



NIGHTLIGHTS

45th ANNIVERSARY EDITION FALL 2021

To Be Present, to Be Available, to Listen— the Foundations of The Night Ministry

BY PAUL W. HAMANN, MA, MNA, PRESIDENT & CEO

The Night Ministry was formed 45 years ago when a diverse coalition of Chicago-based congregations hired the Rev. Tom Behrens to reach out to individuals struggling with homelessness, isolation, and despair during the lonely overnight hours.

Tom was a minister of the United Church of Christ. But as he told the *Chicago Sun-Times* in 1977, with The Night Ministry, it was never his job to “preach at these people or convert them or get them to church.” Rather, he was on the streets “to be present to them, to be available, to listen.”

The Night Ministry has come a long way from the early days of Tom and his first colleagues offering a listening ear on the street corners and in the bars and all-night restaurants of the city’s North Side. Today, our Outreach and Health Ministry Program is active across the city, bringing free health care, food, and supportive services directly to thousands of Chicago residents grappling with homelessness or poverty on an annual basis. Each year, our Youth Housing Programs provide safe, supportive shelter to hundreds of adolescents and young adults. We now offer our services to unsheltered members of the community on the city’s public transit system, and, through a new collaborative program with other agencies, we are providing critical supportive services to homeless young adults who have obtained their own apartments.

But as we have grown, one thing has not changed. The foundation of human connection that Tom laid at the beginning remains today. You can see it in the nonjudgmental



The Rev. Tom Behrens (right), is The Night Ministry’s Founding President & Former CEO.

“The foundation of human connection that Tom laid at the beginning remains today.”

– Paul W. Hamann, MA, MNA
President & CEO

relationships we build with every young person and adult who turns to The Night Ministry for help, and in the compassionate support we offer to so many who have known lives of rejection and mistrust.

I hope you enjoy this special edition of NIGHTLIGHTS as we look back on some of the important milestones in the history of The Night Ministry. I often say that the past is the prologue to the future.

Judging from The Night Ministry’s 45-year history, I say we are in for an exciting future. ◇

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The Night Ministry Pioneers Mobile Health Care on Chicago's Streets

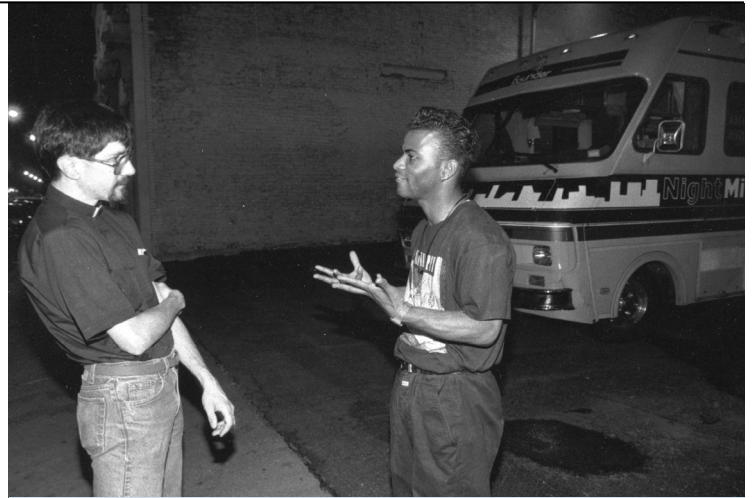
For the first fourteen years of the agency's history, The Night Ministry staff conducted outreach on their feet, supporting the community members they encountered while walking the nighttime streets of Chicago. Realizing that many of those individuals had unaddressed health challenges, in 1990 The Night Ministry added a mobile health care component to the equation via a recreational vehicle.

"We thought we could develop relationships with people by having them come on board while also providing food and health care," explained the Rev. Peter Brick, who developed The Night Ministry's Outreach and Health Ministry Program.

Initially, the RV was out four evenings a week on Chicago's North Side. By the mid-1990s, the program was operating six nights a week and had branched out to other areas of the city. Today, The Night Ministry's custom-built Health Outreach Bus regularly visits six neighborhoods on the South and West sides.

