

# Bearing Witness

An ImmaCare Inc. Publication

Winter 2018

## A Note from the Executive Director



Our nonprofit agency is in the customer service industry. ImmaCare Inc. provides social services and basic human needs to individuals in or facing housing crisis. So, how does that relate to a for-profit business model where “customer satisfaction” is paramount to remaining in business?

It’s easy to forget that the clients served in our Outreach, Shelter and Housing programs are the customers, as payment for the services they receive – provided by our staff – does not come directly from the client. The payment comes from our Government Funders, Private Foundations and the generosity of our donors.

What does that mean for the client? Frankly, it shouldn’t mean a thing. If anything, clients, in addition to each being treated like the best “customers” we have, should also be treated with a level of compassion and empathy high above the scale of any Fortune 500 company. After all, their best interest is at the heart of our mission and they should be treated with utmost respect by staff and volunteers who interact with clients directly, and by the Board of Directors and Management Team as we make decisions on how to improve the services we provide.

At ImmaCare, we strive to do just that. Long gone are the days when providing a bed and a meal was enough. Providing those services are basic human needs that we all have. But for the clients served by our Shelter it is part of a larger picture, one that not only moves individuals into housing, but keeps them housed. To change one’s housing situation impacts if and how they will abuse substances, as well as their mental, physical and emotional health.

Today, we are providing services in a more holistic, client-centered approach, with the metric being measured focused on how many clients move out of the shelter and into permanent housing – not how many bed nights and meals they receive. ImmaCare is part of a larger system with the Greater Hartford Coordinated Access Network. Working together with other similar agencies, we are focusing on housing clients and not on warehousing them.

Sincerely,

Louis Gilbert, Executive Director

### TESTIMONIALS & DEMOGRAPHICS

“I have always felt very good about ImmaCare. I asked to be sent to this shelter because I always felt it was the place that would most care about me and my needs.”



“As a first-time person in need, I’m overly stunned at the great program that is here. I felt lost, depressed, and confused my first night and was totally comforted by the time I received something to eat, a bed, linens, and pillows. I believe that when I’m in a better position to help, I will.”

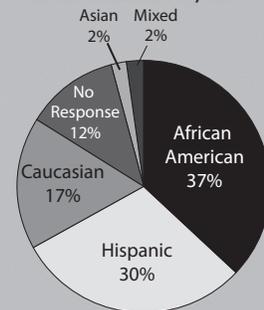
Age of Clients Surveyed

49 Average Client Age

23 Youngest Client

74 Oldest Client

Ethnicity of Clients Surveyed



### FACTS



clients who have a positive opinion of ImmaCare’s 24/7 shelter operations



of clients know that they have access to detox services  
*\*20% stated that this isn't applicable to them*



clients who self-identify as participating in tasks to help out at the shelter

### STAFFING & CASE MANAGEMENT

92% of clients feel the Shelter Staff cares about them

85% of clients feel they can talk to the Shelter Staff

91% of clients feel their Case Manager knows the community resources they need

91% of clients feel their Case Manager helps connect them to community resources

### SHELTER CLEANLINESS

Further improvement of these statistics is a priority during our upcoming Shelter Modernization Project

Overall Shelter Cleanliness 91%

Dorm Area Cleanliness 90%

Kitchen Cleanliness 93%

Bathroom Cleanliness 67%

\*\*Survey results are based on opinions expressed from a pool of 64 clients who were staying in the Shelter (when full, the shelter has beds for 75 men)\*\*

# Carrying on the Legacy – Passing the Food Group Torch

Submitted by Tracey Roderick, St. Mary's Church Simsbury



Monthly, October through April, my soon to be father-in-law opened his home, kitchen and heart to the St. Mary's food group. One month, my fiancé casually asked me to help. I was curious and decided to join the group for the day. The St. Mary's team had been working together for more than nine years and had grown into a well-oiled machine. Everyone pitched in, chopping, mixing, and preparing the meal; even the clean-up was organized. Abruptly, a stern voice bellowed, "Time to load the cars," and we were off.

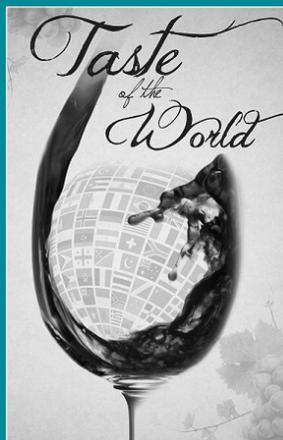
New to the experience, I wondered why after working all day, this group would carve time away from their families to prepare a meal and travel on a cold night into Hartford. As we journeyed toward our destination, light conversation filled the car with neither a grumble or complaint. Approaching ImmaCare's shelter, I was uncomfortable as it was dark and I was in unfamiliar territory. I followed in the shadows of the team, praying God would help me to overcome my fear. The group assembled, we said grace, and began to serve. I could see my fellow humans more clearly than ever, without boundaries of age, class or race. Food and shelter were never concerns in my life. But being eye-to-eye with each man, I realized we were equal. His footsteps could be mine, and mine his. One's biggest problems in life seem rather minor when standing face-to-face with the heart-melting smile of a hungry man who is experiencing homelessness.

In 2012, the Food Group Coordinator role shifted from father to son and daughter-in-law. My husband and I feel extremely blessed to carry on the tradition of opening our home, kitchen and hearts to the group each month. As we enter our 29th year, St. Mary's Food Group has more than tripled in size,

including bakers, cooks, ingredient donors, and servers. For 2018, we are on course to provide meals once each month throughout the entire year, with no end in sight. We love how fulfilling it is to help people, never expecting anything in return.

