



# CORNERSTONE COMMUNITY OUTREACH

FALL 2016 NEWSLETTER



## Don't Give Up, There Is Hope!

"It was always the same, every day after school. I would make up a story to tell my friends why I was walking the other way. 'I've got to go to my uncle's house.' I didn't want them to know I was homeless. I was terribly ashamed of it. I never shared it with anybody, and they never knew."

When Shirley's family came to CCO for shelter she was 12 years old but she wasn't new to the homeless experience. For years, she and her family had shuffled from one extended family member's house to another. At each new destination, disputes erupted and she and her family were once again displaced, and forced to move on to the next couch, floor space, or basement. Shirley grew up with a front row seat to the destabilizing effects of homelessness.

"At CCO, I got to know the staff. They were softer, kinder, and gentler, than the adults I had been around. As a child, some of my best memories were of CCO volunteers and staff teaching me how to do crafts. It had a huge influence on me. Staff and volunteers taught me how to tie-dye. I appreciated it. It opened my eyes to art and artistic expression. I'm still a crafter today. It's a part of who I am. While my family lived at the shelter, we also did a lot of outdoorsy stuff. I remember getting out of the city and camping, experiencing nature. It was one of the best times of my childhood."

Shirley's family eventually moved into an apartment and successfully left CCO, but struggles within her family intensified already-damaged relationships. "I ran away because I kept being told, 'You won't amount to anything.' I knew that I had to do something that would get me where I needed to be. All my high school years, I worked up to 45 hours each week. I would get up and go to school, get out of school, and go to work until midnight or 2 am. Then, do it over and over again. I had a consistent work history but my education suffered. I didn't have much hope. My big dream was to be the manager of a fast-food restaurant. I thought that was the best I could do."

Desperate to break free, Shirley took a leap into the unknown. "I enlisted in the Air Force. At basic training I was asked, 'Are you afraid of blood?' I answered 'No,' so I was trained as a surgical technician. I didn't realize then how that one question would shape my life! I decided I was going to work really hard in the military. The Air Force made me feel like I had a family. It was the first time in my life that I had the structure and support to achieve my goals. I'll never forget the day one of the drill sergeants walked pasted me at basic training and said, 'That Shirley Richards, she's going to be a great airman.' I felt like I could fly!

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## The Blessing of Sharing Food

Canned vegetables, meat, pasta, grains, nuts, boxed food, and more are offered at the CCO Food Pantry each week. Fresh fruits and vegetables make up over 25% of the nutritious foods offered. The majority of CCO food pantry patrons are senior citizens and people with physical challenges on a fixed income who often find it difficult to pay rent, cover prescription medication costs, and other necessities. The CCO Food Pantry helps bridge the financial gap for over 150 pantry patrons each week making it possible for them to remain housed, access medication, pay utilities, and eat nutritious food.

Chris Ramsey, CCO Pantry Supervisor, explained why CCO has offered groceries to neighbors for over 25 years. "We do it because we see the need. There are a lot of low-income and needy, elderly people in the Uptown area. There is a lot of food in America and hungry people who need it. The Greater Chicago Food Depository supplies us with good food and we are blessed to share it."

In addition to having the pantry provide nutritious food, it is almost entirely run by volunteers. Mike Hertenstein, long-time CCO supporter and recent pantry volunteer, had these thoughts about volunteering at the Food Pantry.

"Helping to hand out food on Wednesdays, I have been privileged to see the backstage community of volunteers at CCO. It is a rich and diverse, genuinely-organic culture that makes everything possible there. People seem to really like each other, genuinely want to help, and have a sense that what they are doing is mutually beneficial. There is more going on than simply handing out food in these little encounters. There is a kind of push-back against all the impersonal treatment and brokenness found in many of these situations. People are extending humanity to each other. They wordlessly come and do this thing together week after week. Its kind of astonishing."



Sandra Ramsey, CCO Executive Director at the Food Pantry



## CCO's Back-to-School Bash 2016!

Brand new backpacks and shoes, balloon animals, treats, circus performers, face painting, prizes, an outstanding speaker, and an energetic dance troop made this year's CCO Back-to-School Bash a hit! The children sheltered at CCO got the practical and motivational help to step into a new school year with confidence.

*Holiday Season At CCO*

**Help us make the Holiday Season shine at CCO!**  
**Consider donating new toys for the children or new items that will make Christmas exceptional for parents and single adults. Don't like shopping? You can help by making a financial gift that will allow our Christmas volunteers to provide presents for those who are often overlooked, such as single senior citizens, pregnant mothers, or teens that are sheltered at CCO. Please contact us at [info@ccolife.org](mailto:info@ccolife.org) if you would like to help us this Holiday Season.**

## Don't Give Up, There Is Hope!

(continued from front)

I was stationed in Washington D.C. I took pride in my work and in the Air Force. Years went by and my surgical technician experience and knowledge grew but I knew that ultimately I wanted a civilian life.

After leaving the military, I returned to Chicago and I was hired at a prestigious orthopedic hospital. I really wanted to shine. My work as a surgical technician was exciting and exhausting. I assisted with total joint replacements and worked 50 hours a week. I cared about the patients and my co-workers. Through my work I learned more about medical research which led to a yearning to go back to school and get a degree. So I did. I continued to work full-time and I enrolled in on-line courses.

In 2012 I got my degree in Healthcare Administration. I had been told by some of the people closest to me that I would never amount to anything, yet there I stood with my diploma in hand and I couldn't stop crying. It was a dream come true. I had finally shown the world and myself that I could accomplish something. I never stopped trying. Today, I am a partner in a medical technologies company and I have authored a published medical research paper.

