

# the HOME page

Spring 2011



## Healthy Beat program brings improved health, empowerment to Deborah's Place

In July of 2010, students from the University of Illinois at Chicago held an event in the Learning Center at the Rebecca Johnson Apartments to kick off the Healthy Beat program. Dozens of women attended to be part of wellness discussions, and to play "nutrition BINGO" and other food trivia games. This was the beginning of a fun & exciting year-long program that has provided health education, resources, and empowerment to the women of Deborah's Place.

Healthy Beat is a joint effort between the tenants of the Deborah's Place Rebecca Johnson Apartments (RJA), medical and nutrition students and teachers from the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC). The idea to develop such a program came from our Schweitzer Fellow Meenadchi (Meena) Chelvakumar. It was her vision to develop a health program at RJA that addressed the nutrition concerns of the tenants. Meena and her fellow UIC students - Brian Bamberger, Christine Ranieri, and Sophia Rodriguez - are aided by Deborah's Place staff Juanita Brown and Antoinette Price, Education Services Program Administrator and Health Center Coordinator, respectively.

Over the last seven months the Healthy Beat volunteers have worked with tenant advisors to create health-focused activities that are accessible and engaging. They put on cooking demonstrations in the building's tenant lounge kitchen that highlight the use of fresh, seasonal vegetables. Participants also potted their own personal herb pots and everyone pitched in to plant herbs, lettuces, tomatoes, broccoli and kale in the apartment courtyard.

As the year progressed, the Healthy Beat group formed "Chew n' Chat" sessions, during which the volunteers and guest experts discuss topics surrounding health education and women share stories about their own health and wellness journeys. At one of these Chew n' Chat sessions, Dr. Angela Odoms-Young, a professor in the Nutrition Department at UIC, spoke about "food deserts" in Chicago - areas where there aren't any grocery stores or places to buy affordable nutritional food like fruits, vegetables, good meats and grains.

Another popular Chew n' Chat session was "Healthy Snacking on the Go" which challenged participants to make as many wholesome snack items as possible with ingredients purchased at Aldi's for under \$15.

In the winter, the Healthy Beat tenant advisors encouraged the volunteers to hold a "Demystifying the Doctor" Chew n' Chat session. Many short-term and long-term diseases like diabetes, heart disease and cancer can be prevented or slowed down if they are caught early enough. The UIC medical students talked about the importance of overcoming fears of the healthcare system in order to receive regular check-ups, and also discussed patient rights.

The Healthy Beat program will continue throughout the spring, and we hope even longer. The volunteers have done an immense amount of work to inspire the Deborah's Place tenants to address their nutritional needs and become involved in their "health community." The dedication of the Healthy Beat UIC student volunteers has made this program possible. The inspiration and enthusiasm of our Deborah's Place tenants advisors is empowering the women of Deborah's Place to take responsibility for their own health and wellness.



Top - bottom:

Healthy Beat tenant advisors (l-r) Renee, Emily and Mary;

UIC volunteer Meena (l) and volunteer (r) talk at a nutrition information table;

DP tenant, Deborah (l) and UIC volunteer Sophia (r) plant vegetable seedlings.

## From Audrey's Desk:

In 2010 we marked our 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of service to women who are homeless in Chicago. We took the time to honor our Founding Mothers, celebrate our achievements, and engage in getting the Deborah's Place story out through broadcast and print media. We are grateful for the opportunities to talk about the more than 3,500 women we have helped journey out of homelessness to stable housing, sustainable income and greater self-determination.

2010 was also a year of renewing our commitment and doubling our efforts as we saw a dramatic increase in the number of women who sought help through Deborah's Place.

**“Whatever brought them to Deborah's Place, these women share the same needs: a safe place to stay, help to find affordable housing, and [help to] recover from the physical and emotional trauma of homelessness.”**

We served 450 women last year, a 17% increase over the previous year. We met women made homeless for the first time because they were evicted from a foreclosed building. We met women with harrowing experiences of living two and three years in abandoned buildings or cars, barely surviving the elements and violence. Whatever brought them to Deborah's Place, these women share the same needs: a safe place to stay, help to find affordable housing and an income and supportive services to help them recover from the physical and emotional trauma homelessness.

