



# NIGHTLIGHTS

HOLIDAY 2021

## Holiday Traditions Stretch Back Decades at The Night Ministry

**F**rom the earliest years of The Night Ministry to today, holiday celebrations and traditions have strengthened connections between the agency and the communities it serves.

The first holiday tradition kicked off in the late 1970s: an annual Christmas dinner hosted at a local church and open to all who had no family or friends with whom to spend the holiday. At the inaugural dinner, The Night Ministry served 300 people. By the late 1990s, the event had become so large that multiple sites were needed to host it. Thousands of individuals a year enjoyed a menu that included turkey, ham, and homemade desserts. Guests also received warm weather clothing and gifts donated by generous supporters.

“Though the Christmas dinners were a joyful tradition that brought many members of the community together, The Night Ministry staff realized that very few of the clients served by the Health Outreach Bus were attending the event,” said David Wywialowski, Director of Outreach and Health Ministry. So, The Night Ministry began holding celebrations alongside the Bus, offering a special meal, presents, and holiday festivities on the streets.

Along the way, the giving of gift stockings became an important part of The Night Ministry’s holiday celebrations. The tradition originated in the early 2000s with volunteer and then-high school student Mory Sanderson.

“I was always aware that there were people living not far away that were in need, that didn’t have family, that didn’t have resources,” she said. Sanderson proposed the idea of gift stockings to The Night Ministry, and, with help from



*The Night Ministry’s earliest holiday tradition was an annual sit-down meal open to all members of the community.*

the agency’s staff, and her mother, among others, she set about collecting hundreds of them. “I had an idea,” she said, “but I had a lot of people behind me who believed in me and were able to help me make it happen.”

*“It’s a part of our hearts and a way of giving back.”*

– Jo-Ellyn Dorsey, Grace Lutheran Church

Today, The Night Ministry distributes more than a thousand stockings a year, each filled with essentials like socks, gloves, tissues, and deodorant, along with a few fun items such as candy and a deck of playing cards, and all donated by individuals, congregations, organizations, and businesses from across the Chicago area and beyond.

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 5**

**HOUSING • HEALTH CARE • HUMAN CONNECTION**

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# Youth Programs Adapt Services to Match Evolving Needs of Population

The Night Ministry is restructuring three of its Youth Housing Programs to deepen the impact of its services to young people experiencing homelessness.

“We are making these changes in response to the evolving challenges faced by the population and to reflect demographic shifts among the youth we serve,” said Betsy Carlson, Director of Youth Programs. “We are also adjusting our services based on the feedback our young people have provided us about how we can best help them.”

For nearly 15 years, the Response-Ability Pregnant & Parenting Program (RAPPP) has provided short-term shelter to mothers as young as 14 years of age and their infants, with a goal of reunification with supportive family members or placement in a longer-term housing program. While pregnancy remains a risk factor in youth homelessness, pregnancy rates among younger adolescents have been dropping, resulting in fewer minors arriving at RAPPP’s door. A new iteration of the program, known as Parenting with Purpose, serves a slightly older age range—ages 16 to 24—and provides up to 21 months of transitional living for young families, with a focus on developing greater self-sufficiency.

“We want our residents to develop all of the skills they need to be successful parents and adults,” said Felitha Jones-Patterson, Assistant Director of Youth Programs. “When they leave us, we want them to be independent enough to move into their own market-rate rental or subsidized apartment. A transitional living program allows more time for that to happen.”

The Night Ministry continues to serve young mothers below the age of 16 at its Interim Housing Program, which has always been available to this population and is located at the Open Door Shelter – West Town. The same facility is also now the location of Parenting with Purpose, a move that addresses challenges at the building that had housed RAPPP—a three-story home which lacks an elevator and where young mothers and their children did not have their own private bedrooms.

Meanwhile, the agency is merging two programs, the STEPS Transitional Living Program and Phoenix Hall, into a hybrid housing model, Pathways, which offers an onsite congregate environment as well as community-based apartments coupled with supportive services.

“Not all young adults are ready to live independently, and many have told us they appreciate the structure of a communal setting. But some are ready to live more independently with the right assistance,” said Allison McCann-Stevenson,



Terrell Carter, Program Specialist (left), talks with residents of the new Pathways Transitional Living Program.

Assistant Director of Long-Term Residential Services. “The hybrid structure of Pathways gives us the flexibility to provide a continuum of support which matches where the residents are at in their journeys to greater stability.”

Pathways provides up to two years of housing for up to 12 young people, with eight residing in The Night Ministry’s shelter facility in the North Lawndale neighborhood and four in nearby apartments.

The expansion into community-based housing builds upon The Night Ministry’s successful participation in the Flexible Housing Pool for Youth, launched last year. The agency is providing ongoing case management for pool participants, who are young

adults living in their own subsidized market-rate rental apartments.

The Pathways program shifts the service model for the North Lawndale facility, which had housed Phoenix Hall, a residence that was initially designed exclusively for high school students. While high school students needing housing are still welcome at Pathways, being in high school is no longer a prerequisite to stay there.

“What we are seeing in the North Lawndale neighborhood is a greater need for shelter options for young adults who are not necessarily in high school,” said McCann-Stevenson. “By eliminating the requirement that residents be enrolled in high school, we are lowering barriers to service and bringing more resources into the community.” ♦

*“We are making these changes in response to the evolving challenges faced by the population and to reflect demographic shifts among the youth we serve.”*

– Betsy Carlson, Director of Youth Programs

# Varying Definitions of Homelessness Impact Access to Services

Who is identified as experiencing homelessness and who is not varies under federal definitions, and when interpretations of the term are strict, individuals and communities may be unable to access the resources they need.

