



Bearing Witness

A NEWSLETTER of the IMMACULATE CONCEPTION SHELTER & HOUSING CORPORATION

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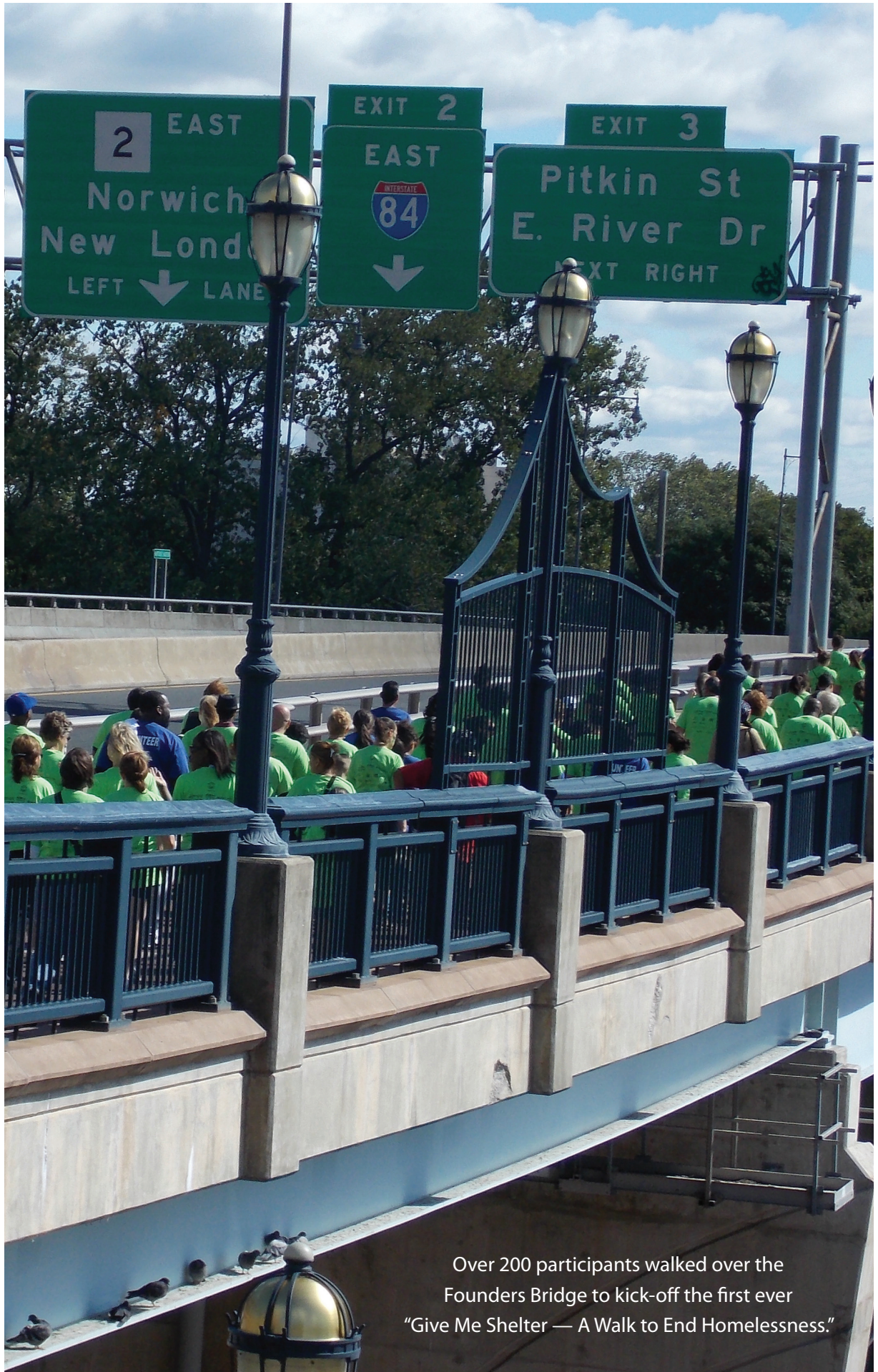
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VOL. 2, ISSUE 2



Over 200 participants walked over the Founders Bridge to kick-off the first ever "Give Me Shelter — A Walk to End Homelessness."

