

208 Staff Only

Class Jobs

### Classroom Calendar

Season: Winter

Month: JANUARY Year: 2013

S	M	T	W	Th	F	S
		1	2	3	4	

Today: FRIDAY  
Yesterday: THURSDAY  
Tomorrow: SATURDAY

Weather:

Events:

Days of the Week: SUNDAY, MONDAY, TUESDAY, WEDNESDAY, THURSDAY, FRIDAY, SATURDAY, SUNDAY

Months: JANUARY, FEBRUARY, MARCH, APRIL, MAY, JUNE, JULY, AUGUST, SEPTEMBER, OCTOBER, NOVEMBER, DECEMBER

Years: 2014

Numbers: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31

A woman with brown hair, wearing a black top and a grey scarf, sits on a red chair. She is looking at a clipboard in her lap. To her left is a stack of blue mats. Behind her is a teal wall with a blue abstract artwork.

A group of young children are sitting on a blue carpet with colorful geometric patterns. They are looking towards the woman and the calendar. One child in the foreground wears a teal shirt with the text "Kids Say Child Development 773.400.0000".

# Focus on the Midwest

## Shelters Designed for Lasting Success

by Suzan Sherman

More than a century ago, immigrants fled the squalor of East Coast urban centers in droves to put down roots in the Midwest, which in its relative emptiness provided the possibility for families to own homes and vast plots of land. The Children's Aid Society's "orphan train" program brought hundreds of thousands of homeless youth to the Midwest to be taken in by farm families, sparking a movement that lasted well into the 20th century. A new and better life in the Heartland was lovingly rendered in Laura Ingalls Wilder's classic children's book *Little House on the Prairie*, but this wholesome pioneer story is far removed from what the present-day Midwest looks like—particularly in its more industrialized cities. The collapse of the family farm, along with the rapidly shrinking manufacturing sector, has caused huge gulfs in regional employment options, and, not surprisingly, there's been a concurrent rise in family homelessness. To get a better sense of what's currently going on, *UNCENSORED* honed in on three small-, middle- and large-size cities in the Midwest—Iowa City, Kansas City, and Minneapolis, respectively—and the key agencies that serve families there, to learn more about the programs being utilized to get people back on their feet.

### From Marginalization to Membership in Iowa City

Five years ago, Shelter House in Iowa City, Iowa, was just a small organization operating out of a single-family home, with a makeshift collection of cots, recliners, and bunk beds for serving up to 29 homeless individuals. Crissy Canganelli, who has been the organization's executive director for 17 years, knew that if Shelter House was going to meet the needs of the growing homeless population without running her skeleton staff of 15 ragged, they had to make some changes—namely, immediately increase state and federal funding. The only homeless shelter in all of Iowa City, Shelter House has managed to do just that, and is now a 70-bed facility with a 40-person staff and a standing annual budget of \$2 million. Despite its growth, the shelter consistently runs at capacity, with applicants often turned away or placed on waiting lists.

Shelter House offers an impressively diverse range of services to the men, women, and children who stay there, including 15-day emergency stays; 90-day stays for those taking part in STAR, a vocational-training program; and long-term housing for up to two years for homeless veterans, the vast majority of whom served in the Vietnam

War. In addition to its 70-bed temporary facility, it also provides permanent supportive housing for up to 18 adults with serious and persistent mental illness at its Fairweather Lodge, with a preference given to veterans.

Genia, a former Shelter House client, had seriously questioned the possibilities for her future; caught in a cycle of poverty, she'd been living with a drug dealer. Yet she had the desire and courage to make changes through the support she received at Shelter House. Up until recently, Genia worked for Shelter House, serving as the organization's administrative assistant, a position she held for a decade before leaving to work as a child care provider out of her home. Before coming to Iowa City, Genia lived in Chicago. "There was this commercial [on a billboard] that said, 'Where will you be in the next five years?'" Genia recounts. "I had no idea where I would be in the next five years—let alone if I would be dead or alive. ... That's just crazy in and of itself. But whatever she [Genia's Shelter House case worker] saw in me, I'm just glad she saw it, and I'm glad to be here and where I'm at today."

