



# CORNERSTONE COMMUNITY OUTREACH

FALL 2014 NEWSLETTER

## Hope, Purpose and Employment

Homelessness does not discriminate between genders, ages, ethnicities, levels of education, or other demographics. At CCO, it has been our privilege to shelter newborns with their families, elderly persons, people with developmental disabilities, those with master's degrees, adults who have worked full-time their entire lives and some with no work history at all. Anyone can become homeless.

Elizabeth's story challenges the norms of who we believe can become homeless in America. It breaks down the fences that divide the "haves" and the "have nots".

"My father was a very hardworking man. He owned a construction company and he instilled a strong work ethic in me. Growing up I can't remember a time when we didn't have what we needed.

After getting my master's degree in finance, I worked full-time as a financial advisor in the Loop. My husband, Doug, was a stock analyst who worked at the Chicago Board of Trade. I have memories of being downtown at work and homeless people would ask me for change. I wasn't thinking about the person in front of me. I was thinking about what I was going to have for lunch, who was going to pick-up the dry cleaning, and when I had to be at my next meeting.

I had always lived in the Chicago suburbs. My husband and I had a beautiful home with our sweet daughter. We often had barbeques with neighbors. That's the sort of life we lived.

After 15 years of building our lives together and of living the American Dream, my husband Doug suddenly and tragically lost his life. We had had a good marriage. We had higher education and great jobs. I couldn't have stopped what happened to Doug, but for some reason I blamed myself. The loss was unbelievable and shocking. I felt a part of me died with him.

At the funeral someone gave me a drink and I remember feeling numb. That's what I wanted to feel. Heavy with grief, I just wanted to feel nothing at all.

I quickly became a functioning alcoholic. These were very dark times. I remember going to an AA meeting. A woman was talking about her



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husband. She said that he was dying and she was so depressed she couldn't stop drinking. Her story spoke to me and that's when I realized I needed help. She's my sponsor to this day and we are very close. I also got intensive residential treatment. It was unbelievably hard physically and emotionally, but I stuck with it. The 12 steps are an important part of my life. People say it's about making amends and forgiving others, but I think it's mostly about forgiving yourself.

In 2008, the recession hit and my company lost 30% of our clients. In 2009, the company closed. I was unemployed and the money was

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## Help for the Holidays

The Holiday Season should be a special time for everyone. At CCO we try to make the holidays bright for each person. You are an important part of that effort. There are a variety of ways you can be a blessing to our shelter guests. Donate new unwrapped toys or gift items for those staying in one of our family shelters, donate funds for a Christmas party in the single men's or women's shelter program, or organize your church or civic group to provide a holiday meal. We work extra hard this time of year to make everyone at CCO feel special and cared for. Join us this holiday season in making Christmas bright for our shelter guests!

# Hope, Purpose and Employment (CONTINUED)

running out. I sold my house and moved to Chicago. I wanted to make sure that my daughter had money for her education. That was very important to me. My unemployment eventually ran out and I began to sell everything I had in storage: furniture, household items, everything.

I was frantically looking for work all over the city. Employers kept saying, "You're overqualified. We can't pay you what you're worth." I just wanted to work. I believe part of the problem was my age. I just kept being rejected and turned away. And I didn't have anything left to sell and I became homeless.

I found shelter at CCO's Naomi House program for single women. The staff made me feel welcome and showed me around, but those first few days and nights were tough. I couldn't believe I was in a shelter. I felt like the biggest failure. I had gone from full-time employment with a home in the suburbs to homelessness. I had never been homeless before. I was scared and I just wanted to hide but I couldn't. I started to send out 50 resumes a day. I used every computer I could get my hands on.

I was working hard to keep my hopes up and attending AA meetings.

CCO has a Free Store where residents and neighbors can "shop" for necessary clothes and household items. One day I was searching the Free Store for cold weather clothes and I found a sweatshirt that says, "Cornerstone University." I ran downstairs to the Naomi House office and showed it to staff and said, "I'm going to graduate from this school with honors!" Everyone believed me and we had a good laugh!

Soon after that, Sandy Ramsey, CCO's Executive Director, called me into her office. I couldn't figure out what I was getting in trouble for. Instead of getting in trouble she offered me an employment position at CCO. I was so surprised!

Now, I am working in the Naomi House program that I had lived in myself. I work as an evening and night staff person. Women living in Naomi House have a lot of needs. When I'm at work, I feel like I'm a psychiatrist, a lawyer, a referee, an officer, a financial advisor, you name it!

I really feel like CCO saved my life. Not just because I got shelter when I was homeless, but because I was given hope, purpose, and employment, too."

-Elizabeth Hartline, as told to Beth Nicholls

## Team CCO

We want to say a special thank you to the members of Team CCO who ran this year's Bank of America Chicago Marathon. You went the extra mile to help alleviate homelessness and support our shelter guests. Thank you!

Most of us aren't going to run 26.2 miles, even for a great cause. However, it's not too late to donate at [www.crowdrise.com/teamcco2014](http://www.crowdrise.com/teamcco2014). Your gift is 100% tax deductible. And if you're thinking of reaching a fitness goal in 2015 remember Team CCO. You can choose from a walk, 8K, obstacle course, half marathon or a full marathon. Find out more at [www.ccolife.org/teamcco](http://www.ccolife.org/teamcco).



Granny and Sally, valuable CCO Food Pantry volunteers.

## Fighting Hunger at CCO!

For over 15 years CCO has enjoyed a valuable partnership with the Greater Chicago Food Depository (GCFD). The GCFD is Chicago's food bank supplying over 650 pantries, soup kitchens, and shelters across the city. From July 2013 through June 2014 CCO received 502,000 pounds of food from GCFD, with an estimated value of \$806,000. Fresh fruits and vegetables accounted for 25% of the total. Through our fabulous Hunger Walkers, grants and subsidies, we paid nothing for these valuable food items and have a remaining food credit of \$1,506. The benefits are astonishing! We want to say a special thank you to our Hunger Walkers, GCFD, and all who have served or supported our meal programs. Thank you!

Join CCO in offering daily necessities and vital services to homeless families and individuals. We rely on the support of volunteers and donors to provide for those in need. Please donate today! Thank you!

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