



NIGHTLIGHTS

SPRING 2024

Youth Leader Speaks Out for Unhoused Mothers in New Documentary Series

Last fall, Kimberly opened her life up to a video crew from WTTW, Chicago's PBS station, for a documentary series about homelessness told through the lives of those who are experiencing it.

She is well poised to do so. As a member of Youth 4 Truth, The Night Ministry's leadership program for young people, Kimberly has a passion for advocacy and is willing to speak out about her experiences as an unhoused young mother. She learned about the series, called **FIRSTHAND: Homeless**, when the documentary producer visited a Youth 4 Truth meeting.

"When the **FIRSTHAND** crew said that there was an opportunity to talk about homelessness and bring more awareness, I knew that I had to tell them how hard it is being a single mother, homeless, and living in shelters," she explained. "And I wanted to speak for their kids too. When they're out on the streets, they're so much more vulnerable."

Kimberly lost her housing after becoming pregnant while attending nursing school. She initially slept in her car or stayed temporarily with other people. Following the birth of her daughter Jasmine, who is now two, Kimberly moved Jasmine and herself between shelters, seeking safety and stability. Throughout that time, seeing her child experience homelessness was deeply challenging.

"Imagine if you were a kid and you didn't know where you were going to sleep at night or where your next meal would be coming from," she said. "Unhoused kids haven't even had a chance at life



Kimberly, a member of The Night Ministry's Youth 4 Truth program, is the subject of a documentary now streaming at wttw.com/firsthand. Photo by Lloyd DeGrane for WTTW.

"I wanted to put everything out there and be as vulnerable as I could because it might help somebody who is going through the same thing,"

– Kimberly, youth leader at The Night Ministry

yet, and they're already going through so much."

These days, Kimberly and her daughter are in permanent housing, where they can finally enjoy the safety and stability of a home. She hopes that she can be a lifeline to other young, unhoused parents by participating in the series.

"I decided to participate in **FIRSTHAND** for a bigger purpose: I wanted to put everything out there and be as vulnerable as I could because it might help somebody who is going through the same thing," she said. "Maybe I could show them that there's still hope in the world."

You can watch Kimberly's story and other documentaries about homelessness at wttw.com/firsthand. ◇

HUMAN CONNECTION • HOUSING • HEALTH CARE

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Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner Summer Kee Offers Compassionate Care



Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner Summer Kee provides foot care for a patient at the Howard Station on the CTA Red Line.

Before starting her nursing career, The Night Ministry's Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner Summer Kee was an educator in the Chicago Public Schools, teaching in the classroom and providing homebound instruction. During that time, she was struck by the need for health education and mental health services among young people from the city's underserved populations.

"Going into my students' homes, I saw how many of them faced health and housing challenges and how so many suffered from unaddressed mental health issues," she said.

After leaving teaching, she transitioned to nursing, working with youth in an inpatient mental health facility, then with patients with traumatic injuries. During this time, she completed clinical training in substance use disorder treatment at Hines Veterans Administration Hospital.

These days, Kee treats clients served by the agency's Youth Programs and Outreach and Health Ministry Program, bringing compassionate physical and mental health care to the city's unhoused and precariously housed populations, allowing the agency to better address clients' mental health

needs, while continuing to grow its capacity to provide basic medical care.

As a Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner, Kee often helps patients fill in gaps in their mental health treatments. She fills prescriptions when patients have stopped taking their medications. Patients also see Kee to have prescriptions refilled while they get reconnected to a regular prescriber or linked to a clinic for further care. Additionally, she provides education about psychiatric medications, including side effects and how long it might take to see results.

Because many of those experiencing homelessness have had adverse experiences with care in the past, Kee puts much effort into providing a comforting environment during examinations. And since The

Night Ministry's approach to care is less formal than what patients would find in traditional medical settings, she can make their experience nuanced and personal, allowing her to build true human connections.

"I don't jump into medical or psychiatric questions right away," she said. "I let patients come in and be themselves first so that they're comfortable. It's a softer approach." ◇

"I don't jump into medical or psychiatric questions right away. I let patients come in and be themselves first so that they're comfortable. It's a softer approach."

– Summer Kee, Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner

Board Chair Michael Borromeo Stands Behind Our Mission

When he joined The Night Ministry's Board of Directors in 2018, Chicagoland native Michael Borromeo found a meaningful way to give back to the community. Now, as Board Chair, his passion for and dedication to the agency's mission has only increased.

What drew you to The Night Ministry?

The agency's mission to provide human connection, housing support, and health care to individuals who are unhoused or experiencing poverty struck me right away. Homelessness in Chicago is such a significant issue. The number of unhoused individuals here is staggering, including young people. I knew I wanted to help.

