



THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

Thanks to your vision, your commitment and your financial support, OPCC is leading the way with effective strategies that address homelessness, domestic violence and mental illness in our communities. As the stories in this newsletter demonstrate, the work that OPCC does – day in and day out – is extremely difficult work. It takes effective social work methodologies, deep compassion and determination to empower people to rebuild their lives. Please envision just for a moment what life would be like if you had no money, no home, no one to trust and no place to turn for help. This is the situation that many of our clients confront when they arrive at the OPCC Annenberg Access Center. Still, even in the most severe circumstances, OPCC embraces each person with dignity and respect and nurtures the hope that has almost been extinguished. **Help us keep the OPCC promise by making a gift today!**

Hope Begins at the Access Center

...where individuals and families receive their first services beginning with an interview with a case manager, a trusting, capable and knowledgeable resource for someone taking their first steps off the streets. The individual or family may be referred to one of OPCC's programs or another social service agency, or may be helped to reunite with family members or return to their community of origin.

As a result of our successful capital campaign which replaced the old facility, OPCC's Annenberg Access Center* opened its doors in September 2007. The Center is a "bridge" which connects



Leaving the streets begins at the Access Center

people from the streets to much needed services and housing. As a staff member stated, "it closes the gap and acts as a drawbridge over the moat." Meeting basic human needs, such as providing meals, a place to shower and make a phone call, a blanket, clean clothes – crossing the bridge from despair to hope, this is what the Access Center provides when a person in need seeks assistance.

Working with OPCC's sister programs and through its collaborations with other



A hot meal and a volunteer's smile!

service providers, the Access Center offers medical and mental health care, emergency and transitional housing, alcohol and drug treatment and immediate motel vouchers for families. In the beginning months of 2009, the Center has seen a 40% increase in its family services program – local families negatively impacted by our national, state and local economic crises.

In order for us to continue to assist thousands of individuals and families on their journeys **From Homelessness to Hope**, we need you, our donors, now more than ever. Many of those in need will not be able to navigate this journey without your continuing financial support. Here's what you helped us achieve in 2008 at the Access Center:

- Served 2,954 unduplicated persons, including 537 family members and 134 veterans
- Provided 44,363 sack lunches and 951 bags of groceries
- Received over 6,308 hours of service from volunteers

**The Access Center began as a Drop In Center in 1963, the first project of OPCC.*

We're Not Looking For A Handout. Neither Are They.

We hear a lot these days about the economic crisis, and how it is impacting every segment of our society. There is constant banter and commentary about what needs to be done to stimulate the economy. More government involvement and regulation, or less? More bailout money for troubled companies and financial institutions, or let the free market sort it all out? Tax cuts or cash infusions? How long will the recession last and how deep will it be? The truth is, nobody knows for sure what will work. Ideologues along the political spectrum are certain they know what's best, but the smartest economists continue to disagree about solutions.

Are we resigned to a world that is hopeless and helpless? No we are not. Things are bad and they're going to get worse before they get better. But we are not destined for failure or doomed to live in a society that can't and won't provide opportunities for all of its members to achieve their potential to live with dignity. Even the most successful people have challenges, make mistakes or experience tragedy that can cause them to stumble and need a little help.

Your support makes the difference between hope and hopelessness. We're in the business of empowering people to rebuild their lives so they can be self-sufficient, and not continue to live in situations that are degrading or violent. Who among us doesn't want the chance to have a safe place to live, enough food to eat and the ability to take care of ourselves and our families? The people we serve at OPCC are no different. They want



John Maceri

what we all want – a life of purpose, to be treated with dignity and the opportunity to be a full participant in our society. We continue to serve them not out of pity, but because we respect them and believe that it is our shared responsibility to make a positive difference in the world.

A community helping others is a community helping itself. We don't want bailouts or handouts, just the opportunity to show you how your continued support makes our community a better place for everyone. And whether the recession is short or long, OPCC will be here to make sure that your investment in us is used wisely to assist our neighbors who need a little help. Won't you join us today in the journey towards a better tomorrow?

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'John Maceri', written in a cursive style.

John Maceri
Executive Director, OPCC

“A community helping others is a community helping itself.”

– John Maceri
Executive Director

Don't Give Up On Them!

