

Florence Okot: *I will never give up!*

Her life has not been easy but Florence Okot will not let anything stand in the way of her dreams. She has become somewhat of a role model for South Central Minnesota Sudanese women. Florence is pursuing her Bachelor's Degree in Social Work from Mankato State University and, according to her friends, will one day earn her doctorate!

"All lot of things God wants me to do," proclaimed Florence when giving thought to her future. "I will not give up."

Florence arrived in the United States on September 22, 1998 after living in a Sudanese refugee camp for over three years. Because it had been determined that her life was in danger, Florence and her three boys, Eric, Joseph and Ben, were chosen for asylum in the United States. The young family was hosted by a church in Texas.

Even though Florence knew the English language and, in fact, taught it in the refugee schools, the relocation was difficult. In her homeland of Sudan, children were nurtured and guided by the entire village. If a single mother, such as Florence, had to work, it was acceptable for her to leave her children in the care of her friends and neighbors. In Texas, she had no family. She really needed her family.

Unbeknownst to Florence, a cousin had been sponsored for asylum by the Sisters of Notre Dame in Mankato several years earlier. When she heard about Florence and her three boys living in Texas, she set about contacting her.

"I was so happy and so excited," said Florence in reflecting on the phone call she had received from her cousin. Within a matter of weeks, Florence and her boys relocated to Mankato.

"My cousin's lease would not allow the boys and me to stay longer than just a few days. That is when I learned about the Theresa House. We were so lucky! They gave us two bedrooms and a kitchen where I could cook for my boys.

Because of my life in the refugee camp, I had a lot of health issues. They took me to the clinic—many, many times, and they connected me with Blue Earth County Housing. They got me signed up for financial assistance and food programs.

They were so good to me!

When I finally got my own apartment, they found me everything that I needed. I got donations of furniture, household items, toys and clothing. Everything. This allowed me to save my money, so that I could start my new life. I knew that I wanted to go to school. I always wanted to go to school.

Most important of all, the staff at Theresa House taught me the importance of being a responsible single mother. They taught me how to keep my children

safe, even when I had to work or go to school. It is so different than in Africa where we all help each other care for our children. In America, I learned that it is my responsibility. My stay at Theresa House taught me that."

While the Sudanese culture supports formal education for boys, girls are simply expected to learn how to cook, care for the house and children and serve their husbands. Education was rarely extended to girls in the Sudan.


Florence's family, however, was different. Her mother was a strong supporter of education for both the boys and girls of her family, and Florence would inherit that strength and resolve so clearly demonstrated by her mother.

"I have always pushed myself to do things for myself. I do not want to depend on others. When I started receiving government assistance, I quickly decided that I did not want to live that way, so I became a nursing assistant. I worked fulltime while attending South Central College and graduated in May of 2008."

Florence went on to enroll in Mankato State University where she is currently a senior majoring in social work and slated for graduation in May of 2013.

"Because I have to double my efforts—it takes me two hours to do what others can do in one hour—I have had to go back on assistance for a short period of time. I have a lot of responsibilities with the three boys, school and community life. I have a lot of interruptions, but I will not give up. I will never give up. I have maintained a high GPA, and I have every intention of pursuing my Master's Degree."

Over the course of her lifetime, Florence has had to endure many losses. Although her husband mysteriously vanished from the refugee camp in the dark of night and her beloved mother and siblings have died, she works—every day—to maintain her positive attitude.



"Maybe it is not my time yet," says Florence, "but I will not give up. I will never give up."

Director's Corner



Julie Caraway Jenson, Program Director, was just getting ready to leave for the day when her office phone rang. "Can you help us?" the little voice on the other end of the line asked. She was just 12 years old, but her family had been sleeping in their car for a number of nights. Within a matter of minutes, the family was in Julie's office completing an intake and the necessary background checks. Little do they know how lucky they

were. Most often, our shelters are "full." It is our pleasure to be able to reacquaint you with our agency in this, our very first, newsletter.

