

GMC NEWS



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GEORGETOWN MINISTRY CENTER

THE CENTER: THEN AND NOW

When we first reopened the Center in July, our guests/members were still referring to themselves as clients and, still used to our old hours, were leaving at 2 p.m. Now, our members really feel invested in the Center and stay until we close at 5 p.m.



Volunteers and members play The Game of Life

While the core group of our guests knew each other, a closer community feeling exists now compared to the summer. I am blown away at how helpful our members are, whether it's showing each other how to fix the coffee maker, letting others borrow their headphones, helping staff load the dishwasher, or volunteering to set up tents and move tons of bottled water at Taste of Georgetown.

Our members appreciate the programming that we've introduced, and participation has increased significantly. Every morning we kick off the day by broadcasting the news via the Internet for half an hour. We've introduced a knitting group that has attracted men, women, new knitters, and experienced ones. Chess tournaments, talent shows, movie screenings, educational workshops: these are just a few more of the activities we have here.

Little by little I see our guests opening up as they learn that Georgetown Ministry Center is a safe, welcoming, and supportive environment. Our talent show in October was met with initial hesitation, and only a few brave souls performed. Staff also participated, and I believe that our members appreciated the fact that staff were willing to open up and share. Several people volunteered for our next talent show, and it is this kind of enthusiasm and support for each other that creates positive and meaningful relationships.

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ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE

Every morning when I walk into the Center I am amazed by the changes. We have come a long way from the little cubby that I first walked into 21 years ago.

The cubby was a waiting room, clothing room, and counseling room, all in one. There was no food. Guests could not use the bathroom or get a drink of water, let alone take a shower. We had so little. Don't get me wrong: we did a lot with what we had. On Tuesdays and Thursdays our volunteers would help the homeless men pick out clothes from the meager holdings. Sadly, clothing is something we no longer have room for. Monday through Friday, volunteers would meet at our Center each evening and walk through the neighborhood with sandwiches made for the homeless people we serve. On any day case management was available for any who desired. It was simple and limited.

Back in 2003 we opened a much larger Center in the basement of Grace Church. It was spectacular. We had water fountains, showers, and a washer and dryer. There was space for people to sit. There were even places where guests could speak privately with a staff member. It was a huge step forward. Within months, however, the space was overwhelmed by the demand for showers and laundry.

Finally, with the experience of the past eight years, we re-imagined the space one more time and we nailed it. The heart of the concept was a psychosocial Model Clubhouse. It is a much larger space for guests to relax in and feel safe for part of the day. We expanded hours. We opened seven days a week. We added computers and a kitchenette where people could make coffee or heat up soup.

When I walk in I am struck by the magic we have made with this new space. Each day 50 people clamor for space in our little Center. Some stay for a few minutes, some for an hour, and others for the day. There is a camaraderie I could not have imagined two years ago. These people, who spend their lives seeking seclusion, watch out for each other. The big, quiet man in the corner becomes alert and rises to help staff when another member becomes agitated and threatens violence. The little, older man who never talks puts a gentle hand on the volatile man, calmly guiding him to the door.

I love seeing C.P. push his cart over from the West End to heat up some food he scrounged from who-knows-where and sit for a while before guiding his cart back over to the West End.

With this new model we develop trusting relationships with members based on mutual respect. This empowers members to seek needed services, which can lead to transitional or permanent housing.

I am so proud of what we have become, and I would like to invite you to drop by and have a look. Spend a few minutes, an hour, or the day with us. You won't regret it.

—Gunther Stern

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In addition to an increase in programming, we've also seen an increase in the number of people we serve each day. Longtime guests are meeting new ones, and I suspect the rise in our numbers is due to the arrival of winter and to our guests spreading the word on the street about everything we have to offer here. The increase in people means that we are constantly running out of socks and



Members relax in a safe, comfortable environment

washcloths, and that our towels get worn and ratty very quickly, but we are always happy to assist our guests in any way we can.