As we move ahead in 2011, we will expand our resources and ability to offer consistent healthcare. We will continue to offer quality supportive housing and comprehensive services to ensure that women stay housed and help the increasing number of women who come to our doors find housing.

Inside this issue, you will read about dynamic programming that is engaging women in taking control of their health. You will also meet some wonderful volunteers and friends who give generously of their time and talents to support the women and work of Deborah's Place.

Deborah's Place did not turn women away last year. We served the women who came with the resources we had. We are here for women in need, and that is possible because you are here for us, supporting us with your time, talents, and resources. Thank you for all that you do to help women break the cycle of homelessness and move beyond that chaos and pain to stability.

Gratefully,



Audrey Thomas  
Executive Director

**“Deborah's Place did not turn women away last year... We are here for women in need, and that is possible because you are here for us...”**



**WE NEED YOUR HELP!  
25 FOR 25 ONLINE  
GIVING CAMPAIGN**

**25 for 25 online campaign kicks off in March to support the 25th Anniversary Capital Campaign to Fund Continuity and Growth**

This month we are launching our 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Capital Campaign to Fund Continuity and Growth. Our goal is to raise \$1 million in order to *sustain* our current critical housing and services, *adapt* to changes in a new funding environment and *steward* Deborah's Place into the next 25 years.

The 25 for 25 online segment of the campaign kicks off in March and is a meaningful and exciting way become involved by encouraging 25 or more of your friends and acquaintances to each donate a multiple of \$25. Each participating campaigner will have their own web page for fund and friend-raising. The top three campaigners who involve the most friends and the person who raises the most funds will be recognized with a special tile on our donor wall and in our marketing materials.

This effort will not only assist the 25th Anniversary Capital Campaign financially but will also help us reach a greater segment of the community while sharing important information about our work at Deborah's Place.

Look for **25 for 25** updates on our website, on Facebook and in upcoming e-mails. Questions? Contact Carol Brumer Glikzman at (773) 639-6536 or [cglikzman@deborahsplace.org](mailto:cgliksman@deborahsplace.org).

## DONOR SPOTLIGHT: Uncle Pete Zonsius

**U** – Understands the needs of people  
**N** – Noble man of society  
**C** – Caring to all he comes in contact with  
**L** – Love for his neighbors  
**E** – Effective teaching with help for the homeless

**P** – Patience is his virtue  
**E** – Energy to travel near and far to deliver hope  
**T** – Trust- worthy to all he touches  
**E** – Everyone can learn from Uncle Pete. I have.

- *Juanita Brown, Education Services Program Administrator & Coordinator of the Learning Center at the Rebecca Johnson Apartments*

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When you mention the name Uncle Pete at Deborah's Place, everyone knows who you're talking about. Although some may not be fortunate to meet him or experience his vitality first-hand, they feel his presence as he sweeps through the hallways with meals and gifts in hand. Uncle Pete has made a tremendous impact on the lives of the women of Deborah's Place for the past nine years.

Eighty-eight year-old Peter Zonsius, or Uncle Pete as he prefers to be called, has devoted his life to serving others. He believes that we're all part of one family, one community, and they we all have the duty to support each other. He has helped thousands of people over the years, and hundreds of women at Deborah's Place.

Along with Juanita Brown, the coordinator of the Learning Center at the Rebecca Johnson Apartments, no one knows him better at Deborah's Place than Gail Lewis, Employment Services Program Coordinator. She and Uncle Pete formed a close relationship ever since he first started supporting the organization and is his go-to gal within the organization. "I first met Uncle Pete in 2003 when he began to bring lunches to the women at Deborah's Place. When I met him, I extended my hand to shake his and said, 'Pleased to meet you Mr. Zonsius.' Instead of shaking my hand, he reached out and gave me a hug! It was as though we were long-time friends. He said, 'Just call me Uncle Pete.' That is how our relationship with Uncle Pete began."