What are your duties as Board Chair?

In my role, I provide guidance and leadership to the Board of Directors. I have the responsibility of providing fiduciary oversight and strategic guidance to Carol J. Sharp, our CEO & President, and to the agency's Executive Leadership team.

What role do you envision for The Night Ministry's CEO & President?

From the moment I met Carol, it was clear that she had an incredible passion for the mission. I appreciate her clear perspective on how to lead and tackle issues. She has a steady hand and is a great leader, and that will go a long way in making sure that The Night Ministry is maximizing the impact we have on the lives of those we serve.

"When you put those two things together—the team and the mission—you have an organization that accomplishes great things."

— Michael Borromeo,
Chair of the Board of Directors



Michael Borromeo assumed the role of Board Chair at The Night Ministry in July 2023.

How is the agency uniquely positioned to serve the unhoused population in Chicago?

The Night Ministry has a skilled team dedicated to the mission. When you put those two things together—the team and the mission—you have an organization that accomplishes great things. This is evidenced by how we continue to evolve and deliver services in different ways that match the growing needs of the city's vulnerable populations. ◇

Join Us for Lighting Up the Night!

Thursday, May 23, 5:30 PM | Hosted by Lou Manfredini of HouseSmarts, WGN Radio 720 & WGN-TV

Join us in support of The Night Ministry's mission at Lacuna Lofts in Pilsen, a vibrant neighborhood served by our Health Outreach Bus and located just a few miles from downtown Chicago. Enjoy a delicious meal, refreshing drinks, exciting live and silent auctions, live music, and much more.

Honoring the Family of Rev. Barbara Bolen | Chicago Transit Authority | Alicia Pond

Visit bidpal.net/lutn2024 to purchase tickets and sponsorships or contact Erica Schoppe, Special Events Coordinator, at 773-506-6029 or ericas@thenightministry.org.

Rapid Rehousing Reduces Barriers to Stable Housing

An initiative to reduce homelessness in Chicago launched at the height of the pandemic is still making an impact years later.

In the spring of 2020, the City of Chicago began partnering with homelessness service providers like The Night Ministry in a concentrated effort to expedite the process of connecting unhoused individuals and families with stable housing through what are known as Accelerated Moving Events (AMEs). A kind of one-stop-shop for housing, AMEs allow people to complete several steps of the housing process in one day.

A report from the city's Inspector General confirms this housing-first approach is successful. Nearly 80% of individuals who attended an initial round of AMEs that began in November 2020 were still stably housed five months later.

The Night Ministry has hosted several AMEs for young people served by the agency. Aislyn, who had been experiencing housing instability, attended an AME at The Crib overnight shelter in January. A case manager helped her browse apartment listings on a tablet, fill out an application online for a unit, and pick out furniture from a virtual showroom. A month later, after she saw the apartment in person and the unit passed a city inspection, Aislyn moved in.

"This means a lot to me," she said. "Not having to worry about figuring out a place to sleep, a place to shower, a place where I could put food in the fridge, and just all the things that go into daily living."

In 2023, more than 60 young people served by The Night



After a period of housing instability, Aislyn is now living in an apartment she obtained as a result of attending an Accelerated Moving Event at The Night Ministry.

Ministry were housed through AMEs, with government funding subsidizing their rent for a year.

Michelle Thomas, Youth Outreach Team Supervisor, said the AME process gives clients greater agency over their living environments.

"This means a lot to me. Not having to worry about figuring out a place to sleep, a place to shower, a place where I could put food in the fridge, and just all the things that go into daily living.."

– Aislyn
a client of The Night Ministry's Youth Outreach Team who is now stably housed.

"In the past, most long-term housing options available for young adults were in transitional living group settings. With the rapid rehousing model and AMEs, there are now more options available for youth for independent living."

Even though they are living independently, young people housed through AMEs continue to receive support through case management

services that help them stabilize and reach employment and income goals to ensure the sustainability of their housing. ◊

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Open Door Shelter—West Town: A True Home for Unhoused Young People

By Felitha Jones-Patterson, Director of Youth Programs, Residential Services

Adolescence and young adulthood are periods of life marked by challenges and discoveries, and unhoused young people must navigate these while simultaneously facing the trauma and upheaval of homelessness.

Whether they come from the streets or from other precarious housing situations to our Open Door Shelter—West Town, they are vulnerable. They come to us in survival mode. As you can imagine, when you are just trying to figure out where you are going to sleep the next night, it is hard to have the capacity to think about much else, and likely not your future and the kind of person you want to become.