—Stephanie Chan

CENTER NEEDS

Wet feet are not fun. Wet feet are also dangerous. Several health problems can arise from sitting around in wet clothing. The body is unable to retain heat as well, which can lead to trench foot, frostbite, and hypothermia. Trench foot occurs when feet are cold and damp and can occur in temperatures up to 60 degrees. The effects are not pleasant and include infection, swollen feet, and necrosis. Frostbite and hypothermia can result in damage to skin tissue, nerve damage, and death.

You can help prevent this! Donate used or new socks to Georgetown Ministry Center. Now that hypothermia season has begun, we could also use gloves, hats, scarves, and sweatpants. Hold a "Winter Comfort" drive at your school, workplace, or church. Every little bit helps.

We also need washcloths. They disappear from our Center faster than we can replace them; our guests use them to keep themselves clean outside of our Center. Old or new, we will put them to good use. Our guests use nice washcloths in the shower and ratty ones to help us wipe down counters at the end of the day.

We appreciate those who want to donate clothes, but we unfortunately cannot accept clothing donations. When we do get the occasional clothing donation, we make it accessible right away, but we simply do not have the space to store clothing that is not taken right away. A list of places that do accept clothing donations is on our website.

—Stephanie Chan

SPIRIT OF GEORGETOWN

Amidst scattered showers, many Georgetowners and friends of Georgetown Ministry Center came together as GMC hosted their Spirit of Georgetown event on October 13th. The benefit, which honored Page and Howard Smith, was held at the stunning home of Nancy Jacobson and Mark Penn and was co-chaired by Page Evans, Eileen McGrath, and Shannon Warner.

GMC Board President Joe Ryan presented Page and Howard with the very first Freddie Award for outstanding service to the less fortunate. GMC chose Page and Howard to honor for their years of service to the community and their generous support of GMC. The Freddie is named in memory of the homeless man whose death inspired Georgetowners to organize Georgetown Ministry Center.

The event raised close to \$60,000, a great success compared to previous years. The money will be used to support GMC's work.

Georgetown Ministry Center serves as a safe and welcoming community for those who are shunned from so many other places in the area. We offer showers, laundry, case management, sandwiches, and most important, a place for our homeless members to call their own.

The event was a delightful social gathering thanks to the hard work and charitable support of our honorees, hosts, co-chairs, and community. We are grateful to the Georgetown community for all its support and look forward to hosting this event for many years to come.

—Dymenn Sasser



Co-chair Page Evans with host Mark Penn

TASTE OF GEORGETOWN

On October 15th, Grace Episcopal Church and the Georgetown Business Improvement District (BID) sponsored the 18th annual Taste of Georgetown. The Taste featured the extraordinary dishes of 30 of Georgetown's finest restaurants, a wine pavilion, and a wonderful showcase of local musical talent on Grace's lawn. The restaurants served sample portions of their signature dishes, and the proceeds benefited Georgetown Ministry Center.

Beautiful fall weather along with parents' weekend at nearby universities brought huge crowds. Although the event has grown, it has remained well-organized by Grace Church and the Georgetown BID. This year's wine pavilion offered 25+ craft beers, 6 wines, and 3 cocktails. This year also marked the beginning of the Taste's "Pumpkin Food Fight."

The 1st annual Pumpkin Food Fight gave chefs the challenge of incorporating pumpkin into one of their dishes. Some interesting choices were Dean & Deluca's Pumpkin Tamales with Sage Pecan Pesto, Mie N Yu's Spicy Pumpkin-Coconut Soup, and Filomena

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Ristorante's Pumpkin Cheesecake. In the end it was Thunder Burger's Pumpkin Hummus on Crostini Jamon Serano that won the contest.

The Taste of Georgetown is a great fall food festival that gives people in the community an opportunity to help the homeless in the area by tasting creative dishes from their favorite restaurants.

—Dymenn Sasser

GIVE ME YOUR TIRED...

