



“IT’S OK HERE”

**A History of Deborah’s Place,
An Organization Serving Women Who Are Homeless
or Formerly Homeless in Chicago, 1985 – 2000**

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* The project proposal and agenda for the November 15, 1984, organizing meeting are used with permission from the 8th Day Center for Justice.

Introduction

Since its founding in 1985, Deborah's Place has provided shelter, food, resources, and support to women in Chicago who are homeless or formerly homeless. Following its mission to provide services "so that women can become empowered to take back and maintain control over their lives," Deborah's Place has achieved an impressive track record by providing a continuum of programs and services which range from basic needs to permanent supportive housing. It has been the lifeline for women who, for any number of reasons, lack the fundamental resources for sustaining basic needs and achieving a better quality of life. Over three thousand women have benefited from the programs and services of Deborah's Place.

Deborah's Place has a unique legacy. Its history is important, not only to Chicago, but to the nation as well. Initially, the founders intended to provide overnight sanctuary for women without shelter.* Over the years, the organization has evolved into a citywide women's service network, including permanent supportive housing. Its philosophy of service based on the importance of relationship-building is held in high esteem as a national model.

Deborah's Place received recognition for its far-reaching impact on homelessness at the Sara Lee Foundation Chicago Spirit Award ceremony in May, 2000. In addition to the \$100,000 award, the Foundation provided support for a collaborative research project between Deborah's Place and the Loyola University Chicago Center for Urban Research and Learning (CURL). The project chosen was a history of the organization's first fifteen years.

Founded in 1996, CURL promotes a model of collaborative research and teaching in service to the community. By developing partnerships with organizations and community residents, CURL links the skills and wisdom present within every community with the specialized knowledge and academic disciplines within Loyola University. Working together, community needs are addressed and the academic experience is enriched.

History of Deborah's Place

The history of Deborah's Place is the story of a small group of remarkable, committed, economically comfortable women who, in 1985, converged with equally remarkable women who happened to be homeless.

Listening to the voices of current and former participants, staff, volunteers, and board members, we have attempted to capture the essence of the relationships of those women who built or participated in Deborah's Place. We hope we have portrayed the ethos of the organization as told by those who were part of the founding, are currently involved, or are involved in the broader movement to end homelessness. Through their voices, we believe it becomes clear that *many* lives have been affected by the interweaving of relationships that changed, and continues to change, lives.

This history is not exhaustive since a detailed documentation is beyond the scope of the project. The qualitative research was conducted between January and July, 2001. Over that

* While serving only single women from the outset, early documents indicate that some consideration was given during the organizing period to the service of women with children.

period of time, thirty-nine persons were interviewed. Fifteen were individual in-depth interviews, while the remainder were part of focus groups. In some cases, individuals participated in a focus group and were interviewed separately. We also relied on the guidance of an additional fifteen women who met with the researchers to provide background information at the beginning of the project. Following the mandate of Deborah's Place to preserve privacy, as well as adhering to Institutional Review Board standards of Loyola University Chicago, care has been taken to guard the identity of participants who did not give written consent for quotation.

Acknowledgements

This project is indebted to individuals who shared with great eagerness their memories, reflections, and stories of Deborah's Place. The lengthy list of contributors is included in Appendix E. Specific recognition must be given to Patricia Crowley, OSB, Executive Director, who provided the vision for the project in the discussions following Sara Lee Chicago Spirit Award. Audrey Thomas, Chief Program Officer, was an integral member of the research team and provided resourceful consultation and enthusiastic support. Kathy Booton Wilson, Director of Supportive Housing, and Mary Coy, Chief Development Officer, also gave direction and support.

Susan Grossman, Ph.D., School of Social Work, Loyola University Chicago, contributed invaluable assistance in directing the team to individuals who could provide a broader context for understanding Deborah's Place. Dr. Grossman was able to recruit a graduate student, Tricia Cestone, to assist the team in interviewing a small group of experts who provided contextual materials. The experts included Les Brown, Director of Policy, Chicago Coalition for the Homeless; Mary Whalen, Consultant, and formerly with the United Way of Metropolitan Chicago; Jan Bendorf, Ph.D., formerly with the Loyola School of Social Work and a board member of Deborah's Place; and Joan Schwingen and Mary Howard, both with the Heartland Alliance. Christine George, Ph.D., CURL Faculty Fellow and Visiting Professor, Department of Sociology, Loyola University Chicago provided considerable consultation and support.

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The principal researchers and authors are Linda S. Von Dreele, Associate Director of the Center for Urban Research and Learning, and Gloria P. Montgomery, CURL Graduate Fellow and doctoral candidate in the Department of Counseling Psychology, Loyola University School of Education.

DEBORAH'S PLACE

MISSION STATEMENT

Deborah's Place, a private non-for-profit corporation, serves women in Chicago who are homeless or formerly homeless. Food, shelter and supportive services are provided by dedicated volunteers and staff so that women can become empowered to take back and maintain control over their lives.

VALUES

- 1. We believe in and encourage creative expression and self-determination, and we support an individual's freedom to make choices;**
- 2. We believe in building community through relationships, communication and social commitment;**
- 3. We believe in the right to quality services delivered with respect and empathy;**
- 4. We believe in diversity that honors differences in age, cultural and social orientation;**
- 5. We believe in the right to safe, clean and affordable housing.**



Homelessness in America

Deborah's Place in Context

In the 1970s and 1980s, homelessness as a national public policy issue in the United States arose from the growing visibility of the poor on city streets. At the national and local levels, a mission-based system was in place to serve primarily the stereotypic male alcoholic 'down on his luck.' There was a great reliance on agencies to provide a meal and a place to sleep. As Joan Schwingen and Mary Howard of the Heartland Alliance report, the primary goal was to get people off the streets and out of the public eye, not to provide services to address the systemic issues of poverty, mental illness, substance abuse, or domestic violence. Looking back, Les Brown, Director of Policy for the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, says there was a religious or a more charitable view. He concludes that "charity is not bad," but charity did not alter the conditions of people.

In Chicago, as elsewhere, the priority was men. An article in an early 1985 Deborah's Place newsletter estimated the number of people who were homeless in Chicago to be between 12,000 and 25,000. The total transitional and emergency shelter beds available were 1,666. Of that number, there were 97 emergency shelter beds with an additional 67 year-round emergency shelter beds available for women.

Many men who were homeless were housed in skid row missions along Madison Street on the West Side or in single room occupancy (SRO) hotels throughout the city. With the demolition of SROs through the City's urban renewal program, many living on the economic edge, including women and children or single women, were displaced to the streets. As Joan observes, "Urban renewal changed the face of homelessness."

The life of homelessness was most inhospitable for women. Single women particularly shunned the few shelters that accepted women for good reasons: they feared for their safety. Many preferred the streets or domestic violence shelters restricted to women. According to Joan and Mary, "The philosophy was that most women were linked to a man who would take care of them and provide for them." Single women were the "bag ladies" who shifted from one dark doorway to the next.

One of the first efforts to seriously address the issue locally was during the first term of Harold Washington, Chicago's reform mayor who took office in 1983. A task force was formed to look at a community-based approach to delivering services for the homeless. Mary Whalen, who at the time

worked for United Way of Metropolitan Chicago, recalls, “The task force identified barriers to building shelters. There was an emphasis on moving away from the warehouse approach.” Les, a member of the task force, says, “I think a very good decision was made right off the bat. We didn’t want a system like New York City where they had those large shelters downtown with a capacity for 500 or more people. We decided that we wanted community-based programs because we understood that in Chicago homeless people became homeless in communities where they had lived. It made more sense to build community-based programs which is what we did.”

The Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, founded in 1980, was in the forefront of preserving SROs, establishing community-based affordable housing organizations with supportive services, educating the public and political leaders about homelessness, and advocating for a more comprehensive and coordinated system to provide services to the people who were homeless. A second organization, the Community Emergency Shelter Organization (CESO),¹ was formed in 1982. CESO, which provided technical assistance for shelters, was a spin-off of the 8th Day Center for Justice, a Roman Catholic peace and justice organization that works for structural change where there is injustice. These advocacy organizations provided the support and grounding for creating community-based service agencies in Chicago and pressing for a more comprehensive look at the issue nationally.

A recognition that there was a national crisis of considerable magnitude resulted in the passage of the Stuart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act in July, 1987, and its amendments in the following year. The McKinney bill unleashed federal appropriations for housing, services, food, health care, job training, mental health, and substance abuse. For the first time, there were resources that went beyond charity and state and local funding to tackle the conditions of a population that for most citizens was invisible, or, for the most part, out of sight. Although emphasis was still on men, services were broadened and money was available to support a diagnostic evaluation of the individual, most of whom had multiple problems. Because of the organizing efforts described above, Chicago was in position to make use of those funds to create or expand the community-based approach to serve the homeless population in the city.

The impetus for creating a shelter serving exclusively single women in Chicago came from the experience of staff at the 8th Day Center for Justice and CESO. During the summer of 1984, the 8th Day Center conducted an anecdotal survey to gauge the needs of homeless single women within a discrete area

¹ While the acronym remains the same, CESO recently has changed its name to Center for Excellence in Service Organization.

north of Chicago's Loop. From the research, staff members Brenda McCarthy and Susan Walker confirmed there was no overnight shelter specifically for women in the city. In a very intentional way, they invited a range of organizations interested in women's issues to an organizing meeting. The result of their organizing efforts was Deborah's Place.

“It’s OK Here”

The Founding of Deborah’s Place

“I used to walk outside and one day I saw a woman on Michigan Avenue who looked like she was homeless. I started talking to her and found out she was homeless. I said, ‘Maybe I can help find you someplace to live.’ She said, ‘ok.’” Patty Crowley, a Founding Mother

Patty Crowley’s story of her singular encounter with a woman along Michigan Avenue epitomizes those of some fifteen or more women who would become Founding Mothers of Deborah’s Place.² As the national phenomenon of increased homelessness manifested itself in Chicago in the mid-1980s, Patty and others responded to an invitation by the 8th Day Center for Justice and CESO to be involved in the lives of women who walked along Michigan Avenue by day and slept on a sidewalk grate by night. These women were struck by the injustice of it all and the imminent danger and loneliness faced day after day by courageous women without a permanent home. There was a recognition of a deep common bond, in spite of their middle-class security and comfort. They were inclined to go beyond anguishing over what they saw. They were doers and responded as such.

Motivation

What did these women have in common, those who gathered at the 8th Day Center on that day or who joined in the organizing between December 1984, and February 1985?

The founders were a disparate group who, according to Les Brown came at the homelessness issue from a “feminist perspective, not a treatment perspective.” Some were acquainted with one another, but most were not. While some had social service backgrounds, only the first director, Martha Whelan, had any familiarity with homelessness since she had recently resigned from a nine-month position at a women’s shelter. The common over-lapping motivations seem to be: they were active in their faith communities, they were committed to social justice, and they had a liberal bent that included feminism.

Most of the Founding Mothers shared a common concern for the plight of people who were homeless. They acted out their faith with an imperative to follow the Gospel’s call to serve. Certainly, there was a network within the Roman Catholic Archdiocese; the Crowley family was prominent within that network, yet there was also early support from LaSalle Street Church, the First United Methodist

Church (known as the Methodist Temple), St. James Cathedral (Episcopal), Fourth Presbyterian, as well as Holy Name Cathedral. Protestants and Catholics alike were drawn to a clear need to serve women who were homeless in Chicago's Loop and along the Magnificent Mile, the geographic home of these large mainline Christian churches.

For the Founding Mothers, there was a strong ideological bent for social justice. That came from their professional affiliations and volunteer experience with other shelters and non-profit organizations such as the League of Women Voters. For them, housing was a right, not a privilege. Bev Barr, a founder and long-time staff, adds, "There wasn't anything [the women] could do to deserve [housing]." This was a mindset that reflected their liberal views and social justice stance. Bev puts it bluntly when she says, "Conservatives don't start shelters. . . and [they] would put a lot of rules on women that would almost be punishment."

Margaret Herring was a founder who served two six-year terms as a board member. She says, "Early on the staff and many volunteers had strong connection to the women's movement . . . many had taken women's studies and were in tune with mainstream press, i.e., *Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper's*." Some of the issues that concerned them were career subordination to a spouse and discrimination about educational opportunities. Margaret comments that she believed that the lack of education was a major reason that women were in shelters. Many of the founders were themselves young and single. Even Patty was facing life as a widow following the death of her husband of 37 years. These experiences were the very personal reasons that these Founding Mothers readily identified with the single women they saw living alone on the streets

Sue Augustus, the first board president, says that she got on the board with ". . . all these interesting women from different walks of life who brought different things to the table. We ended up sharing the same values and we all created the culture. . . It was a maturing thing for me."

