

HOPE HOUSE JOURNAL

November, 2006

Hope House Assists Families Re-Settling In New Orleans

She moved to the Lower Ninth Ward four days before Katrina's storm surge overpowered levees protecting the area. Relatives died as a result. She didn't know where her children were for weeks after rescue workers separated the family in the confusion of the flood waters. When she came to Hope House, she was working at a local bakery and living in a hotel with her young daughter. Her boys were still out of town with relatives. The hotel room was just too crowded for the whole family.

She was spending almost everything she earned on the hotel. She hadn't been able to save anything so that she could rent her own place. Even if she could, it would take a long time to save enough for security deposit and first month's rent in a city where rents have risen dramatically since Katrina.

This brave, determined, yet traumatized woman is one of many who have visited Hope House in the last few months. Like her, they came seeking assistance in getting a place they could call their own.

With a \$150,000 grant from Unity for Greater New Orleans, Hope House has assisted fifty-six families in their quest for a place to call home. We paid the security deposit and up to two months of rent for participating families.

None of the program participants had other housing assistance from the government. Some had housing vouchers in Texas, but lost it. Others got little or no support from FEMA or HUD. All came back to the city because it was their home. They figured that, if they had to be homeless, they preferred to be homeless in their home town. They are working, and often earning more than they had before Katrina. But they just hadn't been able to pull together the money needed to rent a place of their own.

Well over 150 families have called seeking rent assistance since the program began on September 20th. Many, many more need such help. While \$150,000 sounds like a lot of money, it is little in relation to the need.

Much of the city's affordable housing, including most of its public housing, remains closed. The housing crisis only grows as more and more families lose their housing elsewhere and return to the place they call home.

Based on our success with the UNITY grant, we hope to get further funding to help more families obtain housing. The need is so great!



An elusive dream for many in and away from New Orleans.

Transitional Housing Supports Families Having Few Resources

Some families returning to the city have little or no income. They haven't yet been able to find work, or have lost benefits due to a wide range of complications related to Katrina. Transitional housing is a more appropriate way to address their needs than short term rent assistance.

Mary has two young children. She lost everything at the hands of Katrina. She is working, but doesn't yet make enough to rent her own place. Transitional housing, where she can stay for as long as nine months and slowly save for her family's future, makes real sense for her.

Catina Williams, who only a few months ago was a participant in our transitional housing program, now acts as its case manager. She knows the reality of homelessness from the inside. She entered the program soon after the storm, unemployed with three children. She found work, but it didn't pay much; so saving enough for her own place would take some time. Now she is working with other families in need, helping them to overcome the many obstacles that get in the way along the road from homelessness to again having one's own place to live.

As Catina knows so well, it isn't easy to get back on one's feet. It requires hard work, sacrifice, and determination. Often, it also requires outside support - material, emotional, and spiritual. It takes time and patience. Transitional housing plays an important role in making the move possible for at least a few of the families recovering their lives post-Katrina.

Violence Cannot End Violence; Only Love Can Do That

Gandhi stated years ago that violence cannot end violence; only love can do that. Jesus made similar statements nearly two thousand years ago. He told us to love our enemies and to do good to those who hate us. But violence remains our bottom line response to violence, and, as a result, we live in a world of growing and deepening violence. When will we ever learn?

We are horrified that countries like North Korea and Iran are developing nuclear weapons. But the fact is that we, the United States of America, have more nuclear weapons than the rest of the world's nations combined, and only we have used them. Violence doesn't end violence; it begets violence. Only through love will violence be overcome.

We in the U.S. deplore the terrorist actions of those who flew jet planes into the Twin Towers and the Pentagon. And rightly so! But our School of the Americas at Fort Benning teaches Latin American military personnel to terrorize and torture their own people. And our intelligence organizations like the CIA have been implicated in such activities for decades.

We have more weapons than any other country, and we sell more weapons on the international market than any other country. Weapons are made to maim and kill, not to understand and heal. Violence begets violence; love and justice beget peace.

We have sinned as a nation by putting our trust in violence as a tool for peace and security. As a nation, we seem blind to the reality that violence that is done in the name of security only makes us all less safe and secure. We need to look more deeply at ourselves and the ways that we relate to others and to the resources of the world. Economic policies can also be violent and deadly.

At a recent Peace Mass sponsored by Pax Christi New Orleans, I renewed my vow of non-violence for another year. I did it because violence is in me and all around me, and I know that it can destroy me and all that I love and care about. Since I am a citizen of the United States of America, the vow is not just a personal discipline for me. I must deal with my country's violence, as well.