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A Note from the Executive Director

While looking at this issue's cover, you see over two hundred people united in the hope that one day there will come a time that homelessness is not a common occurrence. Together, in bright lime green shirts, they walked over the Founders Bridge, as cars passed by witnessing and wondering what brought all of these people together. Looking up, a striking sign that read, "Give Me Shelter" was blowing in the wind, giving passersby a bit of a hint.

In the past issues of Bearing Witness, we have focused on the stories of the men and women we serve daily. However, in this issue, we also focus on those who serve — the individuals and groups that help us feed, clothe and comfort the homeless. Whether it is a large group like the two hundred Deloitte employees that worked together to beautify the shelter, a group such as Blades Salon who donated their talents by giving haircuts to the clients, or an individual such as Luz Agosto who donates food to be served to clients who are hungry; every contribution, large or small, personal or financial, allows Immaculate to shelter and house the homeless of the Greater Hartford region.

Together, we can continue to help the most poor and needy with dignity and respect.

I hope you enjoy this issue and that it inspires you to continue to serve Immaculate and its mission.

May there always be room at the Inn,



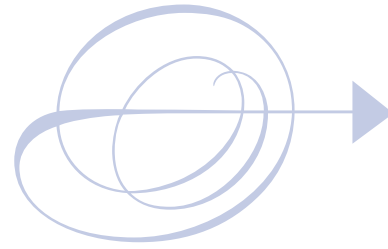
Fred Lynn, *Executive Director*



Immaculate
Conception
Shelter & Housing
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"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." – Margaret Mead

Finding Fate and Optimism



In 2008, Harry Mitchell was enjoying life and working his full-time job at the Greater Hartford Arts Council. When his doctors discovered a benign spinal tumor, his whole life was turned upside down. His surgery left him temporarily paralyzed below the waist for almost a year which impaired his ability to walk and work. His unemployment checks were not enough to sustain his day-to-day life and soon, he was homeless.

He later found himself serving a six month prison sentence and upon his release had nowhere to turn.

“I had lost everything,” he recalled, “Depression got the best of me and I turned to drugs and alcohol.”

He entered a substance abuse rehabilitation center. Though he felt his problem was minimal, he used the facility as his shelter knowing he had no place else to call home.

“I came to realize everything was a catalyst for my purpose in life.”

After months of couch surfing, Harry made his way through various shelter programs in the Hartford area before coming to Immaculate. He knew that if he followed the rules, stayed out of trouble and did what he was supposed to do, he had a greater chance of succeeding.



Harry Mitchell advocating against homelessness at City Hall

Harry had signed himself up to receive permanent housing and before he knew it, he was at the top of the list. He was elated when he found out he would be placed in one of the “scattered site” subsidized apartments. He was happy to regain his independence and start a new chapter of self-sufficiency.

“Through the whole time, I just kept trying to find the positive in the whole situation. I came to realize everything was a catalyst for my purpose in life,” he said.

Today, he is an advocate for homelessness, traveling through most of

Northwest Connecticut, speaking to community organizations and local politicians about the issue of homelessness that plagues so many communities. He hopes to continue to bring more light to the situation – as the demographics of homeless individuals becomes broader – he wants people to realize that poverty exists in many populations.

“Just because I was without a permanent residence, didn’t mean I was useless. Often times, you’re never treated like you’re anything special. But rich or poor, it’s all about personality. Circumstances don’t make the person. Integrity, dignity and honesty do.”

Harry hopes to become a more prominent figure in the local political spectrum, and even has a dream of helping others create a documentary delving deeper into the growing issue of homelessness.

Stay Connected...

You can now stay up-to-date with news about Immaculate by “Liking” Immaculate Conception Shelter & Housing Corporation on Facebook (www.facebook.com/ICSHC.ct) and by joining our Mailing List by logging on to our web site www.icshc.org.



Sharing Blessings

Submitted by Marcia Cattanach, Food Group Coordinator for the Corpus Christi Food Group of Wethersfield

“Amen I say to you, as long as you did for one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it for me.” (Matt 25:40)

This passage from Matthew sums up in one sentence what we need to do as Christians. Through Matthew, God is asking us to share our blessings, and through our Social Action Committee at Corpus Christi Church, we do God’s work.