Early Organizing

Margaret has a clear recollection of the first meeting in late fall. As a new board member of the League of Women Voters, she was responsible for the League's housing portfolio. As such, she was invited to represent the League at a meeting to organize a shelter for homeless women convened by Brenda McCarthy and Susan Walker. A draft proposal for the creation of a shelter for women was

² A listing of the Founding Mothers can be found in Appendix A.

presented.² The documentation to support the proposed action was based on interviews that had been conducted over the previous summer with women on the street and people who were in contact with them such as security guards, librarians, and doormen. The study found that women came from all parts of the city, but they gravitated to the Loop and Michigan Avenue because police heavily patrolled those areas; there they felt safer.

A second meeting of the group followed close on the heels of the first. “Low and behold,” says Bev, a representative from LaSalle Street Church, “I found myself on a board.” Bev credits Brenda with the organizing skills that made things move rapidly. “She came to my church to make a presentation. I put my name on a list for more information and got a letter in the mail. I thought this is all well and good, but I’m busy. She didn’t stop at a letter; she went on to a phone call and I returned to another meeting. Had there not been the follow-up, I wouldn’t have gotten on board.”

With the strong organizing skills of 8th Day Center and CESO, a shelter was operational within three months. A great deal of work was accomplished in a brief span of time. The board was formed with Sue as its first president, and Martha became the first director. Martha describes herself as being very young and just having resigned from another shelter organization. She was “extremely reluctant” to accept a new position, but agreed to do so “on a temporary basis.”

Deborah: Faithful to the Covenant

The naming of the organization was an important milestone. The founders talk about the process of deciding upon ‘Deborah.’ Margaret says, “I did not want to see a woman sitting at the foot of a man, Jesus Christ or not, or in the kitchen cooking. . . so not Mary or Martha. I felt strongly that if we wanted to see women as independent and capable, we needed to select the name of a woman who demonstrated that.” They thought about Esther as the savior of her people, but were reluctant because of the means she took to save them. Nobody could remember Dorcas’ name from the New Testament, so “she missed her opportunity.” ‘Deborah’ from the Book of Judges was agreed upon since she was a strong, independent judge of her people, a Mother of Israel and priestess faithful to the covenant with God. The name has come to mean ‘keeper of the flame’ to those associated with Deborah’s Place.

² Most interestingly, the proposal closely outlines a clear concept of what would become Deborah’s Place. See Appendix B.

Then, there was some debate about ‘haven’ or ‘place.’ It went back and forth. ‘Haven’ meant a place to hide while ‘place’ conjured up a place to rest while gathering strength to take control of one’s life. Would Deborah’s be a place where women would find a home and stay forever or would it provide a spot where women would land, pull together, establish themselves, and move on? The founders settled on ‘place.’

While all this activity was going on, other board members were busy trying to find a site since none of the founding churches was an option. According to Margaret, Martha and Patty, “who knew everybody,” split the Yellow Pages and called every church in the Loop and on the Near North Side. They hit pay dirt at Immaculate Conception, 1415 North Park Avenue. With the assistance from Fr. Jim Jakes, the parish administrator, the church agreed to the use of its gym, kitchen, and restrooms for a period of eight weeks during February and March, 1985.

In the Beginning

Reflecting back on the first two months’ operation of Deborah’s Place, some of the Founding Mothers chuckle. Here they were: operating with no license and using a flashlight as a lantern to guide some women in need of shelter for the night across a dark, vacant lot into the cold gym of Immaculate Conception Church. Bev recalls, “We had a lantern that we waved back and forth out the back door so they could come from Wells [Street] across the vacant lot and see where the entrance was.” With the raise of an eyebrow, she goes on to say it wasn’t necessary to be so covert. As they later learned, city officials were much too busy to be concerned about their unofficial status.

Bev and Martha remember those first nights. Because the group had no license, they could not advertise. Instead, word was sent out to other shelters. “We got some of their overflow, so we cut our eye teeth on some of the most difficult women. . . real characters.” They tell of a woman who talked to a cast of thousands in the bathroom, another who had a fur phobia, and others who were alcoholics. The sheer task of opening and running a shelter was difficult; however, it was manageable since there were only a few women at the beginning.

Martha recalls Fr. Jakes quite vividly. In that first week of operation, he came to the gym one night and read aloud the passage about Deborah from the Bible. She remembers thinking, “Did we really think about this woman?” As a pacifist she was not too sure this strong, independent woman who created 40 years of peace for her people was exactly the image she had in mind. Her greatest image that night,

however, was of Fr. Jakes. She felt he had stepped out on a limb to allow the shelter to exist. In her mind he was a warm and wonderful man.

Martha, as the only paid staff, negotiated all the logistical arrangements, including securing volunteers and making sure there were mats and blankets for sleeping and food for dinner and breakfast. Martha receives high acclaim for her ability to make things happen and taking advantage of opportunities.

From the beginning, volunteers were key to the operation. “We were all volunteers to begin with,” according to Bev, who became the second paid staff. It was vital that there were at least three volunteers for the drop in period for preparation and serving of the evening meal and two for overnight. Bev was more impressed if a volunteer said ‘I want to learn’ rather than ‘I want to help.’ Her goal, even early on, was to educate middle-class volunteers about homelessness. That could best be done as volunteers experienced, at least for one night, some of the realities of homelessness.

The few guests who came those first months made the first magical connections possible. In the experience of the cold gym and the intimacy of sharing a meal or hearing a story, volunteers learned what it meant to serve the women who found themselves without shelter. There was Moonbeam, a real character who wore studded jewelry. Martha recalls that she was getting up in years and came across almost like a biker from the 1960s. After the first winter there was no contact with Moonbeam, and Martha thinks she might have moved South. There were Louise, Marjorie, and then there was Marie, an accordion player who played on the subway platforms and taught Whelan “more than anyone about the need for people to be living their own lives and their need for self-determination.” Martha says that Marie dropped into the shelter as she needed. She didn’t have what one would consider exceptional talent, but her enthusiasm was why people donated money to her. She was a survivor who accommodated to the system, as her needs required her to do.

In the midst of all the activity, stresses, and chaos as this new organization was launched, Martha was looking for a ‘sign’ that somehow this imperfect, hurried-up enterprise was on target. She recalls a woman who had a ragged, intermittent association with the volunteers over the first two months. She came in for meals, but left; she was tough, preferred the streets, and refused to stay overnight. As she left one evening, she said, “It’s ok here.”

In Martha’s mind, “That was our mark, our A+.” She had the sign.

It's About Salad Dressing

The Philosophy of Service

“The only instruction I got [from Bev Barr] besides eating with the women was to provide as many choices as possible because, as she said, that’s what they’re really missing.” Michael (Mickey) Lowenstein, one of the first male volunteers, since 1987.

One of the standard stories at Deborah’s Place is about *salad dressing*. Staff and volunteers alike understand the code words: people deserve options. Even if there are few options to give, at least provide simple choices . . . like different salad dressings for dinner.

Early on, there were few options, yet the principle was operational . . . ‘Do I have the choice of eating dinner sitting in a corner facing the wall? Do I want to talk? Can I create private space around the mat on the floor by draping sheets over chairs?’ The theory goes that choice is related to empowering an individual to take back and maintain control over her life. This principle became the foundation for the mission statement and philosophy of service of Deborah’s Place.

The philosophy of service is one of the characteristics that is most respected in the field, both in Chicago and throughout the country. Les Brown of the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless says, “I’ve always viewed Deborah’s Place as one of the organizations at the forefront of the homeless issue, not only in terms of providing quality resources and services, but they are unique to the degree to which they respect the dignity of individual people and their right to choice.” Mary Whalen, formerly of United Way, adds, “There is a respect that is nowhere else. There is not a sense of the women being treated as objects.”

The regard for this model of relational service is well-deserved. While there may be many elements that contributed to the unique pattern of service that evolved, at least two factors stand out to suggest why and how the distinctive service model developed. The first factor is the timing of its founding, specifically as homelessness was becoming prominent in the public policy debate. The second factor was the exceptional ability of the Founding Mothers, and subsequent volunteers and staff, to respond to individual women who found themselves homeless and in need of services.

The Timing

Emerging as it did in the mid-1980s, Deborah's Place moved along the wave of homelessness that was more visible to the general populace and to the shapers of public policy. The Reagan administration's philosophy of trickle down economics was not lifting all boats, thus the disparities between the have's and have not's were more and more evident. Philanthropy and local governmental resources were not adequate to address what was increasingly more obvious – women and children were joining the swelling ranks of men who were homeless. The new face of homelessness included those who could not be described as 'skid row derelicts.' Instead, the profile was as complex as the individual woman (and man and their children) who had slipped into unemployment, was labeled with multiple diagnoses, or was a victim of racism or violence.

Activists like Les Brown understood the desperate nature of the situation and had joined others to advocate for this population. New York City and Chicago were centers of the movement. The Chicago Coalition for the Homeless was formed in 1980; the National Coalition for the Homeless was founded in Chicago in 1984, but moved to Washington, D.C. in 1987. Mitch Snyder of the Center for Creative Non-Violence was identified by Les as the guru of the issue nationwide. According to Les, "Snyder put his life on the line for this issue." Snyder's efforts, plus those of coalitions across the country, including Chicago, brought about the McKinney Act in 1987 that for the first time directed federal funds to homelessness.

Les recalls, "We were charting new ground in those days. There was a lot of media attention; it was a sexy issue. We could almost literally call a press conference on a street corner. You could say 'we have a homeless woman down here who has nowhere to go.' That was newsworthy. They just loved to come around to report on the homeless problem."

With increased public awareness and the political pressure that resulted in the McKinney Act resources, a more comprehensive approach could be envisioned to address the complexities of the homeless issue. That was the route taken by the founders of Deborah's Place as they began their service to women who were homeless.

Responding to the Individuality of Each Person

The unique quality of the model of relational service comes down to the ability of the founders, volunteers, and staff to respond to the individualized needs of each woman who comes to Deborah's Place. From the beginning, the instinct to provide individual service has been persistent, yet it has not always been easy to accomplish. While difficult and sometimes causing internal debate, the culture of relational service has developed, most likely because, as Martha Whelan, the first director, reflects, "It goes back to a willingness to be empathetic with a woman being alone and scared."

Intimately involved in the organizing phase, Martha was a keen observer. She remembers a constant tension around control. What would be required of women? Would real names be required? What would the operating principles be? In her mind she thought it was a blessing that they had no firmed up rules before opening. She reasons, "Preconceptions end up creating false barriers as far as 'should's and shouldn't's,' i.e., creating policies before we even met a woman who was going to stay there. We just didn't have time to do that." She remembers that the goal was simply "to get a woman through the night."

The principles of service that evolved and are still in place were based on the premise that women entering the shelter were to be welcomed unconditionally and that shelter was provided without strings attached. That philosophy was a huge departure from the warehousing concept of serving people who are homeless. Too, it was different from the mission model that required attendance to religious activities prior to receiving a meal and bed for the night. Each person was allowed to move at her own pace. That might mean something as simple as acknowledging a greeting or participating in an art project. Celebrations of small steps were as important as someone "getting her act together," i.e., getting a GED (General Equivalent Diploma), a job, and independent living. For many years, there was a banner that hung in Martha's office that said, 'Celebrate Small Victories.'

The gift of hospitality has been extraordinarily important in developing the culture of unconditional acceptance. From all reports, especially Patty Crowley and Bev Barr had those gifts. Long before her encounter and conversation with the woman who was homeless on Michigan Avenue, Patty and her family had accommodated numerous people in their home. Besides their own children, the Crowley home was filled with foster children or exchange students, some 30 over the years. Patty brought this love and accommodation of people and activity to Deborah's Place.

Bev, first as Program Administrator and then as the first Coordinator of Volunteers, set the tone for the expected manner of interaction with the guests. That treatment included attention in very individual ways. For example, she told the volunteers it was more important to share a meal with the women than getting the dishes done. Simply being available at 3:00 a.m. to talk or play a game was essential in winning trust and establishing relationships that changed lives.

What staff and volunteers learned over the years is that more than participants' lives changed.

The Fellowship of the Gym Floor

Becoming an Organization

“I remember that the gym floor was very cold and hard. It was very important to sleep on the floor as our guests did. For many of us that was the first introduction to homelessness and a shelter.” Bev Barr -- Founding Mother, staff, 1985 – 1997.

