



GMC NEWS

The Newsletter of the Georgetown Ministry Center



An Avoidable Tragedy

From her perch at the end of Wisconsin Avenue, Janice looks out over the river toward Virginia. Her things are neatly stacked against a massive iron beam that supports the freeway above.

"I'm alright," Janice responds, avoiding eye contact when asked if there is anything we can do for her. She tries not to respond at all, but if we don't leave she often responds with a nonsensical answer: "I'm waiting for the movie stars."

Janice has a brain disorder. She cannot make sense of the world around her. She has formed an emotional attachment to that spot on Wisconsin Avenue and will not leave unless forced to. And, if forced to move, she will just find another spot that, for whatever reason, gives her comfort. She is stuck there, confined in a prison of delusions and paranoid ideas.

Representatives from the Department of Behavioral Health have visited her several times, but they say there is nothing they can do until she puts her own or somebody else's life in immediate danger. Even then, chances of getting someone help and treatment is a lofty goal.

The other week I learned that Jeff, a homeless man who came to GMC for services, had died. His death was caused by his mental disorder, which interfered with his comprehension of his out-of-control hypertension.

I have to admit, when I heard about Jeff passing, my first emotional response was relief. Jeff had attacked me twice for no apparent reason other than delusional rage. The first time he charged at me, one of the tiniest men in our Center stepped between us and calmed him down. The second time, Jeff attacked me on the street. After many calmer interactions with Jeff, I walked up to him and said hi. He went berserk. As I backed away he followed, dancing madly while shaking his fists at me. In a blur his right hand found my left eye, knocking me to the ground and breaking my glasses. I was stunned, but found my feet and discovered that I could run really fast with the right incentive. Several people called the police, and within minutes the intersection was filled with police officers.

"Do you want to press charges?" the officers asked.

I explained that Jeff had a mental illness and that I wanted him to get psychiatric help. In DC, an involuntary psychiatric evaluation is known as an FD12. The police politely tried to discourage me. They had little faith in the mental health system. I, on the other hand, had little faith in the legal system; my

assumption was that if he were arrested, he would be released by morning with a court date that he would never remember or care about. I assumed that the mental health system would take Jeff in, care for him, and maybe, if the stars aligned, return him to some version of reality that would allow him to find housing and stability.

An FD12 petition was prepared and signed. Jeff was transported to the Comprehensive Psychiatric Emergency Program, where he was assessed and released because he had PCP in his system. The rationale was that Jeff was probably assaultive because of PCP and not necessarily because of the severe mental illness.

A year later, I was assaulted again by a second person with a disabling brain disorder. This time, I pressed charges instead of asking for an FD12. The court system ensured several months of observation at St. Elizabeth's Hospital. Patients at St. Elizabeth's are allowed to refuse treatment. Treatment can only be forced by court order. I don't know if this man accepted treatment or not, but there was at least a chance for his delusions to be addressed.

As I was thinking about how difficult it is to get someone the help he or she needs, the Washington Post published an article about Senator Creigh Deeds a year after his mentally ill son attacked him and left him, bleeding from multiple stab wounds, to crawl across a field to a road where he was found and rushed to a hospital. Senator Deeds survived with physical and emotional scars that will never heal. His son died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound. Just 24 hours before the attack, Senator Deeds was with his son at a mental health clinic seeking hospitalization. There were no beds, but there was a bad law that forced them to leave after six hours without intervention.

So what can you do about this problem? Start by learning more about the issue. One great source for information is the web site of the Treatment Advocacy Center. They advocate for sensible laws that allow trained mental health practitioners to intervene before a tragedy occurs and advocate for more psychiatric hospital beds. Don't stop there though. Contact your council member and tell him or her that you care and support sensible laws that allow the community to offer treatment to people when they really need it.

--Gunther Stern



Winter Shelter

This is the twenty-fourth year that Georgetown has offered shelter to ten vulnerable people who are homeless. The winter shelter opens as the winter cold begins to engulf Georgetown during the first week of November.

We have always made a point to include the most vulnerable among the homeless, choosing people with mental illness over people who are fighting addiction, believing that addictive behavior precludes timely arrivals and consistent attendance, two characteristics we felt important for the success of our program. We also try to choose people who seem willing to work on next steps, whatever they might be, to a better place in life.

Residents, staff, and volunteers have all found the shelter experience enriching. Every night, volunteers cook a hot dinner and sit down to eat with our residents and staff. Our residents are opinionated, funny, and full of rich histories and stories.

Let us know if you have a small group that might like to participate and cook dinner one night. It is a great experience!

