

The newsletter of the Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches

EXPRESSIONS

Building community on the North Side

Center for Families continues to reach out

Last year at this time, the Center for Families was facing a critical point in its five-year existence. With critical government support drying up, the challenges at the center and the Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches (GMCC) were daunting.

But true to the entrepreneurial spirit that powers GMCC, these challenges were also viewed as opportunities for growth and focus.

“The funding cuts made by Hennepin County could have been devastating, but it just forced us to be more creative about scheduling groups and people in to the building,” Sara Nelson-Pallmeyer, the center’s outgoing director, explained.

Located at 3333 N. 4th St. in Minneapolis, the center is a combination of real and virtual offices. Organizations such as Goodwill/Easter Seals and the Health Empowerment Resource Center offer everything from job training to health screenings to help finding affordable housing. While assistance is available to anyone who asks, many of the virtual offices focus on helping immigrant families from Liberia, Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon, Togo, Sierra Leone and other West African countries.

From the outset, one of the goals of the center was building trust and word-of-mouth acceptance with the West African community and the McKinley Neighborhood group. The Compassion Capital Fund, a program that helped small non-profits with their capacity building, was a place of connection for many of these groups. Special events, including the West African Cultural and Family Day and the Pan African Summit helped deepen the trust of many people and organizations in the community. Those relationships were strengthened even further when several GMCC programs moved to the center late last year.

“We had to do some community outreach that was immigrant-based,” Bridget Ryan, GMCC program director, said. “After five years of relationship building, the relationship has legs.”

Moving forward, GMCC is concentrating on Northside community development, specifically working to put Supplemental Educational Services (SES), a congregationally-based tutoring program for students who need and want help, on a firmer footing. Presently, three tutoring groups use the Center for Families as their meeting site.

Edmund Ocansey, Center for Families program director, is concerned many elders in the East and West African communities are just sitting home without connections to the community and each other.

He would like to establish a day center at the center at least two days a week for health outreach, exercise and to just have a place to meet others instead sitting home alone.

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The West African Cultural and Family Day is a successful annual event held at the center.

In the news

GMCC and some of its programs have been featured in a variety of media during the past couple of months. Below is the headline, source and opening of each story. To read the complete stories go to the [News & Events page at gmcc.org](#).

Embracing change, doing good **Duke University Faith and Leadership Program**

“Despite helping 358,000 people a year, the Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches doesn’t get many thank-you notes. It’s not that people don’t appreciate having volunteers paint their homes, shovel their snow and plant their gardens. And they’re not being rude by refusing to acknowledge assistance that includes everything from providing food to helping people stay out of jail.

It’s just that the majority of the people who are helped don’t have a clue where the help is coming from.”

MN Program Provides Lifeline for Foster Kids Who “Age Out”

Minnesota News Connection

“The transition to adulthood can be a bumpy road for young people, and family support is often a critical lifeline. But for foster kids who have aged out of the system, the transition is even harder, as many lack the skills needed to make the jump to adulthood. A recent study from the University of Chicago suggests that extending foster care, or providing additional support until age 21, helps aid the transition, and one Minnesota program is doing exactly that. The Division of Indian Work’s Healthy Transitions program teaches a range of life skills such as resume building and job hunting, applying for college, and apartment hunting.”

Ceremonies of thanksgiving **Star Tribune**

“Ten bare-chested men stand around a large glowing fire pit, their breath creating furious clouds around their faces in the biting November cold.

They chant, beat a drum, pray and then strip down to their shorts. One after another, they crawl on their hands and knees into a dome-shaped sweat lodge that awaits them on a patch of snowy land in Minnetonka.

The centuries-old American Indian ceremony is their way of acknowledging Thanksgiving, expressing gratitude to a higher power for the good that’s come to them and those they love.”

A Second Chance: MN Program Trains More Mentors to Guide Ex-Offenders

Minnesota News Connection

“The belief that everyone deserves a second chance is practiced daily by people involved in a unique Minnesota program. The Community Justice Project is a partnership between the Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches and the Minneapolis Police Department. It matches volunteer mentors with felons close to being released. The mentors offer practical advice on education, job hunting, budgeting and housing, and they help ex-offenders navigate through social service and government channels.”



Thanks for Giving to the Max

The second annual Give to the Max Day on Tuesday, Nov. 17 was a success for GMCC. A generous benefactor agreed to match donations up to \$10,000 and our wonderful supporters came through and we earned that match. Thank you for giving us the resources to continue to reach those in need throughout the community.

Changes at Minnesota FoodShare as March Campaign approaches

With the new year comes new leadership at Minnesota FoodShare.

For the past 10 years, Barbara Thell has been the director of Minnesota FoodShare, leading a successful team in producing remarkable results for hungry people in Minnesota. In January, Thell will be transitioning to a new role as FoodShare's Director of Advocacy.

"Where she's made the biggest impact has been in advocacy, so we're glad she will continue to do that for us next year," GMCC president Gary Reierison said. "Barbara has a lot of legislative victories for hungry Minnesotans to show for her ten years of advocacy work."

Some of those successes include free and reduced school breakfasts and lunches, summer feeding program and increased food shelf funding. Thell has made it a hallmark of her advocacy to work behind the scenes, in a bipartisan manner, collaboratively with others, and as part of a team.

"It's that approach that has been so successful, and we're grateful for all the help she's been able to get governmental agencies to provide for so many of the clients we all serve," Reierison added.

FoodShare's new director will be Sara Nelson-Pallmeyer, executive director of GMCC's Center for Families since it opened in 2006.