Women came, slowly at first. Of those who volunteered that first night in the Immaculate Conception gym, memories vary. Either one came, or none, but by the second or third night, there were several. Other memories are clearly etched: going to the door periodically to see if someone were coming across the field, Bev Barr’s bringing yogurt to supply healthy food efficiently, and sleeping on the floor just as the guests did. No one forgets how cold it was on the gym floor. This is what Bev called ‘the fellowship of the gym floor.’

The learning curve was steep during the first two months of operation. The learn-as-you-go experience taught the founders a great deal about not only service provision and organizing, but also about church and Chicago politics. In short order, they began to go beyond a cold-month warming center and to think about a year-round shelter. They began the work to make that happen. Martha Whelan and the board took steps to incorporate, become licensed by the City’s Department of Human Service, and apply for operating funds from the Chicago Community Trust. One critical step was to secure a permanent site, the likely one being Immaculate Conception.

Securing a Site

Within this same period of time, the Archdiocese had closed Immaculate Conception’s school, and the church was eager to utilize the vacant space to generate income for parish support. A day school approached the church, and the parish council had signed a contract with the day school for the 1985-86 school year. When Deborah’s Place asked the church for continuing use of church facilities, there was support from Fr. Jakes and other parishioners; however, there was opposition to the shelter within the congregation since the day school threatened to withdraw from the contract if the shelter used the space concurrently. Tensions were high since the parish had to ultimately weigh the use of the facilities for a non-religious school or for the shelter. Neighborhood opposition beyond the parish added to the tensions.

Since a zoning special use permit was needed, Margaret Herring remembers that a public meeting was held one hot summer afternoon in an alley just south of North Avenue. Fr. Jakes asked Deborah's Place to go ahead with the meeting in the face of a doubtful outcome because the parish "would learn from it." Margaret, who chaired the meeting, recalls the tension-filled encounter:

"The alley was packed with developers, those who bought in the area. For long-time residents, property values had turned around and those living in 'coffin-size' rowhouses suddenly saw their land values increasing. Some from Cabrini-Green townhouses who expressed support didn't say anything. The day school packed the meeting with parents and raised issues such as tuberculosis. A nurse testified that TB bacilli are carried by air, but that sunlight would destroy them and lights could be installed to kill the bacilli. A developer testified how much his firm had invested in the area."

Ald. Burton Natarus was in attendance since the church was in his ward. The alderman countered the developer by saying the firm had used city money to do some of its development. Margaret says, "He was very bold and forceful that night," but even Ald. Natarus' arguments could not save the day for Deborah's Place. Wounded by the experience, Margaret feels they should have told Fr. Jakes, 'You go educate the parish!' The meeting was instructive preparation since each of the future site expansions would require community support and/or a special use permit, as required by city ordinance.

The push was on to locate an alternate site, especially since neither the City nor the Chicago Community Trust would recognize or award grants to an organization that did not have a place from which to deliver services. Patty Crowley and others swung into action again. Martha has memories of being with Patty, driving around the Near North neighborhood, ". . . barreling down alleys. . . It was a prayerful experience. Patty was on her 'seek and ye shall find' mission."

Ald. Natarus proved to be a resourceful ally in the effort to find an alternate location. Through his connections at the New City YMCA, he made introductions that led to securing shared space in the basement of the Town and Garden Apartments at 1404½ North Sedgwick. New City Y operated a

"NEW CHOICE: A SCHOOL OR A WOMEN'S SHELTER. ONLY 1 CAN STAY. THE OTHER MUST MOVE. YOU MAKE THE CHOICE"

**Hearing:
September 5
Immaculate Conception
1431 North Park
7:30 PM**

**The neighborhood must choose.
We will either have a women's
shelter or a school.**

*Text copied from Deborah's Place
archives.*

daycare program from that site and agreed to lease space to Deborah's Place. Less than ideal, the shared space was adequate.

Learning by Trial and Error

The site secured, Deborah's Place opened the first year-round overnight emergency shelter for women in Chicago in December, 1985. The "Overnight" had a staff of three – Martha, continuing as executive director; Bev, volunteer coordinator; and Janet Miller, overnight coordinator. The administrative offices were located at 407 S. Dearborn. There were 25 volunteers, and the budget for operations was \$69,000.

Deborah's Place really began at the first Sedgwick location. This was where the founders, staff, and volunteers learned by trial and error. One hurdle was overcome when the City of Chicago Zoning Board of Appeals approved a special use permit. But there were enormous challenges, a primary one being that the space served children in the daytime and adults at night. There were on-going negotiations about appropriate space use, cleanliness, storage of food and materials. Margaret recalls that, just as Deborah's Place, the daycare was struggling to make ends meet, and food would be missing from the shelter's refrigerator. There was concern on the part of the daycare that some of the women hung around after they were supposed to be gone. Such instances of acrimony were difficult, but not uncommon when organizations share space.

The Overnight could accommodate thirty women on mats lined up on the floor in one large open space. To create some sense of privacy, guests often placed chairs around the mats and creatively draped sheets over the chairs. Thanks to Martha's resourcefulness, Deborah's Place was the first shelter in the city to have pillows, a donation from a major airline. At least three volunteers were needed each night for two shifts: the first from 6:00 – 9:30 p.m. that set up and prepared and served the evening meal; the second, the overnight and clean-up from 9:30 p.m. until 7:00 a.m.

The first board president, Sue Augustus, sees Martha as a visionary and credits her with being ". . . the driving force behind empowering the women and not imposing our middle-class values on their lives. That was a really critical piece for me, trying to step back from imposing my values and making judgments on the women." Sue and Martha worked together very closely.

An event occurred the spring following the opening of the Overnight Shelter that led to the first major programmatic change at Deborah's Place. It had to do with a very mentally ill woman who had come to the shelter a few times and was known to many North Side providers. Martha tells Irene's story:

"I knew Irene from Housing Opportunities for Women (HOW); she was one of the first women there. She was my age and had grown up in a foster care situation where she was bounced from one home to another. At one point, she had a really major personality disorder. Someone had offered to adopt her, but the mother became pregnant, so they decided not to adopt. She ended up, while at HOW, going into Chicago Read Mental Hospital. I visited her on a number of occasions at Reed. While at HOW, we were trying to help her come to the decision to sign papers to allow her son to be adopted. DCFS (Department of Children and Family Services) had lost touch with her and assumed her dead. From Read, she was discharged to Deborah's Place. She came for one night, and I did not have the resources to help her. She also made connections with HOW, and they were trying to get her help. She was hearing voices and was very, very ill. She ended up committing suicide by jumping into a train. It was such a tragedy, tragedy piled upon tragedy. I remember that first morning just being so lost as to how I could help her, and she died."

Martha goes on to say, "That was a pivotal moment. We needed to find a way to be there for women beyond a night. We knew we needed to start a day program."

Expansion: Irene's

A first step in that process was to visit Travelers and Immigrants Aid (now Heartland Alliance) that had a huge day program. Martha, Bev, and Janet were very impressed with what they saw, including an art therapy component. In the summer of 1986, space for the day program was secured at 1742 North Milwaukee Avenue, and in November of that year, the day drop-in center was opened with Audrey Thomas as Program Administrator. The center was named for Irene.

Martha remembers, "We opened Irene's intentionally with art therapy as part of its program." In the Wicker Park neighborhood where the administrative offices had relocated at 1608 N. Milwaukee, the staff met a stained glass artist who had a studio on their floor. The artist agreed to give art lessons at the Overnight. Martha recalls that when he arrived, only a few women participated. One woman, however, started working with him. "She burst out laughing and after that started talking. She had literally not spoken a word since coming to the shelter, yet she started talking. What struck me was that something reached her. That became part of the vision. We wanted to have art therapy and not TV." This commitment to art therapy was formalized with the hiring of Jean Durkin in 1987.

With the operation of the Overnight and Irene's in full swing, the board and staff focused energies during 1988 on drafting a mission statement, based on two years of operational experience. In the same year Deborah's Place was granted its 501(c) (3) status. Also, an internal debate began about further expansion into transitional housing.

Further Expansion: Marah's

Just as the staff had concluded that Irene's was needed, there was increased discussion about ways to provide services beyond overnight shelter and a daytime drop-in center. Within the movement to serve people who are homeless, transitional housing was a new concept for structuring 24-hour services in a protected environment. The model provided the supports necessary for women and men experiencing homelessness to build the resources they need to become self-sufficient and self-sustaining. This concept was appealing and seemed like a natural next step for Deborah's Place to take, especially as the need for more services was obvious and the desire to render support was a natural response of the individuals who made up the staff, board, and volunteers.

The opportunity to create a transitional program was possible because of the passage of the 1987 McKinney Act that created a channel for significant federal funds to reach such community-level programs as Deborah's Place. For the first time there was a source of sufficient funds for this kind of costly initiative. Taking another leap of faith, a proposal was submitted to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and Deborah's Place received a five-year contract, the first awarded by HUD in the City of Chicago. This was for a demonstration project to open a transitional housing program where twenty-two women would reside for up to two years. The site was named Marah's after a woman from the Book of Ruth – "Call me not Naomi; call me Marah for my life has seen much bitterness."

Marah's opened at 1110 N. Noble in March, 1988, under the leadership of Melanie Sanco. Melanie, like so many of the early staff, came to Deborah's Place serendipitously. Staff met Melanie in 1987 while participating in the 8th Day Center Good Friday Walk for Justice, an annual tradition that continues to this day. Melanie introduced herself and an immediate bond was formed. Martha, Bev, and Audrey knew they wanted Melanie at Marah's.

The opening of Marah's was also the beginning of relationships with stipend volunteer programs. Over the years, Lutheran Volunteer Corps, Jesuit Volunteer Corps, Passionist Lay Missioners, Amate

House, and Apostolic Volunteers have provided over 30 young women who offered a year of service in the programs at Deborah's Place.

The Expansion Debate

The opening of Marah's was the beginning of the institutionalization of Deborah's Place, according to Audrey Thomas, who at the time was Program Administrator of Irene's and is currently the Chief Program Officer of Deborah's Place. From the start, there were issues that created internal uncertainty about the decision to create Marah's. The debate was heightened by the realization that some elements of the character of Deborah's Place were changing. Whereas Martha and the staff had strong working relationships with the city and local funders, HUD was a different case. With federal dollars came regulations that were counter to the relational character of Deborah's Place. For instance, all twenty-two beds had to be filled each night. To do that, staff had to take referrals, and they were not prepared for the impact of taking referrals from outside agencies. The paperwork became a huge burden, taking up time that would have been spent more productively with participants. Audrey concludes, "Marah's could not be what it was intended because of funding restrictions."

For many, the decision to create Marah's was another pivotal moment, much like Irene's death. What had been a small, intimate, relational program was growing. For the first of what would be a continuing organizational debate about growth, there were intense discussions: Should the organization remain small and serve a few women in an intense, relational way *or* expand into transitional housing, provide more services, and help more women? On one hand, there was a real fear that getting too big was heading toward institutionalization, harkening back to the kinds of piled-on tragedies of Irene's history with institutions. On the other hand, could the new resources be tapped to bring about desired supportive services that would help more women heal within a structured, nurturing environment, leading to productive choices for the individual woman? Was the choice either/or?

Sue talks about the movement toward growth as a rather organic process. Certainly growth was not planned from the beginning. In some ways, she feels there was a 'naïve notion' that the homeless problem would go away at some point, reasoning that Deborah's Place was helping to make that happen with the Overnight and Irene's. Then staff and the board began talking about a transitional program which ". . . sounded like a good idea and we probably thought that was the last step we would have to take."

A Leadership Change

The philosophical debate over expansion of services and direction of growth ultimately resulted in a change of leadership. “After we opened Marah’s,” Martha recalls, “I started becoming leery of institutions . . . and wanted to abandon the notion of Marah’s.” For her, the Marah’s housing model was not the right direction. Rather, she saw the need to focus more in supporting women in “. . . completely independent housing out in the community.” She reflects, “That was probably the beginning of the end of my ability to be the leader at Deborah’s Place.” Martha resigned in the spring of 1991, and Patricia Crowley, O.S.B., Martha’s friend and mentor, replaced her as the second director.

As the organization’s second leader, Sr. Pat brought her own set of ‘big picture’ skills that were well-grounded in her faith, education, social action, and proven administrative experience. As the daughter of Patty Crowley, who resigned from the board when her daughter became director, Sr. Pat was familiar with Deborah’s Place and could easily pick up the mantle to lead Deborah’s Place through the next set of transitions. The tasks ahead were daunting.

