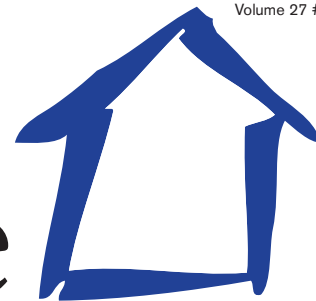


the HOME page

Fall 2011



Dreams Achieved, Barriers Overcome: Success in Education & Employment

Ever since she was a young girl, Gina secretly wanted to work in a hospital. That dream didn't seem attainable until this year, when at the age of 55, the Deborah's Place Rebecca Johnson Apartments' resident earned her General Education Degree (GED) from the state of Illinois.

Following an assault in 2005, Gina became homeless and moved into Deborah's Place. The experience of homelessness is one of the many obstacles she had to overcome in her journey. During her junior year, she dropped out of high school because her family couldn't afford the bus fare to and from school. She was often ostracized by her peers and her self-esteem disintegrated. School wasn't meeting her or her family's needs so she decided to find a full-time job instead.

Gina built a career and life as a beautician. She worked in a salon for decades but when she lost her job and couldn't find another in her field, she quickly realized her options were limited. Without a high school degree and a decades-old felony charge still looming on her record, no one would hire her.

When she moved into the Rebecca Johnson Apartments, Gina was able to gain access to education and job services in the DP Learning Center that supported her on her journey to self-sufficiency. With the support and encouragement of the DP Employment Services Coordinator and Learning Center Staff, she found a part-time job and started taking free GED test prep classes down the street at Marillac Social Center. Marilyn Derr, Deborah's Place Adult Educator, tutored Gina every week in the Learning Center. "She helped me tremendously," Gina said. "I was determined to finish this. I needed to prove to myself that I could do this and I knew I could."

After months of hard work and dedication, Gina passed the GED test in March and earned her degree. Today she is working toward her lifelong dream of becoming a nurse. She is making

plans to take a Phlebotomy class which will teach her how to draw blood, and is researching nursing school. "If you want to do something with your life, if you want to pursue something, [Deborah's Place] has all the things you need to do it. But you need to take advantage of them."

Maxine, another Deborah's Place tenant who lives at the Patty Crowley Apartments in Old Town, shares Gina's sentiment. "[Deborah's Place] is the best thing that ever happened to me," Maxine said. "This place gave me hope and belief. Now it's up to me. I have to do this for me. I'm committed."

Like Gina, Maxine encountered many obstacles on her journey out of homelessness to stability. Maxine struggled with drug addiction and had trouble with the law. However through all of that,



Gina (right) with her GED and Marilyn Derr, DP Adult Educator

Today Gina is working toward her lifelong dream of becoming a nurse.

she held a steady job. "At one point in my life, I had it all. I worked in a bakery for 16 years. When I lost my job, that's when all hell broke loose." When she was fired from the bakery, she lost her stability and hit rock bottom. Soon after, she was arrested for drug possession and went to prison.

(continued on page 4)

Would You Hire Diane?

Let's pretend you own a small restaurant. You are looking to hire a third waitress for the lunchtime rush. To advertise the opportunity, you post a sign in the front window. A woman walks in, introduces herself as Diane Johnson, presents her resume, and requests an application. She politely thanks you and promises to return the next day.

Based on your encounter and skimming her resume, you determine:

- ✓ *She has a high school diploma and is currently taking courses towards an Associate's degree in business.*
- ✓ *She has restaurant experience and was employed as a waitress until May 2010.*
- ✓ *She dresses professionally, and has a polite, personable, and pleasant demeanor.*

As promised, Diane returns the next morning to submit her application. On page two, you see:

Have you ever been convicted of a criminal offense?

✓ Yes No

Would you consider Diane for the position?



Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan (center), the keynote speaker at this year's Gala, with Deborah's Place Board President Kim Cole and Executive Director Audrey Thomas.

From Audrey's Desk

Last week, I was delighted to receive an e-mail from a former Deborah's Place tenant. She wrote to share that she is still in housing, finishing an advanced educational degree, and finding her work as a teacher rewarding. She expressed gratitude for her time at Deborah's Place and the services she received.

Her check-in was a welcome reminder that with appropriate services and support, women can move on from the experience of homelessness. At Deborah's Place, we believe that the work we do produces results.

In this issue of *The Home Page*, we share with you our documented outcomes for FY'11. You will meet two women who successfully met their education and employment goals and the staff and volunteers who provided them with resources and support the needed.