Uncle Pete's heart and generosity is rooted within St. John Brebeuf's Catholic Church in Niles. He served as a maintenance engineer at the school there for 26 years and works diligently to support the church and connect the parish with local social service organizations. Several years ago he started the St. John Brebeuf Sandwich Ministry, where he collects bagged lunches from the parishioners every month and drops them off to 20 different locations, including Deborah's Place. With the nutritious meals he and the church provide often come cards with words of encouragement for the women.

"Uncle Pete is generous and he truly has a heart of gold," says Gail. "His ministry is working with people who are homeless and providing them with a nutritious meal. When he drops off the lunches at Deborah's Place and sees someone walking by, he asks them if they are hungry and offers them a lunch. Uncle Pete's parting words are always, 'God bless you and thank you for the work you are doing with the women.'"

Uncle Pete's support goes well beyond the monthly meals. He often brings gifts, gift cards and dinners for special occasions, and encourages fellow do-gooders to visit and support Deborah's Place with him.

**Every month Uncle Pete brings meals to hundreds of people in need at 20 different organizations.**

Uncle Pete's generosity reaches far and wide. In addition to Deborah's Place, he supports Marillac Service Center, Franciscan Outreach Ministries - just to name a few - and is especially dedicated to Catholic Charities, where for many years he volunteered as a Temporary Care Driver for newly adopted babies.

He never asks for public acknowledgment, never expects recognition. He just does what he feels and knows is right: help others who truly need help. Many Deborah's Place women, staff and volunteers have been touched in some way by Uncle Pete's warmth and kindness. We are so grateful that he and his parish have shared their gracious spirits with us and we look forward to our continued relationship.

## Deborah's Place staff member, Sarah Letson, provides expert leadership and management to city-wide homeless services data system

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At Deborah's Place, we take pride in our role as a leader in Chicago's homeless services community. This spring, we are proud to spotlight Sarah Letson, Development Coordinator and newly elected Co-Chair of the Chicago Planning Council on Homelessness' HMIS Committee.



Sarah Letson (l) with tenant Pam Boyd (r) at an annual Chili Cook-Off event in the Deborah's Place gym.

**Data is the key to planning, evaluating programs, and securing funding for Deborah's Place and all homeless service agencies.**

Sarah joined the Deborah's Place team in 2008 as Development Coordinator. In addition to coordinating volunteers, managing the website, and performing other development duties, Sarah is in charge of managing and analyzing participant data using Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS), a software application designed to track the characteristics and service needs of people who are homeless. All Chicago homeless service agencies receiving federal funding are required to use the HMIS system, which the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) uses to make critical funding decisions across the country.

One of Sarah's first tasks at Deborah's Place was to facilitate the roll-out of new HMIS software across the agency, a great challenge even to Sarah, who is experienced in data management. "It was a big change [for us]," she says. "The whole staff had to be retrained." As Sarah helped the Deborah's Place staff to understand the system and utilize it more efficiently, she recognized ways that HMIS could become more user-friendly for all agencies working with people who are homeless. And she wasn't afraid to share her suggestions with the Chicago Department of Family and Support Services, who administers the city-wide HMIS system. As a result, Sarah quickly gained recognition as an expert in HMIS data management and analysis, and it wasn't long before she was asked her to join the city-wide HMIS Committee. In October, she was elected Co-Chair.

As Co-Chair, Sarah's role in the HMIS Committee – which serves in an advisory capacity to the Chicago Planning Council on Homelessness – is an important one. Composed of service providers and consumers, the Committee monitors implementation of the HMIS system in Chicago, coordinates user training, and makes suggestions for system-wide improvements. The goals are to streamline the data collection process, improve how agencies in Chicago use and report information, and ensure data reliability and quality. "Data is the key to [making] accurate and informed decisions," says Sarah – a point that cannot be understated given the importance of data in planning, evaluating programs, and securing funding for any service to the public.