Approximately 15 years ago, my family and I started preparing and serving meals at Immaculate. This was possible only because our church, Corpus Christi in Wethersfield, had been providing these meals for many years before we came aboard. It is the man that comes quietly to the table, head down, taking his dish of food, who quickly, humbly looks up to say “Thank you, Miss” that makes me cry. This is why we come to Immaculate. One gentleman we will always remember is Don. Whenever we were serving the meal, Don, my husband, and I would strike up a conversation, and continue the conversation every month right where we left off. Don was always upbeat and happy in spite of all his issues. We were thrilled for him when he was able to get into an apartment nearby. This was before Casa de Francisco was built. We miss our talks with Don.

Some of you may remember when Homefront (an organization that brings together professional carpenters, painters and builders, along with parishioners from area churches to remodel/repair approved homes) came to the shelter. It was a magical day of laughter and fun because we were excited to do God’s work. There must have been over 100 people at the shelter that day painting, cleaning, and remodeling. Plumbers, carpenters, professional painters working beside regular folks like us, teaching us the tricks and trades of their profession. We all wanted to create a clean, more beautiful place for our brothers and friends to eat and sleep in. The newly remodeled kitchen – although simple in design – was the most striking improvement to all who prepare and serve so many meals to the shelter residents.

As the Food Group Coordinator for Corpus Christi, it is my privilege and responsibility to be the “bridge” between our church and Immaculate. I say privilege because I get to talk, meet, and greet God’s angels who volunteer to prepare and donate food for the shelter. When I put the notices in our church bulletin, I try to convey the gratitude that is shown to our servers. I want our parishioners to understand and really know the men that they are preparing meals for, and how much their time and talents are appreciated.

The student volunteers that accompany us to serve the meal are shown a part of our society that they never would have encountered perhaps until much later in their lives. Our children must see those of us less fortunate. It just might be that one of them might be the one to find a permanent solution to homelessness. We never know who among us can make the difference.

The Corpus Christi Food Group is more than just a food group. With an understanding that Immaculate relies heavily on the kindness of individuals and groups who are able to make donations, we hosted a mum sale in the fall. All the proceeds of the sale went to Immaculate Conception Shelter’s Capital Campaign for a new shelter. Although it was a modest fundraiser, if other individuals and groups could host similar fundraisers for Immaculate, collectively we would have a substantial impact in serving and housing the homeless.

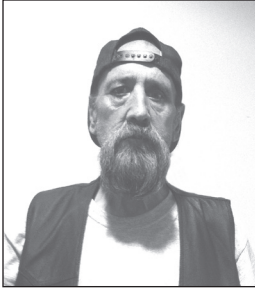


If you’d like to submit a story to our “A Look Back” feature, please contact Teresa Wierbicki at Teresa@icshc.org.

A Day in the Life

My Life

Submitted by Bill Allis, Peer Advocate



My name is Bill Allis, and I work for the Immaculate Conception Shelter & Housing Corp. as a Peer Advocate/Attendant.

This is my story on how I got to where I am at today. It has been a long and hard road, with a lot of setbacks, and a lot of good things, because of the people I have met and have helped me along the way. I still have a long way to go.

I got out of Federal Prison in September 2002. I went back to New Haven, where I was homeless. I went to the Columbus House, where I was assigned a case manager. While discussing my case, I told him that when I was incarcerated, I earned my GED and attended Culinary School. He told me to try to find a job with CT Works. Then one day, he called me into his office, and asked me if I would like to work for the Columbus House and take over the kitchen and overflow; I said "Yes."

While working I went to Mentorship Classes and completed them. I worked from October until May, and the job ended; I was back to where I started, jobless and homeless.

My probation officer and I didn't see eye to eye on some things, so he had the court place me in a halfway house in Hartford; I was there for six months. When I got out, I went back to New Haven. Five months later, I was back in the halfway house. I was there for another four months before being discharged. I returned to New Haven where things were not going well; I was back with old friends that I shouldn't have been with. I decided to go back to Florida but I couldn't find a job and returned to Connecticut. However, this time, I came to Hartford for a fresh start.