As always, thank you for your support that allows us to continue to provide the supportive housing, services and solutions to ending homelessness for the women we serve.

Gratefully,

Audrey Thomas
Executive Director

Without knowing the circumstances of the offense or conviction, some employers would discard Diane's application immediately. Some might run a criminal background check to determine the type of conviction. Others might give her an interview—a chance to explain.

The likelihood of Diane getting a job offer will largely depend on how averse the employers she approaches are to hiring ex-offenders. Perceived liability—real or not—makes many hesitant to consider applicants with conviction histories.

In a multi-city survey by Holzer et al. (2001), over 60 percent of employers indicated that they would “probably not” or “definitely not” hire someone with a criminal record.

Around a quarter of women who are homeless have been involved in the criminal justice system. Most convictions are for nonviolent crimes that were a means for survival—petty theft, prostitution, possession of substances.

Without stable employment, what chance do Diane and other women with a criminal background have to overcome their histories and achieve stability and self-sufficiency? Who will give them the opportunity?

Of the multiple hurdles that women at Deborah's Place face in finding employment, the stigma and bias experienced by those with a criminal record is one of the most serious.

What other forms of stigma need to be overcome to help women fully recover from homelessness? What can we, as a Deborah's Place community, do to reduce or eliminate such stigma?



Tell us what you think. Visit our Facebook page to weigh in.



Gail (right) worked with Maureen to obtain a job she loves.

Employment Coordinator Helps Women Overcome Barriers

"Where is Gail?" "Is Gail here today?" "I hope I can see Gail today." Their questions echo through the halls of Deborah's Place every day. As the Employment Coordinator, Gail Lewis works tirelessly to help the women we serve meet their employment goals.

Gail came to Deborah's Place in 1990 to work in daytime services before becoming the employment coordinator. Her ability to connect to resources and genuine care for the women has endeared her to her colleagues and the women we serve.

Each day, Gail assists women with writing resumes and teaching them how to apply for jobs online. She works one-on-one with women to assess skills and experience, and conducts job readiness workshops. Gail is always developing and fostering relationships with potential employers, and networking with other community agencies sharing employment information and resources.

What makes Gail successful in employment services? Her supervisor, Megan Reedy-McGovern, Associate Director of Clinical Services says, "Like most people who work in employment services, Gail is extremely resourceful, creative, and determined when it comes to helping participants prepare for and find employment. What makes her different is her overwhelming care and concern for the women, as well as her openness to each person and her individual situation."

"Upon meeting Gail, most people immediately feel welcomed and cared for. She has amazing warmth that allows people to feel comfortable and safe in her presence. This is especially important as she meets and works with participants as they begin their job searches. At the beginning of this process, it is common for participants to feel insecure, vulnerable, and overwhelmed. Gail's warm presence and welcoming smile help women feel comfortable in talking about their employment struggles and obstacles."

Most of the women we serve have many obstacles to employment—inconsistent work history, lack of marketable skills, and criminal backgrounds. In addition, half of the women served by Deborah's Place are over the age of 50. Given the high unemployment rate in our city, anyone in that age bracket is struggling to find employment.

However, Gail is not daunted. Her positive and hopeful outlook allows women to build the confidence they need to go through the job-seeking process and maintain their momentum and motivation.

Employment Services Wish List

You can help women out of the chaos and trauma of homelessness to achieve stability, security, and independence with an in-kind donation of the following:

CTA Fare Cards for women to travel to & from job interviews or to work until they receive their first paycheck.

USB Flash Drives for Computers for women to maintain their resumes, cover letters, and job applications.

Resume Paper (special stock) for women to present a professional resume to prospective employers.

Portfolios or Small Briefcases for women to carry their paperwork to job interviews and present themselves in a professional manner.

Writing Supplies (stationery, ink pens, and notepads) for filling out applications, writing follow-up letters, and taking notes.

Please note that we are unable to accept donations of used clothing.

Donations are accepted at 2822 W. Jackson Blvd, Chicago. Should you have any questions or like to coordinate your drop off, please contact Stephanie Dixon at 773.722.5080 or sdixon@deborahsplace.org.

Be Our Guest at our Tour & Coffee Hour

Even if you think you know us well, this is your chance to experience a guided tour of our facilities engage with the residents and staff about our award-winning supportive housing and service expand your knowledge of the issue of homelessness and its impact on the lives of women.

