

Triumph Over Terror

She'd been beaten, restrained and abused for most of her short marriage but when he started playing Russian Roulette with a loaded gun pointed at her head, she knew she had no choice but to leave. Pregnant and with her teenage son in tow, Talitha fled her six-bedroom family home located in the Midwest with just \$8 in bills and a handful of change. Truck drivers and church people helped her along the way by providing rides, meals and a safe place for her and her son to sleep. There were many days in the three week journey that Talitha went without food, filling up on water to ward off the unrelenting pang of hunger. The little money that she had—and the generosity of strangers—kept her boy well fed. Talitha found family in St. Paul who could care for her son until she could get settled in her own home. She continued her trek on to the Mankato area where her sisters welcomed her with a sigh of relief.

Now seven months pregnant, Talitha doubled up with one sister until the landlord reminded them that they were not abiding by the lease agreement. Talitha, then, was forced to sleep in the family's van or couch-hop with various friends of the family. She went to area soup kitchens to eat and when they weren't open, she shared occasional meals with friends and family or filled her stomach with water. Each and every day, Talitha was relentless in her search for affordable housing. She made repeated phone calls to area landlords

day after day after day until, one day, her new OB-GYN doctor told her about the Welcome Inn. She left the doctor's office and immediately placed the call. Would they have room for her? Yes! She was homeless by all definitions of the term and, therefore, eligible for help. The very next day, Talitha was checked in.

"They were so awesome," said Talitha. "They made me feel like I was home from the very first day."

While Talitha was safe for the present, she was anxious to be reunited with her son. She knew that she still needed to find an affordable

"Our home is filled with a lot of respect and love."

apartment for her, her boy and her new baby due to arrive within weeks. "I got up every morning and started my daily round of calls. On some days I called both morning and afternoon. I tried the same landlords over and over again. I filled out application after application. The staff was wonderful, helping me in every way possible."

But, alas, babies don't always wait for their mothers to find a permanent home. Talitha's baby boy arrived while she was still in the shelter. His birth was cause for great celebration! Staff visited her in the hospital and took turns cuddling the little one once she returned "home."

Talitha renewed her relentless phone calls to area landlords and within days of her baby's birth, she finally had a place of her own. She immediately sent for her oldest son.

Today, Talitha and her sons live in a cute little apartment of their own. "Our home is filled with a lot of respect and love," says Talitha. "My son saw the beatings. He knows what we went through. He also knows, we made it! He is proud of what we accomplished. We thank God every day."



The President's Prose



Homeless in Mankato? How can that be? I have often wondered that myself until I became more acquainted with Partners for Affordable Housing. Now I understand. Homelessness is just another word describing individuals and families who are experiencing a temporary housing crisis. For whatever reason, they were unable to maintain their monthly rent payments. As we all know, non-payment of rent results in

eviction—and yes, it is true—we have families who have been forced to find respite in their cars or with friends until alternative housing can be found. It is complicated and there is no easy fix. Our families struggle each and every day with poverty and our community's lack of affordable housing. Here are the facts:

- Blue Earth County has one of the highest poverty rates in Minnesota, surpassed only by those three counties on which Indian Reservations are located! According to our most recent census, 19% of our county's population is struggling to live at or below the poverty rate of \$11,700 for a single person or \$22,800 for a family of four.
- The Affordable Housing Task Force reported that 1 in 10 families in the Mankato proper live on incomes BELOW the poverty rate and last summer, the Free Press actually ran an article that said 1 in 6 families in our community earn LESS than poverty rate. One in 6!

Housing is considered affordable if it consumes less than 30% of a household's income. At higher levels, families must choose between

housing and other basic needs. Many will struggle to weather day to day life and some will fail.

Over the last 10 years, there has been a marked increase in the proportion of our community's population that pays more than 30% of their incomes for housing. In Blue Earth County, one-third of all renters pay more than 30% of their household incomes to maintain their apartments and in the Mankato proper, 6 out of every 10 renters are paying more than 30% of their income for rent. Why is this of concern to us? Because families who dedicate over 30% of their income to housing are families who cannot sustain an emergency. If the family bread-earner loses his or her job, or has a debilitating accident, the rent payments are jeopardized.