Partners for Affordable Housing (PAH) is missioned to provide shelter for homeless families and individuals and help them find economically viable long term housing. PAH is seasoned in the providership of housing for vulnerable populations having worked within the arena for over 25 years. The organization owns and operates a number of scattered site housing facilities that provide emergency, transitional and permanent affordable housing options to homeless and/or at-risk individuals and families in the Mankato area.

Emergency Housing for the Homeless

Though it offers a wide range of housing options for low-income families and individuals, PAH is probably best known as Mankato's "homeless shelter" offering emergency housing to those experiencing a temporary housing crisis. Theresa House accommodates as many as 18 residents while the Welcome Inn, next door, accommodates 14 guests. Single females are provided simple bedrooms with shared kitchens and bathrooms while families may be offered small, private apartments, as available.

Case Management Services

Using a "Housing First/Harm Reduction" Model of Care, emergency shelter accommodations are augmented by licensed social workers who meet with guests on a regular basis helping them address the issues contributing to their homelessness. This model was chosen based on the premise that many vulnerable families with children and single adults are more responsive to interventions and social services support after they are in housing rather than living in a car or on the streets. The model of care seeks not to blame participants for their situation but uses skills and approaches designed to reduce future incidents of homelessness.

Transitional and Permanent Affordable Housing for Low Income Residents

Because Partners for Affordable Housing believes all human beings, regardless of their economic status, are entitled to safe, decent, affordable housing, the agency provides transitional and permanent housing in single family homes and apartment complexes it owns and manages throughout Mankato. Tenants in transitional housing units pay rent assessed at 30% of income. Rates are adjusted as their income changes throughout the year. Families living in transitional housing units are limited to two years' residency while families living in permanent housing units can stay as long as they continue to pay rent and live by lease guidelines.

There is so much more I would like to share with you. How is it that our beautiful city has families sleeping in their cars or hidden and huddled underneath bushes in an area park? If you would like to know more about the services Partners for Affordable Housing offers their vulnerable guests—and how you can help us in our mission—, please call me. I can be reached at 507-387-2115. As always, it is my honor to serve.

Carrol Meyers-Dobler

Thomas Facilitates Project GEM for the Children of Rivertown Homes



Hi! My name is Maddie Thomas, and I am facilitating Project GEM for Partners for Affordable Housing this year. Project GEM is a free after-school program that targets low income/special needs youth, ages 6 to 14 years of age. I am working with the children who live in the Rivertown Homes apartment complexes, one of many apartment complexes owned and operated by Partners for Affordable Housing.

I'm an art major at MSU, so I am very excited to be bringing art to younger kids. We'll be doing a lot of different activities including painting, drawing, collaging, beadwork, and much more! The children will be learning some basic art vocabulary such as value, unity, and movement and will be incorporating these elements into their pieces of work. They'll also learn about different artists and their style and techniques which, over time, will help them build their own unique styles.

Classes take place in the "annex" every Friday afternoon from 3:30-5:30 p.m. and extend throughout the entire school year. At the end of the year there will be a formal community-based art show. Each one of our young students will be showing his/her work at the exhibit.

Project GEM was made possible through the generous support of the Carl and Verna Schmidt Foundation.

Heat and Humidity No Match for Verizon Volunteers

On a sunny and warm June afternoon, Verizon Wireless Center employees mowed lawns, trimmed shrubbery, weeded gardens and planted flowers at Mankato's two homeless shelters, the Theresa House and Welcome Inn. Their efforts were on behalf of the Greater Mankato Area United Way's National Day of Action.

Though the temperature hovered in the 90's, smiles abounded as the volunteers worked. The flowers and hanging planters, generously donated by HyVee Garden Center and Drummer's, did much to create a homey atmosphere for shelter guests.

A tour of the two facilities followed by home-baked goodies and cold bottled water brought finality to the day. Tired and weary as they were, the Verizon volunteer returned to their worksite to finish out their assigned shifts before heading home for much-needed showers and air-conditioning.