If the OPCC Annenberg Access Center's role is expressed in a single phrase it would be *unconditional support*. The Center reaches out to all homeless individuals regardless of their problems or circumstances. Clients often have struggled for years to receive the services they need, or they may find it difficult to navigate the service system. We provide support to everyone, whether they are ready to make that big step into permanent housing or are still ambivalent about their recovery. The staff reaches out to individuals without discrimination or judgment; providing whatever steps are necessary.

Often our participants feel hopeless and that society has given up on them. Survival on the street can be devastating. At the Center individuals learn



New, clean clothes made my day!

to feel hope again because we do not give up on them no matter what happens, or how long the participant may struggle; assisting, guiding and supporting them when they are ready to change their lives.

This unconditional support lives in all the work we do, from developing

relationships with individuals who have been so alienated that they may at first refuse to consider help, through on-going case management support to people who have moved into permanent housing and who we continue to support so that their successes can continue as they maintain their new home.

A great example of how this unconditional support can transform a person's life is Andrew who has been coming to the Access Center for years, struggling with mental illness and addictions, having many upsets and setbacks. His perception that staff did not judge or give up on him allowed Andrew to ultimately succeed and overcome his personal obstacles, and move off the streets and into permanent housing.

View from the Ground Up

Born in Venice, Andrew spent his high school years in San Francisco. An all-city athlete he received a college scholarship and earned a business degree. While in a successful career, Andrew became involved in interstate drug transportation and assault, eventually landing in prison for 25 years. Upon his 2003 release with no support, he found himself homeless and turned again to selling drugs. After three years he "got tired of being sick and tired" and periodically he would stop by the Access Center but wasn't ready to accept assistance.

In April 2008, Andrew said "no more" to the drug life, but the next month was a robbery victim and broke a leg. He delayed seeking medical care, the leg became infected and, after two

months of hospital treatment, in June 2008 Andrew was forced to make the decision to have his leg amputated. Andrew felt hopeless and doomed and reached out for assistance from the Access Center.

In October 2008 Andrew received a prosthetic leg. Now active again and living in his own apartment, Andrew is giving back; forming and leading 12-step groups. He also writes and works on career and personal goals.

Now, instead of hopeless and looking from the ground up, Andrew has made the journey from hopelessness to hope. He is an enthusiastic fan of the Access Center staff who "gave me a new life and have loved me unconditionally during the years I couldn't love myself." He added, "The staff empow-



Andrew looking up!!

ered me to change my life and made me feel like people still cared – I wouldn't be here today without them."

Services for the Most Vulnerable

OPCC was awarded funding through Los Angeles County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky's Discretionary Funding to launch a pilot project of intensive wraparound services using a flexible "whatever it takes" approach to move the most vulnerable and chronically homeless from the streets of Santa Monica and assisting them to lead a meaningful life in permanent supportive housing. OPCC's Safety Net will utilize a diverse, multi-disciplinary team of clinical professionals, paraprofessionals and peer advocates to engage 40 people* from the Santa Monica Service Registry in medical care, mental health, substance abuse, benefits establishment and life skills training and support to overcome any barriers preventing them from obtaining housing.

Chronically homeless individuals will be assisted in moving from the streets to permanent supportive housing with intermediary steps as necessary in temporary housing including motels, master-leased apartment units and shelters where services will be brought to the individual. The highly individualized program will engage partnering agencies, businesses and community members in supporting Safety Net participants as they transition off the streets and regain a life of hope and dignity in permanent housing.

**29 of these individuals have already been helped off the streets.*

... a flexible
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OPCC Receives County Grant

OPCC received a grant from the County of Los Angeles for an innovative program providing "Healthcare for Empowerment to Access Respite, Treatment and Housing" (Project HEARTH) in partnership with the Venice Family Clinic, St. John's Health Center and Santa Monica-UCLA Medical Center.

"HEARTH links medical care to permanent housing which will help homeless people accept assistance in getting off the street," says John Maceri, OPCC's Executive Director. "The program also directly addresses the most critical barrier to permanent housing, the shortage of low-cost rental housing. HEARTH provides for a full-time Housing Coordinator to work with property owners to promote acceptance of subsidized tenants and to support successful landlord/tenant relationships."* This effort expands OPCC's Shelter Plus Care Program, which has achieved an annual housing retention rate of over 90%.

HEARTH provides two part-time physicians in a medical suite in the OPCC Annenberg Access Center in Santa Monica. Individuals treated on the street or released by local hospitals will be followed up by the medical team and referred for supportive services and housing.

