

IHN – ML

The Redeemer Connection

IHN's mission as been expressed in many ways, but the bottom line is one of hope, and commitment to help the homeless find a better life for themselves and their families
provide a support system that offers food, shelter and access to social services
allow guests to keep their families together, seek permanent employment, obtain housing and
re- establish a productive life in the community.

Beginnings

During the summer of 1990 Karen Olsen, founder in 1983, of the Interfaith Hospitality Network met informally with the clergy of Main Line churches at Our Mother of Good Council (OMGC) to explore the possibility of their becoming involved with IHN. Rabbi Henry Cohen, Beth David; The Rev. William Cherry, Ardmore United Methodist; The Rev. George Hollingshead, Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church and Monsignor James Meehan, St. John Neumann set out to found IHN –ML.

After agreeing to embrace the mission the group agreed to start up once they had commitments from 8 congregations to serve as hosts. Meanwhile there was lots of organizational work to be done. Volunteers from many churches worked together to check into how other IHN's operated; locate an Exec. Director, a social worker and referral agencies; lease space for a day center; locate a van and van driver to transport the families; draw up incorporation and non-profit agreements; purchase liability insurance and finally to begin fundraising to support all of this. It was a monumental effort and added to all of this have been difficulties with township zoning boards and fire marshals re: proper occupancy permits.

In November of 1991 IHN-ML was incorporated, and in May 1992 welcomed it's first guests, becoming then the 23rd of the then 27 programs nationwide. **We partner regularly with other area networks – Ambler, Berks, Souderton and NE Philadelphia. Together we are part of a 35 state system of 146 networks!**

It has not all been smooth sailing, but through the efforts of committed volunteers IHN- ML will, in November, begin its 16th year of service. I could not begin to chronicle the names of all those volunteers and staff members who have been so devoted to their work with IHN – it would take pages. It is the people though who make the ministry work!

Day center

Until the purchase of the current 1449 DeKalb St. building in 1999, the Day Center and office were re-located frequently. Opening at the New Life Mennonite Church in Norristown in 1992 it was moved St. George's Coptic Orthodox Church, also in Norristown, in the Fall of 1995 when New Life needed the space for another purpose. It remained at St. George's until being evicted by the township during the summer of 1996. Temporarily the offices moved to Ardmore YMCA, and then to St. John's Episcopal Church in Norristown in September of 1996. The opening celebration for 1449 DeKalb was held in March 2001.

Through Annual Reports and newsletters it is apparent that personnel changes were frequent due burn-out from stress and unpredictable hours. Until Carole Marchand arrived as Exec. Director and Case Manager in June of 2004 these were two separate positions.

Admission to the network, from its inception, has been competitive.

While the goal is to consistently have a full program, equating to roughly 4 family units, that has not always been possible. During the screening, many applicants find that they cannot meet IHN admission criteria (i.e. no history of substance abuse or severe mental health issues); others cannot agree to the demanding goals of the network.

The goal is to have families independent again after 120 days. Currently we are finding that many remain in the network for longer due to the limited availability of affordable or subsidized housing. This is

certainly one of the factors that contribute to homelessness and is an area that we all need to focus our attention on in the years to come.

Of the guests who do not “graduate” most make their own decision to leave, when they realize that they cannot fulfill the demands of the program. As volunteers we do not often see or understand the challenges a guest faces on any given day. It is a tough program with weekly goals that each guest is accountable for.

How do families hear about IHN? Most come from referral agencies which over the years have include:

Area food banks

Woman’s Resource Center – Wayne

Aging and Adult Services-

Norristown & Bryn Mawr

Norristown Ministries Hospitality Center

Chester Homeless Coalition Warming Center

Laurel House

Project Share

Project Rainbow

Hospitals

Churches

LM & Radnor school districts

Homeless Hotline

Funding. as with all non-profits, requires constant work.

Grants have been sought to provide maintenance and staffing of the day center; vans to transport the families to the congregations from the day center and beds for the guests. Our own Lucetta Alderfer was the first chair of the Grants Committee and wrote successful proposals for foundations grants, many with Redeemer connections. Among those very generous to the network have been public and private foundations, government agencies and a few individuals.

In addition to foundation grants, fundraising efforts have included sale of “house” pins, t-shirts, a flea market and most recently a breakfast.

Recently Redeemer has been able to supply substantial monies from our own Outreach funds and proceeds from Great Concerts for Great Causes.

Host congregations currently serving the network are listed in bold face type.