"With Sara's energy and enthusiasm and Barbara's continuing role, Minnesota FoodShare is positioned for even more success in its effort to prevent hunger in the state," Reierison said.

Theme, goal set for 2011 Campaign

With FoodShare's March Campaign just around the corner, Nelson-Pallmeyer will hit the ground running. Food shelf usage continues to rise in many areas and Minnesota FoodShare has set another ambitious goal – to raise a combination of 12 million dollars and pounds during the 2011 March Campaign.

This year's theme for the campaign, which annually accounts for more than half the food distributed through food shelves in Minnesota, is "Fill 300 food shelves. Mission impossible? Not if you help." Sue Kainz, March Campaign coordinator, has already begun building momentum throughout the state in support of this effort.

For more information about the March Campaign and how you can get involved, contact:

Sue Kainz at skainz@gmcc.org or 612-721-8687 x326

Sarah O'Brien at sobrien@gmcc.org or 612-721-8687 x331



Barbara Thell



Sara Nelson-Pallmeyer

"With Sara's energy and enthusiasm and Barbara's continuing role, Minnesota FoodShare is positioned for even more success in its effort to prevent hunger in the state."

Gary Reierison

No slowdown at Division of Indian Work

The end of the year was a very busy time at the Division of Indian Work (DIW):

- On Friday, Nov. 5 during the fourth annual Powderhorn Empty Bowls event, more than 1,300 hand-crafted bowls were distributed as a reminder of the empty bowls that need filling in our communities. Almost 1,500 men, women and children gathered for homemade soups and fresh bread and more than 120 volunteers, many from DIW and GMCC, donated their time to help make the day a success. The event raised more than \$21,000 for three programs, including DIW's Horizons Unlimited Food Shelf.
- The Dakota Lodge at DIW was a busy place on Thursday, Nov. 4 and Friday Nov. 5 as more than 1,250 winter coats were handed out to American Indian children who attend Minneapolis public schools and qualify for the free or reduced lunch program. Again this year, the annual coat distribution was supported by the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community, with additional support from Macy's and Herberger's.
- In the days leading up to Thanksgiving, Horizons Unlimited distributed 250 holiday baskets to those in need. In addition, the week before Christmas, more than 1,000 toys were handed out through the Toys for Tots campaign, making the season brighter for many children and teens.



Coats were selected and bowls were filled with soup lovingly prepared by volunteers as the community came together to support DIW.



Getting a jump on summer

White might be the prevailing color of the moment, but it's not too early to begin thinking of sprucing up your home with a new coat of paint. For low-income seniors or disabled homeowners, who meet the following guidelines, participating in the 2011 Metro Paint-A-Thon may be an option:

- Be over the age of 60 or have a permanent physical disability.
- Own and occupy a single-family home in Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott or Washington county that needs the exterior painted, but does not need major repairs.
- Live in a home where the monthly income of all persons living there does not exceed the following guidelines:

Household Size	Monthly Income
1	\$1,800
2	\$2,500
3	\$3,100
4	\$3,700
5	\$4,300

For more information or to apply to the program, contact: Deidre Pope at dpope@gmcc.org or 612-721-8687 x321

The deadline to apply is May 6, 2011.

Plan now for spring and summer retreats

Urban Immersion Service Retreats is already getting calls about registration for spring weekend retreats and summer half and week-long retreats. Programming combines an overview of poverty and its causes with hands-on help for those in need. Ultimately, the retreats challenge participants to move beyond a one-time volunteer experience and live their spirituality. Visit urbanimmersion.gmcc.org to register.

For more information on the retreats, contact: Gennae Falconer at gfalconer@gmcc.org or 612-276-1564

Bethel classes at Center for Families

Bethel Seminary will be holding classes leading to a certificate in community ministry leadership or in urban ministry leadership at the Center for Families starting January 20.

Both certificates are designed to prepare and build capacity among churches, mission agencies, public and private Christian organizations, and their leaders for high-quality, effective community leadership and development.

For more information, contact: Bethel Seminary Office of Admissions and Recruitment at 651-638-6288 or bsem-admit@bethel.edu.

Center for Families continued from cover.

The next challenge is to formalize the proposal and find programming dollars.

In addition, Bethel Seminary is going to hold ministry classes at the center starting in January. And building partners have solid relationships with the center and many are looking to expand their programming.

So the future is full of possibilities for the Center for Families. However, the work ahead will not include Nelson-Pallmeyer, who is now the director of Minnesota FoodShare. "I have mixed feelings about the move because I love the community here. It's diverse and a fun group of people to work with," she said. "But there are great people in place to continue the work we started at the Center for Families. We will continue building on that success."

Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches (GMCC)

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EXPRESSIONS

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Making the most of your contributions

Bringing people of various denominations, spiritual practices and beliefs together to serve seniors, American Indians, West Africans, single mothers, students and the hungry is not an easy task. However, it is one our employees and volunteers embrace with motivation and dedication. And it would not be possible for GMCC's 30-plus programs to continue to reach those less fortunate without your moral and financial support. Thank you for your contributions. **To donate visit gmcc.org.**



By moving to more electronic forms of communication, the staff at GMCC is doing its part to make the most of your contributions while reducing our carbon footprint. Please consider receiving your GMCC publications by e-mail. If you would prefer this method of delivery, please contact info@gmcc.org.

One of our goals for 2011 is to build our "fan base" on Facebook. It's also a great place to receive regular updates on GMCC events and programming.

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