Events updates

Spirit of Georgetown

Anyone who attended this year's Spirit of Georgetown can't deny how beautiful the night was. With a soaring tent above our heads, friends of GMC gathered to honor Jocelyn Dyer for her years of support, volunteerism, and leadership on our Board.

Patricia Davies, GMC's President, thanked co-chairs Sarah Kuhn, Andrew Law, Avery Miller, and Deborah Winsor with bouquets of flowers and presented our honoree, Jocelyn Dyer, with the Freddie award. Pat thanked everyone for coming, noting that Georgetowners like Outerbridge Horsey, who was our first board president, have always supported GMC. She also warmly thanked everyone for their support, especially in light of the loss of Fannie Mae's Help the Homeless campaign, which was a

centerpiece of many homeless services organizations' fundraising plans. (For more details about how the loss of Fannie Mae has affected GMC, read *Fannie Mae*, back page.) Following Pat's speech, one of our new board members, Kathryn



Jocelyn Dyer and Debbie Winsor

Cohen, talked about the good work that GMC does, but how policy changes are needed in addition to the direct services that GMC provides. Such policy changes, ranging from Assisted Outpatient Treatment to revised HIPAA laws, would help prevent tragedies, like the ones Gunther described in *An Avoidable Tragedy* (page 1) from occurring. We cannot thank our co-chairs and Jocelyn enough for their hard work planning the event and bringing together their friends to support us. Thanks also to our corporate sponsors: RBC Wealth Management-Warner Investment Group and Washington Fine Properties.

Georgetown 5k Race Against Homelessness

The wind on October 19 was nippy, but luckily the 300+ people who showed up on Georgetown University's campus that day were running the first annual Georgetown 5k Race Against Homelessness to stay warm. With over 250 runners and over 50 walkers, the event was at maximum capacity. Our runners ranged from middle school students to several runners over 70, serious runners and easy joggers. Our top male runner, Yaron Yeger, finished with an amazing time of 16:09. And, Georgetown's own Avery Miller (who co-chaired our Spirit of Georgetown event just three days before the race) finished with a time of 18:09! Congratulations; we are impressed!



Near the finish!

We cannot thank Georgetown University enough for their dedication in putting on this race. This year, we had a superstar team of students who did everything from plan the race route and organize food, entertainment, and volunteers. Even better, they found a way to subsidize the cost of the race t-shirts so that 100% of race registration fees would directly benefit Georgetown Ministry Center. Thank you so much to our neighborhood sponsors: the Georgetown BID, Pinstripes, EastBanc, Jonathan G. Willen and Associates, and Fitness Together. We are grateful as well for our in-kind sponsors: Georgetown Running Company, Lululemon, Thirty-One Gifts, the Four Seasons Fitness Club, The Body You Want Fitness Solutions, and Patagonia.

And of course, to everyone who came out and supported us, THANK YOU! We hope to see you at next year's race, which we already know will be even bigger and better.

Taste of Georgetown

September and October are always a whirlwind of activity and events for Georgetown and GMC, and this year was no exception. In September, the Georgetown BID put on the Taste of Georgetown and moved the event from its previous location on Wisconsin Avenue to underneath the Whitehurst Freeway on K Street. This move turned out to be a great one; even though it rained all day, everyone stayed covered and dry underneath the freeway. We had a table where we sold some of the beautiful stuffed animals, scarves, and blankets made by our weekly knit and crochet group and were so happy to see some of our volunteers and donors stop by to say hi! Despite the rain, it was a tremendously fun event that let everyone get a taste of what Georgetown has to offer.

Thoughts from Our Volunteers

We recently asked two of our volunteers to tell us about their experience volunteering in our day center. Here's what they had to say.

I have been a volunteer at GMC for four months. I have always heard how important it is to listen, but since coming to GMC I have come to realize how important it is to listen with empathy and care. By listening without reacting and often with little response, I learn so much from the members at the center.

I have come to see that I am very much the same as they are. As human beings, I know that we all long for happiness, peace, love, and purpose. Listening is something that helps to validate purpose, something that is closely tied to self-esteem. The self-esteem of homeless individuals seems fragile at best. By listening, I can powerfully communicate my unconditional love to all of these sisters and brothers of mine. In so doing, I often see smiles, and I truly believe that many I listen to feel more self-worth, self-value, meaning and connection. How simple, yet so profound it is.

Every day that I walk through the door of GMC, I know that I am one of the luckiest people in the world.

—Bruce Johnston

I suppose it was serendipity, a brief mention in a bulletin, that first nudged me to volunteer at GMC. With little experience in helping the homeless, I had much to learn. Now, two years later, my perspective has changed quite a bit and in a good way!