"Most patients released from the hospital need follow-up care, medications management, good nutrition and monitoring," says LaTisha Starbuck, Vice-President of Mission and Ethics at St. John's Health Center in Santa Monica. "HEARTH will allow OPCC and Venice Family Clinic to help patients recover in housing rather than on the street and give them the permanent housing opportunities that will benefit their health and welfare in the long term."

Individuals discharged from local hospitals will avoid a return to homelessness through priority placement in Samoshel, with intensive services leading



Dr. Theresa Brehove, Venice Family Clinic, provides medical care twice weekly at the Access Center.

to permanent housing. The "respite care" model has been implemented recently on Skid Row in response to incidents of patient dumping by hospitals. OPCC and VFC will work with the two hospitals in Santa Monica to design a discharge planning system and protocols for prevention of hospitalization for homeless patients, who present an increasing burden on emergency room staff and hospital beds.

**If you have access to housing, such as available vacant units on the open market, please contact OPCC, 310.264.6646.*

Suzy's Success and Service

After 17 years of alcohol and drug abuse, Suzy became homeless and lived with her young son in a tent by the freeway until the courts took him from her. In 1998 wanting control of her life, Suzy "had enough" and came to OPCC where she received case management and emergency shelter. After a few months, Suzy moved to OPCC's Turning Point Transitional Shelter where, "I learned acceptance, how to become a team member, group living structure, life skills and made life long friends." She obtained retail and office jobs and after several years in the business world, "was called" to social service, working with economically disadvantaged individuals in the homeless population and HIV-positive women's community.

In early 2007, Suzy was hired as the

full-time Program Director at Miriam's House, a sober living facility for women and their children. Suzy feels strongly that her experiences at Turning Point translated into her work ethic and what she shares daily with her staff, clients and members of twelve step programs. In addition to a career of "giving back," she is studying to become a Certified Reality Therapist through the William Glasser Institute at Loyola Marymount University and in late 2009 hopes to commence work on a psychology degree. Her personal experience and commitment to improving the life circumstances of our most disenfranchised population is heartwarming and inspirational.

"Coming to OPCC saved my life and gave me the opportunity to be an



Suzy visiting Turning Point

example to others, including my son with whom I have a good relationship. Being of service is now a major part of my joyous and free life."

Congratulations, Suzy, on your 10+ years of successes! We are proud of you and are humbled by how your OPCC experiences changed your life and now many other lives.

It Can Happen to You

In 2008, the Westside Shelter & Hunger Coalition held its annual Celebrating Success event, honoring 22 former clients of the Coalition's member agencies – individuals who left the streets and are now leading self-sufficient and hopeful lives. OPCC's "graduate," Onita was one of four who shared her story with the audience of over 450.

Born and raised in Chicago, Onita was the middle child in a loving family. She earned Bachelor's and Master's degrees and worked as a Life Skills Counselor for seven years, a career helping those in need. Onita used to believe people were homeless because of poor choices, but she learned differently when she became homeless in 2005. Onita's employer downsized and

she was laid off; a serious relationship ended and several people close to her passed away. She felt a failure, a loser and embarrassed. This was a huge blow to her ego because she was employed in the mental health field for so long.

After two and one-half years of being homeless, Onita entered OPCC's Daybreak Shelter in 2007. She met so many peers needing help and says she realized that she still had the education and experience to help others. She says, "At Daybreak I gained self-esteem, safety, a sense of well-being and support. I realized my potential."

In March 2008, Onita moved into her one-bedroom apartment in the San Fernando Valley and is employed part-time as a peer advocate. She continues taking classes and serves as the Vice



Daybreak benefits from Onita's contributions

President of Daybreak Designs where she makes jewelry and cupcakes.

Onita says that while homeless she was humbled in recognizing her flaws and wants people to know that **homeless people are human**. Homelessness can happen to anyone.

Rennell Declares "A Perfect Fit"

Seventeen years ago Jeff Rennell began his career at OPCC where he has contributed to and witnessed the growth of the agency that "has made a tremendous impact on the lives of clients and my life as well."

After obtaining his BA in Finance & Accounting at the University of Virginia, Jeff came to Santa Monica and worked in the gift industry, then at several accounting positions, but began to struggle with employment opportunities due to physical challenges that limited his mobility. Referred to a job at OPCC, Jeff says, "we found a perfect fit with each other, the agency's needs and my own – it felt like coming home. OPCC has treated me with the care and dignity which reflects the culture of the

organization and I am proud to carry that on in our work every day."