Thomas first came to Shelter House with nothing but the clothes on his back. Of his time living on the street, he says, "It's a horrendous feeling. Displaced, alone, where am I going to take

a shower, how am I going to eat today? I came to the shelter the first day a little shaky, sick ... and just with the realization that I didn't want to do it anymore. If things were going to change, I needed to change my actions." Thomas got involved with the Community Stories Writing Workshop, a Shelter House program affiliated with the renowned Nonfiction Writing Program at the University of Iowa (UI), and his book of poetry and prose, *The Bullfrog Dreams of Flying*, has since been published and can be found at the Iowa City Public Library.

The Community Stories Writing Workshop is facilitated by Rossina Liu, who co-founded it five years ago and is currently writing her PhD dissertation on the program, a "kind of writing home" that has been built among its members. "Writing is self-discovery—it's about uncovering new aspects of who we are in a narrative and revising how we see ourselves and our possibilities," Liu says. The culmination of this yearlong program, which meets once a week, is the production of a journal printed in partnership with UI's Center for the Book and a public reading at Prairie Lights, a local bookstore. As Liu writes in her dissertation, "In this space [the workshop], writing is transitional, a tool for crossing environments from the streets to the classroom, from marginalization to membership."

**Left:** Mike Rickettes, a line cook in the Culinary Training Program, prepares a fish dinner for both residents at Shelter House and families in need served by other local nonprofits.

**Right:** Shelter House kitchen manager, Kimberly Blumer, helps prepare loaves of fresh bread for both shelter residents and clients of other local nonprofits serving individuals in need.



For those interested in working in the food industry, Shelter House provides a 12-week Culinary Training Program, which offers skill building for employment in restaurants and industrial kitchens. While some meals prepared in the shelter's kitchen are provided to Shelter House residents, a percentage are given to other area nonprofits and businesses for a fee as part of the Culinary Starts program, a resourceful revenue-producer for the organization. Another revenue builder is the Fresh Starts program, which provides low-cost janitorial services—performed by Fairweather Lodge residents—to seven local businesses.

Among those who have taken part in Shelter House's STAR (Support Training and Access to Resources) program—which works with residents to provide life-skills and vocational training, educational assistance, and child care services—75 percent have moved on to permanent housing. And yet, remaining economically stable and employable can be difficult. Iowa's City's current housing vacancy rate is 1 percent, with the national average typically 5–7 percent. “There's no incentive for landlords to reduce rents, and our families are competing for housing with university students who are subsidized by their parents,” Canganelli says. Another obstacle



**Above:** Meg Jacobs, a long-standing Shelter House volunteer, shares story time with a child. Meg works with the resident children and guides them through a variety of fun and educational activities.

**Left:** Jerry Stevens, a Fresh Starts crew member, puts his new janitorial skills to work at Shelter House in Iowa City.



to finding affordable housing, Canganelli notes, is “the current technology—which allows for quick and easy background checks—making it much more difficult for the people who come through Shelter House to move forward beyond their pasts.”

For those who live outside major urban centers and far from reliable transit systems, the added cost of a car, gas, and insurance can be crippling. And although Iowa City has an excellent public transportation system, it has the highest housing costs in the state. “The more affordable towns of Coralville and North Liberty do not have as good of a transit system, and with the rise of more service-sector jobs with weekend needs, when transit is not running as often, it's tough for people to get around,” Canganelli says. These jobs, paying \$8 to \$9 per hour, often force households to double up with friends or relatives or work multiple jobs.

## It's a Hand Up, Not a Handout, in Kansas City

Chuck Arney, the COO and interim director of Hillcrest Transitional Housing, which has locations in seven counties in the Kansas City metro area of Kansas and Missouri, also finds the lack of public transportation to be a huge burden on the population he serves: homeless families, individuals, and youth. Fifty percent of Hillcrest's programming, which Arney describes as "employment based," is about the importance of saving money. With a rigor not unlike that of the 12-step Debtors Anonymous program, Hillcrest requires each resident to account for every penny spent and earned and to open a savings account, with the end goal being that those who graduate will have socked away \$5,000 on average—enough to purchase a car.

Adults attending the Hillcrest 90-day program are required to find and maintain 35–40 hours of work per week and attend 4–5 weekly life-skills sessions, which are scheduled around their work and educational programs—an intense and rigorous schedule that keeps people focused on positive end results. An impressive 95 percent of Hillcrest graduates are self-supporting one year after completing the program, and 80 percent will have remained self-sufficient five years later.

"Generational poverty is typical here—we're seeing people in their 30's and 40's who have struggled their whole lives, using survivalist practices that are not good for self-sufficiency, or else a marriage has broken up and the mother can no longer afford housing," Arney explains. Families and individuals generally arrive at Hillcrest after being referred by a caseworker at an emergency shelter or by a social worker at a local school. Arney's staff have observed that "people are coming into the program underemployed with fewer and fewer benefits."