I look back at myself as a little girl trying to survive family conflict and homelessness, as a teen closing McDonald's late at night, as a new recruit entering basic training, as a young surgical tech stepping into the OR, and as an adult student studying for an exam. I truly don't believe I would have made it to the place I am at today without hope.

When it comes to being homeless, it's easy to give up and fall into sorrow. Don't give up. If you're homeless right now, find organizations like Cornerstone Community Outreach. They will help with food, clothes, shelter, training, and housing referrals; these steps will get you where you need to go. It is not easy and I'm not trying to minimize the situation, but there is help, there is hope!"

-Shirley Richards, as told to Beth Nicholls

## Surgery, Recovery, and the Long Road Home

"When I arrived at Cornerstone Community Outreach (CCO) I was recovering from hip replacement surgery on both hips and I was legally blind in my left eye due to a cataract. Health problems, extensive surgeries, and long recovery times caused me to lose my job and become homeless.

I had my left cataract removed while I was at CCO and I recovered there, too. The doctor told me that if I had waited any longer I may not have gotten my vision back. My vision was so good after the surgery I felt like I could see through walls! I was finally on the road to health and healing.

My CCO case managers, Andre and Jeremy, were there every time I needed their help with important appointments, transportation, laundry cards, medical referrals, and housing lists. I put my name on every piece of paper and data-base I could get ahold of. I knew finding housing was going to be a long road, and it was, but God really saw me through. I believe He never leaves us or forsakes us.

That long road of homelessness ended the day I moved into Friendly Towers, an independent affordable living program for senior citizens. It is a safe, quiet building near Lake Michigan. It's my home, I couldn't think of a better place to live.

After being in my apartment for two years, I was asked to be a member of the Cornerstone Community Outreach Board of Directors. I felt truly honored. I appreciate the opportunity to give back to CCO through serving as a board member. I believe my homeless experience gives me a deeper understanding of what CCO residents are going through.

People call me a success story but I'm a work in progress. Even in the times I didn't ask for help, God was there helping me through."

-Dawson Key, as told to Beth Nicholls



## RUN FOR SHELTER

Is 26.2 miles calling you? Don't delay! The 2017 Bank of America Chicago Marathon registration is open October 25 - November 29, 2016. If you are interested in going the extra mile to help alleviate homelessness contact Andrew at [awinter@ccolife.org](mailto:awinter@ccolife.org) or visit [teamcco.org](http://teamcco.org) today!

**Swim, Cycle, and Run for Shelter!** "I never realized how many hills are on Lake Shore Drive but riding up them, after swimming a half mile, I sure noticed! At first I was cursing the hills with my legs on fire, but then I realized homeless people sleep under these bridges. This is why I am doing this because people sleep under overpasses when what they really need is shelter and a home. So those hills became an opportunity to pray for people experiencing homelessness: for each man, woman and child that has to sleep under a bridge, in a shelter family room, or in a bunk bed in an open dorm. The cycling piece of this triathlon was a little slow but it was filled with joy, peace, and the presence of God. I am happy I took the time to be present to the pain. It was a good reminder of why I chose to do this race."

- Eve Haycock, Team CCO triathlete, shared about her motivation to get through the grueling biking section of the Chicago Triathlon.

Do you want to turn your fitness goals into an opportunity to feed, clothe, and provide safe shelter for homeless Chicagoans? Visit [ccolife.org](http://ccolife.org) to learn more about the charitable fitness options available to you through Team CCO. Run for Shelter!



## Leland House, Forever a Part of our Life Story

"As a student at Moody Bible Institute, I thought my mandatory volunteer work at the Leland House tutoring children would be a difficult burden. I was quickly proven wrong, firstly, because I immediately fell in love with the children, and secondly, because I met my wife there.

Tutoring the children became an immense joy for me. I had never worked with children in this manner before so I was a little lost at first. Fortunately, one year I was assigned a partner: my wife-to-be. The first week she came in I was mesmerized by the way she handled the kids with love and strictness all at once. I watched her as she made funny faces and played along with the children's ridiculous games while maintaining order in a learning atmosphere. Needless to say, I fell in love



with her as we worked side by side at the Leland house and together we fell in love with the kids.

Unfortunately, after our service time at Leland House was complete my wife was hit by a car right outside of our school. Her pelvis was shattered and she was in the hospital for some time. During this time she received countless cards and flowers from friends and family but none compared to one large envelope. The big yellow envelope held dozens of crayon-scrawled, hand-written letters and pictures from all our children at the Leland House. It was in that moment that we

knew we had created life-long friends and lasting memories with the children and families through our blessed time at the Leland House. My wife and I are now happily married with an 8-month-old baby

girl living in Texas and the Leland House children and experience is forever a part of our life story. - Levi McDonald

Leland House has been a subsidized housing program for families in need for over 20 years. This year ownership of Leland House was transferred to an organization that is committed to continuing affordable housing for the families housed there. CCO made this decision so that employees and resources could be focused on our homeless shelter programs, which provide safe shelter, nutritious meals, and supportive services to nearly 350 individuals and families each day. We want to say a special thanks to Pegge, Carol, and all the other staff, who faithfully served at Leland House. We also want to thank Barnabas Project and many other valuable organizations who worked alongside our families to make Leland House an outstanding place to live. 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!



Cornerstone Community Outreach  
4615 N. Clifton Ave. Chicago, IL 60640  
773.271.8163