

GOOD SAMARITAN

St. Vincent de Paul | Louisville, KY

www.svdplou.org

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New Lease on Life

Sherri Finds Peace in Supportive Housing Program on SVDP Campus

Struggling to raise two sons as a single mom took its toll on Sherri, 47.

Like any mother, she loved and cared for her boys, doing the typical things like helping them with homework and working to put food on the table. The boys also faced learning disabilities and mental health problems that required her constant vigilance and advocacy. "They were my life," she says.

When her sons eventually grew up and moved out of the mobile home the three of them shared, Sherri felt lost. "I became very depressed," Sherri recalls. The overwhelming sadness did not lift. She locked herself inside and gave up on life. Her home fell into disrepair. She stopped working and ended up penniless.

After she survived her deliberate attempt to overdose on prescription painkillers, Sherri began to realize the extent of her own mental illness. During a 41-day stay at Central State Hospital, she was diagnosed with manic depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder. "That's also where I found out I was an alcoholic," she adds.

Sherri was referred to St. Jude Women's Recovery Center in April of 2010. "I showed up on their doorstep homeless with all my belongings in a box," she explains.

Last December she graduated from the program. But she isn't leaving St. Vincent de Paul yet. With her sustained sobriety, a steady office job, and a case management plan in place to help her remain on the path to independence, Sherri was accepted as one of the first tenants in SVDP's new apartments for people transitioning from homelessness.

"I love it here!" Sherri says, with a smile on her face and enthusiasm in her voice. "Being here in my own apartment is almost like a dream. Sometimes I just walk around, going from room to room, and I look at this and I can't believe it. I have a beautiful, clean, safe place to live. I am so blessed."

Sherri is active in Alcoholics Anonymous, and she sees doctors and takes medication to manage her depression. Her outlook is positive. "If all I have to do for the rest of my life is take a pill so that I'm not sitting in a fetal position all day, I'll gladly do it," she says.

Through the 12-Step program and the "TLC and tools" she has received at St. Vincent de Paul, Sherri also has learned to put her trust in God.

A Bible rests on the kitchen table inside her tidy, 1-bedroom apartment that looks out toward our Open Hand Kitchen. A tapestry of *The Last Supper* and a painting of the Madonna and Child hang on her walls, along with family pictures and other mementoes.

"I've always been spiritual," she says. "For me, it was never a question of faith. I was just tired. I always wanted to take care of everything—and I did—but it got to a point where I felt like everything was beyond my control."

Though she still has a fierce love for her children, she understands she must take care of herself first. "I am picking up the pieces of my life," she says.

In addition to working, Sherri is taking college classes with hopes of obtaining a nursing degree someday. But for right now, she is taking it one day at a time.

"I want to be a healer and to be the best child of God I can be," Sherri says. "I know that sounds like a cliché, but I mean it with all my heart."

On the Ground

By Ed Wnorowski



Good Times.

I am not certain that I know what that term means. Virtually my entire career at St. Vincent de Paul has been during one of the most difficult financial crises since the Great Depression. Conventional wisdom would certainly support the statement that my tenure here has been in Difficult Times.

Oddly, for me the contrary seems to be more the case. I should warn you that several of my co-workers believe that I, being an eternal optimist, suffer from Chronic “Cup-Half-Full” Syndrome. That stated, I feel that I have enjoyed some very good times during these past few years.

We are dealing with more “need” from families and individuals seeking help than ever before. Since 2008, in the face of soaring unemployment, unprecedented foreclosure and eviction rates, and rising homelessness—particularly among families—we have had some incredible successes.

These successes must be measured in terms of individual accomplishments, or perhaps a better term might be individual victories. For example, as our cover story this month about our client Sherri so beautifully documents, St. Vincent de Paul is helping people overcome significant challenges and barriers to independence.

Sherri began her journey from homelessness to independence at St. Jude Women’s Recovery Center, which has been part of St. Vincent de Paul for more than 20 years. And now, having successfully completed that program, Sherri’s journey has taken a positive next step: She has transitioned into her own 1-bedroom apartment as a resident of our new supportive housing program here on our downtown campus.

This new housing could not have been constructed in these difficult times without the financial support of corporations and the community, who recognized the need for such a program and dug deep to make it happen. This is truly a victory in these tough economic times.

As I have explained in previous columns, this project includes 54 housing units (apartments) that are now providing clean, safe, and supportive housing to families and individuals transitioning out of homelessness.

While compared to the scope of the homeless problem in our community, 54 units might seem insignificant. Yet when you realize that it represents 54 families representing as many as 140 men, women and children, it takes on a whole new level of consequence.

Without these 54 homes, the alternatives for these vulnerable individuals would have been the uncertainty and challenges of emergency homeless shelters or, perhaps, the streets.

Speaking for myself and on behalf of our case managers who work to help improve these folks’ lives, the apartments represent 54 significant victories.

We owe these victories, and many others like them, to this collaboration we call the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Through the generosity of our donors—individuals, corporations, foundations, and parishes—in difficult and good times alike, we can make a difference in the lives of those needing our help.

Good Times, indeed.

Wnorowski is executive director of St. Vincent de Paul | Louisville.