The statistics are bountiful, indeed, but you can clearly understand. We have, quite literally, hundreds of families who are at risk here in our beautiful communities of Mankato/North Mankato.

What does all of this mean for Partners for Affordable Housing? It means we will do what we need to do to provide a safe and nurturing respite for families caught in a housing crisis—and we will do it with your help. With the holiday season just around the corner, we hope that you will consider just exactly what you can do to help us in our mission of service. Will you send a financial gift? Will you donate basic household items? Will you pass on your children's outgrown clothing? We can promise that whatever you choose to do to help us in our mission, we will honor your gifts by providing stellar service to Mankato's most vulnerable.

Mark Piepho, President
Partners for Affordable Housing Board of Directors

Cooking With *The Other White Meat!*



Linda Hachfeld
MPH, RD

Linda Hachfeld, CEO of Appletree Press, was looking for a way to give back some of the joy of food and knowledge of eating healthy to her community when she approached Partners for Affordable Housing in early May. Linda has been one of our friendliest neighbors at our new office on Good Counsel Hill and was very excited to meet with Partners to discuss her idea.

After collaboration, grants were written and submitted. Partners was awarded the Minnesota

Pork Board Literacy Grant and the Mission Grant from First Congregational United Church of Christ for Linda's innovative project. "Eating Healthy on a Budget" is an October evening cooking class which will involve all of the families sheltered within Theresa House and the Welcome Inn. University students will help facilitate the themed stations where participants will learn about safe cooking temperatures, proper food storage and healthy proportions. Of course, the evening will end with the all-important taste test!



The Littlest *Philanthropist*

Philanthropist. At four years old, Madelyn Ryan could barely pronounce the word much less understand its' meaning. None the less, Madelyn was being mentored in philanthropy and her mentors were none other than her grandparents, Mike and Lois Ryan of Montgomery, MN.

Looking for an agency that could use children's toys and books, Grandma Lois e-mailed Partners for Affordable Housing. She had just retired and was cleaning out and downsizing the family home. Little Madelyn, who had been lovingly cared for during the day by Grandpa and Grandma, had outgrown some of the toys that Mike and Lois had bought for her over the years. Would Partners need them?

Director Carrol Meyers-Dobler quickly responded to the e-mail quest that came out of the blue. With a capacity of eleven families in the two shelters, Welcome Inn and Theresa House, toys for the little ones were at a premium. She messaged Lois back and within a week, the agency accepted bags and bags of brand name educational toys, a youth bed and hard cover books!

The unexpected windfall was followed by a number of other visits. Over the course of the summer, philanthropists Mike and Lois along with Madelyn's parents, Jeff and Steph Ryan, donated a crib, dresser, massive quantities of children's clothing and more toys. As fast as the donations

came in, they were distributed to families in need, families who sought refuge at the Mankato shelters.

Since all the donations had been Madelyn's, Grandpa Mike thought it important for her to see where her treasures were going. The littlest philanthropist came with Grandma and Grandpa one day and patiently listened as Grandma and Grandpa explained who, now, was going to play with her toys and books. While some children might have shed tears at having to say good-bye to some of their favorite things, little Madelyn just smiled before skipping back down the hallway and into her Grandpa's truck. After all, Grandma and Grandpa had more fun planned for their special day together!

If you are doing some fall cleaning and have basic household items you would like to donate to families rebuilding their lives, please contact Onnie Brodkorb, Volunteer Coordinator, at 387-2115.



Madelyn's little sister, Sophia, just 18 months, is also learning the power of philanthropy through Grandpa and Grandma Ryan.

New Beginnings Skills Classes Launched

In response to the observed/ expressed needs of our Emergency Shelter (homeless) guests and those households enrolled in our Transitional Housing Program, Partners for Affordable Housing launched "skills" classes known as "New Beginnings" in September. The once-a-week, four-month curriculum focuses on three key courses: (1) preparing nutritious meals while stretching your food dollars, (2) building and maintaining financial strength, and (3) achieving self-sufficiency through employment.

"Cooking Matters", presented in partnership with the University of Minnesota Extension Office, is a hands-on, cooking-based nutrition education program that teaches low income families how to shop for, prepare and enjoy nutritious meals on a limited budget.