Let's Pedal Past Poverty!

Be prepared to pedal to the limit at Partners for Affordable Housing's first "Pedal Past Poverty" Race slated for Saturday, March 2nd from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at the YMCA in Mankato, MN. This, one-day, **one-of-a-kind stationary bike race** will incorporate 40 teams of ten riders each, all competing for a broad array of wild and wonderful prizes. Who will be the real winners? Our Mankato neighbors who are experiencing a temporary housing crisis and are guests of the Theresa House or Welcome Inn.

"Pedal Past Poverty" is an event that challenges teams of ten to compete against one another riding on a stationary bike for 20-minute intervals with a 10-minute break to change riders. Media partners for the event include Lime Valley Advertising, Radio Mankato and KEYC-TV with bikes provided by the YMCA and Mankato State University.

The name of the game is fun, so you do not have to be of Tour de France caliber to enter. Plenty of contestants will need to take frequent breaks during their 20 minutes of cycling.

- Every Pedal Past Poverty participant will receive a **free t-shirt and "goodie" bag**. Additionally, each rider will be entered into a drawing for random prizes to be awarded throughout the day.
- Radio Mankato will be with us throughout the day blasting kick-butt, pedal fast music! DJ's will keep our riders motivated, counting out the seconds that remain in each heat. Finally, KEYC-TV crews will do their best to make sure your family catches a glimpse of you on the evening news!
- Crazy, zany prizes will be awarded throughout the day. Almost everyone can plan on walking away with something wonderful!
- Grand prizes are awarded to the team that bikes the greatest number of miles during the race and the team that raises the most money prior to the race.
- Individual grand prizes will be awarded to the cyclist who rides the most miles during his/her 20 minute heat and the cyclist who raises the greatest amount of money before the race.

- Lunch will be sold at the race with all proceeds benefitting the Theresa House and Welcome Inn.

Team qualifications are simple:

1. Each team is made up of 10 riders.
2. Each team member is asked to raise \$100 or more. Monies can be raised by asking neighbors, friends or family members for checks or cash in advance of the race OR, teams may solicit a corporate gift in the amount of \$1,000. In some cases, businesses may match dollars raised by individual participants. *Dollars raised are turned in at Registration before a rider is issued his/her t-shirt and goodie bag!*
3. Each team must appoint a Team Captain who will serve as liaison to the Pedal Past Poverty Planning Committee.
4. Each participant cycles for 20 minutes. Towels and bottled water will be provided post ride!
5. The race is 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. but participants need only come for their assigned time slot. All participants are encouraged to stay, however, as the fun extends throughout the day!



Participation in Pedal Past Poverty is limited to the first 40 teams who register. Endorsed by Greater Mankato Bike/Walk Advocates, this race is bound to attract a lot of participants. Interested riders are encouraged to contact Partners for Affordable Housing at 507-387-2115 to have their names added to the event brochure mailing list.



Will You Be the Good Samaritan?

Two companions were travelling an ancient road well known to be dangerous when they came upon an injured man lying by the side of the road.

The first traveler averted his eyes and kept on walking, moving quickly past the fallen man and muttering to himself, "What will happen to me if I stop?"

His companion, however, immediately slowed his steps, stopped next to the injured man and offered his assistance, saying to his friend, "What will happen to him if I don't stop?"

Readers may recognize this story from their childhood days when they attended Sunday School. It is the story of the Good Samaritan.

The Theresa House and Welcome Inn are in need of Good Samaritans willing to volunteer within the shelters for a three hour shift just once a week. Shelter volunteers will serve to strengthen and augment the services provided guests, providing yet another layer of support to those experiencing a temporary housing crisis.

Prospective volunteers will need to be flexible in that duties will change from week to week. Good Samaritans may be asked to greet visitors, answer phones or make copies as requested by staff, visit or initiate board or card games with the residents, accept and sort donations, serve as a resource to guests by directing them to community-based agencies or programs that may be able to help them, or simply bake up a batch of brownies or chocolate chip cookies! Volunteers are also needed to help engage the children in activities which may include the completion of homework, art and/or holiday projects, the reading of stories, playing indoor or outdoor games or visiting the Children's Museum of Southern Minnesota located within walking distance of the two shelters.