As individuals experiencing homelessness are at greater risk of HIV infection, HIV education and prevention were important aspects of the program early on. A decade after the program began, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention approached The Night Ministry about providing HIV testing at the Health Outreach Bus. Two years later, it asked The Night Ministry to pilot a rapid test.

"We went from having a test that would take two weeks to get a result to a test that produced a result in 20 minutes," said David Wywialowski, Director of Outreach and Health



The Rev. Peter Brick (left) speaks with a client outside the Health Outreach Program's first vehicle, a converted RV.

Ministry. "When serving a population that moves around often, being able to tell someone their status at the end of an HIV counseling session was a game changer."

"We thought we could develop relationships with people by having them come on board while also providing food and health care."

- Rev. Peter Brick, Former Director of the Health Outreach Program

Other advancements over the years included the introduction of electronic medical records and the hiring of a full-time Case Manager to help clients with housing, employment, and other non-medical needs. But for Barb Sexton, who served as a Nurse Practitioner on the Bus for more than two decades, what remained constant was the emphasis on nurturing compassionate connections with clients.

"When I go into your neighborhood, I'm on your turf. I'm the guest," she said. "And returning to your neighborhood gives me time to build a relationship with you." ♦

NIGHT LIGHTS 2021

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 21, 6 PM

Join The Night Ministry's Associate Board for their annual evening of fun and philanthropy from the comfort of your home! This year's virtual Night Lights will feature an incredible silent auction with amazing items and packages along with guest speakers and special surprises. Visit www.thenightministry.org/nightlights for the details.

The Night Ministry Opens Its First Youth Shelter in a Time of Dire Need

By the close of the 1980s, Chicago's population of unsheltered young people had reached an estimated 10,000 individuals per year. State law prohibited nonprofits from operating group shelters for them, leaving youth experiencing homelessness with few, if any, options for a safe place to spend the night.

"At the time, if you were a young person, you either had to be in the custody of your parents or the custody of the Department of Children and Family Services," said Barb Bolsen, former Vice President of Strategic Partnerships and Community Engagement at The Night Ministry. "For a young person who was being abused at home, there were no in-between places."

To address the pressing need for safe housing, the agency's then-Executive Director, Tom Behrens, along with fellow advocates, pushed legislation permitting youth shelters in Illinois. In 1989, the desired legislation passed, and planning could begin for Open Door Shelter—Lakeview.

The shelter would be open 24 hours a day with 16 beds for individuals aged 14 to 21 and their children. The chosen neighborhood, Lakeview, was ideal, as it was a magnet for the city's young and unsheltered.

The doors opened on October 12, 1992. "The doorbell rang," shared Michelle Krczewski, a Youth Worker at the time. "My stomach was full of butterflies while I opened the door. As I heard Jim's story and did his intake I realized, 'Hey! It's working. We have our first resident!'"

"As I heard Jim's story and did his intake, I realized, 'Hey! It's working. We have our first resident!'"

- Michelle Krczewski, Youth Worker at Open Door Shelter - Lakeview in 1992



Residents and staff enjoy a meal together at The Night Ministry's first youth shelter in Lakeview.

Much has changed since those early days. As you will read elsewhere in this newsletter, the shelter eventually moved to a larger facility and The Night Ministry opened more housing programs to serve the particular challenges faced by homeless youth.

Yet, the core vision of The Night Ministry's first shelter continues throughout the agency's housing programs. As Behrens put it, "No questions asked; just come in, get some

sleep, be safe, and let's talk about how to deal with your problems in the morning." ♦

Individuals experiencing homelessness are at greater risk of HIV infection and are less likely to receive effective treatment. Support The Night Ministry's HIV testing and prevention efforts by joining our AIDS Run & Walk Team at Soldier Field on Saturday, October 2! Sign up to run, walk, or roll with us or make a donation at give.classy.org/thenightministry. Questions? **Contact Maggie Shiflett** at maggie@thenightministry.org or **773-506-6005**.

**AIDS
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&
WALK
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West Town Facility Enhances and Expands Services for Homeless Youth

On August 3, 2006, the residents of The Night Ministry's Open Door Shelter—Lakeview packed up their belongings and made the journey, along with the shelter's staff, to a newly rehabbed facility in Chicago's West Town neighborhood.