I was homeless upon my arrival in Hartford. I went to the Fire House shelter where I stayed for seven months; four months beyond the time normally allowed because I had two lens implants. Staff advised me to go to the Immaculate

We are sorry to inform you that Bill Allis passed away on January 20, 2013, after a long illness.

Bill touched the lives of both his family and friends, and the Immaculate family.

His humor, kindness, and assistance to those in need will be greatly missed.



Conception Shelter and Housing Corporation where I was able to join their summer program. I was assigned a case manager who had me see the employment specialist who helped me find work.

I got back my right to vote, took a course to become a certified moderator, and I now work at the polls. I also have weekly Peer Support Group sessions that meet on Wednesday at 4:30 and 5:30 at the Immaculate Conception Shelter and Housing Corporation.

My life is coming together for the better, but I still have a long way to go. But thanks to the Immaculate, I am getting there.



This is what I try to remember:

If you think you are beaten – you are.

If you think you dare not – you don't.

If you want to win, but think you can't,

It's almost a cinch that you won't.

If you think you'll lose – you're lost.

*For out of the world, we find that
success begins with a fellow's will.*

It's all in a state of mind.

~ Bill Allis



Deloitte helps ICSHC make an Impact



Each year, Deloitte, a Hartford based company that provides audit, consulting, financial advisory, risk management and tax services, selects a charity to have a positive “impact” in the Hartford community. Immaculate Conception Shelter and Housing Corporation was lucky enough to be selected as the 2012 Deloitte Impact Day project. On June 8, 2012 approximately 200 Deloitte employees volunteered their time and talents on a variety of projects including: painting the interior walls and ceiling of the shelter; purchasing and installing shelving for the food pantry; taking inventory, moving and organizing clothing donations; painting client beds and lockers; planting vegetables, fruit and herbs in the community garden; and fixing and painting fixtures on the outside of the building.

The 115-year-old church building has served the Hartford community as a shelter for more than 30 years. “The projects the Deloitte employees tackled not only brought

warmth to the Immaculate Conception Shelter, but also lifted the financial burden we would have otherwise incurred,” said Fred Lynn, ICSHC Executive Director. “Thank you to Michael Goldbas, our friend at Deloitte, and the many employees giving of their time and talents to help us.”

As things were coming together in the afternoon, Connecticut Senator Richard Blumenthal stopped by for a visit and watched as a new sign was placed at the entrance to the shelter. He thanked the Deloitte employees for providing such a positive impact on Immaculate, and thanked Immaculate for providing life-saving services to the homeless of the Hartford area.

After a long day, the shelter was ready to welcome our clients. Thank you to the Deloitte volunteers for your hard work – the shelter looks great!

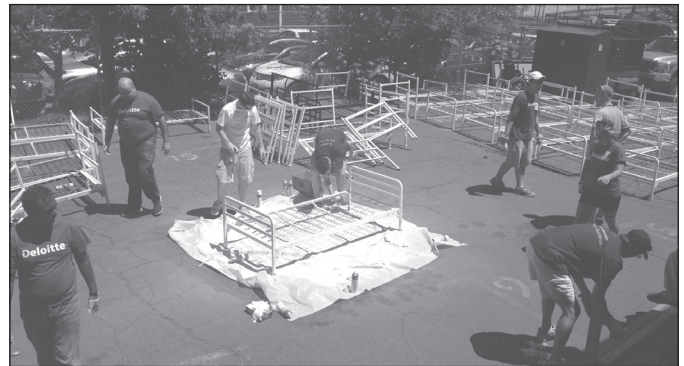


For years, Michael Goldbas of Deloitte and coordinator for the Hands to Hart food group has been a resource to Immaculate.

“In addition to providing home-cooked meals to shelter clients, Michael is an advocate of Immaculate’s mission and helps raise awareness to colleagues and others who may not realize the many services provided by the agency,” said John Mayo, Board Vice President. “Thanks to him, this past year Immaculate was selected for the second time as benefactor of Deloitte’s Impact Day project. As a result, Immaculate received approximately \$60,000 in donations and services. We are truly blessed to have Michael as a member of the Immaculate team.”