Persons interested in learning more about the volunteer opportunities at the Welcome Inn or Partners for Affordable Housing are asked to contact Tiki at 507-387-2115 for application materials and a complete job description. Orientation and support will be offered each volunteer upon acceptance.

Donors *Thank You!*

The following is a list of all Partners for Affordable Housing donors who gave a cash or in-kind gift between January 1, 2012 and August 31, 2012. If your name or business has been omitted from this list, or we have a typographical error, please let us know. We are extremely grateful to those who have chosen to support our work with a portion of their life treasures.

Annual Memberships:

Coomes, Roger & Sally
Cowan, David
Gaffer, Christopher R
Hicks, Gerald & Mary
Kinne, Dale & Rosemary
Jensen, William & Margie
Martindale-Bergene, Dean & Wendy
Meyers-Dobler, Carrol A
Murphy, Mark & Pam
Nygaard, Mary Beth & Joseph Kunkel
Peipho, Mark & Shirley
Walchuk, Chris & Mary
Zachmann, Sister Alice

Cash Gifts:

A M Exchange Club
Bach, Michael & Sandra
Benshoof, Brian & Nancy
Bradley, Scott & Dawn
Carlson, Margaret
Chernoff, Joel & Pam
Christensen, Charles & Rosemary
Community Chest of Mapleton
Conroy, Judy
Coomes, Mary & Bradley
Coomes, Roger & Sally
Cooper, Scott & Lynette

Date, Kevin or Mary
Dehning, C & M
Gehrke, Robert & Deborah
Graber, Kim
Grabianowski, Kaaren E
Herickhoff, Penelope
Johnson, Robert & Patrice
Kanyusik, Carolyn
Kettner, Larry & Linda
Kvebak, Brian & Sally
Lloyd, Mark & Myrna
Mankato Moose Lodge
Mankato Sertoma Club
Nelson, Travis
Peterson, Scott & Sheryl
Prochazka, Randy or Donna
Rodning, Barbara
Rogers, Patrick & Molly Madden
Rossow, Janet
Schindle, Pamela
Sneer, Stuart
Trembley, David
United Prairie Bank
Voyager Bank
Walsh, Sandy
Wermerskirchen, Thomas & Theresa
Worke, Mark or Jean
Zierden, Mark B
Zonta Club of Mankato

Church Supporters:

Bethel Baptist Church
Christ The King Lutheran Church
First Presbyterian Church
Grace Lutheran Church Gifts & Memorials
Hilltop United Methodist Church
St John the Baptist Catholic Church
St Joseph The Worker Catholic Church

Grantors:

Anonymous
Carl & Verna Schmidt
Emergency Shelter Grant
Hickory Tech
HUD
Mankato Area Foundation
Robert E Fraser Foundation
School Sisters of Notre Dame
Transitional Housing Grant
United Way

In-Kind Contributors:

American Legion Post II
Pam Bartholomew & Gerry Schneck
Jack Beiswanger
Catholic Order of Foresters
Christopher & Banks
Jim Decker
Barbara Dombrovski
Elevate Church of Mankato
First Presbyterian Church
Flexible Plastics
Jessie Frette
Jolinda Grabianowski
Lisa Lutms
Madison Lake Church
Jill McKeown
Navitor Midwest
Chuck Pettipiece
Chelsea Plantz
Poet Biorefining
Amanda Shandor
Stacy Shrum
Amy Steffen
Stephanie Struckhoff
Mikella Thompson
Arvid Zenk

Partners Earns STAR Award

Minnesota's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) Team at Wilder in St. Paul has awarded Partners for Affordable Housing the 2011-2012 ESG STAR Award. The recognition was bestowed upon the agency for their accurate accounting of the homeless population in the region. On a quarterly and annual basis, statistics related to the numbers of people experiencing homelessness as well as related demographic information is entered into the Minnesota Homeless Management Information System. The tabulations are orchestrated by Program Director Julie Caraway Jensen and Associate Director/Case Manager Willow Schreyer. The system is utilized state wide and is an important tool to demonstrate the need for homeless programs in Minnesota.

