the second year, provided the single women of Naomi House with a Christmas Eve Day of Beauty, pampering us by setting up stations and offering complimentary facials and massages on-site. Martin Luther King Day weekend brought employees of **Kraft Foods** and the law firm of **Lord, Bissell & Brooke** to volunteer their services sorting clothing, serving food, and children's activities.

Space doesn't allow mentioning everyone, but volunteers, **we couldn't do it without you!**

HAVE YOU SEEN OUR WEB SITE?

Don't miss out on the CCO website, ccolife.org! You can view past newsletters, view links to our various CCO outreaches (there are no less than eleven of them!), read stories from those we're involved with, make online contributions, and even sign up online for volunteer work. Groups can also get involved online, as well as using the below form and the enclosed envelope.

Our website is still in its infancy; future plans may also include online group discussions and information sharing from and for the homeless themselves. (Yes, the homeless often use computers!) And also check out teamcco.org, our exciting new opportunity involving athletes and those supporting them! (Story, page 2)

**YES, I WANT TO PARTNER WITH CCO IN
ASSISTING FAMILIES STAND ON THEIR OWN
IN STRENGTH AND HOPE.**

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE _____ ZIP _____

I am interested in volunteering at CCO.

Please send me more information on opportunities for my church to serve at the shelter.

I would like to have my youth group visit CCO, please send me more information.

I will pray regularly for the work going on at CCO and the lives being touched.

Please accept my financial gift: \$10.00

\$15.00 \$20.00 \$50.00 \$100.00

Please mail all responses, checks, and requests to: CORNERSTONE COMMUNITY OUTREACH
4628 N. Clifton, Chicago, IL 60640