Fred Lynn, ICSHC Executive Director, Senator Richard Blumenthal and Michael Goldbas and Laurie Londergan of Deloitte outside of the Shelter.



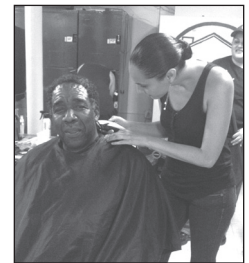
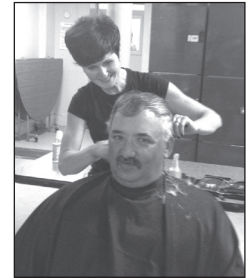
Deloitte volunteers working on a variety of projects throughout their day at Immaculate



Haircuts and a Smile

During the summer months, clients of Immaculate Conception Shelter were blessed to have Blades Salon of Wethersfield come to the Shelter to trim, cut and shave the hair of clients! Blades employees, led by Jay Roberts, owner, and Ed Coutu, manager, provided services to over 30 men. Jay and Ed have been supportive of Immaculate in a number of other ways, including donating a gift basket to our silent auction for the 30th Anniversary Celebration and most recently Christmas presents for the shelter residents. When Jay was asked why he volunteered at the shelter and donated money for winter clothes, he said, "It's what everyone should do."

Little acts of kindness such as these leave quite an impact. After their haircuts, the gentlemen walked around with a little extra pep in their step, thankful for the lighter feeling everyone feels after a nice haircut. One gentleman shared, "I felt like a regular customer. I didn't feel like I was in the shelter, I didn't feel as though I was patronized. Instead, I felt cared for and treated professionally."



Many thanks to the Blades Salon Family!

A Generous Heart and a Helping Hand

Luz Agosto is never reluctant when given the opportunity to give back to her community. Using her own resources and time, Luz has raised the bar on what it means to be generous. Luz has been a full-time employee with AT&T for over 25 years as a Technical Assistant. Working part-time at Marshalls has afforded her the ability to not only meet new people, but help those in her community, like those we serve at Immaculate.

After meeting Immaculate's Board President, Jane Starkowski, Luz immediately became interested in the work and mission of the agency. Jane stated that Immaculate is always in need of clothes and household goods. Knowing she is in a place in her life where she is able to give back, Luz did not hesitate



to begin working with ICSHC. Using her employee discount at Marshall's Home Goods, Luz stocked up on socks, pillows and blankets. The shelter's constant need for goods was something she knew she could help with and continues to do so when she can.

Her generosity does not end with the buying of goods. While talking with Jane, Luz learned that the Board members would be volunteering to cook dinner for the Shelter clients. Luz joined in enthusiastically and purchased and prepared food for the dinner.

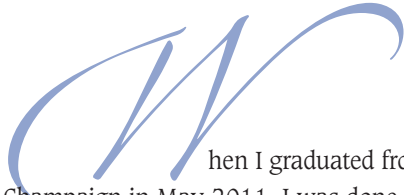
ICSHC is so grateful for Luz; she has an incredibly giving heart and has brought smiles to many during the time she has helped our agency.

UPCOMING EVENTS!

On Friday, May 10, 2013, Immaculate will be hosting its first International Food, Wine and Beer Festival. Check your email and mail box for a *Save the Date!* If you are not currently on our mailing list, please email your address to: Teresa@icshc.org.

ICSHC 101

Submitted by Becky Long, Jesuit Volunteer, 2011-2012



When I graduated from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in May 2011, I was done. I was done with books, exams, reports, lectures, math formulas, all of it. I was done with learning. So I set out for my year as a Jesuit Volunteer at Immaculate Conception Shelter and Housing Corp (known as, “The Mac”). Little did I know that my education was just beginning. When I reflect on how much I have learned at the Mac — I am amazed. The Mac taught me more about myself and the world around me than any University could ever teach me.

The Mac taught me...