With Sr. Pat at the helm, a strategic planning process began led by Day Piercy, a consultant long involved in women’s issues. A significant outcome of the planning was a new program of supportive services and a commitment to explore the creation of permanent housing. These services were designed to assist women as they moved into independent housing, a program similar to the one Martha had in mind. The services included: assistance in locating and moving to an apartment, continued case management, and a food pantry. In the following year, the staff and board explored models of co-location, i.e., low income housing coupled with overnight shelter. With funding from the Prince Charitable Trust, several staff toured various models and programs on the East Coast. A building at 2100 West North Avenue was identified as a possible site for creating a combined overnight shelter and low income housing.

NIMBY

An emergency situation presented itself when in the spring of 1993 the Overnight Shelter was evicted from the Town and Garden Apartments on Sedgwick. As early as the previous November, there had been rumblings that the site was to be redeveloped for low income rental housing. As it turned out, Light Associates, the development arm of Metroplex, was to convert the building into subsidized housing. The developer needed the first floor space for a tenant gathering place. With no significant opposition

from the community at the zoning hearings, the Overnight reopened at 1866 North Milwaukee in May, 1993, without missing a night of service. This was seen as a temporary move, one that lasted for more than 18 months.

Within a few short months, staff and board were dealing with two significant issues – a possible new low income housing initiative *and* a permanent relocation of the Overnight Shelter. Both needs could be accommodated in the 2100 West North Avenue location. Progress toward that resolution was halted, however, when there was vocal neighborhood opposition and zoning was denied. This was another NIMBY (Not in My Backyard) response where, as Audrey recalls, “Deborah’s Place, aided by the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless and 8th Day Center for Justice, waged a valiant, but futile campaign to win approval.”

Fortunately, a building at 1530 N. Sedgwick became available in June, 1993. With the help of Ald. Burton Natarus and the community, a special use permit was easily obtained. In late 1994, under the project development leadership of Katrina Van Valkenburgh, re-construction began, and the Overnight moved into the new Sedgwick building in March, 1995. Shortly thereafter, two additional programs were added within the same building, making this a co-location site. While the first floor housed the Overnight Shelter, the second floor became a transitional shelter, subsequently named for named for Teresa Newman, a former participant and board member. Part of the second and the third and fourth floors became thirty-nine units of permanent low income housing. Kerry Frank was the first Program Administrator of Teresa’s. Financial support for the 1530 site came from a Kresge Foundation challenge grant and a successful \$1.65 million capital campaign. This significant milestone was acknowledged as Deborah’s Place celebrated its 10th year anniversary with the organization’s first gala fundraiser atop the John Hancock Building in June, 1995.

With expanding programs serving a larger number of women, it was important to look closely at services. The result of a self-study was the Long-Range Plan for FY97 – FY99 that called for a restructuring of the delivery of services. Such positions as Clinical Director and Education/Employment Director were added. More emphasis was placed on research and evaluation of services. With assistance from South Shore Bank, a study to determine the feasibility of a small business venture was conducted in 1997. WomanCraft, Inc., a participant-operated papermaking and jewelry venture, was opened in late 1998.

Further Expansion

Also within the same period, there was an increasing need to relocate Marah's from Noble Street since the lease was to end. After an extensive search for a new location, a new site was identified at the St. Alphonsus convent at 1456 West Oakdale in Lakeview, a northside community area experiencing tremendous gentrification pressures. Recalling previous zoning battles in gentrifying neighborhoods, the staff and board worked with the pastor, parishioners, the Lakeview Action Coalition, and a newly formed citywide organization, United Power for Action and Justice (UPAJ), to organize support for the relocation.

Alderman Terry Gabinski had originally deferred the decision to a small neighborhood association which held a very contentious meeting on May 13, 1997. That night it was clear that this was a divided neighborhood. Deborah's Place could not have anticipated the intensity of the firestorm they encountered. Not surprisingly, neighbors with connections with the developers organized to create a climate of fear, but the fervor of the split within the parish and the community was a surprise. This opposition was countered by a growing number of supporters who participated in a year-long campaign led by Deborah's Place, Lakeview Action Coalition., and UPAJ. Efforts included open houses and meetings, press conferences, a candlelight vigil, and a door-to-door campaign for signatures of support. The culmination of these efforts came when Ald. Gabinski, under pressure from the large number of constituents, decided to lend his support, essentially assuring approval of the special use permit. With zoning in place, Marah's was able to open on Oakdale in October, 1999.

In March, 1997, the board sanctioned the most ambitious development in the organization's history. Marillac House, a social service agency located at 2822 West Jackson Boulevard on the West Side, had vacated its multi-story building to move to a new location nearby. Deborah's Place proposed to redevelop the 'old' Marillac House into ninety permanent low income housing units for an estimated \$10 million. Following a successful \$5 million capital campaign, the Rebecca Johnson Apartments, named for a former participant, opened in August, 2000, and was dedicated the following month.

“This Is a Magic Place”

Participants and Programs

“This is a magic place. At Deborah’s Place women are on their way.” Gloria, a participant of Deborah’s Place

Who are the women served by Deborah’s Place? They are mothers, daughters, sisters, grandmothers, and friends. They range in age from 18 to 61 and older; they represent every major racial or ethnic group. Some have been diagnosed with mental illnesses and/or substance abuse problems, while many have not. A small number have physical disabilities while some have come from situations of domestic violence. Others have faced economic and societal misfortunes or have, by no fault of their own, fallen onto the lowest rungs of a stratified socio-economic system. They are a diverse group of women who have found themselves in need of shelter and support. Diverse as they are, their common ground is Deborah’s Place where they find a “safety net” and “a home.”

A Safety Net

The appearance and use of this safety net varies for each woman, depending on her particular needs. Some women require the supportive ear of a staff member, while others need simply to be acknowledged or need only to be left alone in this safe environment. Deborah’s Place offers a continuum of care that includes Irene’s Daytime Support Center and the Overnight Shelter, Teresa’s and Marah’s Transitional Programs and Deborah’s Place II Apartments and Rebecca Johnson Apartments, both of which offer permanent supportive housing.³ Within this continuum of care, staff, volunteers, and board members work tirelessly to ensure that the safety net is in place.

The Overnight Shelter provides a safe and quiet environment for participants to sleep. Many describe the atmosphere at the Overnight, as “homey”. Gwen states that “. . .it’s like a home-base and a sisterhood.” There is a living area where the women can lounge, a kitchen where staff and volunteers prepare dinner and breakfast for the women, and a dining area where the women gather to eat and socialize. Located in a separate section of the building, the sleeping area provides beds for approximately 30 women. There is an intimate feeling with beds lined in rows covered in bedding and adorned with stuffed animals and other personal belongings, waiting for the return of the occupant for the night.

³ Program descriptions are found in Appendix E.

This is in stark contrast to a description of the Overnight in the early days. Marie Claude Schauer, a long time volunteer, says, “They have luxury compared to then. Women slept on the floor [mats] all lined up with tents over them made from chairs.” Another volunteer, Mary Margaret Kelly, remembers the roaches that occupied the floor with them as they slept. Today, shower facilities, a television, a learning center with computer access, arts and crafts, and a library, therapeutic services such as art therapy, and case management are all available to the women at the Overnight Shelter.

Volunteers reminisce about the intimacy of their relationships and the lessons they learned from the women whom they served at the Overnight. Glenda Peters fondly remembers the bonds built early on. She says, “I knew their names and I knew when they signed in at night. I talked with them at night and I [even] knew who rocked themselves to sleep.” Mickey Lowenstein shares his experience, saying, “The group was smaller and very tight. It was almost like a club. . . there was a sense that this was a shared experience for that night.”

Irene’s

A companion to the Overnight is Irene’s Daytime Support Center. Irene’s offers a safe place for participants to spend the day. It is located on the third floor of a large loft building. The environment here appears homey as well. When entering the center, there is a semi-separated area for those who smoke cigarettes and where everyone can store personal belongings in lockers. Participants at Irene’s are invited to eat lunch, do laundry, and take showers. Other activities include computer access, art therapy, puzzles and board games, case management, and therapeutic services. Some of the women take this time to catch up on the lives of fellow participants and socialize with staff. For many, the services of Irene’s are used in conjunction with the Overnight, while others choose one or the other. Christine, a former participant and current Learning Center employee, talks about the difference between Deborah’s Place and other shelter programs. She recalls, “The difference is that you have a bed to sleep in and although they do make you leave from the overnight to go to Irene’s, at least you have a destination.” Most of the women share the sentiments of one participant who says, “It feels good to know that you always have a place to go and you don’t have to be in the street.”

Many of the women of Deborah’s Place came from other shelters or the streets of Chicago. One participant talks of suffering a “nervous breakdown” and being unable to care for herself or her children. She speaks of having to live in abandoned buildings and finally in a shelter where she suffered from both mental and physical illness due to harsh and inhumane treatment. She says of her experience, “[You

were] treated like garbage. They just talked to you like you were nothing.” Of Deborah’s Place she says, “God knew I needed a blessing.” She entered Deborah’s Place through Teresa’s Transitional Shelter.

Transitional Programs

Teresa’s is a four-month program which offers dormitory style living for up to ten women. This stable living environment allows the participants to practice their daily living skills including cooking, housekeeping, and conflict resolution. One example of the support and individual attention given to the women of Deborah’s Place is this participant’s memory of her stay at Teresa’s. She describes the transitional shelter as small and cozy with a kitchen that she could actually use. She says of Teresa’s:

“That was just a miracle for me. When I got there, my mentor just kind of took care of me. I was so tired from being unable to sleep at the other shelter and having to be up at 6 am. We had to be up at 8 am at Teresa’s, but she would let me sleep until 8:30 and she would come and tap the bed and call my name softly. She was a blessing. She was in my corner and I needed that support.”

After completing Teresa’s, those women choosing additional support have the option of participating in Marah’s Transitional Housing Program. Marah’s offers 22 - 30 women the opportunity to live in a semi-structured environment with their own room and a shared bath. This two-year program fosters community and gives participants a chance to further enhance their daily living skills through shared duties such as cooking and cleaning. It is a quiet place located on the grounds of St. Alphonsus Catholic Church where a garden and gazebo offer invitations to sit quietly. There are administrative and case management offices, meeting rooms, and a kitchen on the first floor. Bedrooms, a learning center, and a chapel occupy the second floor and more rooms are on the remaining floor. Staff at Marah’s is available to the participants 24 hours a day. A participant states, “I know that I can get up and can come downstairs and there’s somebody around all the time. I’m able to go into the office and say ‘Can I talk? Do you have a minute?’” She also talks of the atmosphere at Marah’s saying, “There’s peace here. It is a place where nuns lived and the walls are crying out ‘Shut up, quiet down’ when women are making too much noise.” She speaks of going into the chapel and experiencing a “golden peace.”

Permanent Housing

Another component of the continuum of services offered by Deborah’s Place is Deborah’s Place II Apartments (DP II) and the Rebecca Johnson Apartments, both of which provide permanent supportive housing and represent the end of homelessness for many women. DP II, serving up to 39 women, offers both private and shared bathrooms and either a full kitchen or refrigerator/microwave units. Rebecca

Johnson's is a 90-unit studio apartment complex where each unit is equipped with its own bathroom and kitchen. At both sites, women making the transition from homelessness to independent living are provided with counseling and case management, along with educational and skill development classes to help facilitate their transition. Donna, a former participant and current Rebecca Johnson tenant says of the continuum of care provided by Deborah's Place, "They give us a fighting chance to say, 'Hey, we're worth this.' They support us no matter what our decisions are. They don't judge us as one group of women no matter what the circumstances are; they take each individual on their own basis."

Supportive Services

Throughout its early history, Deborah's Place provided assistance to participants with income and housing through residential programs. In 1994, in preparation for the addition of supportive housing, Kathy Booton Wilson led the organization in formalizing the case management and therapeutic services. In subsequent years, those services have grown to include health care provisions and specialized work with long-term shelter participants and participants with addition issues. Today, all women who come to Deborah's Place have access to case management as well as therapeutic, educational, and employment services.

As early as 1988, a learning center was established in a converted chapel at Marah's. From that small beginning has grown the education and employment services. Since 1994, Patty Zuccarello, has developed services that are respectful of adult learning styles and strengths. Her visionary work has resulted in the incorporation of a humanities curriculum, including philosophy, art, history, music, and literature. This curriculum is available for both participants and staff.

Patty also has led the development of a long-term goal of a social venture to employ women who wanted to work but were unable to access traditional job placement programs and employment opportunities. The goal was achieved with the opening of WomanCraft, Inc.