As Finance Director, Jeff has seen OPCC grow from a \$2.8 million budget in 1992 to currently \$9.1 million; from a staff of less than 100 to about 190 (30% of the current staff are former agency clients). Jeff's department manages over 30 government contracts. The impact made by Jeff and his small "wonderful finance team" is quite significant as they have strengthened and built on the foundation of the excellent financial reputation that OPCC enjoys with its funders.

Asked why the lengthy tenure of 17 years, Jeff responds, "Why would I go any place else; there's no other place like OPCC. I'm proud of what I do and



Jeff as Finance Director working it for OPCC!

even prouder of the agency and what we do day after day." Jeff and his wife, Ellen have been married 25 years and enjoy life with son, Aaron, a student at Santa Monica High School.

OPCC is grateful to Jeff for his contributions and lengthy and loyal tenure.

Hope & Service with Joy

Individuals from all walks of life volunteered and worked together to elect President Barack Obama and their volunteerism continues to make a huge impact. Many of these individuals have answered the President's call to service by understanding how important it is in these economic times to help each other. OPCC is most grateful to have the "Obama volunteers" preparing meals, serving food, donating clothing and meeting and interacting with many of our clients.

When asked "Why OPCC?" volunteer coordinator Joy Horowitz responded, "We chose to serve OPCC because we were so impressed with its programs and the dedication of the people who administer them. LA is the homeless capital of the U.S. and our population in Santa Monica continues to be underserved."

Several OPCC projects have reaped the benefits of this service: dinners at Samoshel and Turning Point and barbecue for the Daybreak and Safe Haven guests. Each Sunday that they gather there's an average of 15-20 Obama volunteers and many more who contribute by cooking, making donations and volunteering additional time – a total of several hundred committed individuals!

These amazing, generous individuals bring hope to our clients, save OPCC hundreds of dollars each time they prepare food and they are another shining example of treating with dignity those we serve each day. To Joy, Kathy Rodman, Celia Bernstein and all the dedicated Obama volunteers...thank you for your service and becoming part of our OPCC family!



Providing meals and making a difference!

OPCC's Response to the Current Economic Crisis

It certainly will not come as a surprise that OPCC is witnessing a slowdown in financial contributions. In response to the current economic crisis, OPCC has taken measures to ensure that the agency continues to operate and provide services to those in need. One of the measures we are taking is reaching out to our donors to thank them for their support and asking them to keep us high on their list of priorities. We believe that our philanthropic partners – individuals, businesses, foundations, government funders – understand the unique benefit we offer the community and will continue to support us.

If OPCC cannot find ways to compensate for the losses incurred in these economic times, the operation of our core programs become directly threatened. With less funding, vital aspects of the programs will be cut and, as a result, fewer clients will receive the services that they need to find and maintain a level of self-sufficiency. We believe it is our responsibility to do everything we can to continue to serve those most in need, and we can't do that without assistance in sustaining the core programs that link vulnerable people to housing and support services.

As the stories and testimonials in this newsletter illustrate, OPCC plays a critically important role in maintaining the health of Westside communities by addressing homelessness, domestic violence and chronic mental illness. Given the financial challenges outlined above,

we are asking you – our esteemed donors, volunteers and supporters – **to join with us to ensure that we have the funds necessary to maintain our core services and meet the rising demand for services brought about by job losses, evictions and reduced services at other community organizations.**

If you have already made a gift this year, please consider making another gift before the end of our current fiscal year (June 30, 2009). If your employer has a matching gift program, please make sure that you fill out the appropriate paperwork so that OPCC will benefit from this generous program. And, if you have not given to OPCC in recent years, please re-establish your relationship and give what you can afford. None of us has a crystal ball that will tell us when we will emerge from the current economic crisis. We ask you to stand with us by making a generous gift now.



Community support is critical if OPCC is to meet the increasing needs of our neighbors.

We believe it is our responsibility to do everything we can to continue to serve those most in need...

A Note of Gratitude

Dear John,

You can consider this a fan letter. Whenever I grow weary of the situation of poor people in Santa Monica, and indeed our country, I think of you all and the many others like you and your cohorts who work so hard and unselfishly to make Santa Monica a better city for all those who are here.

Thank you for understanding that basic human needs have to be met with dignity and true respect. A long time ago a very wise old Irish nun told me, "God is a rascal and He loves to hide in His people. It's up to us to find Him there." Isn't that great?

So let's continue playing hide and seek with the Divine.

Sincerely,
Sister Maureen Craig
St. John's Health Center

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