9:30AM on the following Saturdays:

1530 N. Sedgwick

September 24

November 12

April 21, 2012

2822 W. Jackson

October 1

February 18, 2012

Space is limited. RSVP a week in advance of the tour of your choice to Carol Brumer Gliksman at 773.638.6536 or cgliksman@deborahsplace.org.

Dreams Achieved *(continued from front page)*

Maxine went through an intense drug rehabilitation and therapy program in prison. When she was released, she committed to staying drug-free and had found a new positive direction in life. But her past continued to haunt her. Like one-quarter of women who are homeless, she has a criminal conviction; to most potential employers that results in an immediate turn-away. Her age and limited computer skills made it even more difficult to get a foot in the door in today's highly competitive job market. In order to afford a place to live, she needed a job but couldn't get one.

She stayed in a recovery home for a few months before she was able to move into Deborah's Place this year. Now she has a safe, stable home where she is surrounded by staff whose goal is to provide her with services, delivered with respect and empathy, to support her in achieving her goals. Case managers link her to resources and services, and the Learning Center staff in advancing her educational, computer, and life skills that are crucial to employment and social success.

Today she is participating in a work reintegration program where she is placed in temporary jobs in a range of fields from deconstruction to administration. She is building her experience as well as her self-determination. "I was so blue because I didn't have a job. Now I love what I'm doing. Every day I'm learning."

Each hurdle a woman faces on the road to educational development and search for employment contributes to feelings of low self-esteem, low self-worth, and a sense of hopelessness, disappointment, and frustration. Both the Education Service and Employment Service of Deborah's Place help women to overcome these barriers and make progress toward greater stability, security, and independence.

During fiscal year 2011, Deborah's Place helped 361 women access educational or social-emotional development opportunities through our Learning Centers, and 56 women obtained or maintained employment. Beyond the program's benefits to individual women seeking a pathway to self-sufficiency, Employment Services demonstrated a positive impact on the community of women at Deborah's Place. Women like Gina and Maxine, who are climbing toward self-sufficiency and are overcoming the traumatic experience of homelessness, provide a motivating example for others who are struggling with daily challenges on their road to recovery.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: Vanessa Lew: Champion of Education

Every Friday afternoon, Vanessa "Ness" Lew enters the Sedgwick location of Deborah's Place. Armed with enthusiasm, energy, packets of poetry, and prose, she makes her way to the Learning Center. She spends the next hour with a group of two to eight women dissecting a wide variety of material from Shakespeare to Frost, Robert Johnson to Bob Dylan, and occasionally some of the women's own work.

Vanessa came to Deborah's Place after she discovered the organization through her church's website. Her literature group has been running for a year-and-a-half, and has encouraged educational achievement, and socio-emotional development among the participants. She describes the group's atmosphere as supportive, as the ladies "find themselves laughing over a favorite song, comparing notes about personal struggles, and generally finding commonality amongst each other." These weekly sessions prove that education is more than simply academic understanding.

Beyond the weekly classes, Vanessa also works one-on-one with interested participants. Recently, Vanessa acted as a tutor and mentor for Jessica,* a Deborah's Place participant who successfully completed the 2011 University of Wisconsin-Madison Odyssey Project—a year-long study in the humanities for adults facing economic barriers to higher education.

Vanessa read Jessica's papers, brought her school supplies, and stayed past the Learning Center's closing time to discuss academic concepts broached in Jessica's classes. She speaks highly of Jessica's academic abilities and interest in learning, noting in particular that Jessica "writes prolifically" and holds a fascination with acquiring new vocabulary and using those words in her poetry. Vanessa goes on to say, "It was thrilling to watch [Jessica] take advantage of opportunity, work hard and succeed." Jessica graduated valedictorian from the Odyssey Project.

Vanessa finds her own motivation in the Learning Center on a weekly basis. She says, "I've learned a great deal in my time at Deborah's Place. I've witnessed the strength and perseverance of these women in the face of adversity. Their optimism, camaraderie, and wisdom more than impress me. It challenges and inspires me to work harder in my own life."

Thank you Vanessa for your work helping Deborah's Place women achieve their educational goals.

If you are interested in volunteering at Deborah's Place, visit the volunteer page at deborahsplace.org.



Vanessa "Ness" Lew

"Their optimism, camaraderie, and wisdom more than impress me."

*Name changed in order to protect the privacy of the individual.