Over the years, the supportive service program has been a training ground for graduate students from Loyola University Chicago School of Social Work, School of the Art Institute, University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration, University of Illinois of Chicago School of Art Therapy and Jane Addams School of Social Work. Deborah's Place has always felt a responsibility to provide applied practice opportunities for over sixty students.

The Principles at Work

Deborah's Place is a safe haven for women who have had significant trauma in their lives. As Gail Lewis, Program Administrator of Irene's observes, "The women [coming to] Deborah's Place are in crisis, but they have the time to heal. They can take baby steps and don't have to fix everything in a moment." A former participant and current Rebecca Johnson tenant tells a story of being pregnant and living in a drug infested warming center where used drug paraphernalia could easily be seen both inside and outside of the building. "That was a horrible place and I was so unhappy there . . . it was a nightmare for me." While in this warming center she suffered a miscarriage and slipped into a deep sadness. She was taken to a hospital psychiatric ward and diagnosed with clinical depression. From there, she came to Deborah's Place. She says, "Deborah's Place was a godsend to me If it wasn't for Deborah's Place, I don't think I could've gotten through that." Other women speak of having lived in the back of an Alcoholics Anonymous club, coming from domestic violence shelters, or sleeping on the streets of Chicago.

The fundamental principles of Deborah's Place lay the foundation of support, respect, and choice, of empowerment, individuality, and relationship building. Jean Durkin, Creative Arts Coordinator who functions as an art therapist, has worked at Deborah's Place for approximately 14 years. She says of the organization:

"There is a dedication to the power of relationships and there's enough time to create relationships. It's up to women coming in to decide if they want to change. The staff has no preconceived notions of what course they are going to take. We can offer a lot of choices and a lot of opportunities and tell them stories, but it's their choice and their pace. I can form a relationship so what I can offer might be a little bit more in line with who they are. The power of the relationship can also change people [because] they can trust that we have their best interest at heart."

As independent housing becomes an option for participants, they can continue to have access to all of the supportive services within the organization. For example, case management services remain available as long as any participant chooses to utilize them. Additionally, a food pantry provides basic necessities (e.g., food, linens, and small appliances) to help support former participants in times of need.

The participants and former participants of all of the programs are part of the community of Deborah's Place and as such are encouraged to participate in community meetings where their feedback and suggestions are taken seriously and often implemented. Having their voices heard is, more times than

not, a new experience for them, yet it is part of the very fabric and philosophy of the organization. It is not only the provision of food, shelter, and supportive services that enables women to become empowered to take back and maintain control of their lives. It is also the compassion shown to them on a consistent basis. Even the small considerations given to the participants help to facilitate the goal of empowerment. Gwen, a participant at Irene's, recalls "I was gone for Christmas and I thought they would give away my Christmas bag, but they didn't. When I came back, they said, 'We've got something for you' and it was my stuff for Christmas. Somebody still thinks about me even when I'm gone." She goes on to say, "I didn't believe women cared about women. They knew I liked to crochet so they provided the yarn so I could make scarves and hats. They didn't have to do that."

Deborah's Place provides an environment that is free from judgment and stipulations. Such an environment allows women to make choices about their lives and helps them to become empowered and to discover or reclaim their positive self-esteem and self-respect. Queen asserts that Deborah's Place "is a safety net [and] if you've had trauma, it is protection, a place where you feel safe. . . and can dry your tears."

Keepers of the Flame

Leadership – Volunteers, Board, and Staff – and Tensions

“You say, ‘Wow, I’m really a part of this, this wonderful organization’ . . . and then you realize that you really want to stay with it and keep doing things to help.” Maureen McGowan, a board member in her second six-year term.

Deborah’s Place is an organization founded and sustained by women for women. This does not mean that men have not played a part in its formation or development. On the contrary, the involvement of men in supporting roles has been critical over the past sixteen years, as both women *and* men have participated and provided expertise, guidance, and financial support to the organization. Since 1988, for example, Mickey Lowenstein has been a volunteer. While the board remains all women, involvement has broadened in recent years since men joined the staff in 1995, further counteracting the notion that Deborah’s Place is a ‘women only’ bastion. It is significant, however, that Deborah’s Place remains distinctly and fundamentally a women’s organization, and from that derives its culture and ways of doing things.

The ways of doing things at Deborah’s Place invoke the feminine proclivity toward consensus, hospitality, and inclusion. From its origins, women with financial and social resources saw themselves ‘in this together’ with women who, for any number of reasons, had little access to shelter, employment, and security. Thus, a culture of empathetic nurturing developed which cuts across barriers of economics, social status, and racial stereotype. This culture invites guests to become participants, encourages volunteers to do their part to make a difference in other lives, and, in very explicit and intentional ways, influences leadership and decision making on many levels. The culture also provides the framework for working through tensions, especially tensions about the character of Deborah’s Place as it has experienced growth and change over its sixteen-year history.

Volunteers, the board, and staff are the keepers of the flame at Deborah’s Place. They are the people who encounter the personal life stories, crises, victories, and challenges at Irene’s, the Overnight, or the other programs at Deborah’s Place. All in this together, they are the women and men who witness the everyday living of participants, and their reward for extending themselves in this manner is in receiving as much as they are giving. A sampling of their stories tells much about the style of leadership and problem solving that characterizes Deborah’s Place.

In This Together

Marie Claude Schauer has volunteered at the Overnight since 1988. Talking with her fellow volunteers, she tells how she began to volunteer after seeing an article in the paper. She says, “I lead a privileged life, and I should do something.” From her very comfortable condominium, she could walk to the Town and Garden Apartments and later to 1530 N. Sedgwick. She remembers being astonished to learn how bright some of the guests were. At one point, she was reading philosophy as part of a book club at the University of Chicago. “Could you believe that these women knew more than I did? They were telling me this and that. Two were graduates of the University of Chicago.” Marie Claude does crossword puzzles during the night and recalls how “. . . there was one lady who completed a puzzle in five minutes that took me two hours. I thought that was fabulous.” On another occasion, a woman with whom she played Scrabble commented on Marie Claude’s French accent and offered to teach her English.

Glenda Peters, along with Marie Claude, Mary Margaret Kelly and Mickey Lowenstein, have vivid memories of the intimacy at 1404 ½ N. Sedgwick where they began volunteering. Contrasting those intimate experiences with the present Overnight, however, Glenda says, “. . . the dignity of having their own bed to come back to at night [at the current Overnight] has made a great difference. [The beds] give a sense of groundedness.” A poignant conversation recently reminded Glenda that if tables were to turn, she, too, could find haven at Deborah’s Place. She told a participant about her business, complaining that it was either feast or famine. The woman replied, “If it gets really bad, you can get a job at Deborah’s Place. It’s probably \$5.00 an hour.” Glenda went home and thought, “It’s not all bad. You would have a safe place to sleep, you could help other people, and have enough food to eat. It was a heartwarming, secure feeling.”

Like Marie Claude and Glenda, Mary Margaret and Mickey have volunteered since the early years. Mary Margaret was attracted by the liberal views of Patty Crowley and others. She stayed to share in the lives of women and provide some of the consistency that is needed to sustain relationships. Mickey was invited by a friend to volunteer and came to the Overnight reluctantly because of his initial fears. Going into a shelter was a new experience, and he was not sure how women would accept a man. Mickey was pleasantly surprised to find how accepted he was by the women. The irony was the importance of Mickey’s being with participants since many had only negative experiences or relationships with men.

Overcoming Stereotypes

After finding he had a place at the shelter, Mickey recalls, as did Marie Claude, how amazed he was at the intelligence of some of the women. “I kept going home and saying, ‘What is she doing here?’ It’s much easier [to understand why someone is homeless] if you have someone that’s not bright or has an obvious handicap or substance problem, but for some of these women, it was not obvious at all.”

Penny Applegate, who has been involved since 1986 as a volunteer and board member, also had to rethink her own stereotypes of women who experience homelessness. At the beginning she remembers saying, “Let’s see, if so-and-so appears to have a substance abuse problem, now does that mean there’s a plan in place for her to go from a to b? What is her plan? Then it hit me one day, ‘Well, what is my plan for an area where I may need to change?’ Then I realized that this is not about what’s right for someone else.”

A volunteer, and later a board member, who was recruited for her computer skills was Caroline Steimle. Right out of college in 1992, she was comfortable with what she knew – bringing computers into the learning center. As she says, she came in with the attitude she was going to teach someone skills so they could find a job and move into housing. In her mind there was a linear plan. She subsequently learned about “. . . relationships and life in general. What kept me are the values and seeing how everyone has a lot of respect and empathy for everyone else and being in a community where that is not taken for granted. . . what really projects [is] just the freedom to make choices – that everyone has the freedom to make choices.”

Emma Taylor was homeless herself when she came to Deborah’s Place. She is now on staff and delights in saying, “. . . now [I] can help those ladies who don’t know how to let it out. I can pick [them] up and carry them.” A goal for her is “to get participants to a place where they can trust themselves and us to help to heal whatever they have come out of and put them back on their feet and get back into society.”

Another former participant is Constance. She surprises her friends by calling Deborah’s Place ‘home.’ She says, “I’m going home; they make you feel like that. . . I can stay here until I’m ready to move on. There’s no time limit.” Donna, a Rebecca Johnson resident, responds, “. . . they support you no matter what [your] decision is, whether right, wrong, or indifferent.”

Board member, Cheryl Kobetsky, sums up her thoughts this way: “It’s about . . . each woman finding her own path; it’s not that there’s a prescribed end. Everybody’s path is different.” In her mind, Deborah’s Place is where “. . . we give people the space to grow.” And to staffperson, Jean Durkin, “It’s a dance. . . providing [services] and getting the hell away.”

Leadership In the Midst of Change

Change from the early days and ultimate growth of Deborah’s Place was inevitable. Glenda compares the changes at Deborah’s Place with that of a small, intimate family business. “The first 3- 5 years, it’s cozy. Then all of a sudden you’ve been successful and it’s time to grow. When you grow, you have to have a corporate structure. As good as intentions are, it’s different.” Taking that assessment to a logical next step, growth, and consequent change, often necessitate different leadership styles.

It would be difficult to find anyone who questions that Martha Whelan and Bev Barr were the right team to lead the first years of Deborah’s Place. Martha has been described as ‘charismatic, a go-getter, persuasive, and resourceful.’ Pat Crowley says of her friend Martha, “I always think Martha gifted this agency with that challenge to find alternative ways to deal with life, that there isn’t only one way.” She says of Bev, “. . . [Bev] was a wealth of humanity and many volunteers equate Deborah’s Place with Bev and rightfully so.” It was Bev who set the standard for interaction with and sensitivity to participants. It was she who saw the role of educating volunteers to the issue of homelessness. But, it was Martha herself who saw clearly the need for new top leadership at the end of her six years of service when in 1991 she began to question the direction of new growth with the opening of Marah’s.

Within a six-year period, Deborah’s Place expanded from a single overnight shelter into Irene’s, and then Marah’s. Expansion was a natural progression: programs were grounded in real experience, and the philosophy of service was coherently articulated as the organization became more sophisticated. Deborah’s Place was no longer, however, an intimate, cozy enterprise where everyone knew everyone. It was becoming, as Glenda describes, a corporate enterprise, although distinct as a non-profit organization since its purpose remained caring and nurturing. The trade-off, according to Glenda, was giving more women a chance.

The person to assume the leadership role for the expansion period was Patricia Crowley, OSB. Raised in Wilmette, Illinois, and educated at St. Scholastica Academy in Chicago, she was the eldest daughter of religiously progressive, socially active parents within Roman Catholic circles. Upon

completing her education at Mundelein College, now part of Loyola University Chicago, she entered the Benedictine Sisters and taught theology and French at St. Scholastica for a number of years. Her passion to alleviate the burden of poverty led her to work with youth and families in Rogers Park as the director of the Howard Area Community Center (HACC) where she honed her administrative skills. In 1989 she was awarded a Chicago Community Trust Fellowship and spent fifteen months researching how women immigrants represented in Rogers Park organized in their countries of origin. Upon her return from abroad, she was available for a new position and wanted to work with women. In 1991, she was tapped as the second director of Deborah's Place. Sr. Pat, taking the long view, sees her role in the growth this way:

“I think that we were propelled into growth in one way by being put out of the 1404 ½ N. Sedgwick site and having to fight that. I think I ‘grow things.’ I tend to think bigger and say this isn’t satisfactory; this is lovely, but it isn’t enough for these women. So, I think it’s a combination of things. Somebody else probably wouldn’t have taken those leaps in reaction to circumstances. That causes some tensions because somebody like Audrey [Thomas], who is very systematic and very thorough, calls herself a pessimist, as seeing all the bad things that could happen; however, I see all the good things that could happen and don’t always see the pitfalls. We’re totally opposite. It’s a healthy tension and we’ve worked well together.”