Hillcrest's youth program is comprised of teens ages 16–20. With 10 youth in residence at a time, the average stay at Hillcrest is one year. "First and foremost, we provide a safe, loving, and secure environment," Arney explains, "and then stress the importance of continuing with their education"—be it a GED, high school diploma, college degree, or vocational training—as well as finding part-time employment. "Three recent gradu-



A student at People Serving People works one-on-one with a volunteer tutor. The organization hosts 4,600 individuals who volunteer their time, skills, and services to families in need. (Photo courtesy of Jay Larson)

ates of the youth program," Arney says with evident pride, "just moved on to college."

Hillcrest offers rent- and utility-free housing with individual kitchens so that all residents learn to cook healthfully and on a budget rather than relying on fast food. In addition, Hillcrest's community garden provides thousands of pounds of fresh produce and herbs to its residents free of cost, and is staffed by a network of volunteers who plant, tend, and harvest. Through community support, residents also receive items and services such as glasses, haircuts, work uniforms, dental work, and medical assistance.

To be eligible for the Hillcrest program, a person must fill out an online application, with self-revealing questions such as, "Is there a warrant out for your arrest at present?" and "Have you been a battered person?" The person must also list all unpaid bills and other debts, but honest answers have never hindered Hillcrest's intake staff from considering an application, as the only requirement to take part in the program is a willingness to work hard and make life changes.

An applicant is immediately placed on a waiting list, and to move to the top, he or she must call the Hillcrest office daily to check for openings—another way for intake staff to gauge

an applicant's tenacity and initiative. Upon the applicant's acceptance into the program, a Hillcrest caseworker determines the primary cause of crisis—be it domestic violence, generational poverty, crime, divorce, or medical bills—a process Arney describes as “triage to find out where lives have been sabotaged.”

Back in the spring of 2014, James, a father of two, had been couch-surfing with friends and relatives and struggling to make ends meet as a janitor. A six-year custody battle had drained him of finances, and he owed several thousand dollars in back child support. James filled out an application for Hillcrest and had an appointment for an interview the following day, after which he was given 24 hours to consider whether or not he was up for taking part in the program. “I knew they were going to track every penny I had,” James says. “I knew there were rules that I had to follow—I had to be home by a certain time; I had to have inspections, and make sure that everything was clean.” But the rigor of the program, which also contained plenty of positive reinforcement, was just the right fit for James, whose motivation for succeeding was being able to see and care



A young mother shares a bedtime story with her two girls. The family is staying at the residence operated by People Serving People in Minneapolis—the region's largest and most comprehensive shelter provider. (Photo courtesy of Jay Larson)

for his children and making sure he had his own place to spend time with them during his weekend visitations.

James has since remarried and lives in a two-bedroom apartment five miles away from Hillcrest. “I still work at the same place I did before, but now I don't have to worry if I'm going to have enough money to make rent, because now I budget. I've learned that I can purchase good, quality food at a grocery store rather than spending five times more in a restaurant. I'm not a millionaire, but I'm not worried if I'm going to have a roof over my head for my children.”

On his last night at Hillcrest, James wrote a letter to the resident who would be filling his room after he left. “If they took it to heart, or read it, I have no idea, but I tried to express that they had led themselves into something that could change their life if they wanted it to.”

A Shelter House volunteer helps a child with arts and crafts.



## Investing in the Youngest Homeless in Minneapolis

Not unlike its Midwest neighbors Kansas City and Iowa City, Minneapolis also finds itself challenged by a poor public transportation system and a lack of affordable housing. Despite being a progressive and wealthy city, it has the greatest educational achievement and income disparities between whites and people of color in the nation. Between 9 and 11 percent of children in Minnesota Public Schools are homeless or highly mobile, and in some schools, more than 95 percent receive free or reduced-price lunch.

Daniel Gumnit, the chief executive officer of People Serving People (PSP) in Minneapolis, the largest and most comprehensive shelter provider in Minnesota, hopes families can end their homelessness in one visit to PSP. What distinguishes his 99-room emergency shelter from many others is its plethora of on-site programs and services designed to address the specific barriers that homeless families face, with housing, employment, education, and emotional and life-enrichment needs all addressed.