Curriculum activities include:

- Weekly hands-on cooking experiences emphasizing nutrition and safety
- Learning why it is important to eat together as a "family"
- The opportunity to replicate the meal prepared in class through the providence of recipe and free groceries at the conclusion of each session
- Touring a grocery store, reading labels, comparing prices and making nutritious, budget-friendly purchases

"Cents Sense", presented in partnership with United Prairie Bank, focuses on building healthy financial habits.

The goal for the program is to teach participants lifelong money management skills.

Curriculum activities include:

- Examining family income and building a realistic budget
- Learning about checking and savings accounts

- Understanding insurance basics—buying with economy for maximum protection
- Reading a bank statement/balancing a checking account
- Examining the real costs of buying on credit
- Researching one's credit score and learning the impact of your score

"Square Pegs and Round Holes", presented in partnership with the Life Work Planning Center, focuses on employment-related issues.

The goal of the program is to help participants identify and improve job search skills.

Curriculum activities include:

- Completing a needs assessment
- Identifying interests, skills, values and strengths
- Developing an individualized action plan
- Conducting online/newspaper job searches
- Drafting cover letters and building resumes'
- Practicing for the interview and dressing the part
- Building appropriate workplace communication skills

Partners' anticipates repeating the entire curriculum three times during 2014. This will enable the agency to make classes available to all shelter residents whose average length of stay is currently at 74 days.

If your church, service club or business would like to provide snacks for our New Beginnings participants, please contact Carrol at 387-2115.

PARTNERS FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING



Heels on Wheels *Spikes on Spokes*

It's time to get your heels on wheels or your spikes on spokes in preparation for Partners' Second Annual Pedal Past Poverty Bike Race scheduled for Saturday, March 1st from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the YMCA in Mankato!

This one-day, one-of-a-kind stationary bike race will incorporate 50 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.

Partners' signature event, Pedal Past Poverty, raised over \$74,000 in net proceeds in its inaugural year. The race 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. Boring? Not on your life! The name of the game is fun—and you do not have to be of Tour de France caliber to enter!

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, TV and newspaper crews will do their best to make sure your family catches a glimpse of you on the evening news or in the Sunday paper!

Crazy, zany prizes will be awarded throughout the day. Almost everyone can plan on walking away with something wonderful!

Grand prizes will be 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. More grand prizes will be awarded to the most creative teams and the most spirited teams!

Individual grand prizes will be awarded to the cyclists who ride the most miles during his/her 20-minute heat and the cyclists who raise the greatest amount of money before the race.

To view pictures of last year's race, please go to our website, partnersforhousing.org. To learn how you can participate in this year's race, please contact Carrol or Onnie at 387-2115. Teams fill quickly so don't wait! Let us hear from you soon!

"Strong and healthy communities reach out and care for those in need. Everyone in our community deserves a place to call home. Please join the Greater Mankato Multisport Club and our family for Pedal Past Poverty. We will be exercising our bodies so that others may exercise their rights to safe and secure housing."

Chris and Shari Crocker
Honorary Co-Chairs
Pedal Past Poverty 2014



Unexpected Gifts

Unexpected gifts are my favorite. Accepting in-kind donations is a large part of my job and brings a smile to my face every day. I never know what will arrive at my office door. One day it's a bed and dresser, the next it's boxes of diapers and baby wipes. Big or small, these gifts are vital to the services provided through Partners for Affordable Housing.

This year we encourage our generous supporters to consider adopting a family this holiday season. Every family has specific needs and wishes. A single mom needs new gym shoes for both her kids and is hoping for silverware and dishes for her new apartment. A couple experiencing foreclosure needs car repair and is hoping for new clothes to wear to work. Their children want the same toys your children (or grandchildren) want.

Will you be the one who will choose to adopt someone and make his/her dreams come true? Or, instead of buying massive gifts for your own family, will your family adopt one of our families?

For more information on adopting a family contact Onnie Brodkorb, Director of Volunteer Services 507-387-2115.

Can You Help?

The average family of four does 8 loads of laundry per week and uses 13 bottles of laundry detergent a year.

Toilet paper? The same family of four will need 20 packs of toilet paper per year.

Now multiply that by at least 10 (because 11 family units are able to stay in our shelters each and every night) and you have an idea of the needs for Theresa House and Welcome Inn.

