



LIVINGLIFE

for a change



SUMMER 2002

A Year Later

WHEN WE WROTE YOU A year ago we described our hopes and plans for obtaining the five-story factory building across the street from CCO's center.

We have been in our new building for ten months. The concrete-steel building now houses Sylvia's Family Shelter on the third floor for 100 moms, dads, and children. Naomi's, an over-night shelter for 100 homeless women is located on second floor.

The first floor is home for Brothas and Sistas United, our after school programs for junior high students through high school. A conference room and administrative offices are also on the first floor.

Fifth floor has a free-store. Families shop for clothing while living with us and furniture and household goods when they are ready to leave. Fourth floor is being developed for people in training as staff.

Because of the growing problem of homelessness we were asked to provide a place to sleep for 100 men. Each night the floor of the dining room serves as Macon's Over-night Men's Shelter (MOM'S).

There is nothing fancy in this converted factory and there is still much to do. But the building is teeming with life and those "living life for a change."



Being Neighbors

WE ALL NEED GOOD NEIGHBORS. We have the privilege of serving every day and watching the changes come on a daily basis. But our friends, the people who plunge into the inner city to serve for a day, a weekend, or a week, are the people who keep the energy flowing. Not only do these folks shoulder a sweat burden, they also keep our spirits fresh with new enthusiasm. Maybe some readers of this newsletter have volunteered at CCO. If so we thank you and want you to know you did more for us than just the tasks you were assigned. It would be impossible to name everyone but we would like to give our readers a flavor of the good neighbors who have gone the extra mile for those who are homeless.

Willow Creek Church has been a bulwark of help for us this year. They coined the word "plunge" as a description of their trips into the city. They also carried out a theme in preaching and service called "Blanketing the City." The shelter was blessed with hundreds of blankets and sheets through that effort. We see the happy faces of Willow's people doing everything from serving dinner to sorting clothes in the free store to painting walls and floors.

Representatives of the staff at Unilever Corporation came to visit CCO asking what a group of trained and skilled volunteers could accomplish. We replied that the opportunities are limitless, but our most urgent need was for the 15 families at the Sylvia Shelter without rooms. We explained that we had constructed rooms for 12 families in the shelter but had come to the end of our funds for that purpose..

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LOVE SHINES through

SANDY WAS ON DUTY the night Yvette (not her real name) arrived at CCO. She had been staying with her mother but the building manager could not allow extended family members to live in the small apartment. Yvette had three children and one on the way.

Sandy settled the family on mats in the big open room on third floor. There are over 100 people living at Sylvia's Family shelter but less than half of the families have rooms. We are building living spaces as funding comes in. (Read *Being Neighbors* on the front page to see what's happening now.)

The two women made the beds and tucked in each of the children with the new blankets donated by members of the Willow Creek Church. Then they sat down to talk; Yvette had planned to give the baby she was expecting up for adoption. She had been date-raped and had felt she would not be able to love the child that came from that attack. But time

was getting close to her delivery and she was having second thoughts. As the baby moved in her womb she found her heart stirring with love.

Yvette was with us about a month when she came in with a big smile announcing that she had found an apartment and had the keys. At the same time the doctors became concerned about her health and decided to induce labor.

The night before Yvette went into the hospital Sandy went to our blanket supply and found a queen size comforter with a beautiful floral pattern and a new baby blanket. She waited until everyone was asleep and left them by Yvette's bed -- a housewarming gift and a welcome to the new baby to come.

When Sandy arrived at the office the next morning Yvette was already at the hospital, but there on her desk was a warm letter thanking "the angels" that had given such a loving gift.

Did you know that the average age of a homeless person in the United States is 9 years old?



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They said, let us work on it. They not only purchased the materials for 15 new rooms but as of this writing the people from Unilever, several of the shelter fathers, along with two carpenters from Missouri (who just happened to show up at the right time) are all working together to provide the rest of our families with rooms. The Unilever Company shared in the project by outfitting the volunteers for their work and giving them time off for the project.

The National Covenant Women Ministries has adopted CCO for an outreach called Safe Essentials. Because many homeless people come to us with nothing the Covenant Women Ministries is conducting a drive to provide every homeless man, woman, and child with a packet of needful and special items that will be set aside for them alone. With this kind of thoughtfulness we can provide a warm welcome to people, giving them upon arrival some things they can call their own.