Violence is within each of us and deeply engrained in our national persona. It eats at and erodes each our souls, as well as the soul of our nation. It ruptures relationships with others. It evokes acts of violence against us, individually and as a nation. Perhaps we each need to consider taking the vow of non-violence. As a nation, we certainly need to model the behavior we demand of other nations. Violence cannot end violence; only love can do that.

By Don Everard



As the names of victims of terror and torture by graduates of the U.S. School of the Americas are read, thousands of concerned Americans raise white crosses and respond with "Presente!" at the annual Fort Benning protest.

Re-Open Lafitte Development So Residents Can Come Home

The Lafitte Public Housing Development, considered by many to be the city's best kept housing development, could soon be demolished along with three other developments - Magnolia, Calliope, and St. Bernard.

Lafitte had only minor flooding after Katrina. Many of its former residents believe that it could easily be made habitable; many would be willing to clean up their own apartments. They certainly don't want it demolished.

Internal HANO reports seem to verify their assessment. A federal lawsuit by residents asks that plans to demolish all four developments be scrapped and that repairs be made to allow residents to return to their homes as soon as possible.

Sadly, Providence Community Housing, an arm of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, has entered into a contract with HUD and the Housing Authority of New Orleans to re-develop the Lafitte Housing Development, once it is demolished. Providence's intentions appear to be honorable, but aligning itself with HANO and the plan to demolish Lafitte gives undeserved credibility to the decision to demolish.

The closure of much of public housing has kept many residents from returning to New Orleans. It has also put public housing residents in competition with others for the very limited amount of private rental housing available in the city. This competition inevitably leads to higher rents for all, as landlords recognize that people coming back to the city have little choice but to pay whatever they decide to charge.

Lafitte should not be torn down. Its residents should be allowed to return to their homes as soon as possible!

Support Comes From Afar

Significant support for Hope House is coming from two far-flung nations: Qatar and The Netherlands.

Qatar, the small, oil rich nation on the Persian Gulf, has given millions of dollars of relief to the Gulf area. UNITY for Greater New Orleans (formerly Unity for the Homeless) was asked to distribute approximately \$2 million of these funds to agencies working with homeless people. Some of that money, about \$23,000, will help Hope House refurbish a building that houses two homeless families. We are most grateful to the people of Qatar for their generous gift to us and to the Gulf area.

In The Netherlands there is a man named Fred. Fred made a fortune in real estate, and has been using his money, his time and energy, and his position to better humanity ever since. He has created and helped create several philanthropic foundations, the last simply called the Fred Foundation. He is a strong advocate of Creation Centered Spirituality and a great advocate of international cooperation for peace and economic justice.

Fred is also a friend and one-time sponsor of Bart Stapert, who founded and manned the St. Thomas Community Law Center for several years. Initially, the Law Center was housed at Hope House. Stapert returned to The Netherlands a few years ago, but never forgot us.

After Katrina devastated New Orleans Stapert spoke with Fred about the city's plight. Fred said that he would like to help, but wanted to give his support to a group that he knew and could trust. He had visited Hope House when Stapert was in the neighborhood, so we were familiar to him.. His \$20,000.00 gift will be used to enhance our efforts to assist people in dealing with the many problems resulting from Katrina. Again, we are most grateful.



Transitional Housing resident Aletha Vasquez speaks at UNITY for the Greater New Orleans grant award ceremony, where Qatar's Katrina recovery funds for homeless shelters were distributed.

Hope House Receives 2006 Harry Chapin Self-Reliance Award

World Hunger Year (WHY) and the Harry Chapin Foundation have chosen Hope House as one of their nine Harry Chapin Self-Reliance Award winners for 2006. The award includes a \$5000 prize to further the work of Hope House.

WHY and the Chapin Foundation chose Hope House from among over 150 applicants for the award, which recognizes groups that foster self-reliance in exemplary ways. Our adult learning center, transitional housing program, and community resource center foster self-reliance.

The adult learning center assists people in developing basic academic skills and preparing for the GED. But its teachers also guide students in learning to learn and thinking critically. As students learn, they develop greater confidence in themselves. They rely more on their own abilities; they become more self-reliant.

Case management is a key element in the transitional housing program. It assists participants in developing and implementing a plan of action that will move them from homelessness to permanent housing and greater self-reliance. Participants often enter the program with little confidence in themselves. By the time they finish the program, most have a real sense that they can succeed.

The community resource center offers people tools they need and help in using these tools. The tools offered in the resource center are computers and internet access, which they cannot afford to buy for themselves. With these tools and assistance in learning to use them, people are able to do many things to improve their lives.