What else do you use every day? Dish soap, shampoo, paper towels, Kleenex, toothpaste, surface cleaner, Tupperware? All of these things are needed every single day at the shelters.

As families move in and out we are also in need of home basics such as bedding, towels, silverware, dishes, gently used furniture and kitchen appliances.

All donations—big or small—are very helpful and appreciated.

A full and updated needs list can always be found on our website <http://partnersforhousing.org/get-involved/needs-list/>

Will You Help a Child With His Homework?

Will You Shoot Baskets With Her on a Saturday Afternoon?

Children whose families, of necessity, must stay at the shelters for a period of time until affordable community-based housing can be obtained, are often the innocent victims of homelessness. Though the Theresa House and Welcome Inn are a safe respite for families experiencing a temporary housing crisis, the congregate living space is burdensome to everyone, especially the children. The homes have no green space on which children can play. The parking lots at the back of the shelters provide a sort of basketball court until the neighbors complain about balls bouncing off the sides of their houses. Like it or not, our children have to share the scant toys, books and games we have with other children of need.

Luckily, area grantors, including our Greater Mankato Area United Way, recognized the needs of these very special children, offering an increase of funding that will allow the development of a Youth Enrichment Program.

The goal of the program, orchestrated through the efforts of Onnie Brodkorb, Director of Volunteer Services for PAH, is to (1) improve the academic performance of our young students through mandatory after-school tutoring, (2) introduce our students to the magic of discovery at the Children's Museum of Southern Minnesota, (3) help them to develop their large and small muscle abilities as well as social and emotional communication skills through simply plain fun at the YMCA in Mankato and (4) expose them to a wide range of cultural arts and the joys of creative expression through Project GEM.

Volunteer involvement is critical to making this program happen. If you can tutor a child once a week, or would be willing to accompany our kids to the Children's Museum or the YMCA, please call Onnie at 387-2115.

Our Kids Are Ready for School!

Open Your Heart to the Hungry and Homeless not only funded the exterior painting of the Theresa House but also granted Partners for Affordable Housing \$2,606 in grant dollars dedicated to the purchase of critical school supplies for children housed within one of the two shelters. The grant dollars not only support the purchase of school essentials such as pencils, paper, crayons, notebooks and erasers but also the much-needed and very expensive gym shoes, backpacks and activity fees. Their gift ensures that all of our sheltered children can start school looking and feeling no different than any other child—and that is how it should be!



Staff Trained in *Crucial Conversations*

Grant dollars secured by Ashley Strom, Assistant Director for RSO's and Non-Traditional Students at Minnesota State University Mankato, made it possible for Ashley and co-facilitators Megan Hajhal and Lenny Koupal to provide "Crucial Conversations" training to the entire Partners for Affordable Housing staff. The nine hour training, hosted by the School Sisters of Notre Dame and valued at several thousand dollars, took place in July. Staff learned how to skillfully handle those rare but difficult conversations that sometimes need to happen in one's personal and professional life. Topics presented included decreasing defensiveness while maintaining honesty and respect, speaking persuasively but not abrasively, and troubleshooting for your toughest conversations. Each participant received her own copy of *Crucial Conversations* and training video for future reference.



Ashley Strom



Keep Partners for Affordable Housing in mind on November 14th for GiveMN's Give to the Max Day. Check www.partnersforhousing.org or call 507-387-2115 for more info.

Understanding the magic of discovery, Dorothy Schiller, mother of PAH Director Carrol Meyers-Dobler, purchased an Access Membership to the Children's Museum of Southern Minnesota for the children whose families are sheltered within the Theresa House. (Grant dollars support a similar membership for the children sheltered at the Welcome Inn.) The membership will make it easy for families to walk over to the Museum for fun anytime they want!

Thanks, Mom!

Erika Gives Back

Erika Holm, former resident of the Welcome Inn, is one of three women who *bravely* tell their story of hope and recovery in this year's United Way campaign video. The video can be viewed on the Greater Mankato United Way's website, www.mankatounitedway.org and will be shown at the United Way's Campaign Kick-Off scheduled for Friday, September 20th at 8 a.m. at the Verizon Wireless Civic Center in Mankato. While Erika has long been on her own, she fondly remembers the help she was provided while staying at the Welcome Inn. Because of that experience, Erika has spearheaded philanthropy at her church. Church members fill laundry baskets with basic household cleaning products and paper supplies—necessary things which cannot be purchased with food stamps—and present them to families as they move out of the shelters.