In Cheryl’s opinion the board and staff “. . . [have been] proactive about how they deal with change.” That proactivity is consistent with the cultural legacy of consensus building, yet even with such a framework for decision making, the transitions have been difficult. Penny expresses it this way: “We’re not the same board and we’re not the same organization. It’s a tremendously different place.”

The Expanded Service Debate

By developing a continuum of care, Deborah’s Place has stretched its resources to meet women where they are and provide a broad range of support services, including case management, to assist them in their choices. Explicit in all these expanded services is the commitment to serve more women. Turning in this new direction, the questions become: Can more women be served effectively and well? By serving more, is the foundation of relationship-building lost and is the organization becoming institutionalized as Martha feared? The dilemma is summed up by Emma: “It is the [question of the] good of the few vs the good of the many.”

At the board level, the debate began in the late 1980s about the desirability of a housing program. These early discussions led to the decision to launch Marah’s as a transitional shelter, but permanent

supportive housing was on the table as well. Sr. Pat recalls that the board investigated a site for supportive housing as far back as the early 1990s before her tenure began. Former member Margaret Herring, however, raises the fundamental philosophical questions about any expansion. While agreeing that the decisions about Marah's and subsequent housing were correct, she questions whether a new program needs to be started to respond to every identified need. She states, "I believe that if we want to foster independence in women, they need to learn how to negotiate society, and that means they have to reach out to other organizations where they may not be as comfortable as they are at Deborah's Place."

Reflecting on the current level of programs and services, Sr. Pat sees that ". . . the tensions right now are about a business approach, particularly about money. With the expansion to add 90 additional units of housing and re-locating Marah's, the budget has crept to close to \$4 million. This organization has always approached things as 'It's all gonna work out,' but right now there's really a challenge . . . I get nervous and tend to think I'm glad the board is overseeing it closely." She acknowledges that ". . . the board keeps reminding me that I can't even talk about additional housing until 2003."

The Rebecca Johnson Apartments presented more than the challenge of tremendous growth. In Sr. Pat's mind, this expansion also brought to a head geographic and racial tensions within the organization. With the opening of Rebecca Johnson, Deborah's Place began serving Chicago's West Side, a predominately African American low income section of the city. The other sites are located in Near North Side, West Town, and, Lakeview, communities on Chicago's North Side. This move represented a major point of departure, which, in the eyes of some, was related to racial prejudices. These feelings were verbalized in concerns about the real or perceived high incidences of crime and the fear that the community would not be safe. Sr. Pat credits Cheryl with creating the climate on the board where the decision to move the West Side was possible and well grounded. Staff tensions over that decision resulted in some compromises. For example, sliding protective gates were placed in the parking lot. While some staff were lost with the opening of Rebecca Johnson, the move to the West Side has proven to be a wise decision.

The West Side move also raised the issue of the representation of minorities on the board. One member, Jan Branion-Wethers, and others pointed out that the board did not reflect the racial or ethnic populations being served by Deborah's Place. That became more apparent with the opening of Rebecca Johnson. Jan had for some time been pushing the board to be more proactive around the issues of diversity and multiculturalism. An adequate solution to this problem is still being sought.

Growth Tensions

Another tension related to the board has been the requirement of members to volunteer at one of the programs since volunteering had been one of the historic prerequisites of board membership. Reducing, and finally dropping that condition was the result of a shift in the composition of the board. Because of increased demands for more professional skills at the board level, the need has been greater to tap lawyers, financial experts, and individuals with access to the corporate and foundation world. The reality has been that few have the time to commit to a specific number of volunteer hours per month. The rationale is that professionals donate their time and talent to the work of Deborah's Place in other ways. The counter to that argument is that the board cannot advocate for something they do not experience, and therefore understand, at some personal level. In FY 2002, a new initiative began under Vice-President Marcia McCormick's leadership whereby board members will participate in group volunteer opportunities. Debbie Kleban, current board president, has encouraged members to share meals with participants as part of monthly board meetings.

With expansion of services to multiple sites, it is more difficult to maintain hands-on relationships so valued by everyone. This is particularly frustrating to staff. "We used to know every woman's name in every program," says Kathy Booton Wilson, Director of Supportive Housing. "It's harder," she says, "to personalize now with 380 names to remember at any given time." Moving administrative offices to Rebecca Johnson Apartments has made a difference to Artaisha Prosper, Human Service Generalist, who in her management role feels isolated from participants. When her office was at Irene's, she would have lunch on a regular basis with guests; that is no longer possible.

The staff also speaks of the difficulty in relating to one another and maintaining communication. With the buildings being a distance apart, it is impossible to walk from one site to another. Kathy recalls when it was easy to go out together to celebrate birthdays; Jean laments that such celebrations are done in little groups now. In Artaisha's mind that means that some are left out. Gail Lewis, Program Administrator of Irene's, finds it unpleasant to have to identify herself when being admitted to one of the sites. At the current level, the entire staff can never be together since services are provided 24 hours a day and someone is always on duty.

Staff members, Patty Zuccarello and Marilyn Derr, share concerns about the numbers that can be served and wonder when that threshold is reached. Patty gives the past Christmas party as an example of

reaching limitations when the additional 90 women from Rebecca Johnson were added to the Deborah's Place family. Marilyn adds that staff tries to be careful to serve no matter what the numbers are.

The complexities of serving the particular population often challenge the resources of seasoned staff and may also impact the capacity threshold. A considerable amount of time and energy are necessary when staff must weigh the good of the few vs the good of many: Where do choices fit in when a woman's lack of personal cleanliness is offensive or if a woman decides not to take her medication? How do the guiding principles get translated into everyday practice?

One noticeable change due largely to expansion over time has been an increased professionalism at the staff level. Whereas in the beginning few held professional credentials, now there is a growing number of social workers and counselors with degrees. While certainly viewed as beneficial, some tension has arisen around professionalism vs the life experience approach for recruiting competent, caring staff.

Mediating Tensions

In spite of the uncertainties and legitimate concerns related to its growth, Deborah's Place has taken intentional steps to mediate the tensions inherent in change and fluctuation. Guided by an understanding of and appreciation for organizational dynamics, the leadership initiated a series of re-orientation meetings for staff within the past year. In small groups, they were led through a process of relating their stories about Deborah's Place, identifying components of the culture that were important to them, and putting out for open discussion the tensions they were feeling as their environment changed. Other important meetings about change management have been held, and attention has been paid to ensure that phones work and better communication is possible through email. The board, too, has continued to develop and update its long-range plans and holds semi-annual retreats.

Witnessing small or tremendously large changes in the lives of women is the joy that motivates all the keepers of the flame to stay involved at Deborah's Place. The successes may be noticeable only to a case manager or a volunteer who is at the Overnight once a month. Or, the success may be dramatic and noticeable to all those present. The latter was the experience of those in attendance at the recent graduation of the Career Exploration Program (CEP). At the conclusion of the exercise, the eleven graduates danced in a synchronized, conga-line formation while singing with great gusto the song "I Believe I Can Fly." This act of coordinated, social activity was possible for a number of the women

because of change deep inside themselves. They could, indeed, 'fly' because of their experience at Deborah's Place.

A Sea Change

Deborah's Place in the Broader Context

“Not a lot of people want to come to grips with the fact that this [homelessness] is a systemic problem. There's got to be a sea change in how this and other issues are conceived in order to really turn it around.” Les Brown, Chicago Coalition for the Homeless

Deborah's Place has been at the forefront of advocacy and education since its inception. From early citywide efforts such as hunger strikes and sit-ins at the Daley Civic Center and participation in local and national organizations such as the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, all involved in Deborah's Place have maintained a commitment to ending the systemic problem of homelessness.

In the early days, Deborah's Place needed to educate the public about homelessness in addition to providing direct service to participants. Martha Whelan tells of speaking at the Near North Loop Ministerial Association in the early days and challenging each church to become involved in the homeless issue. She says, “I basically [told them that] these are the women in your community and you are the churches for whom we are going to be ministering. Then I challenged them to make it a project of their church.” She recalls that each church did eventually become involved, although in varying degrees.

Many staff and participants have been active, historically, in causes related to homelessness and to Deborah's Place specifically. Bev Barr developed a volunteer newsletter that was aimed at educating others about homelessness. In addition, she also used mass media, such as television and radio, to educate the general public about the issue. She also speaks of involving participants, whenever possible, by having them accompany her to speaking engagements.

Audrey Thomas reflects on the political activism of Deborah's Place in those early days. She, too, published a newsletter called “Shelter Links” and remembers being involved in burning the U.S. Census forms in 1990 in the yard of Marah's as a political stance against the ‘point-in-time’ method used to count the homeless population. She also tells of organizing a five-day fast and vigil at Daley Center Plaza during the Thanksgiving holiday while people were doing their Christmas shopping. That demonstration was to protest the inequitable allocation of funds to people who were homeless. She states that in the past, “There was a more politically active culture so that staff and participants would go to demonstrations around issues of homelessness, but also around issues of the sanctuary movement and the war going on in Central America . . . so that there was sort of a culture of political activity.” Margaret

Herring adds, “Staff has always been willing to look outward to participate in broader homeless [and other] issues. It keeps [them] from being isolated and allows them to see [the homeless issue] as a broader social problem.”

Activism at Deborah’s Place has been reinforced by the many city zoning battles and neighborhood gentrification struggles they have experienced over the years. Margaret talks of how almost every attempt to acquire new property or relocate a program was met by community opposition. Deborah’s Place was constantly facing opposition from homeowners and community residents. As a consequence, Deborah’s Place became a much more politically savvy organization. Such sophistication about politics is shared by some participants. For example, one participant argues that, “You can’t help but become political about homelessness. You’re living it every day.” She goes on to describe homelessness as a new citizenship status and equates it with being an “immigrant from another country.”

New Activism

The philosophy and tactics regarding advocacy and education have changed. There has been a shift in the approach from one that is more radical ‘in-your-face, hunger-strike-on-the-capital-steps’ to one that is more collaborative and leans toward engaging in discourse with public policy makers and other powers to educate about homelessness. This shift was apparent with the changing leadership at Deborah’s Place as well as locally and nationally with the development of such alliance groups as the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless.

As this shift occurred, Deborah’s Place became an organization that works more within the system to effect broad change. Today, Sr. Pat spends a great deal of her time working on citywide issues. She says, “We’ve been pushing the city for four and one-half years now to really plan in a concerted way, a consolidated way, with agencies and government to really try to take definitive steps toward an end to homelessness.” In 1999, Deborah’s Place was instrumental in founding The Partnership to End Homelessness (PTEH) as a freestanding organization. The Partnership, which began as a part of the Community Emergency Shelter Organization (CESO) in 1994, is a citywide membership organization with 70-some members. The Continuum of Care Governance Board is the entity to oversee citywide issues. Among other local initiatives, Sr. Pat represents Deborah’s Place at the PTEH as well as working closely with housing issues at the Chicago Rehab Network and the Supportive Housing Providers Association.

Highly supportive of the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH), Deborah's Place has joined in the ten-year plan to end homelessness across the country. According to Brown, this alliance is made up of 400 to 500 individuals, organizations, and other stakeholders around the country and the goal of the organization is to develop a plan to end homelessness in ten years. Sr. Pat adds that this plan was originally launched at a conference in Washington, D.C. held by the NAEH. She explains the framework this way:

One might take the image of a house and call it homelessness. The house is bulging and can't accommodate people in a humane and dignified way. It needs to be torn down, but we cannot do that yet. We do need, however, to close the front door to the house and that's the prevention piece. The Coalition is working on that in terms of a response to intervene before people actually become homeless. Then, we have to work on what's going on in the house so there are programs that help people heal. The final step is to open the back door of the house to provide permanent housing and jobs. Here we need to work at making the living wage jobs and affordable housing available."

Just as in the early years, participants are encouraged to participate in advocacy work. Christine, a former participant and current employee of Deborah's Place, serves on the Continuum of Care and its executive board. She states, "I'm on the board with Pat Crowley and I feel so privileged." She goes on to explain that she was recruited to participate in the coalition because they wanted representation from individuals who were formerly homeless.

Although the methods of educating the public and advocating for individuals who are homeless have changed significantly, the message remains the same. Les cogently states:

This is a systemic problem that's not going to be solved until we address the lack of political will to do anything about it. Within the context of the lack of affordable housing, lack of employment, lack of access to affordable healthcare, etc., it is a problem that exist because there is no valid safety net and there is no real system of resources that everybody has access to. . . There is a great disparity between the rich and the poor in this country more than ever before . . . and there is a lot of misunderstanding about the nature of this problem and who homeless people are."