Take this one example. There is the notion that "one size fits all." I discovered that the guests are men and women of all ages, backgrounds and education, each with his or her own unique story.

Another surprise I discovered was that they frequently have family members or friends with whom they keep in touch, often through social media. I learned, too, that a number are veterans.

You can't miss the sense of community at GMC. From the ever popular computer time to lively games of chess or Scrabble, or activities like knitting, yoga, and outings to see the Nationals ... the guests are active participants and more than willing to help out or offer suggestions. It's a safe environment where they can relax and be themselves.

I'm happy to spend a few hours a week getting to know the guests and helping out where I can. In the end it's really about kinship with our fellow human beings, who in this case just happen to be homeless!

—Jane Gasda



Calling all current, past, and retired World Bank and IMF employees!

Please consider supporting GMC through the World Bank's Community Connections Campaign and the IMF's Helping Hands Campaign.



Board of Directors

Christ Church, Georgetown - Elizabeth Bluhm
Dumbarton United Methodist Church - Martha Dickey
Epiphany Roman Catholic Church - John Lehr
First Baptist Church, Georgetown - Vinette Saunders
Georgetown Lutheran Church - Connie Baker
Georgetown Presbyterian Church - Pat Davies
Georgetown University - Ray Shiu
Grace Episcopal Church - Drew Davis
Holy Trinity Catholic Church - Ron Castaldi
Kesher Israel, Georgetown Synagogue - Jessica Ribner
Mt. Zion United Methodist Church - Deborah Owens
St. John's Episcopal Church - Jocelyn Dyer
St. Luke's United Methodist Church - Dorothy Preston
St. Paul's K Street - Jeremiah Cassidy
St. Stephen the Martyr - Laura Wilson

And from the community...

Citizens Association of Georgetown - Page Robinson
Georgetown Business Association - Elizabeth Webster
Georgetown BID - John Wiebenson
Georgetown Clergy Association - John Graham
Other Community Representatives -
Kathryn Cohen, Page Evans, James P. Jordan,
Susan Weber

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Vice President - Alexander Bullock
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Volunteer Coordinator - Emma Whitaker

Consulting Physicians

Psychiatry
Ron Koshes, M.D.
Michael Morse, M.D.; Psychiatric Resident (*with GWU*)

Family Practice

Catherine Crosland, M.D. (*with Unity Health Care*)

Fannie Mae

For the past twenty or so years, homeless services providers across DC geared up for Fannie Mae's Help the Homeless campaign every Fall. Many people fondly remember the walk on the National Mall that demonstrated the level of support DMV residents have for organizations like ours. This year, Fannie Mae announced that it was discontinuing Help the Homeless, which had grown to be a centerpiece of many organizations' funding. The loss of Help the Homeless means that we, like many other organizations, are restrategizing our fundraising efforts and that now, more than ever, we need your support. Some of the sponsors who gave through Help the Homeless are still with us, and the Georgetown 5k Race Against Homelessness will help fill a small portion of the hole that Fannie Mae left. Despite all this, we are still experiencing a loss of \$78,000 this year.

All of us at Georgetown Ministry Center are proud of the work we do. We are proud to say that we are one of the few programs in the city that is open 8 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. We pride ourselves on the trusting relationships we've built with the community of homeless individuals who turn to GMC in times of need. We do not want to cut back any programs. We cannot cut back any programs. To do so would hurt those who are already so vulnerable and in need of our support. We know you care, or else you wouldn't be reading our newsletter. Continue reading to learn more about different ways you can help.

Georgetown Ministry Center
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Washington, DC 20007
www.georgetownministrycenter.org

How to Help

Donate today -- There are so many ways to do give! Online or by check, annually or monthly, cash gifts let us put the money where it's needed the most. Make checks out to Georgetown Ministry Center or give online by going to gmcgt.org/help/donate, where you can choose to make a single or recurring gift.

Workplace giving -- GMC is part of the United Way (#9635) and CFC (#31661), as well as the World Bank Community Connections campaign and the IMF's Helping Hands campaign. If you are a current, retired, or past employee of the World Bank or IMF, please consider giving through their campaigns; they match 50% of gifts, and in the past have even matched 100% of employee gifts!

Charitable bequests -- Consider including a gift to Georgetown Ministry Center in your will. This is a simple and flexible way to give and to honor our important work. Please contact us if you would like to learn more.

Become a GMC advocate -- Tell others about the work we do. Share our newsletter with a friend. Ask for donations to GMC in lieu of birthday, wedding, or other celebratory gifts. There are so many ways to help. We are full of ideas and would love to hear yours.