Sprucing Up *the Shelters*

The green-space surrounding the Welcome Inn and Theresa House definitely improved after employees of Ridley, Inc. volunteered for United Way's Day of Action held Thursday, July 20th. Trees were trimmed, weeds pulled, grass cut and flowers, donated by Hilltop HyVee, were planted. One would have thought that they all went home exhausted but NO! When the labor intensive work was done, the volunteers turned their attention to sanitizing and organizing the kitchens within the two shelters!



Fresh Paint on Theresa House

The Theresa House, located next door to the Welcome Inn in the downtown area of "old" Mankato, was given a much needed exterior paint job in June, courtesy of the Open Your Heart to the Hungry and Homeless Foundation based in St. Paul. Over the years, the interior of the vintage home has been carefully and thoughtfully maintained by Partners' staff. New flooring, fresh paint and the replacement of windows assured a safe haven for families experiencing a temporary housing crisis. The exterior, however, presented a greater challenge. It seemed that neither staff nor volunteers wanted to climb the scaffolding required to repaint the three story brick building! Open Your Heart board members fully understood. Grant dollars, awarded last winter, made it possible to hire a professional. Today the Theresa House proclaims, "Welcome" to the wandering weary who need a temporary home.



New Windows to the World

Partners for Affordable Housing is probably best known as the parent agency for Mankato's two homeless shelters, the Welcome Inn and the Theresa House, but did you know that the agency owns and operates eight other housing facilities for low-income persons?

Within these units, individuals and families can rent *affordable* apartments—and can stay as long as they continue to pay their monthly rent and live by lease guidelines!

Thanks to the Carl and Verna Schmidt Foundation, one of these facilities was recently upgraded through the installation of new energy-smart windows. The Schmidt Foundation has long-supported the capital needs of Partners for Affordable Housing. These significant and expensive improvements would not be possible without their help—or the help of the Open Your Heart to the Hungry and Homeless Foundation. (See related article within this edition.)

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October 2013 Newsletter



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



Partners Introduces *New Staff*



Onnie Brodkorb, Volunteer Coordinator: As a former Sunday School Coordinator, Onnie knows how to match volunteers with the perfect rewarding experience. Onnie is responsible for the After School Enrichment Program for children in the shelters, planning and implementing special holiday events, assuring nursery care for pre-schoolers during New Beginnings Classes and overseeing the agency's ongoing collection of donated household items.



Vanessa Lange, Support Staff. Vanessa is a student at South Central College and Vice President of Phi Theta Kappa. In her free time she enjoys going to music festivals and camping. Vanessa works evenings and weekends at the shelters.



Brittney Renando, Shelter Manager: Brittney received a degree in Communication Studies and Human Resource Management from MSU, Mankato. She joined Partners in September bringing with her a wealth of experience in managing the group home setting. Her passion is anchored in helping people of all walks of life find the meaningful lives they so deserve.

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Partners Introduces *NEW Board Directors*



Kevin Mettler is a native of Mankato. He and his wife, Patti have 3 daughters, Ashley, Alyssa, and Megan. Kevin graduated from MSU in 1993 with a BA in Corrections, and a minor in Sociology. He previously worked for the Leo Hoffman Center and Blue Earth County. Currently, Kevin is the Drug Court Coordinator for the Adult, Family and Veterans Courts. In his spare time he is the Head Football Coach at Mankato Loyola and the Youth Minister at Holy Rosary Church.



Doug Lago recently moved to Mankato in January 2013 as the Market President for United Prairie Bank. He spent the past 23 years in Estherville, Iowa as the President and CEO of Emmet County State Bank. He also served for 20 years on the Iowa Lakes Community College Foundation and was the Board President since 2000. He recently married his wife, Amy, who works for Cohernet Solution in Minneapolis. She was recently featured in the Minneapolis and St. Paul Tribune Business section as one of the "Movers and Shakers" in business communities. The couple loves to be on the water, play golf, read and be with family and friends.