



CORNERSTONE COMMUNITY OUTREACH

FALL 2015 NEWSLETTER



Sudden Increase in Homeless Families

Chicago's homeless clearinghouse, that directs families to available shelter beds, is filled to overflowing. Due to the sudden influx of homeless parents and children, CCO has been asked to take in more people. On a normal night we shelter over 200 people in our family shelters. These families consist of mothers with children, fathers with children, three-generation families, and couples with children.

As a result of this sudden increase in need, we have welcomed more homeless families into our family shelter programs. Our budget has not increased to meet this need and we are asking you, our donors, to consider giving a financial gift that will allow us to continue to provide safe shelter, nutritious meals, and intensive case management services to a larger number of families. Join in the good things that are happening at CCO!

Denise's Story

Denise seems to have an endless abundance of joy. She is a very petite woman in her late 50's with bright eyes and a wide, welcoming smile that goes well with her upbeat personality. Denise's past was filled with a solid and consistent work history. For 30 years she was employed with Illinois Bell. She began in 1979 working part-time in the mailroom and was promoted 12 times, working her way up to full-time Engineering Clerk. After taking early retirement from Illinois Bell and giving the funds to her son to pay for his college education, Denise found work as a secretary with a moving company. Eight years later that business relocated to Florida. Denise found herself unemployed and alone. Too young for social security benefits but old enough to experience age discrimination when looking for work, she didn't know where to turn for help. Finding a job proved difficult and she eventually lost her apartment. Denise had a storage space that measured about 10 feet by 10 feet located in an outdoor lot on the south side of

Chicago. The space held all the items from the apartment she had lost and with nowhere else to turn, she moved into it. Without any heat at all and only a few flashlights for light, Denise said she prayed, read her Bible, and cried a river in that storage unit. Keeping clean was a real

“ In my storage unit, I was too cold to rest. I wanted a place to lay my head down and just sleep. I'd wrap up in ten blankets, just trying to get warm. ”

challenge and when she tried to wash up in local public bathrooms she endured looks and comments from people who seemed to fear or despise her. Her former life was utterly lost. For three years and throughout notoriously harsh Chicago winters, Denise stayed in her storage unit. To escape the cold, she would

often ride the Chicago Public Transit system. "I was so tired of riding the buses. So tired... but when I rode the buses no one ever robbed me. An angel must have been sitting beside me." Throughout these years Denise kept her difficult circumstances hidden from her son who lived out of state.

This sweet, hard-working woman had been forced so far out on the margins that she couldn't find her way back. This past January, in the deadly cold, Denise arrived at Cornerstone. Three years of surviving alone would lead us to believe that Denise would find living with the 74 other women sheltered at Naomi House nearly impossible. Not so! Denise soon began to encourage homeless women younger than her, giving words of wisdom, and helping to defuse tense situations.

During her time at the shelter, Denise felt that God told her, "I'm giving you the rope but it's up to you to grab ahold and pull yourself up." And she did just that. During her stay at CCO Denise got security guard training, earned her PERC (Permanent Employment Registration Card) card, and got full-time work as a security guard.

CONTINUED ON REVERSE



“ Even a child with normal feet was in love with the world after he had got a new pair of shoes. ”

- Flannery O'Connor

CCO Back-to-School Bash

This year's CCO Back-to-School Bash was once again filled with music, treats, prizes, academic motivation, school supplies, and backpacks. We want to say a huge thank you to Senator Heather Steans, who for the third year in a row, donated money for a new pair of shoes for each of our school-age children. House of Representatives Greg Harris also joined in the effort to provide back-to-school shoes. Northeastern Illinois University Alumni Association donated hundreds of brand new backpacks which allowed the children to choose a color and style they wanted for the new school year. Associate Dean of NEIU, Alberto Lopez, and Pastor Neil Taylor, provided motivational speeches

to encourage the children to enter the classroom with hope and determination. Target - Wilson Yard generously donated cases of water and juice for the event. Families enjoyed eating pizza and cake after choosing a new beanie baby or toy. Each year this special event helps create an air of excitement and joy about the upcoming school year. We always look forward to a fun afternoon with the families sheltered at CCO. Beyond that, donors provide many of the essential back-to-school items that prepare our children in a very practical sense. To all our outstanding donors and volunteers we want to say a huge "thank you" for helping the school year start off right.



A MARATHON

TEAM CCO

Go the extra mile to help alleviate homelessness in Chicago! Visit our fundraising page on Crowdrise entitled Team CCO 2015 Chicago Marathon. Once there, you will be able to see the dedicated men and women who are running 26.2 painful, triumphant, agonizing, exhilarating miles at this year's Bank of America Chicago Marathon. Each of these runners are tirelessly raising funds and awareness for CCO's shelter guests. Consider showing your support by donating today!



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Denise's Story *(continued from front)*

Of Naomi House staff Denise says, "They really supported me. The case managers got to know me and took time with me. I felt that they respected me."

For the last 8 months Denise has been working full-time as a security officer for a domestic violence shelter that serves women with children. She enjoys her work immensely. The day Denise moved into her apartment she shouted, "Lord, You have been too good to me!" and then sat down and cried tears of gratitude. We rejoice with Denise!

Denise's story reflects a trend of age-related employment discrimination. Regardless of her impeccable work history and experience Denise struggled to find a job. The turning point in Denise's story is when she arrived at CCO and began to climb out of the day-to-day survival situation she had sunk into. We have been blessed by her stay and applaud the employer that saw what we see in Denise - a lovely, enthusiastic, hard-working woman who simply needed a job.

— Denise Hardy, as told to Beth Nicholls

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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