**Save the Date: Friday, April 13, 2018!**

**6th Annual Taste of the World  
An International Food, Wine & Beer Tasting**



We would like to invite you to join us for Taste of the World at St. Thomas Seminary in Bloomfield. It is a delicious evening, consisting of stations of international cuisine, delectable wine, and beer from local breweries. There is also an expansive silent auction to raise greatly needed funds for ImmaCare's programs.

Tickets to the event will be available in March. If you, your business, or a business you know would like to sponsor the event or donate to the silent auction, please contact Teresa Wierbicki at [twierbicki@immacare.org](mailto:twierbicki@immacare.org) or 860.742.4823 Ext. 103.

# A Change in Leadership Can Change Everything

Submitted by Carl Wright, Eversource Corporate Accounting Group, and Boy Scout Troop 170 Leader

For years, the Eversource Corporate Accounting Group has sponsored a “Giving Tree” during the holidays. In 2016, with no “champion” to support ImmaCare, a few of us new department members volunteered to take this project on. Upon receipt of the “Wish List,” I was surprised that what had once consisted of items to set-up homes had morphed into a need for tents and sleeping bags. As a Boy Scout leader who has spent overnights in a tent during the winter, I could only imagine what living in one full-time over a New England winter would be like. Inspired by the need for survival essentials, our team rallied to fulfill the needs of ImmaCare’s Outreach clients.



The small mountain of outdoor survival goods donated by Eversource employees for the clients of ImmaCare, including tents, sleeping bags, comforters, ground pads, thermals, wool hats and wool gloves.

A community project that began at work soon infiltrated my home life. When I entered ImmaCare’s men’s shelter for the first time, my comfortable suburban sensibilities were shaken. Soon, my teenaged son and the scouts came to mind.



Scouts and Leaders of Boy Scout Troop 170 at ImmaCare the evening that they served dinner at the shelter.

It wasn’t long before Troop 170 decided to sponsor a supper at the shelter. The scouts thought about what a home-cooked meal could mean to people without a kitchen or home, and decided everything would be made from scratch. The menu consisted of enchiladas, tacos, charro beans, yellow rice, and brownies. With little adult leadership, scout volunteers organized into groups of ‘cooks’, ‘servers’ or both. Meanwhile, our youth Scout leaders, Jack and Allen, benefitted immensely from the leadership opportunity presented by this project. From researching recipes

through execution, they learned how to plan, motivate, and delegate. But beyond that, our entire group learned about empathy, compassion, need, and appreciation for what we have.

In addition to the many “Thank You” and “God Bless You” we received, the fantastic staff, and the camaraderie

among the scouts afterward, each one of us took away our own meaningful memories. For me there are two that stand out: One, the gentleman who kept coming back for beans, saying, “these are fantastic!” and, two, the gentleman who did not speak English, but came to thank us by crossing his arms in prayer while pointing at us and heaven.

## Does your employer have a Matching Gifts Program, an Employee Giving Program or a Volunteer Grant Program?

Thousands of employers around the country offer programs to their employees in which they will match an employee’s donation to an eligible charity. Some offer grants to the organizations in exchange for your volunteer hours. Still others give employees the opportunity to donate a portion of their paycheck directly to an agency. ImmaCare Inc. is a tax exempt

501(c)3 non-profit organization that has donors who participate in a number of these programs.

Just a few of the local employers who offer such programs are: UTC, Prudential Financial, Apple, Travelers, Disney, Starbucks, GE, Aetna, Gap, The Hartford, Home Depot, and many more!

*Eligible employers are very familiar with helping you set yourself up within their programs, but if you need a little guidance on where to start, please reach out to us!*  
**Teresa Wierbicki,**  
[twierbicki@immacare.org](mailto:twierbicki@immacare.org)

# Mindfulness—Being in the Present

Submitted by Steve MacHattie, LCSW



Take a deep breath and hold it in. Slowly exhale, breathing out through your nose. Focus on your breathing and notice where you feel tension. Take another deep breath and

release the tension. Spend a few minutes focusing only on your breathing. You will notice other thoughts coming to mind. Don't judge them or yourself for having them. Allow the thoughts to come in; acknowledge and release them.

When I do this, I envision a dry cleaner's conveyor belt. I visualize putting the thoughts on the belt, and I let it go around; when it comes back, I choose to pick it up or let it go.

What you are doing is a mindfulness exercise. I was a hard sell on mindfulness. It seemed "hokey" to me. But then I tried it with real effort. We all struggle

with things and one day, while I was ruminating, I stopped and took a breath. I took another breath and released the tension in my body. I put my problem on the belt and watched it go and then I sat for a minute. My goal was to sit still and notice any urges I might have and not act on them.

I had the urge to check the timer on my phone. I wanted to move, to scratch. I was reminded of boot camp, standing with sand fleas biting and not being allowed to swat them away. I was reminded that I can control my urges. The timer beeped and I was done. The problem I had been focusing on was still something I needed to deal with. However, I was calmer. There was nothing I needed to do that day in relation to my problem and I could let it go, at least for the day.

I don't typically work weekends, but was in one Sunday reviewing files when my phone rang. One of my clients was having a terrible day. I met with him

and we started the progressive relaxation technique. I had him talk to me about one meal he would cook once he was housed. I had him describe it in detail. I asked him to imagine smelling the meal -- imagine seeing it on the table. We probably did this for 20 minutes and, when we were done, he was calmer.

Together, we devised a plan for him to stay calm through the night and to check in with me on Monday. Though he still needed to address the issues that upset him, he was calmer and able to effectively resolve them during the week.

You can approach mindfulness in whatever way works best for you: prayerfully, meditatively, contemplatively. Regardless of approach, adding mindfulness to our lives can put us in the present and reduce stress. It may sound hokey, but if you try it, I think you will find it can be helpful in your daily life, too.



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