As outspoken advocates, Les and Sr. Pat agree that what is needed is a coordinated, interrelated structure that focuses on prevention, adequate service delivery, and resources that lead to empowerment and self-efficacy. In order to effect universal, systemic change, more attention must be paid to the interconnectedness and interdependence of government systems (e.g., affordable housing, healthcare, employment). It is the breakdown within and between these systems that must be rectified if true change is to occur.

It's (Still) OK Here

The Future

The remarkable story of Deborah's Place tells of an investment in people. The investment story is as many-sided and complex as the thousands of women who find themselves involved in homelessness, whether a woman who is or was homeless or a person who is committed to being part of a woman's life as she deals with her situation.

Because of the small numbers in those first few years, the investment in women afforded the possibilities of intimate, very personal relationships. While there were some initial concepts of how *not* to offer services to women who were homeless, there was no secret formula or road map to follow. The Founding Mothers, guided by their best instincts of intrinsic value and fairness, created their own road map by *doing* while being intimately involved with the women who found their way to Deborah's Place. For these gutsy founders, the principles that still guide the programs and relationships grew out of their experiences, including some significant hard-fought and hard-won battles. When all is said and done, the founders created, and those that followed sustained, an organization that challenged perceptions and broke the mold for delivering services to women who are homeless.

The stories of the early years are wonderful and cannot be forgotten, especially as time alters memory and change occurs, either naturally or by design. In this history, the founding stories lead to developmental stories, then to current reflections, all of which are important for understanding the maturation of this organization. Deborah's Place indeed has matured, but most would agree that it has done so in large measure without losing the tenets and spirit of the Founding Mothers. Sustaining the vision and philosophy of service of the founders through change and expansion has been a great challenge in the first sixteen years. Balancing the desire to serve more women -- giving more women a chance -- while maintaining costly service components will be an even greater challenge for the future.

Always Questioning Ourselves

At Deborah's Place, it is acceptable to question; the openness of the culture allows for that. While there is solid buy-in to the central philosophies that make Deborah's Place unique, it is not surprising that there is debate over how the philosophies are to be carried out in a new expansive environment. How can intimate relationships be developed and maintained if there are more people? Are

professional credentials required of all staff in order to provide appropriate case management and services? What are acceptable behavioral boundaries that lead to empowerment rather than restrictions? At all levels, everyone is adjusting the new realities of human interaction and accommodation. As board member, Cheryl Kobetsky, comments, “[Everything] is all so new. . . we really have to adapt and digest this before we make anymore strategic plans or do anymore leaps of faith [beyond Rebecca Johnson] because the next leap could be right off into the abyss.”

Fully recognizing that tensions are indicative of the growth issue, Sr. Pat’s immediate goal is to stabilize the organization. This includes more concentration on management and communication systems that will mediate the sense of loss felt by staff and board for the small, intimate Deborah’s Place that is no more. She says, “Putting into place systems is taking time.” Acknowledging that fact does not prevent her from anticipating next steps. As the visionary who “grows things,” she sees around her real need. In the planning stage for Rebecca Johnson, for example, the staff and board met with West Side residents. Mothers from Rockwell Gardens, the nearest Chicago Housing Authority complex to the Jackson Boulevard site, wanted to know why Deborah’s Place could not help them. Sr. Pat would love to see the development of family housing but understands that she would be blocked from proposing such a move by a staff and board still adjusting to the responsibilities for the permanent housing of Rebecca Johnson.

One on-going tension is the high cost of funding the specialized, individualized services at Deborah’s Place. As a founder, Margaret Herring has a long perspective on this issue. She points out a continuing need to justify to funders the high costs of service delivery. Deborah’s Place values small changes in women’s lives which are hard to quantify, yet there is every effort to remain true to the mission and services in spite of the increased need to raise more and more funds to support increased services. The constant argument is that the philosophy of services *does* work. Deborah’s Place has been successful in providing a continuum of service that helps women gain the tools for self-reliance as fits her situation and individual goals.

Deborah’s Place will continue to play a key role in advocating for an end to homelessness. In partnership with colleagues locally and nationally, much energy will continue in that direction. While extremely daunting, the advocate voices must be heard, especially those, like Deborah’s Place, that have refined some of the successful tools to assist individuals in taking back their lives. The balance between delivering services and advocating will be one of the continuing tensions for Deborah’s Place.

Going Down the Right Path?

What is the right path for Deborah's Place? More than likely, the organization will continue to create an environment that honors the integrity and self-realization of individual women who are or were formerly homeless. In the sixteen years of its service to women, the organization has changed and grown, but it has not lost the vision of welcoming, supporting, and advocating for the women who, for untold reasons, are without the resources, at least temporarily, to do for themselves.

The dedicated people involved in Deborah's Place will keep asking, "Are we going down the right path?" While there are differing opinions and tensions, there is consensus that for now the path is the right one, and where there are issues, there a concerted effort is made to work together on solutions. As the history has shown, the differences in the past have not diverted energies from the main task at hand: serving women

It will be healthy for staff, board, volunteers, and participants to keep asking about the right path. The true test will be if women who find a home at Deborah's Place will continue to say, "It's ok here."

APPENDIX A

Deborah's Place
Founding Mothers
(Listed in alphabetical order)

The Founding Mothers listed here are women who were integral to Deborah's Place during its founding and the first year of operation. Most served on the first Board of Directors and were instrumental in shaping the philosophies and direction of the organization.

Sue Augustus
Angie Balloy
Carol Barnes
Beverly Barr
Cynthia Bowman
Mary Brucker
Sue Buchanan
Peggy Byrne
Patty Crowley
Beth Ann Flynn
Margaret Herring
Kathy Kietbrink
Brenda McCarthy
Jo Anne Sylvester
Susan Walker
Martha (Whelan) Robinson
Carol White

APPENDIX B



434 S. Wabash Rm.700 Chicago, Illinois 60605 (312) 427-4351

CESO / Women's Project Meeting

6:00-8:00 p.m.

Nov. 15, 1984

AREA OF CONCERN:

East of Halsted
West of Wells
North of Ohio
South of North Ave.

RESEARCH:

1. Power Structure / "urban renewal"
who owns the land and buildings in the area
2. Who are people to contact for support?
Who may be people that would oppose a shelter?
3. What are existing patterns and attitudes?
4. Who "owns" the local media?
5. Who really "runs" the area?
How do they stay in power?

BASIC
PROCESS:

1. How much time can each person put
into working for the goal?
2. Evaluation of personal resources
and resources in the group
3. Brain storming Ideas
opinions, debate, next steps
4. List of what needs to be done.

QUESTIONS:

1. Who do we approach first?
(Religious Organizations, women's groups, etc?)
2. Can we get a list of vacant properties in the
Loop and north Loop area?

Project Proposal: Emergency Shelter Care for Women

Homelessness is a national problem of massive and increasing proportions, affecting at least 2.5 million people in the United States. For most of us, homeless women remain essentially invisible. The truth is that there are thousands of homeless women inhabiting the city of Chicago - and not a single overnight shelter (for women only) is in operation.

Finding a place to sleep that is safe from the abuses of the street and where one can remain without being asked to leave or be taken off to jail is impossible for most homeless women. Sleep deprivation disorients and confuses even those of us with strong minds - combined with poor nutrition, lack of shelter, constant exposure to the elements and physical and mental infirmities, many women spend their days in a continual fog of fatigue. Hope for improvement or a better way of life for these women diminishes.

We believe that basic shelter is an absolute and "inalienable" human right.

GOAL: To create an adequate, accessible space, offered in an atmosphere of human dignity and respect - for women in the city of Chicago who need and want overnight emergency shelter. (This is a necessary first step toward eventual elimination of homelessness for women)
To provide a model of cooperation among various groups and individuals already concerned about the problem of homelessness.

DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS: The individual woman alone should be the one to decide her need for shelter. Although many of us might feel and believe that someone has other alternatives - options cannot be fairly assessed by those of us with little knowledge of the adequacy or emotional as well as economic factors which may limit her options. In addition, women generally fear going to shelters where men are also present.

NEED: It has been estimated that there are somewhere between 5000-6000 homeless women in the city of Chicago. On any given night it is possible to count several hundred who are homeless. While the need for an emergency shelter for women is apparent; and since homeless women refuse to be counted, the city itself has refused, even under pressure, to meet the need.
Hence, we may be talking about a situation where it may be impossible to gain an accurate understanding of the need until after it has been met to some degree.
Through the creation of such an atmosphere of respect and dignity hopefully many of the homeless women of Chicago will "come inside" and be visible. Many street women have been deeply hurt and terribly marginated. They may come slowly but they will come. If our efforts are sincere and our approach one of Justice rather than Charity - the project will help to meet the tremendous need.



APPENDIX VII

434 S. Wabash Rm.700 Chicago, Illinois 60605 (312) 427-4351

Community Emergency Shelter Organization - Women's Project

PROJECT GOALS

PROBLEM: With the exception of three small neighborhood winter shelters (only one of which serves women only) there are no resources for single women who exhibit visible psychiatric symptoms. These women are almost always turned away by most emergency shelters. It is believed by many social workers and other community workers who have experience with these women that they are extremely frightened of being in close proximity to males. Therefore, since the numbers of homeless women in Chicago range in estimates of anywhere from 5000 to 10,000, we believe that there is a tremendous need for shelters specifically dealing with and serving homeless women.

- GOALS:
1. To organize concerned persons and groups (particularly Church, Civic, and Women's Organizations) to directly open and operate shelters in their own communities.
 2. To provide advocacy, technical and practical assistance to these groups.
 3. To work toward expanding the awareness of Chicago citizens to the needs, concerns, and problems specific to homeless women.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Complete a preliminary research needs assessment of the Chicago Loop area and the Near North side, (boundaries: Congress north to Division, Lake Front west to Wacker/Kingsbury, bordering the Chicago River) by February 1, 1984.
 - A. Purpose of preliminary research, to address the following areas specific to the target region:
 1. approximate numbers of homeless women as compared to men
 2. places where homeless women sleep
 3. specific high-traffic areas where homeless women congregate
 4. basic food sources
 5. basic health services/needs
 6. social, personal and human needs
 7. reasons for women having lost their 'homes'
 8. problems faced and issues specific to women
 9. services needed (what homeless women feel they would like to see by way of services)



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2. Organize, develop, and open a year-round emergency night shelter for single women. (the so-called "shopping bag ladies" and those most desperately in need of assistance) This shelter would serve approximately 20 to 30 women. Projected opening date will be May, 1984.

3. Organize, develop, and open a year-round drop-in center for women, to serve approximately 50 persons. Projected opening date will be September 1984.

NOTE: (The shelter and drop-in center may or may not be located in the same structure. Projected opening dates for operation may shift depending upon this factor.)

RESOURCES: While some may feel that the government has the primary responsibility to provide the resources necessary to care for the needier members of our society (namely, the homeless): religious and business leaders must join in involving concerned people in efforts to provide adequate shelter.

Likewise, the homeless themselves need the opportunity to become part of the process for self-help and equal participation. A realistic approach would require the assistance of religious, social, and community leaders working with those who are without shelter.

PROGRAM

- I. Accessibility
- II. Services
- III. Atmosphere

ACCESSIBILITY

LOCATION: Location of the shelter would be somewhat decentralized based upon the needs of the population it would be serving. The current proposed location (Grace Street) is within walking distance of the women it would serve. Some outreach work could be done to transport those less able to walk the distance.

NEIGHBORHOOD SUPPORT: We have some reasonable assurance that since the property is already used to serve battered women, that the presence of an overnight shelter would be acceptable to the surrounding community. Establishing credibility should not be difficult.

TRANSPORTATION: Where some women may be located somewhat beyond walking distance from the area of the shelter, places like Sarah's Circle (a four year old emergency drop-in shelter for women during the daytime) could serve as gathering areas where the women could rest and wait to be picked up in the evening, taken to the shelter, and returned the following morning.

DAILY HOURS: Seasonal weather conditions could be the primary governing factor regarding the extension of hours outside of basic expectations that the shelter would provide at least 8 hours of rest per night. Suggested hours of operation would be from 10:00 pm to 7 am.

OPERATION: The shelter would operate on a year-round basis.

SERVICE

BATHROOMS: Three toilets would provide adequate and operable conditions.

SHOWERS: Four shower stalls could be utilized daily.

TOILET ARTICLES: The shelter will provide needed toiletry articles.

