



The Companion

Pleading for Shelter and Housing

by Chuck Bowen, Executive Director

It was a desperate act. The doors at Central Presbyterian Church were open for Sunday worship. He entered and sat on a crowded pew at the rear of the sanctuary.

As the service began, Pastor Gary Charles welcomed everyone for a special Sunday of music in recognition of All Saints' Day.

Moved by the welcome, this man rose from the pew and walked to the front of the sanctuary, climbed the steps to the chancel and sat in one of the ornate, oversized chairs usually occupied by the pastors. When Dr. Charles turned to him, he stood up, stepped forward and told the crowd of 500 worshippers his story.

A former chef who spent weeks in a coma after a car accident, all he wanted was a job. Without a valid ID, most shelters were closed to him. And living on the street made it impossible to find a job. Even if someone were willing to hire him, his lack of ID would again be an obstacle. He pleaded with the congregation to help him.

I met him as he came down from the chancel. We walked to the narthex and talked about finding shelter and employment. Hearing his challenges, I realized that our options were limited and near-term solutions were few. Still, we offered him assistance in replacing his ID, finding shelter and in applying for disability benefits.

His name was Winslow and he shares his misfortune with thousands in the City of Atlanta each night.



In January 2011, a census was taken of the people who were homeless in Atlanta on a given night (see sidebar).

On that particular night, 90% of shelter beds and 78% of transitional housing beds were occupied. Even if every bed had been filled, more than

1,500 men, women and children would have had to sleep outside or in places not meant for human habitation.

Over the past two years, public discourse has focused on whether or not one shelter operated by the Task Force for the Homeless will continue to operate. Sadly, this conflict has dominated the news cycles and obscured the more pressing need for real solutions.

It remains to be seen what will happen with the shelter at Peachtree and Pine. What is absolutely certain is that Atlanta needs a better system of shelters and transitional housing that is truly effective in helping people return to stability. It will require more than the efforts of one organization to accomplish this. It will require civic will, good faith and collaborative effort of businesses, churches, nonprofits, elected leaders and government agencies.

Recovering from homelessness will always be difficult. Let's at least give ourselves the resources we need to truly help our neighbors. Otherwise, Winslow and others like him will remain desperate, pleading with us in vain.

Quick Facts: Homelessness in Atlanta

On January 25, 2011, a census of homeless individuals and families was conducted in the City of Atlanta, Fulton County and DeKalb County.

These numbers represent the count from that one night.

6,838

people were homeless

5,765

were individuals

1,073

were in families

5,987

were in the City of Atlanta

2,460

were in emergency shelters

2,000

were in transitional housing

2,378

were unsheltered

269

shelter beds were empty

553

transitional housing beds were empty

19,771

people will experience homelessness in 2011 (estimate)

For a copy of the full census report, contact Kevin Spears at kspears@centrloac.org.

About Central OAC

Central Outreach & Advocacy Center seeks to be a passionate and well respected voice in the community on behalf of people who are homeless and is committed to collaborating with area service providers to significantly reduce the risk and prevalence of homelessness in Atlanta.

Last year, more than 8,000 men, women and children received assistance at Central OAC.

Central OAC works to overcome barriers to employment, housing and healthcare for those who are homeless or near-homeless in two ways:

Outreach

We serve guests one-on-one to meet critical basic needs and we offer innovative, transformational programs that empower our guests to become self-sufficient and return to stable, permanent housing.

Advocacy

Guided by our guests' experiences, we engage in education and coalition-building that call our community to build better structures of care and dismantle the systems that cause homelessness.

Get Connected!

Visit our blogs for more insights on homelessness and Central OAC's mission.

For daily prayers and reflections on outreach, visit

<http://centraloutreach.wordpress.com>.

For updates on public policy advocacy, visit

<http://centraladvocacy.wordpress.com>

For pictures, videos and reflections on caring for our neighbors in need, find us on

facebook

Season of Joy, Season of Thanks

Central OAC is deeply grateful to these community partners for their support of our mission in 2010-11 through grants and in-kind contributions.

Foundations

Harold & Kayrita Anderson Family Foundation
The Atlanta Foundation
Francis Hollis Brain Foundation
The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta
Conlee Family Supporting Foundation
Georgia Health Foundation
Wilbur & Hilda Glenn Family Foundation
John H. & Wilhelmina D. Harland Charitable Foundation
The Imlay Foundation
Lois & Lucy Lampkin Foundation
The Sara Giles Moore Foundation
SunTrust Foundation
The Tull Charitable Foundation, Inc.

Congregations

Central Presbyterian Church
First Presbyterian Church of Cedar Falls
Oostanaula United Methodist Church
Trinity Presbyterian Church

Groups, Associations & Federated Giving Programs

Atlanta Track Club
Baby Boomers Sunday School (Piedmont Church)
DeKalb School Employees Foundation, Inc.
Emory & Henry College
Peachtree Yoga Center
Rebekah Circle (Central Presbyterian Church)
United Way

We also thank the many individuals and families who have generously supported Central OAC in 2010-11.