Being a homeless immigrant creates many problems for someone attempting to integrate into a new society. If you lose your papers you have entered the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) nightmare. While I have been working at Georgetown Ministry Center, I never really gave much thought to everything required to help someone who is homeless and has INS issues.



I have been working with a guy whom I have known for the last five years. When I started the process of helping him apply for housing, I realized that he did not have any documentation. When I asked him about identification he said that he had lost everything. The first thing we did was to try and replace his green card. The problem we faced was that he did not remember his alien registration number, which is a major hurdle when trying to request anything from INS. Kim, as we shall call him, thought that he knew, but unfortunately it was not correct. The next step was to schedule a face-to-face appointment with INS to obtain any documents that they had. Now I have to share with you the only other time that I had any connections with someone on the streets and INS, the guy went there on his own and they deported him. Not too long after that he died. So, I was very nervous about entering INS with someone, fearful that the same would happen again.

When we arrived and waited our turn to sit down with someone, the clerk searched her database and could not find any records on or about Kim. I wanted to grab Kim's hand and run out of there as fast as we could, worried that the immigration police would come in and detain him. We were fortunate to leave with the explanation that no records on Kim could be found. Needless to say we were stuck at this point, and I could not get any help from them as to what to do next. I tried to call immigration lawyers for help, because I do not have any experience working with this population of homeless. To no avail—I could not get the answers that we needed, but the Internet is a great tool for finding answers.

I researched this problem and realized that we could file a Freedom of Information request for all of Kim's documents, and with a small fee that's what we did. About three months after, we received everything that we needed to obtain his permanent green card. Now we are trying to raised the \$450 that he needs to get his green card. With this we can apply for a housing voucher to help Kim move off the streets and into his own place.

This may have been my first time dealing with INS, but it definitely won't be my last. I am currently working with someone who's applying for his citizenship. As I watch this new population come in to our Center, I realize that a lot of them have the same issues, and some are afraid to say anything because they do not want to be deported.

—Roy Witherspoon

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And from the community...

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HELP THE HOMELESS

MINI-WALK

On September 25th, GMC hosted its second annual Fun Day on the lawn of Grace Church. This was the first of a series of mini-walks for Fannie Mae's 2011 Help the Homeless campaign. Many families stopped to enjoy the festivities and to help the cause. There were fun activities for all ages along with food and tasty treats, supplied by Whole Foods and Georgetown Cupcakes. Looming clouds put a damper on the event and although we raised \$2,000 we still fell short of our goal.

We were also paired with Hyde and Stoddert elementary schools again this year. Staff and volunteers spread out to various classes to read books that illustrated homelessness in a way children could understand. Eager discussions followed the readings as the kids had many questions, most of which their classmates answered for them. We were amazed at how bright and aware they were!

Epiphany Catholic Church held a mini-walk with their congregation, tying it into their fall festival.

The mini-walks are a way for the community to raise their awareness of homelessness, which continues to be a problem in our own backyard. Fannie Mae especially stressed the mini-walks this year, as this will be the last year they host the National Mall walk on November 19th.

If you weren't able to participate in any of the mini-walks this year, we look forward to having your support next year.

— *Dymenn Sasser*

KNITTING CLASS

When I was searching for a new employee one thing caught my eye with Stephanie. She listed on her resume that she taught knitting to homeless women in Boston. This, I knew, was going to be the kind of activity that we wanted in our new Clubhouse. As it turned out a volunteer stepped forward to teach and Stephanie began to assume a much bigger role in our new program. Pat Davies asked one day what we thought about a knitting class for our homeless members. She hardly got the words out before Stephanie signed her up.

Each Monday this Georgetownner pulls up in her car and unloads yarn and needles that she purchased for the members. From 11 until noon she patiently helps the mostly female class rig their needles for hats and scarves and other colorful pieces. The highlight for me was the day I walked out into the waiting room hours after the class had finished to see a very unlikely trio sitting together working on their pieces. They allowed me to take this picture.



Three members of the knitting class still working on their projects well after the class has ended

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