BEDDING: The shelter would provide adequate, warm, and comfortable sleeping provisions.

CLOTHING: It would be possible to provide changes of clothing donated by the community at large.

RECREATION: The shelter would have a common area where guests would be able to socialize with staff, volunteers and each other.

MEDICAL CONCERNS: Every effort would be made to provide referral services for any woman needing physical and/or mental health care.

LAUNDRY: All supplies such as bedding, mattresses, blankets and pillows would be cleaned on a regular basis.

ATMOSPHERE

INTAKE: Women would be welcomed to the shelter, informally asked to record their names, and then introduced to the various above services which the shelter would provide.

ATMOSPHERE: A pleasant, calm, home-like atmosphere would be created and maintained.

LEVEL OF RESPECT: It is very important that there is no one or nothing in the shelter which would create an impression that guests are inferior or "unfortunate" women. Guests must not ever be "herded" or ordered, but at all times treated with respect and courtesy.

STRUCTURE FOR DEVELOPMENT: The shelter would structurally include opportunities for guests to take responsibility for participating in the ongoing maintenance and operation of the shelter. There could be several levels of participation which could lead toward guests becoming members of the staff as well as eventual movement toward outside job opportunities.

REFERRALS: Each member of the shelter staff would be capable of referring women to other appropriate and available services, to meet the individual needs upon request.

STAFF/VOLUNTEER LEVELS: A Coordinator and additional staff would be hired to see that the project would run smoothly. Adequate numbers of trained, qualified volunteers would be present at all times in the shelter when in operation.

Contacts: Chris Hannibal, BVM
Director: Sarah's Circle
4455 N. Broadway
Chicago, IL 60640
(w) 728-1991
(h) 561-8842

Susan Walker
8th Day Center for Justice
Coalition for the Homeless
22 E. Van Buren St.
Chicago, IL 60605
(w) 427-4351
(h) 831-9098

APPENDIX C

Interviewees

This history of Deborah's Place has been reported through either one-on-one interviews or focus groups with those individuals most intimately involved in the founding and on-going operation of the organization.

**Penny Applegate
Sue Augustus
Beverly Barr
Jan Wolff Bendorf
Les Brown
Wanda Cheers
Patricia Crowley, OSB
Patty Crowley
Marilyn Derr
Jean Durkin
Marquette L. Gist
Gwendolyn Harris
Queen Hayes
Caryl Horn
Mary Howard
Lisa Jones
Mary Margaret Kelly
Cheryl Kobetsky
Gail Clanton Lewis
Michael (Mickey) Lowenstein**

**Donna K. Luginbuhl
Maureen McGowan
Gloria McIntyre
Joan Newell
Glenda Peters
Barbara Potter
Artaisha Prosper
Martha Whelan Robinson
Marie Claude Schauer
Joan Schwingen
Caroline Steimle
Emma Taylor
Audrey Thomas
Constance Weathersby
Christine B. West
Mary Whalen
Katherine Booton Wilson
Dorothy J. Yancy
Patty Zuccarello**

APPENDIX D

Chronological History of Deborah's Place

December 1984	A group of women, later called the Founding Mothers, met with 8th Day Center for Justice and Community Emergency Shelter Organization (CESO) staff to establish an emergency overnight shelter for women who are homeless on Chicago's near north side
February 1985	A winter-only overnight shelter at Immaculate Conception gym, 1415 N. North Park Avenue opened with one paid staff member, the first Executive Director, Martha Whelan Robinson. Support came from 36 volunteers and 15 founding board members.
December 1985	The first year-round overnight emergency shelter for women in Chicago opened at 1404 ½ N. Sedgwick, with a staff of 3, a corps of 25 volunteers, and a budget of \$69,000.
November 1986	The daytime program opened, offering lunch, showers, phones, laundry, art therapy, and job and housing counseling. The program was named for Irene's in memory of a former participant.
September 1987	Board and staff wrote the mission statement
March 1988	Marah's, the transitional housing program, opened at 1110 N. Noble with a five-year HUD contract. The program could house 22 women for up to two years.
May 1991	Patricia Crowley, O.S.B. was hired as second Executive Director
July 1992	The Supportive Services program began. This program was designed to assist women with their own housing and giving them the support needed to maintain the housing.
Spring 1993	Overnight Shelter was evicted from 1404 ½ N. Sedgwick by low-income housing developer. The Overnight Shelter reopened at 1866 N. Milwaukee Avenue without missing one night of service.
Winter 1993	Construction began at 1530 N. Sedgwick. This was designed as a co-location site to house the Overnight Shelter, transitional, and permanent housing.
Spring 1995	The Overnight Shelter moved to 1530 N. Sedgwick. In April, the new transitional shelter, called Shelter II, opened at the same address. In June, the first group of women moved into Deborah's Place II, the first permanent housing.
December 1995	Shelter II was dedicated and renamed in honor of participant, Teresa Newman.
April 1996	Core Values Statement was developed and approved by the Board of Directors.
March 1997	The Board of Directors voted to develop 90 units of permanent supportive housing at the former Marillac House, 2822 W. Jackson. The 'A Light in the Window' \$4 million capital campaign began.

April 1998	An innovative business venture was approved to employ Deborah's Place participants.
August-October	WomanCraft, Inc., a for-profit company, hired its first staff.
January 1999	Deborah's Place became a founding member of the newly organized advocacy organization, Partnership to End Homelessness.
October 1999	Marah's relocated from 1110 North Noble to St Alphonsus Church at 1456 West Oakdale.
April 2000	Deborah's Place won the Sara Lee Spirit Award for its far-reaching impact and unwavering commitment to end homelessness.
August 2000	Rebecca Johnson Apartments welcomed its first tenants on August 17, thus adding 90 units of permanent housing to Deborah's Place.

APPENDIX E

Deborah's Place Program Services

Deborah's Place offers a complete continuum of shelter and housing options, all linked with vital supportive services, to women who are homeless. Deborah's Place is committed to offering the women it serves as many choices as possible to help them heal from the trauma of homelessness. Women are assisted in their journey and are encouraged to take advantage of new opportunities and resources made available by Deborah's Place.

Deborah's Place is Chicago's largest provider of supportive housing exclusively for women and is recognized as an innovative leader among homeless service providers locally and nationally. Our track record demonstrates that working collaboratively with our participants, offering a range of high quality services and trying new approaches places Deborah's Place at the forefront of agencies making a difference to those in need in Chicago.

The Overnight Shelter

The overnight shelter offers a safe, comfortable environment where women who are homeless may eat, shower, use the learning center, participate in activities, or just rest during the nighttime hours.

Address: 1530 North Sedgwick
Hours of Operation: 5:00 PM-8:00 AM
Phone Number: (312) 944-8810
Referral Process: Call the above phone number to determine whether space is available. The overnight shelter will accept any woman who is 18 or older and homeless provided space is available.
Beds: 30-35
Length of Stay: No limit

Irene's, Daytime Support Center

Irene's offers a safe alternative to the streets for women who are homeless during the day. At Irene's, women may eat lunch, shower, meet with a case manager, work with the art therapist, do laundry, use computers, or store belongings.

Address: 1742 North Milwaukee Avenue - Third Floor
Hours of Operation: 8:00AM - 5:00PM
Phone Number: (773) 772-0200
Referral Process: Call the above phone number to determine whether space is available. Irene's will accept any woman who is 18 or older and homeless provided space is available.
Capacity: 30 women
Length of Stay: No limit

Teresa's Transitional Shelter

This program offers women who are homeless a safe place to work on goals while receiving individual and group support. Women sleep in a dormitory style setting, and participate in community cooking and chores.

Address: 1530 North Sedgwick
Hours of Operation: 24 Hours Per Day
Phone Number: (312) 944-8669
Referral Process: Referrals are taken from agencies who have participated in an on-site orientation to the Teresa's program, which are held monthly. Call the above number for information on attending a referral orientation.
Beds: 10
Length of Stay: Up to 4 months

Marah's Transitional Housing Program

Marah's offers a semi-structured environment where women who are homeless can enjoy the comfort of private bedrooms, while participating in communal meals and upkeep of the program. Women set individual goals, work with case management, and use the on-site learning center as they prepare to meet their housing, employment and educational goals.

Address: 1456 West Oakdale
Hours of Operation: 24 Hours Per Day
Phone Number: (773) 348-9011
Referral Process: Referrals are accepted from the Teresa's Transitional Shelter program and from agencies who have been through the agency orientation. Call the above number for information on attending a referral orientation.
Beds: 30
Length of Stay: Up to 2 years

Deborah's Place II Apartments

The Deborah's Place II Apartments serve as permanent, supportive housing for women who have been homeless. Tenants sign leases and pay 30% of their income as rent. Case management, support groups, art therapy and educational and employment services are available to tenants on-site.

Address: 1530 North Sedgwick
Hours of Operation: 24 Hours Per Day
Phone Number: (312) 944-9227
Referral Process: Women who are homeless may apply in person 24 hours per day, or call the property clerk at (773) 638-6491 to receive an application.
Beds: 39 Apartments
Length of Stay: Unlimited - Leases run one year

Rebecca Johnson Apartments

The Rebecca Johnson Apartments serve as permanent, supportive housing for women who have been homeless. Tenants sign leases and pay 30% of their income as rent. Case management, support groups, art therapy and educational and employment services are available to tenants on-site.

Address: 2822 West Jackson
Hours of Operation: 24 Hours Per Day
Phone Number: (773) 638-6450
Referral Process: Women who are homeless may apply in person 24 hours per day, or call the property clerk at (773) 638-6491 to receive an application.
Beds: 90 Apartments
Length of Stay: Unlimited - Leases run one year

Case Management/Therapeutic Services

Each woman who comes to Deborah's Place is introduced to a unique case management model that is based on the premise that each woman is an individual with her own journey and struggles. Our services are tailored to each individual. Case managers go to where the women are, whether that is at the overnight shelter or in their own housing. We offer a full range of services, including crisis intervention, referrals, advocacy, and assistance in obtaining housing, healthcare and income. A full time art therapist and a health services coordinator enhance the ability of the case management team to offer assistance in a holistic manner.

Case Management/Therapeutic Services at Deborah's Place is divided into two programs, which often interface and work together:

Program Case Management - Offers services to women in the overnight shelter, Irene's, Teresa's, Marah's, and off-site housing. A participant retains the same case manager as she moves throughout these programs.

Housing Case Management - Offers services to women in the Deborah's Place II Apartments and the Rebecca Johnson Apartments. Case management staff works closely with property management to assist women in maintaining housing and achieving their goals.

Education & Employment Services

The Education and Employment Services program at Deborah's Place provides a continuum of opportunities for the women we serve. Three on-site Learning Centers provide women with a safe place to engage in individualized and group activities as adult learners. Art and craft supplies, computer equipment, books, knitting and sewing items are made available daily for women to explore their interests and gain insights into their strengths or aptitudes. For more information, contact 773-638-6391.

All women who come to Deborah's Place as program participants or tenants qualify for the Deborah's Place Scholarship Fund. Learning Center staff work with women on an individual basis to identify appropriate training and educational resources in the community. The fund defrays some of the training expenses such as tuition, books, and transportation.

Internship Placements

For women who are interested in returning to work after a significant lapse in work history, or who have never worked before, Deborah's Place offers the Career Exploration Program (CEP). The goal of this program is to help women define the role of work in their lives, and is available for all of the women served by Deborah's Place. CEP participants work at internships over the course of the program as a hands-on way of exploring work issues. The program is split into two phases. Phase I involves internship, classes, and employment conferences. Phase II involves internship, employment conferences, and independent study time to assist participants in meeting their long-term education and/or employment goals. All internships are paid by Deborah's Place, and sites are usually found throughout the non-profit community in Chicago. To host an intern, call 773-638-6398.

Job Placements

For women who are looking for direct job placements, our Employment Services staff provide job leads, an interview clothing allowance, and transportation. Each job-seeker is assigned to an employment staff person who manages her case through the job seeking, interviewing, and employment process. The emphasis is on individual employment goals and maintaining employment once it is obtained. To list a job opening, call 773-638-6398.

Women in housing who are interested in assisting other women with educational goals are also encouraged to apply to be a Learning Center Assistant.

WomanCraft, Inc.

1742 N. Milwaukee Ave.
773-292-1226

WomanCraft, Inc., an on-site business venture, sells handmade jewelry and paper products through catalogues, direct sales and local shops. The business provides a supportive, realistic workplace where low-income women can earn income, engage in meaningful work, improve job skills and build a work history. WomanCraft, Inc. is wholly owned by Deborah's Place.