- ... to be more loving, gentle, patient, and to trust in the slow work of change.
- ... that some of the most brilliant, beautiful, creative, strong people in this world struggle with addiction and homelessness.
- ... to always focus on moving forward.
- ... to take it “un dia a la vez.”
- ... that strong women drink strong coffee.
- ... to never feel alone; there is always someone just around the corner eagerly waiting to welcome you into their family.
- ... that the socioeconomic structures in this country were built to knock people down but I am hopeful because there are a lot of people pushing back.
- ... that it takes loving mothers and patient fathers to nurture children (and the Mac taught me that it does not matter how old we get, we all still need to be nurtured.)
- ... that there is always room for laughter.
- ... that there is always enough rice, mac and cheese and taco salad to feed the bunch.
- ... that some days are beautiful and some days are rotten, but love always remains.



The Mac taught me that when you mix challenges, support, frustration and inspiration, the outcome is growth. I leave this year having grown more fully into the person I have always wanted to be. I leave this year with more skills, knowledge and hope than I ever thought possible and it is all thanks to the staff and clients of the Mac. Although I am leaving Hartford and moving forward in life, I will carry you all with me in my heart and will forever be grateful for the past twelve months.

Employees from Travelers come to Immaculate for a Day of Caring!



Immaculate was fortunate enough to have employees from Travelers select two Immaculate projects for the United Way Day of Caring.

Approximately 10 representatives from the Travelers Bond & Financial Products, Construction Services Claims Department and the Loss Sensitive Services Department helped clean-up our vegetable and flower gardens, getting them ready for the winter.



After enjoying lunch with some of Immaculate’s staff and Executive Director, Fred Lynn, the Travelers Employees tackled a closet filled with donations, helping to move and organize the items onto shelves in a bigger area.

Many thanks to the Travelers Employees for all of their hard work!

Q&A with Tony Mack

What do you do at ICSHC?

I am ICSHC's Outreach Coordinator. I provide services for chronically homeless men and women living in places such as abandoned buildings, parks and campsites. I provide these clients with food, sleeping bags, clothing and toiletries. My services also include helping clients with obtaining housing, medical and mental health referrals, food stamps, and Social Security checks. I spend about 6 out of 8 working hours, Monday through Friday, driving around and finding clients no matter what the weather brings.



How is your job different in the winter?

In the winter it's difficult to get to the clients during a snow storm and other inclement weather. They still won't go to a shelter; they still sleep outdoors in the cold and snow. I have to go through the deep snow to get to them and try to convince

them to go to the shelter and get warm. Sometimes, mental illnesses prevent clients from wanting to enter the shelter.

I find clients along the East Hartford Riverfront, Charter Oak Bridge, along the railroad tracks in East Hartford; in parks, abandoned buildings and bus stations. Many of the people I approach I know. I bring them food, clothing, toiletries, sleeping bags, blankets and other basic necessities. They are always grateful.

How do you find your clients?

Being a native of Hartford is beneficial in my search because I know the city well and I can reach more potential clients hiding in different locations. Sometimes, I invite clients to ride in the van with me as I search for other potential clients so that they can direct me to places where they might know of others living. I also team up with other agencies and share information on where there might be possible clients.

Have you noticed any changes in regards to homelessness in Hartford?

There has been a surprising change to the face of homelessness. I'm seeing more young people and out-of-towners on the streets. There was a time when some of my clients did not want to talk or receive help; however, that has

changed, and now more clients seem to want housing. They want to get off the streets and not live in shelters. Many are homeless because they are losing their jobs and can't pay their bills as a consequence.

Explain why donations play such a huge role in your job.

The donations help me engage with clients, who live outdoors and who don't have anything. I am able to give winter coats, underwear, socks, hats, gloves — things that are hard for the agency to pay for. I am so thankful to the many individuals, church groups, food groups and businesses that donate basic necessities.

I have a lot of clients who don't take showers and need donations. I bring them clothes, give them an opportunity to take a shower, get clean, and perhaps come inside. I couldn't do my job effectively without the countless donations of basic necessities I am able to provide the clients.

What goes through your mind when you convince a client to finally go to the shelter after days, weeks, months working with them?