The average stay at PSP is only 39 days, a negligible amount of time compared with New York City shelter stays, which average 400 days. Some families remain at PSP for just two to three days, though these families most likely experienced a one-time catastrophe such as a fire or health emergency, while other families, facing more deeply entrenched challenges, such as generational poverty, chemical dependence, or mental health issues, might remain at PSP for six to seven months.

Drew, Jill, and their two children found themselves homeless after suffering a job loss—at any given time, one parent hadn't been working due to the high cost of child care—and falling



behind on rent. They ended up at a local hotel before connecting with PSP. Says Drew, “When we got the phone call that we were accepted into the housing program, she [Jill] thought that it was a joke. She was like, ‘Are you serious?’ And then she started to cry. It was a dream come true. ... I don't think we could

have gone through all those hardships without having a place like People Serving People to help us out.” Drew continues, “I mean, who knows, we could be under a bridge somewhere. I see people all the time that are just sleeping outside, and that's scary when you have two children.” Since their stay at People Serving People, he and his wife have found steady employment, working together in a local café.

**Above:** One of many volunteer tutors at People Serving People works with a preschool student to decorate her Summer Learning Packet.

**Left:** A boy living at Shelter House draws a picture of his family during a children's art activity night.

**Right:** A teacher leads her preschool classroom at People Serving People, guiding young learners through an enriching, trauma-informed curriculum.



“Hennepin County has a ‘shelter-all’ mandate, which does not allow homeless families to remain out on the street,” says Gumnit. “Here in Minneapolis we have a profound and unique level of cooperation between state, city, and local nonprofits working together to end homelessness.” This level of cooperation and care extends far beyond those working in civil service and the nonprofit sector. All of the programs PSP provides are funded by philanthropy—be it donations by corporations, private foundations, or individuals. Its powerhouse board of directors come from Regis Corporation, Xcel Energy, UBS Financial, Best Buy, and General Mills, among other well-known firms. In addition, PSP has a monumental number of volunteers—4,600—who come from all walks of life, from nursing students to investment bankers to retirees, and offer their services as meal servers, tutors, tech mentors, and readers.

“There’s a tremendous reward that comes out of working here,” Gumnit says, with volunteer slots filling up months in advance. Because of the shelter’s proximity to large Fortune

500 company offices in downtown Minneapolis, professionals often pitch in before and after work, or during lunch. A team from U.S. Bank comes every Wednesday morning to serve breakfast, and Ameriprise Financial serves food to residents seven times per month. Second Harvest Heartland, which is part of Feeding America, a national network of food banks, provides 450,000 pounds of food annually. In addition, PSP’s truck picks up pallet loads of fresh fruit, vegetables, and meat from Cub Foods/SuperValu two or three times per week.

To Gumnit, the greatest “return on the investment” comes from providing services to the youngest and most vulnerable in the population. Therefore, PSP’s Early Childhood Development Program—a licensed weekday preschool serving infants, toddlers, and preschool-age children and offering a trauma-informed curriculum focused on executive functioning skills and social/emotional development—is high on his priority list. So is the Parent Engagement Program, which provides support for parenting, behavioral management, and healthy childhood development. “If children are not properly prepared for kindergarten, they’re probably not going to be reading at grade level by third grade. Statistically, these children are four times less likely to graduate from high school by age 19 than a child who is reading-proficient in third grade. If you add in the factor of poverty, the student is 13 times less likely to graduate on time,” says Gumnit.

Like Shelter House, PSP has a long-standing Culinary Arts Training Program to help former residents and others facing challenges achieve self-sufficiency. The program offers classroom and hands-on training in the areas of sanitation, food preparation, roasting, baking, sautéing, equipment, and soups. Upon completion of the rigorous 13-week program, each graduate is given a uniform, a cookbook, a set of industrial kitchen knives, and a certificate. One of the Culinary Arts program’s graduates, Faduma Hashi, a native of Somalia, opened up her own café, Starlight Café, in downtown Minneapolis.

After exiting PSP, some families participate in a pilot program with a home visiting advocate who will assist the families in areas essential to maintaining self-sufficiency, such as employment, child care, transportation, and health care. The progress of these families is carefully monitored so that no one falls through the cracks. That is part of achieving People Serving People’s ultimate goal, one shared by Iowa City’s Shelter House and Kansas City’s Hillcrest Transitional Housing: that families who come through its doors will never return, and that those whom the organizations have served will find permanent homes and the means to maintain them. ■