** indicates the founding congregations*

* Ardmore United Methodist Church

* **Beth David Reform Congregation - Gladwyne**

* **Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church**

* **Central Baptist Church – Wayne**

* First Presbyterian Church of Ardmore

* **Our Mother of Good Council – Bryn Mawr**

* **St. John Neumann Church – Bryn Mawr**

* **St Mary’s Episcopal Church – Ardmore**

* **St. Thomas of Villanova – Rosemont**

4 churches from Main Line Alliance of Black Churches

St. Katherine of Sienna – Wayne

Church of the Redeemer – Bryn Mawr
we began in 2004

Wayne Presbyterian Church

St David’s Episcopal – Radnor

Paoli Presbyterian Church

In 1998 there was a plea for more host congregations, to relieve some of the pressure of frequent hosting. Again in 2006-07 this same need has led to the addition of 2 new host congregations, bringing the total to 12. It is hoped that in 2007-08 we can have 13, meaning then that congregations would host only once a quarter.

Support congregations have included the following, with those currently serving listed in bold face type.

Church of the Redeemer – Bryn Mawr

Main Line Unitarian – King of Prussia

Presentation Blessed Virgin Mary Church –
Penn Wynne

Radnor Friends Meeting – Villanova

St. Margaret’s – Narberth

United Methodist Church of Bala Cynwyd

United Methodist Church of Narberth

Christ Church(Episcopal) – Ithan

Temple Shalom – Broomall

St. Luke United Methodist – Bryn Mawr

St. Katherine of Sienna – Wayne

Berwyn United Methodist Church

**Beth Am Israel Congregation –
Penn Valley
First Baptist church – Wayne
Second Baptist Church - Wayne
Haverford Friends Meeting**

**Main Line Unitarian – Devon
Or Shalom - Paoli
Trinity Episcopal – Gulph Mills
United Methodist - Wayne**

Volunteers are what make the network work!

Carole Marchand currently counts the number of volunteers serving the network annually as 2,500!

In 1996 some area schools became interested in fulfilling service requirements by assisting. Those schools included Akiba Academy, The Baldwin School, Agnes Irwin and Beth Shalom. The Lower Merion School District recently expressed some interest, but that has not worked out because of logistics.

Currently, Redeemer has just under 100 parishioners involved. The first volunteers from Redeemer were:

Lucetta Alderfer who served as our Coordinator and was a member of the original Board of Directors/
Chair of the Grants Committee

Susan Ayres
Quartie & Barbara Clothier
Rick & Rita Davis
Barbara Hobbs
Rachel & Jim Hopkinson
Polly Mackie

Ted McCoy
Ann Peterson
Pat Schwab
Barkie Supplee
Tommi Whitfield
Roy Winkler

In addition to the host week volunteers, help is needed for mentoring – volunteers who stay in touch with graduated families for a period of two years as they continue their transition to independence.

Publicity

In the beginning, Newsletters were sent to all volunteers every 2 mos. That has not happened recently, but it is a goal of Carole Marchand to make that happen again soon, though probably on a quarterly basis.

The local press has taken an interest in the network over the years. Most recently the Main Line Times has made a commitment to an article several times per year. Additionally the Main Line Chamber of Commerce's Leadership program has produced a high quality brochure for use in fundraising.

Barbara Hobbs served on the Publicity Committee of the Board for a while. Currently Jim Pugh works with me to prepare articles for our weekly *Bulletin* and the monthly *Voice*.

Advocacy for the homeless

In early newsletters and Annual Reports there were updates on community advocacy efforts. While interest remains strong, IHN – ML has not had the volunteer depth to focus on these efforts recently. It is certainly an area where volunteer help and leadership could be used in the future.

Donations

In the past IHN established a relationship with People Caring and Sharing, an agency that assisted with moving services and with donations of furniture, pots and pans, linens, etc. to furnish graduates' new residences. Since then other host & support parishes, Redeemer's Thrift Shop and individual parishioners have provided many wonderful articles of clothing and household items for the families.

Anniversaries

A 10th anniversary party for IHN-ML was held in March 2002 in the newly constructed parish house at St. Katherine of Sienna in Wayne. Speakers were Karen Olson (founder) and Anthony Campolo of Eastern University. We will look forward to celebrating IHN – ML's achievements at the 20th Anniversary in 2012!

Sources:

Lucetta Alderfer's files of early Annual reports; newsletters and newspaper articles have been immensely helpful to me in putting together this outline.

November 2, 2009