That is why we offer our young people so much more than just a hot meal and a safe place to sleep. Our professionally trained staff provide youth-centered and trauma-informed care around-the-clock, offering our residents the listening ear and emotional support they need to start to recover from what they have been through. We become their teachers, influencers, and supporters.

Homelessness is not something our young people deserve. Everyone deserves to be housed—it is a human right. We make every effort to demonstrate to our residents that this unfortunate circumstance does not have to be the end of their growth. And, under our holistic care, they stabilize, are nourished by affirming relationships with our staff and each other, and can at last take steps towards realizing their life goals.

Our West Town shelter is our young people's home. It is a safe space where they can be their authentic selves and it is a steppingstone from which they can begin building stable

"Our West Town shelter is our young people's home. It is a safe space where they can be their authentic selves."



The Night Ministry's Felitha Jones-Patterson oversees the Interim Housing Program and Parenting with Purpose, the two youth housing programs that call West Town home.

and independent futures. It is a place where they can transition from surviving to thriving.

We are honored to walk alongside them through their journeys, providing a helping hand at this challenging moment in their lives. And when we see our young people come back after a decade or more, telling us that they will never forget what The Night Ministry did for them, we know we have made a difference and that our efforts are truly impactful. ♦

Saluting a BEACON OF HOPE



It was The Night Ministry's nonjudgmental approach to serving Chicago's unhoused population that drew Cathy Crino to our mission.

"My impression was that it was a no-strings-attached operation," said Cathy, who became aware of The Night Ministry after moving to Chicago in the late 1980s.

"The first concern is addressing people's immediate needs—first aid, food. Then, if they can get what they need, they can move on to getting out of the situation they are in."

Cathy has supported our mission in multiple ways for thirty years. In addition to providing ongoing monthly gifts as a Beacon of Hope, through her career at the Archdiocese of Chicago, she helped coordinate activities benefitting our clients, such as meal services and holiday collections.

Thank you, Cathy! We are so grateful to you and all Beacons of Hope for your sustaining support of our mission! To become a Beacon of Hope, visit thenightministry.org/donate and select to have your donation recur at a frequency of your choosing, from weekly or monthly to quarterly or annually.



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Equitably Meeting the Needs of Chicago's Migrant and Unhoused Populations

By Carol J. Sharp, MPA, President & CEO

Homelessness is a pressing concern in our society that becomes even more complex for Chicago when considering the needs of migrants who are brought to a sanctuary city only to find themselves without a home. To provide effective and equitable homelessness services, it is essential to address the disparate challenges faced by both migrants and our longtime unhoused neighbors.

Both migrants and our unhoused neighbors are consistently experiencing trauma, which can contribute to their vulnerability and exacerbate their challenges. As The Night Ministry does, homelessness services should prioritize trauma-informed care, recognizing the particular experiences and needs of individuals who have endured various traumas, including displacement, violence, dangerous weather conditions, abandonment, life-threatening illnesses, and assault. By addressing trauma, we can help all individuals on their path to recovery and stability.

Migrants often face legal and regulatory barriers that prevent them from accessing necessary healthcare and addiction treatment. To address this issue, policymakers and service providers must advocate for inclusive policies that remove these barriers and ensure migrants can access the support they need without fear of legal consequences or deportation.

To achieve equitable balance, it is essential to ensure the fair and equal distribution of resources among migrants and unhoused neighbors. Government agencies have access to funding and infrastructure, while nonprofits often have specialized knowledge and expertise in working with marginalized populations. By pooling



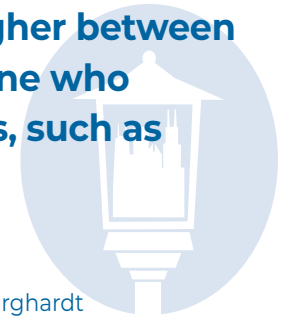
Through collaboration, advocacy, and a commitment to treating individuals fairly, we can work toward a society in which everyone has the help they need to overcome homelessness.

resources, we can create comprehensive programs that address the immediate needs of migrants and homeless individuals, as well as provide long-term support for their integration into society.

In Chicago, we should all be able to live in safety and with the freedom to prosper. Homelessness can be eliminated for both newcomers and long-term residents when government, corporate, religious, and nonprofit leaders collaborate to guarantee that everyone has access to a safe and reasonably priced place to live. ◊

This is an edited version of an opinion piece published in Crain's Chicago Business. To read the full article, visit <https://www.chicagobusiness.com/equity/chicagos-unhoused-and-new-arrivals-set-balancing-act-opinion>.

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