Kids Enjoy Basketball Game, Courtesy of Donor

Ten children who live in St. Vincent de Paul's Apartments for families enjoyed a Saturday afternoon field trip to the KFC Yum Center last month. The occasion was a long-awaited outing to watch the University of Louisville Cardinals' men's basketball team battle the University of Notre Dame's Fighting Irish.

The game went into double overtime before the Cards' close loss, but for the youths who were lucky enough to attend, it was a thrill to experience a game from the comfort of a corporate suite. All the pizza, popcorn, cookies, and soft drinks were also a big hit with the kids.

Local businessman Phil Gahm (below, left), who founded The Champ Foundation, donated the tickets as a silent auction item in St. Vincent de Paul's Charity Golf Scramble and Auction Event last September. It is the second consecutive year that Gahm has made the suite available to underprivileged youth in our programs. We are most grateful for his generosity.



Feinstein Hunger Challenge Begins Next Month

It's that time of year again, when donations to St. Vincent de Paul can go farther in our efforts to fight hunger among people in need.

For the 15th consecutive year, Alan Shawn Feinstein will divide \$1 million among hunger-fighting agencies such as ours nationwide, in an effort to boost fundraising efforts for the organizations in March and April.

Your donations of cash, checks, and food items (valued at \$1 per item or pound) or pledges made exclusively through this challenge will count toward the Feinstein challenge. These donations or pledges must be received by St. Vincent de Paul between March 1 and April 30, 2012.



The Cranston, Rhode Island-based Feinstein Foundation's past spring fundraisers have raised more than \$1.25 billion for some 2,000 agencies nationwide.

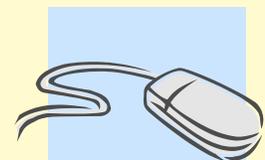
To help us receive matching funds through this effort, please contact Kathi Johnson at (502) 301-8695; kjohnson@svdplou.org.

TOO MUCH STUFF?

Donate Your Gently Used Furniture, Clothing and Household Items to St. Vincent de Paul's Thrift Stores.

CALL Us for Free Pickup: (502) 589-7837

CLICK for more info: www.svdplou.org



Plan Ahead:

February 22-26

Invitation for Renewal
Seton Cove
Indianapolis, Indiana

For more information, contact SVDP USA at (314) 576-3993

April 18-21

SVDP Mid-Year Meeting
Hilton at the Ball Park
St. Louis, Missouri

For more information, contact Donna Young at (502) 301-8688

SVDP Case Manager Named to Coalition for the Homeless Board

Beth White, 32, a case manager at St. Vincent de Paul since last March, has been named to a one-year appointment on the board of directors for the Louisville Coalition for the Homeless.

She has a unique perspective for the task, having experienced a period of homelessness herself.

"I know what it's like to be out there on the street with nothing, and I know what it takes to overcome this and become a contributing member to these issues," she says. "As someone with experience on the streets, I can help to make the resources that work, work better and assist in revamping the ones that do not work at all."

St. Vincent de Paul is a member of the Coalition, which works with other homeless service providers, government agencies, community and faith-based groups, and concerned citizens to advocate for people who are homeless and for the prevention and elimination of homelessness.

Beth also plans to share feedback with the board on behalf of her current clients. "As a case manager, I can offer the sides and opinions of my current clients and what I feel is helping them and what changes can be made to help them further," Beth adds.

"I am excited about this because I feel that I can bring a fresh, open, and compassionate point of view to assist in making important decisions for the homeless community."

Her role as a graduate student at the University of Louisville's Kent School of Social Work is another opportunity for Beth to offer perspective. "I can take what I am learning from other students and my professors and use the theories and policies to make well-rounded decisions that will make the best impact on the decisions of the board," she says.



Visited our Website? www.svdplou.org

A screenshot of the St. Vincent de Paul Louisville website. The header shows the organization's name and a search bar. Below the header is a navigation menu with links: Home, Who We Are, What We Do, Give a Gift, Get Involved, and Contact Us. The main content area features a large image of a white picket fence and the text: "It's About Community. We've been helping people in Louisville, Central Kentucky and Southern Indiana since 1853. In the past 12 months, volunteers joyfully gave more than 61,000 volunteer hours to help the poor. Now, in these difficult economic times, we need your support more than ever."

Humana Foundation Awards Grant to St. Vincent de Paul

St. Vincent de Paul has received a \$20,000 grant from the Louisville-based Humana Foundation to provide support for homeless families in our 54 new supportive housing apartments.

The Foundation, established in 1981 as the philanthropic arm of Humana, Inc., one of the nation's leading health benefits companies, awarded grants last December to eight local nonprofits that operate emergency shelters or that address substance abuse and recovery, domestic violence and sexual assault, senior care services or mental illness.

"These are tough times for people in our communities," Virginia Kelly Judd, the foundation's executive director, said. "With the need for social services increasing every day, Humana strives to be part of this effort to connect those in need with helpful services from outstanding organizations."

Welcome to St. Vincent de Paul

Need Help?

If you or someone you know is homeless and needs help with housing, call (502) 301-8697.



Main Menu

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If you need other help, such as food, clothing, or assistance