Sarah has gained recognition as a true leader in the Chicago community of homeless services. "Sarah is the first person I call upon for HMIS questions or concerns," says Nicole Bahena of the Chicago Alliance to End Homelessness. "She has demonstrated a commitment to not only the HMIS Committee, but also to making sure HMIS is successfully implemented for all homeless service agencies in Chicago."

Thank you, Sarah, for representing Deborah's Place as an organization at the forefront of homeless services in Chicago. And congratulations!

## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: Marty Clemons

*Maxine, a participant of Teresa's Interim Housing receives Reiki therapy from Marty outside the 1530 N. Sedgwick Learning Center.*



## Volunteer brings peace and healing to women through alternative therapy

Wednesdays at Deborah's Place bring an alternative path to inner peace and wellness, thanks to long-time volunteer and yogi Marty Clemons.

Owner of Bend Yoga & Movement Studio in Chicago and a certified yoga teacher and Reiki practitioner, Marty began volunteering at Marah's Permanent Housing three years ago after a friend introduced her to the women. Marty has made Wednesdays her day to give back to the community: she volunteers at the Learning Center at 1532 N. Sedgwick on Wednesday mornings, then travels to Marah's in Lakeview in the afternoon, and is looking to expand to offer healing to the 2822 W. Jackson location as well. "I feel honored and privileged to be able to heal people," Marty says.

Described as an "energy massage," Marty uses Reiki to channel healing energy to recipients through her hands, using physical touch and close proximity. Women sit or stand for 15-minute sessions and may choose an essential oil such as lavender or peppermint to enhance their experience. Participants describe feeling pleasurable vibrations or heat throughout their bodies after a Reiki session with Marty.

**"Once they find that peace, no one can take it away."**

Always cognizant of the women's needs, Marty has changed her offerings throughout the years to best fit the diverse population served by Deborah's Place. She has offered physical forms of yoga - Hatha and Kundalini - and now is providing Reiki and Gong Baths to allow women who are less able to participate in physical yoga because of disabilities to experience the healing benefits of her services.

In recognition of the chaos that can enter all of our lives at times, Marty aims to empower women to care for themselves even after her sessions end. She hopes to teach women "...to find that deep sense of peace and calm. Once they find that peace, no one can take it away." Thank you, Marty, for the healing and peace you bring to the women of Deborah's Place.

## In Memory of our beloved Mary Benedetto

On Saturday, January 15, 2011, Mary Benedetto, former Deborah's Place staff, passed away after a long illness. Mary was a cherished staff member at Deborah's Place from 1998 to 2009. For those who knew her, she was more than a co-worker. She was an inspiration, a mentor and friend.

She loved to read and to learn new things. As the Food Service Coordinator then Program Administrator of the overnight shelter and later the Safe Haven, Mary worked tirelessly with and for "her ladies". Mary had innate skills and abilities in working with people who are homeless and in crisis. She understood that the first thing that people need is to be safe and to know that they are cared for. She knew that authentic relationship is the key to recovery.

Mary was exceedingly generous with her time, talents, wisdom and good humor. Those who knew her have many stories of her acts of kindness for those she knew and for strangers. At her funeral mass, Mary's cousin told a beautiful story about being on vacation with Mary and her beloved husband, Nick, in Dublin. Mary saw a woman who was homeless and she went right to her, talked with her, and gave the woman a referral to a shelter - in Dublin! That was Mary. She did not worry about her work-life balance. For Mary, every task she performed, relationship she nurtured, prayer she uttered, was life. We will miss her.





*Save the Date*  
**Deborah's Place Annual Gala**

*Please join us at our annual Gala as we open doors for women in Chicago.*

**Thursday, June 16, 2011**  
**Chicago Cultural Center**  
**78 E. Washington St., Chicago**

*Invitation to follow*

Sponsorship and advertising opportunities are available. Please contact Elizabeth Ashton Golden at (773) 638-6539 or [egolden@deborahsplace.org](mailto:egolden@deborahsplace.org).



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**Spring 2011:**

**25 for 25 Online Campaign**

Health & Healing at Deborah's Place

**Spotlight on Uncle Pete**

In Memory of Mary Benedetto