While shopping in Uptown several women from the South Park Church met some folks living at the shelter. The women visited CCO then rallied their fellowship to cook and serve a feast of "soul food" for all the center's residents. What a meal. Students from Moody Bible Institute and North Park College and Seminary help weekly during their school year. The Chicago Culver Club provides a ham dinner with all of the extras each year during the Christmas season. Several Eagle Scouts have earned their honors with projects at CCO. .

The Center for Student Missions sends regular groups. People from the Cook County Hospital Physical Therapy Department, the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs, Carl Shurz High School, Notre Dame High School, Mercy Home for Girls — the list goes on and on of folks with hearts of compassion who have come and partnered with us.

A prayer for our friends:
Dear Lord, We thank you for each friend who has come to be that good neighbor to those in need. Bless them as they have blessed us. Encourage them where they live and work as they have encouraged us. May they never forget your heart for the poor. Amen

brothas & sistas united



Members of Brothas & Sistat United, our junior high and high school programs were invited guests of the cast of Les Miserables while the inspiring musical was in Chicago. And inspire it did. BSU members came home and wrote a Christmas play of their own, an inner-city version of Scrooge. Later that week the Les Miserables' cast further carried out the theme of their musical as they served a meal to our 200 afternoon dinner guests.



SUMMER CAMP AND CHANGED LIVES

Campfires, sing-a-longs, hearts ignited by the Holy Spirit, and life long changes made: these are common sights each year at BSU/BSU2 summer camp. This summer we will be adventuring off to a new camp facility. We are going to Kids Across America (KAA) a camp specializing in dealing with urban youth and the problems they face. At camp this year not only will the kids have a new experience but the leaders also as they learn how to appropriately run a camp for inner city young people. There are currently 67 children involved in our program. We would like to send all of them, but over ninety percent of our members cannot afford to pay for camp on their own. We need sponsors. Will you help send our group to camp? If you find it in your means to help please send donations to BSU CAMP, C/O Eve Stuglin, 4615 N. Clifton, Chicago, IL 60640. Please pray for the finances, for the youth that this will be a life changing experience for them, for the staff that we will be unified and will be a constant light to the BSU members, and for travel safety.



Look Who's Watching

I was walking to work one morning absorbed in planning out the day when I was brought back by a cheery voice, "Good morning." I looked up to see Virginia and her small son, who had both lived at CCO for a few months. "Good morning, Sandy." "Good morning to you," I replied. As we talked about how she was doing in her new job I felt

this tug on my skirt. Looking down, there was two-year-old Sean trying to get my attention, "Ga morning, ga morning," he announced with a smile. The two-year-old heard his mom and I greet each other and he imitated our behavior.

Sitting at my desk later in the day, I thought about Sean. That morning he captured something he had experi-

— Sandy Ram-

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

an average food pantry wednesday

THE NATURE OF OUR FOOD BAG WEDNESDAYS has changed over the past few months. We've had an influx of dinner guest volunteers. They are extremely helpful yet they bring certain complexities. Our volunteers range in size, age, gender, and spiritual beliefs. Each volunteer comes to us from a homeless or low-income situation. Some are very hardworking, levelheaded, and searching men who always get my admiration for their persistent efforts.

A couple of these men (who are close friends of mine) are huge, both physically and in their desire to spread the gospel. Both men love God dearly and want the world to know that Jesus is Lord. And this is where the problem arises. These men want to proclaim their beliefs in loud, boisterous, exclamations of praise, though often disagreeing with each other.

One Wednesday Pierre, standing in line for his pantry food, proclaims in his North African accent that he is a god and all truth comes from him. This fine-clothed fellow is a regular dinner guest.

One of our evangelistic giants, who is working beside Chris and myself giving out groceries, feels the need to put

him straight. Voices raise, mannerisms sharpen, and the room gets louder and louder. We try to unobtrusively quiet them but to no avail. The Christian giant is rebuking this man angrily with perspiration pouring off his forehead. Pierre continues to proclaim his divinity but his smile turns to a frown. We continue to give food bags to the long line of people in need.

One short gentleman with a huge grin steps up to the table to receive his supplies as angry words echo above his head. He begins to laugh and says to me, "You've got a fine example of a Christian here," while looking at our angry volunteer. He turns to him, "Is that the way Jesus would act, brother?"

Our amused gentleman then wanders around the dining room continuing to laugh as he explains to everyone in hearing range just how Jesus would act and what he taught. Many people through this dinner guest's chuckles hear testimony today. The giant calms down. The guru leaves frustrated. Chris and I sit bewildered. And the gospel is spread through a mysterious little man. Amen.

— Jeremy Nichols