Mankato's First Presbyterian Church Vacation Bible School students gathered food, soaps and shampoos and paper products for Theresa House and the Welcome Inn.

Their gifts, much appreciated, filled the entire back of a pick-up truck! The students also collected much needed office supplies which were delivered to the Administrative Offices of Partners for Affordable Housing.





Kids with our tie-dyed shirts!

Summer Programming *Too Much Fun*



The kids in their chef hats with the snack they made.



Bowling in her shirt she tied dyed herself!



The kids racing the cars they made.

It was an exciting summer for the kids living at the 16 unit Rivertown Apartment Complex owned and operated by Partners for Affordable Housing. AmeriCorps Member, Martinique Pautzke, planned and implemented a daily six-week summer activity program designed to preserve the childrens' reading and math skills in an atmosphere of fun. Attendance was not mandatory but every afternoon, up to fifteen children gathered outside the "annex" door waiting for classes to start. The kids, ages 5 to 14, did everything from reading chapter books and tie dyeing t-shirts on the Fourth of July to making, from scratch, homemade cheese quesadillas. Some of the weekly themes included the Earth, Space, and Animals of the World. With the help of Vine Faith in Action, transportation services made it possible to take the children on five field trips: Andreas Observatory at MSUM, Children's Museum of Southern Minnesota, McGowan Farm, Dutler's Bowling, and Sibley Park. The success of the Summer Enrichment pilot program led the agency to seek funding for Project GEM during the school year. (See related article on p. 2)

Charlie Gives His Birthday Presents to Mankato's Shelters

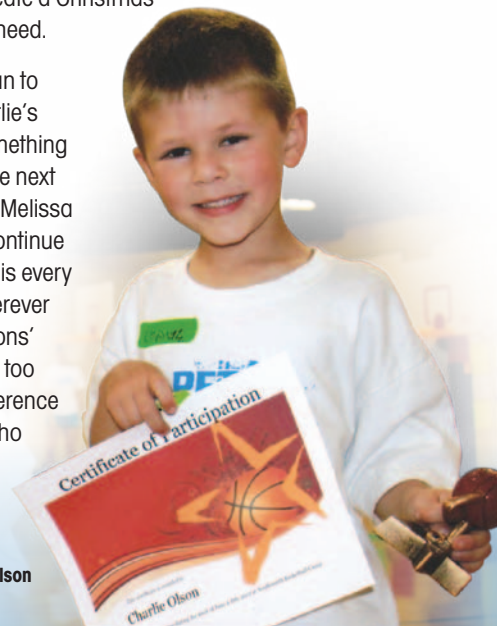
Charlie Olson, St. Peter, is just five but already he understands the importance of "philanthropy." Instead of asking his friends and family to bring him presents for his birthday celebration every year, he asks them to consider bringing a gift for someone experiencing a temporary housing crisis. The gifts are gathered and delivered, by Charlie and his family, to Theresa House and the Welcome Inn—but not before Charlie, himself, goes shopping with the \$20 Target gift card his parents give him every year.

According to his mom, Charlie has an "enormous heart" and that heart is more than evident when Charlie shops with his gift card. With much thought, Charlie carefully picks out things parents might need for their babies at the shelters: diapers, bibs, rattles, baby foods, and more. At the close of his shopping trip, Charlie always adds cake mix and frosting to ensure that a homeless child could still have a birthday party even if the family was living in one of the shelters.