The move came nearly 14 years after the Interim Housing Program, providing up to four months of supportive shelter to young people experiencing homelessness, had first opened in Lakeview. But things were tight at the facility on North Clark Street, where there were only two bedrooms for the program's 16 beds.

"There was just not one inch of unused space," said Carole Mills, The Night Ministry's former Senior Director of Youth Programs, who was the shelter director at the time. "It was difficult to establish a sense of privacy."

At the larger facility on North Noble Street, each resident would share a room with only one other young person, among many enhancements. But the additional space in the building also allowed The Night Ministry to expand its capacity to serve homeless youth. The top floor at West Town became home to the new STEPS Transitional Living Program.

"We knew there was a need to provide two years of additional support to focus on self-sufficiency," Allison McCann-Stevenson, The Night Ministry's Assistant Director of Long-Term Residential Services, said of the STEPS Program, which offers a more independent living situation for up to eight young adults.



Program Specialist Henry Merrill (right) speaks to a resident of the Interim Housing Program at the Open Door Shelter—West Town facility.

The Interim Program's relocation also freed up the Lakeview building for a new 8-bed shelter program—The Night Ministry's Response-Ability Pregnant & Parenting Program, dedicated to serving pregnant and parenting young mothers and their children.

Today, West Town continues to provide safe shelter to hundreds of adolescents and young adults a year as well as the supportive services they need to build lives of greater stability.

"There's been so much transformation and growth that has happened here," said Neal Marie Ross, Manager of Youth Supportive Services. "If the

walls of West Town could talk, I think they would say they are proud of our young people and proud of our agency, too." ◇

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– Neal Marie Ross, Manager of Youth Supportive Services

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The Crib Turns Young Homeless Advocates' Vision into Reality

The Crib, The Night Ministry's overnight shelter for young adults experiencing homelessness, owes much to a group of young changemakers called Homeless Experts Living Life's Obstacles (H.E.L.L.O.).

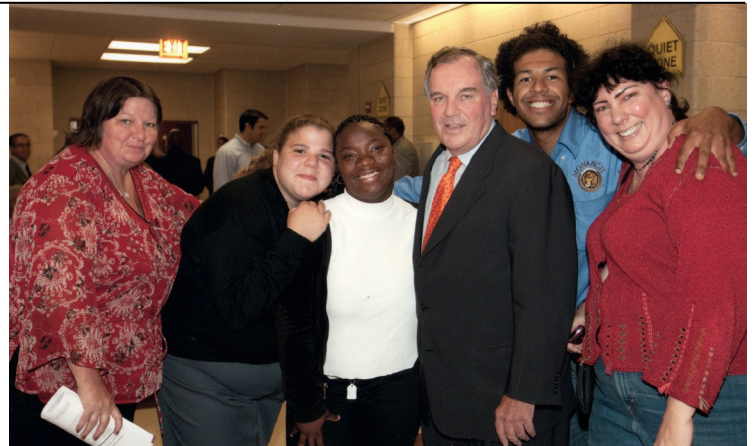
For years, H.E.L.L.O. members would meet weekly to discuss their experiences and insights as young Chicagoans struggling with homelessness. Their big break came in 2009 during a City of Chicago budget hearing, attended by then-Mayor Richard M. Daley, at which the group offered proposals to address youth homelessness in the city.

Their compelling presentation spurred the mayor to form the City of Chicago Task Force on Homeless Youth. The goals of the task force, which included H.E.L.L.O., The Night Ministry, Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, and Lakeview Action Coalition, were based upon the young members' advocacy agenda.

"They wanted a shelter for young people that didn't end when they turned 21. At the time, no youth shelters were addressing that need," said Tedd Peso, Director of Strategic Partnerships.

Former H.E.L.L.O. member Conrad Burnett shared why an increased age limit mattered: "Most adult shelters don't feel safe. For youth of different sexual orientations, a lot of the adult shelters are not tolerant."

H.E.L.L.O. also proposed establishing a shelter with few barriers to entry, such as not requiring identification. Their ideas would help form the concept for The Crib.



