

Cornerstone Community Outreach

Easter:

A Day in Cornerstone's Dining Room

A Message from Sandra Ramsey



It is Easter weekend and the cooks at the shelter are starting to bake hams for Easter dinner. Our gas meter reader comes to turn off the gas due to late payment. Strangely, no one can find the key to the basement where the meter is located. The meter reader tells me this and seems a little confused as to what he should do next. Like a Jedi master I tell him, "It's Easter, this is a shelter. You don't need to turn the gas off." To which he agrees, "No, I don't need to turn the gas off," and leaves.

I am in the middle of the dining room during dinner when I look down. Immediately in front of me is Johnny sitting in his wheelchair. He looks like he was just beat up. His left eye is bloodshot, he's wet himself again, and he's very dirty. I ask him, "What happened to you?" "I got into it with someone," he mumbles sheepishly. I roll my eyes at him, irritated that

even someone in a wheelchair has to fight on the streets. Secretly, though, I'm thankful he's still with us and not dead. I call Thomas over, the bank president's son who has been doing community service with us for school all week. "Thomas, can you help Johnny? Carry his tray, and get him over to a table." I feel happy I can match Thomas up with Johnny; they need to meet each other. Like all of us, Thomas needs the Johnnys of this world to carry with him in his heart throughout his life.

The mother and father with five little children have learned to be first in line for dinner. I admire their pre-planning especially since they have a set of two-year-old triplets, and then a 3- and 5-year-old. The oldest little boy waits at the beginning of the line while the parents sit with the little girl and the triplets. The two triplet boys are identical and with their round heads, round faces and big round eyes, they remind me of two baby owls. Now they have learned to recognize me and they wave hello.

Karen is in the dinner line. She has lived in our single women's program several times. Throughout the years I've known her, she has



struggled with drugs on and off, although mostly on. When she resurfaced into our program a couple of years ago she was bone thin with rotten teeth. During that stay with us, she continued to struggle with her addiction and act out finally causing us to ask her to leave. She was just too much of a threat to staff and other clients. Later there came a point when Karen got herself a job and was doing better. She came back to us, asking if she could eat dinner with us as she worked at her job in the neighborhood. I thought it would be okay as long as she didn't start to cause any trouble.

This had generated some consternation because she had been such a troublemaker previously. But I tried to look at her in a new light, and made a judgment call in her favor as she was making wiser decisions. For a short time she ate meals with us but she eventually faded back off the scene. We hadn't heard from her in awhile. Now, here she stood in

front of me, looking good, settled in an apartment, and with a full set of new teeth that restored a youthful look to her face. She thanked us for letting her eat with us and told me she was doing very well at her job. I was thankful for those meals she had spent with us. Something small to us was a final piece that helped her maintain both her job and housing. Then I was thankful for all the years we had been a part of her life. It hadn't always been easy but it was so rewarding to see how far she had come.

Our goal at CCO is to love and support those we come into contact with and help them to become self-sufficient and filled with self-worth. We are delighted when we get to see lives like Karen's changed. We take every opportunity to celebrate life with our residents. Many children and adults are brought great joy during the Easter season from basket donations made possible by many of you. Thank you for taking time to look into some of the lives we serve.

Have a happy spring! -Sandy Ramsey