Charlie is a South Elementary kindergartner who loves to play basketball and soccer. Like any five-year-old, Charlie is full of energy. He lives with his parents, Tim and Melissa, and 3 year old twin brothers, Maxwell and Lincoln. When he is not in school, his days are spent riding bike, reading books, visiting the area parks and playing Star Wars and Ninjagos. When he lost a precious front tooth at the end of summer, he surprised his parents by placing his tooth fairy money in the collection plate at church. "I don't need it," he told his proud mother. This is just one example of Charlie's kind and generous heart.

Charlie's brothers, Max and Lincoln also dedicate their birthday parties to the essence of giving. They support Mankato's animal shelter, providing dog and cat food, leashes and cozy beds for homeless animals. The focus on family philanthropy was actually started in both Tim and Melissa's families of origin. Melissa's family adopted The Black Hills Children's Home, buying Christmas gifts for all the children every single year for as long as Melissa could remember while Tim's family pooled their holiday gift-buying dollars every year so that they could create a Christmas for another family in need.

"It is better to give than to receive." This is Charlie's family motto and something they hope reaches the next generation. Tim and Melissa hope their children continue giving to those in crisis every year, whoever or wherever it is needed. The Olsons' believe you are never too young to make a difference and support those who need a helping hand.



Charlie Olson

November 2012 Newsletter



Partners for Affordable Housing provides shelter for homeless families and individuals, and helps them to secure economically viable long-term housing.

partnersforhousing.org

Board of *Directors*

David Cowan
President

Rhys Gaffer
Vice President

Sally Coomes
Secretary

Rosemary Kinne
Treasurer

Steve Behm
Member at Large

Wade Davis
Member at Large

Jerry Hicks
Member at Large

Margie Jensen
Member at Large

Mark Murphy
Member at Large

Mary Beth Nygaard
Member at Large

Mark Piepho
Member at Large

Chris Walchuk
Member at Large

Sr Alice Zachmann
Member at Large

Partners Introduces *New Staff*



Jeni Kolstad is a Licensed Social Worker who is working part-time on our Emergency Solutions Grant, Rapid Re-Housing Program. She will be helping shelter guests to move out of the shelter and into safe, decent and affordable rental units. Grant dollars awarded the agency earlier this year help these new residents with their monthly rent for a period of up to 18 months.



Jennifer Lamoreax has served as a volunteer in the administrative offices since 2007. She recently started working the early evening or overnight hours as Shelter Support. Jennifer is a recent graduate of MSU and hopes to become a physician specializing in the care of women.



Alicia Reyes volunteered within the shelters while pursuing her degree in corrections at Mankato State University. She was recently hired to serve as Shelter Support and regularly works the early evening or overnight hours within Theresa House and the Welcome Inn.



Martinique "Tiki" Pautzke volunteered within the shelters' After School Program and orchestrated the Summer Enrichment Program hosted at the Rivertown Homes Apartment Complex. Tiki graduated in 2012 from Mankato State University with a degree in Spanish and Spanish Education, most recently worked as Shelter Support. Tiki was promoted to Volunteer Coordinator/Development Assistant for Partners for Affordable Housing in September of this year.

Each and every day, our home needs what your home needs. The shelters are in particular need of the following items:

kitchen knives, dishes, pots and pans, toilet paper, tissues, laundry soap, dish soap, deodorant, shampoo, conditioner, body wash, baby wash, feminine care products (pads and tampons), diapers, wipes, cleaning supplies, mops, vacuums, pillows, fans, space heaters, bus tokens, gas cards, gift cards, batteries, and pain reliever for infants, children, and adults.

Your in-kind gifts do not have to be brand new! We gratefully accept gently used items and dance on the rooftops when a kind soul donates something brand new. Your gifts allow us to preserve our much needed cash so that we can continue to maintain our facilities and offer respite to those in need.

This holiday season will be especially painful for the many families who call our shelters "home." Please do not forget that our families, many with small children, still hope for a "Merry Christmas." If you can help provide gifts or holiday goodies for our guests, please contact Tiki Pautzke, Volunteer Coordinator. Tiki can provide you with the details of our guests' holiday wishes.