I feel great that I am able to achieve my goal to get a client out of the woods and into the shelter. It's a big step for the clients, and it's when I can begin to REALLY start helping them. Once they agree to come to the shelter, I can help them get the documents needed to eventually get housed, maybe then I can help get them into an apartment. Even though they will be assigned a case manager, the client will always be my client. I've earned their trust, and invested time in them and will always advocate for what is in their best interests. I take pride in my job and I am glad to have this position because it has made me more kind and humble. I used to work for the money, but now I work for the love of it. I enjoy my job and providing services to others. It makes me a better person to be able to provide for those in need. It makes me feel a little like Superman.

Immaculate Conception Shelter & Housing Corporation is especially grateful to everyone who donates to our agency. We are better able to serve our clients, and provide for their well-being thanks to your support. We sincerely appreciate you.

Road to Citizenship

Cuong Bui left behind his family and friends in Vietnam 30 years ago to come to the US in pursuit of new opportunities. He first landed in New York where he worked long hours as a dishwasher. When Cuong was laid off he suffered economic hardship and eventually landed at ICSHC's Shelter. Cuong worked hard to get himself back on his feet. After years of hard work and determination, Cuong has made a stable life for himself in Hartford. In 2012, Cuong moved into a one bedroom apartment, furnished it and also purchased a car. However, Cuong's proudest accomplishment came when his citizenship application was approved. On June 15, 2012 after six months of paperwork, studying, tests, interviews and hundreds of dollars, Cuong was sworn in as an American



Cuong Bui with his case manager, Becky Long, minutes after he became a citizen of the United States!

citizen. ICSHC staff watched proudly as Cuong shook hands with the judge. All were honored to have been invited to Cuong's special day.

When asked about the citizenship process, Cuong stated, "It was a very long and expensive process, but it was worth it. I have been waiting to become a citizen and have my own passport for thirty years." One of Cuong's favorite things to do is watch the news in his new apartment. Cuong is an active citizen and was especially proud to vote in his first Presidential Election this year.

First *Give Me Shelter* Walk Great Success!

On Saturday, September 15, 2012, Immaculate hosted the first ever *Give Me Shelter – A Walk to End Homelessness*.

Over 200 participants met at Mortensen Riverfront Plaza, Hartford, walked over the Founders Bridge and along the Connecticut River. Immediately after the walk, participants were treated to music, face painting and a juggler. J Restaurant Bar donated wraps for lunch, and 99 Restaurant donated bottled water.

Thank you to our sponsors, and to those who volunteered and participated. The first Give Me Shelter Walk would not have been possible without everyone's help.

A special thank you to Lynn Aureli who inspired her Confirmation teachers Darlene Ferguson, Niki Bordieri and Carol Rizzo, from St. James Church in Rocky Hill to create a team called LA Direction for the Walk. LA Direction was the largest team that participated. As part of her Confirmation service, Lynn volunteered many times at the shelter. Once her service was completed, she continued to serve at the shelter. In May 2012, Lynn was diagnosed with acute myelogenous leukemia (AML). Even though she would be in the hospital at the time of the walk, her friends and neighbors in Rocky Hill took up her challenge to participate and raise money for the shelter. Because of their commitment, LA Direction accounted for 20% of walk participants.



Team "LA Direction" with Lisa Russo-Label and her dog Buddie

Thank you to our *Give Me Shelter* sponsors:

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About Immaculate Conception Shelter & Housing Corporation

Since 1981, Immaculate has been providing emergency housing and shelter services to thousands of homeless individuals. We focus on men who are most vulnerable, including those with HIV/AIDS or other health issues, alcohol or drug abuse problems, and mental health issues.

Mission

Because housing is a human right, Immaculate Conception Shelter & Housing Corporation will provide housing and decent shelter with unconditional love to those with no other options.

Immaculate's service delivery is based on a Housing First model informed by a public health, harm reduction framework. Home is seen as a right and a foundation upon which fragile, broken and vulnerable individuals can, with proper supports, focus on improving their quality of life.

Programs

- Street Outreach
- Emergency Shelter
- Permanent Supportive Housing

In these three components, Immaculate offers shelter, food, clothing, medical and mental health services, case management, addiction services, entitlement assistance, education, job training, referrals and housing services.

For more information on Immaculate or to find out how you can help, call Teresa at (860) 724-4823 ext. 103.