Your contributions make a difference in the lives of the men, women and children we serve and there are simply too many of you to list here.

Visit www.centraloutreachandadvocacy/partners.html for a grateful acknowledgement of all our donors.

You are cordially invited...

It is time for the annual Central OAC Christmas party!

Our lobby will be aglow with festive cheer for our guests, volunteers, staff and friends. No chestnuts roasting on an open fire but there will be hot cider, Christmas treats, carols being sung by a choir and tidings of great joy.

We welcome contributions of treats and sweets for the table and hygiene items for gift bags for our guests.

And we hope that you will join us!

Central OAC
Christmas Party

Friday, December 16
10:00 am to 12:30pm
In the Outreach Center



Mission in a Nutshell: Overcoming Isolation

by Kevin Spears, Director of Development

Visitors at Central OAC often want to know if there is one single factor that accounts for homelessness.

Some have heard that most people are homeless because they have a mental illness or a substance addiction. This is not true. Many do but most do not.

Some have heard that most people are homeless because they have chosen to be homeless. This is not true. Some have but most have not.

What people who are homeless have in common is that their resources were not sufficient to overcome a lost job, a disabling illness, an addiction, physical abuse, a criminal record, a bad decision, depression, loss of benefits, eviction or any of the dozens of crises that can start a downward spiral.

The other thing they share in common is isolation.

There are many people who face economic hardship, illness, addiction, domestic violence and other crises without



becoming homeless. Though financial resources are important, they survive those hard times largely because of the friends, family and other social resources that they can call on for support.

But when your system of social support has eroded – or never existed in the first place – a small crisis is magnified and a large crisis is devastating.

And when you fall, you fall through the cracks.

Central OAC provides a host of programs and services to assist people who are homeless – from crisis assistance that meets an immediate need to job readiness training to case management that walks with a person on the whole journey of recovery.

But they all have this one aim in common: overcoming the isolation that has deprived a person of a safe, healthy, enduring home.

One of our guests recently put it this way: “If you have just one person by your side, that makes all the difference.”

And that, in a nutshell, is Central OAC’s mission.

Advocacy Spotlight: Incarceration and Identification

by Renée Snead, Director of Public Policy Advocacy

If you follow Central OAC’s work closely, you know that replacing state ID cards is a significant part of the crisis assistance that we provide. Last year we helped 1575 people obtain their state IDs so that they can access resources and services for their recovery. Partner agencies like Crossroads Community Ministries who provide the same service see similar levels of need.

Of the hundreds we see each year for IDs, many have been released recently from prison or jail. People leave a state prison with a prison ID card but it is practically useless. They cannot use it to open a bank account, secure housing or find employment.

People released from a city or country jail after even a brief stay find that somewhere between being booked and being released their ID card simply disappeared. The common practice of shuttling prisoners between city and

county facilities increases the likelihood that personal effects will be lost in the system.

And if that person is homeless when they are released, they do not have the resources that make replacing or obtaining a valid ID easy.

Many agencies have policies and practices that directly impact whether a person leaves incarceration with a valid ID in hand. Certainly, the state prisons and the local jails play a role, but state and city probation offices and the Department of Driver Services are also involved. Each of these has an opportunity to contribute to a released inmate’s successful re-entry into society by ensuring that he or she has a valid ID. In our experience, few of these agencies are aware of that responsibility.

These problems are not unique to Georgia. In the past two years,

Colorado, Nevada, Kentucky, New York and Virginia have enacted laws to ensure that individuals leaving jails and prisons are provided a valid state ID. In originating its bill, the Colorado Senate stated its legislative intent clearly: “The lack of valid identification is an impediment to successful re-entry and employment.”

Central OAC is committed to addressing these systemic problems in Georgia. First, we must instill in our elected leaders and government officials a recognition of the reality described by the legislative intent of the Colorado bill. We cannot do this alone and we will look to individuals, churches, organizations and the business community for help.

If you would like to be a part of this critical campaign, contact Renée Snead at rsnead@centraloac.org.



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Automatic Debit: An Easy Way to Increase Your Giving

A monthly gift of just **\$25** adds up to **\$300** in annual support for Central OAC.

Schedule an automatic debit or charge to your credit card by contacting Celeste Anthony (canthony@centraloac.org / 404-601-3172).

Your Gift Makes a Difference

Here is what your contribution to Central OAC can accomplish:

\$50 gives 5 guests a MARTA card that gets them to the first week of a new job.

\$100 gives 4 guests a new ID for access to housing, employment and benefits.

\$250 gives 7 guests an eye exam, prescription glasses and clear vision.

\$500 gives 1 guest a dedicated case manager for the journey back to stability.

\$1000 gives 1 guest job search training and support that gets him or her back to work.



Merry Christmas!

*From the volunteers,
staff and board of
directors at Central
OAC*

Give easily and securely online at www.centraloac.org.