Harry Chapin was a renowned singer and songwriter, who died in an automobile accident in 1981 at the age of 38. He used his fame and talent to promote a variety of social justice issues; he was especially concerned about world hunger. The Harry Chapin Foundation and WHY have kept his legacy alive.

We are grateful!

Hope House Financial Statements 7/1/06 - 10/31/06

Income:

Private Donations & Grants	30,807.00
Government Grants	64,141.00
Government Grants Receivable	53,590.00
Program Income	3,350.00
Interest and Investment	24.00
Other	1,175.00

Total Income 153,087.00

Expenses:

Emergency Assistance	13,692.00
Adult Education	18,682.00
Family Transitional Housing	112,748.00
Youth Recreation	5,393.00
Community Resource Center	660.00
General/Administration	23,349.00

Total Expenses 174,524.00

Net -21,437.00

Other News....

Sisters Lory Schaff and Kathleen Bahlinger have returned to New Orleans after 20+ years in Baton Rouge. Sister Lory, who founded Hope House, said that they just had to come back to New Orleans to be part of the city's recovery. Sr. Kathleen is teaching math at Frederick Douglas High School on St. Claude Avenue, while Sr. Lory has been sharing her expertise with several groups trying to create adult education programs in the city. We are glad to have them back in the city!

Many migrant recovery workers in New Orleans and across the Gulf Coast continue to have a hard time. The New Orleans Worker Justice Coalition, which has been using Hope House as its base of operations since January, works to organize black and Latino workers. In the process, Coalition workers have documented many abuses by police, hotels, shipyards, and construction contractors.

Their report entitled "And Injustice for All: Workers' Lives in the Reconstruction of New Orleans" can be found at www.neworleansworkerjustice.org.

The Orleans Parish Prison Reform Coalition continues to advocate for changes at the local jail. While Katrina ravaged OPP and the rest of the city's criminal justice system, it seems that getting back to normal is the system's goal, and normal was never good.

It appears that the criminal sheriff and other government officials plan to rebuild the prison to pre-Katrina size, despite the reality that the city's population has shrunk by half. Before the storm OPP could house over 7000 people, making it one of the country's largest jails.

The coalition believes that OPP should be much smaller, and that the city should seek alternatives to incarceration for people charged with minor, non-violent offenses. Believing that the city cannot "arrest its way out of its crime problem," the coalition also calls for much more emphasis on rehabilitation.

One promising alternative is the day reporting center." It allows participants who have been assessed as low-risk to maintain employment while ensuring their adherence to court mandates. It offers job-skill development and adult education, and requires each participant to secure meaningful employment. Other services include random alcohol and drug testing, home visits, employment verifications and visits, curfew checks and assistance with court appearances.

Hope House is a founding member of the coalition and supports humane and effective responses to crime.

Four neighborhood men were arrested the other night outside a small corner store. They were all charged with public drunkenness by officers in three unmarked cars that suddenly swept into the community. The police did no test to demonstrate that the men were drinking - no "walking a straight line," no breatholizer test. In fact, none of the men had been drinking.

A few months prior, four young men were arrested outside the Redemptorist Gym just as our daily recreation program was closing down. The charges - criminal trespass. They had all just left the gym; the recreation staff were still inside.

Another man, walking home through River Garden after buying some household goods at Wal-Mart, was arrested for "obstructing a crime scene." He wasn't paying attention, and inadvertently walked into the scene of a drug bust. As a result he lost his job, and was facing eviction for not paying his rent.

Another young man was pulled over supposedly for failing to use his signal while turning onto St. Andrew Street in River Garden. He tried to take out his wallet to show the police officer his ID. The policeman, gun drawn and menacingly pointed at the young man, made him lie prone on the ground. The officer then called for back-up, and at least 10 patrol cars arrived in minutes. At that point the young man was told to strip down to his boxer shorts. His young daughter watched from the sidewalk. Don Everard was observing the scene from across the street, when he was ordered by another officer to leave the "crime scene" or face immediate arrest.

Good community policing or police harassment?

Christmas Is Not Far Away; Can You Be Santa For A Neighborhood Child?

Once again we are looking for big-hearted people who are willing to be Santa or Mrs. Claus for economically struggling families in a our community. If you live in the city, you already know that most everything costs more these days — food, rent, utilities. Budgets are very tight for many families, so Christmas gifts often get a low priority.

If you would like to help make Christmas a little more joyful for a child or a family, please call us at 504-525-2561.