25 for 25 Challenge Participants Raise \$95,690 through 50 Fundraisers & 535 Donors

This spring and summer, we asked all of our volunteers, donors, board members, and staff to participate in the 25 for 25 Challenge, an online fundraising initiative of *Deborah's Place 25th Anniversary Capital Campaign*.

Between April 1 and July 31, over 50 deeply committed, passionate volunteers, and dedicated staff members took the challenge head on and inspired 25 or more of their

friends and acquaintances to donate to Deborah's Place in \$25 increments.

We were thrilled by the response from both current and new supporters! With the help of 50 fundraisers, 535 donors, and a generous matching gift donor, we raised \$95,690!!

The 25 for 25 Challenge included some serious, good-natured competition to see who could raise the most funds and inspire the most friends to participate. Kudos go to the top competitors, top donors, and participants for their generous support and hard work.

Jim Perry and Bob Horton, some of our top Challenge donors, learned about Deborah's Place through an online volunteer posting. Since June 2009, Jim has been preparing and serving lunch on Mondays for the women at 1530 N. Sedgwick. Jim supports Deborah's Place because he is passionate about the "crime of homelessness." He feels that women especially are often overlooked on this important issue and wants to ensure women have a safe place to live. He and Bob were exploring opportunities to go beyond volunteering for Deborah's Place, so when the 25 for 25 Challenge was announced, the matching gift was "a great incentive to make their gift go even farther," says Jim.

Jim and all of the top 25 for 25 Challenge participants will have their names added to the capital campaign donor quilt that will be displayed at 1530 N. Sedgwick.

We also want to recognize and welcome the 335 individuals who donated to Deborah's Place for the first time through the Challenge! Thank you!

All the funds raised in the 25 for 25 Challenge will support the *25th Anniversary Capital Campaign to Fund Continuity and Growth*. Although the Challenge is complete, the Capital Campaign will continue through 2012. Donations are always welcome and we invite you to attend one of our upcoming campaign coffees and tours, where you and your friends can experience an in-depth, firsthand look at our buildings and work. Visit deborahsplace.org for more information or contact Carol Brumer Glikzman, Individual Gift Officer, at 773.638.6536 or cglikzman@deborahsplace.org.

Thank you all for your commitment to ensuring the future of Deborah's Place!

“Participating in the 25 for 25 Challenge was a privilege for me. What fun, easy way to support the women of Deborah's Place. I'm so proud of and grateful for all of my friends and family who rose to the Challenge and contributed so generously to its success.”

Debbie Kleban,

Top Challenge Fundraiser, Capital Campaign Committee Member, volunteer and donor

TOP 25 FOR 25 CHALLENGE COMPETITORS PARTICIPANTS

**An anonymous matching donor
Jim Perry and Bob Horton**

Top Donors

Debbie Kleban—\$4,500

Top Fundraiser

Kimberly Cole—inspired 68 friends and family

Top Friend-Raiser

Eleni Marsh—\$2,100

Top Staff Fundraiser

Jean Durkin—inspired 29 friends and family

Top Staff Friend-Raiser

2011 Annual Gala Opens Doors for Women in Chicago

On June 17, hundreds of donors, volunteers, participants, and board members joined together for a memorable evening at the Chicago Cultural Center for Deborah's Place 2011 Annual Gala, "Opening Doors for Women in Chicago."

Over 250 individuals and corporate sponsors donated and raised over \$120,000 which will be used to provide life-changing housing & supportive services to over 400 women who are served by Deborah's Place.

Thank you to all our corporate sponsors and individual donors for your generous support, and to Bonnie S. Hawkins, Event Chair, and the Gala Steering & Event Committees who dedicated their time, energy, and skills to planning this year's event.

See more pictures and read more about the event online in the DP News & Events section of deborahsplace.org.



Photos from left to right:

Former board member Joyce Dugan received the 2011 Patty Crowley Award for more than 10 years of volunteer work and contributions to Deborah's Place.

Paul Haase, Vice President of the Board; Melissa Haase, Gala Steering Committee Member; Paul Rupke and wife Debbie Kleban, member of the President's Circle & Capital Campaign Committees.

Guests mingled as they kept close eyes on their bids for the 38 silent auction items.

Deborah's Place tenant Mary McFadden (left) was awarded the Renewal of Spirit Award for her leadership and volunteerism within the organization. Mary is pictured with Event Chair Bonnie S. Hawkins.

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Deborah's Place Annual Gala Recap