Youth from H.E.L.L.O. and members of The Night Ministry staff with former Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley at City Hall in August 2009.

In January 2011, vision became reality as the shelter doors opened to the first residents. The site, located in the basement of Lake View Lutheran Church, provided a safe place to sleep to a total of 138 young individuals over the course of an initial 4-month pilot period. The program became year-round in 2013.

In July 2020, the shelter moved to the current location at 1735 North Ashland, where residents now enjoy upgrades such as a separate sleeping room, multiple shower rooms, and a computer room.

LaShaunda Battie, Manager of Youth Engagement Services, said, "Moving to the bigger space has

been beneficial in terms of programming, having access to more rooms, having quiet spaces, and having a whole separate section for case management." ♦

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- Tedd Peso, Director of Strategic Partnerships



HOW WILL YOU LEAVE YOUR LEGACY?

"My late wife Linda and I have always considered ourselves very fortunate. We both wanted to make sure we would try and help where we could. From volunteering for seniors to cooking at a men's shelter, we tried to make a difference. I hope that the gift we leave behind to The Night Ministry will help those in need and honor my late wife's memory."

- Robert Hack, Legacy Society Member

After securing economic stability and providing for the needs of your loved ones, you may choose to make a lasting charitable impact with a bequest to The Night Ministry. If you have already included The Night Ministry in your will, please let us know—we would like to acknowledge your generosity and welcome you as a member of The Legacy Society. **Contact Melissa Graham, Senior Director of Individual Stewardship, at 773-506-6019 or melissag@thenightministry.org.**



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We are looking back

at our first 45 years. Read more about
The Night Ministry's history inside!



The Night Ministry Launches Chicago's First Street Medicine Program

By 2015, The Night Ministry's Health Outreach Bus had been on the road for 25 years, providing free health care to Chicagoans experiencing poverty or homelessness, but the agency sensed it could be making a wider impact on the streets.

"There was this inkling that we could reach more people who were really falling between the cracks if we were a little more flexible and more mobile," said Erin Ryan, Senior Vice President.

In search of new ideas, Ryan and David Wywialowski, Director of Outreach and Health Ministry, attended a conference on health care for the homeless. As luck would have it, Jim Withers, founder of Pittsburgh's pioneering street medicine program Operation Safety Net, was seated right behind Ryan. The two struck up a conversation. "He asked me, 'What do you know about street medicine?' And the rest is history," she said.

Backpack Medicine, the initial prototype, launched as the winter set in that year. A small team, usually consisting of Wywialowski, a nurse, and a social worker, would set out once or twice a week. With backpacks filled with survival supplies, they visited scattered encampments and unsheltered individuals in hard-to-reach locations.

Over Street Medicine's young life, it has steadily grown from serving one day a week to six. Not only has the schedule expanded, but staff has increased to include a full-time Case Manager, a Nurse Practitioner, a Substance Use Advocate, a Peer Support



The Night Ministry's Street Medicine Team assisting clients along Lower Wacker Drive. Photo by Lloyd DeGrane.

Advocate, and Outreach Workers. The program's comprehensive approach helps clients meet their basic needs while also providing assistance with housing, harm reduction, and more.

In 2019, Street Medicine upgraded to a custom-made van complete with a space for medical exams and consultations, exterior lighting to illuminate dark spaces, and organized storage. Today the team regularly visits over 40 sites across Chicago.

Noam Greene, Lead Outreach Worker, said Street Medicine's dependability strengthens its connections within the communities it serves. "Just like any relationship, it takes time to build trust, and we've been able to demonstrate we are going to keep coming back," they said. ◇

Thank you to those who generously gave at the \$500 level or higher between May 26 and July 31, 2021. Thank you as well to everyone who donated during this time period through alternate giving portals, such as Facebook, Amazon Smile, Workplace Giving, and more.



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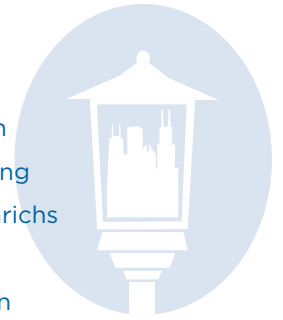
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