According to a recent report from the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless (CCH), the vast majority of those experiencing homelessness in Chicago from 2015 to 2019 were doubled-up, a term used to describe those temporarily staying with others, such as friends or family, out of necessity. Yet, with a few exceptions, doubled-up families and individuals are not considered homeless under the definition used by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

Unlike those living in shelters or on the streets, all of whom qualify under HUD's definition of the term, the doubled-up homeless are hidden from view. "The difference in definition is between visible homelessness versus invisible homelessness," said Darla Bardine, Executive Director of the National Network for Youth. "There's this false narrative that the visibly homeless are the most in need," she said.

Julie Dworkin, Director of Policy at CCH, added that those living doubled-up are categorically homeless: "The fact of the matter is, the household doesn't have a home of their own. They've lost their housing probably due to financial circumstances. They're just basically getting unofficial shelter at someone's house, but it's not necessarily a better or even more stable situation than a shelter."

The effects of HUD's definition are far-reaching. "Those who are doubled-up face significant barriers to qualify for services – like case management or shelter – which really make a difference in getting people out of the cycle of homelessness, until they end up being homeless according to HUD's definition," said Tedd Peso, Director of Strategic Partnerships at The Night Ministry.



*The definition of homelessness utilized by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development precludes many from qualifying for vital services and resources.*

But not all federal definitions of homelessness are so strict, and some include "invisible" populations. The Department of Education (USDE), for example, adopts a broader understanding of what constitutes homelessness for young people, one that includes those who live doubled-up, as well as those in motels, camping grounds, substandard housing, and more.

As a result, school districts are required to provide students USDE defines as homeless with services, resources, and additional rights including immediate enrollment in school even if they missed the enrollment deadline, transportation, school choice, and waived fees – all intended to prevent homelessness from affecting their academic engagement.

"Everyone – no matter what their individual experience of homelessness looks like – deserves access to the supportive services that will help them secure safe and stable housing. The longer there is confusion over who can get access to these services, the longer it is going to take us to end homelessness," said Peso. ♦

*"Those who are doubled-up face significant barriers to qualify for services."*

*– Tedd Peso, Director of Strategic Partnerships*

## GEARING UP FOR WINTER

Surviving a Chicago winter can be a challenge. You can help by donating the following cold-weather clothing and accessories for those we serve:

- New or gently used winter coats, sizes large and extra-large
- New thermal underwear and socks
- New hats, scarves, and gloves
- Hand and toe warmers

Please contact **Miranda Dean**, Resource Coordinator, at **773-506-6022** or **miranda@thenightministry.org** to make donation arrangements.

# The Night Ministry Engages in Dialogue and Examination to Foster Racial Equity

The Night Ministry is taking steps to realize racial equity in its day-to-day operations, a process which involves becoming an anti-racist organization.

The agency's mission makes it imperative for The Night Ministry to take these steps, said Chief of Staff Traci Rivera.

"We have a social responsibility to move things forward. Systemic racism and inequities are major factors in homelessness," she said. "If we want to reach a place where homelessness is ended, we need to work to make sure that opportunities are available and equitable for everyone, and that work starts here within the agency."

Rivera serves on The Night Ministry's Racial Equity Task Force, which is helping guide the organization through the process. The task force is made up of employees from across the agency, as well as the Chair of the Board of Directors, Kiantae Bowles.

Congregational Engagement Manager Brittany Caine-Conley, the task force's co-chair, said becoming anti-racist requires the recognition of the myriad of ways that racial inequity is embedded into society.

"It is a proactive stance, and it has to do with the choices that we make daily. It's different than saying, 'I'm not racist,' because that doesn't acknowledge the reality around us, that many of our institutions and systems are rooted in white cultural dominance," she said.

Operationalizing anti-racism involves having open, honest, and often difficult conversations, as well as workshops and consultations with outside partners.



The Night Ministry is working to realize racial equity across its programs and administrative departments.

"It requires that as an organization we take a deep dive into our policies, our culture, and how we operate," said Caine-Conley. "We need to illuminate ways that we are not living up to who we want to be in terms of racial equity."

Departments within The Night Ministry, including administrative units and those which provide services to clients, are working with the task force to develop goals to foster racial equity. The commitment to racial equity and anti-racism is also part of the strategic planning process in which The Night Ministry is currently engaged, which will deliver a roadmap for the agency to follow in the coming years.

"It's definitely difficult, but I think anything that is worthwhile is not always going to come easy," said Rivera. "It's not a fast process and really it will never be done. There will always be ways to improve." ◇

*"We have a social responsibility to move things forward."*

- Traci Rivera, Chief of Staff

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# Holiday Traditions Stretch Back Decades

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

“It’s a part of our hearts and a way of giving back,” said Jo-Ellyn Dorsey, a member of Grace Lutheran Church. The congregation, which has supported The Night Ministry for decades, has a tradition of providing handmade holiday stockings and donations each year.

Even the Street Medicine Team has developed a variation on the stocking tradition, providing drawstring backpacks packed with winter survival gear to unsheltered individuals living in encampments.

The Night Ministry’s Youth Programs also have their holiday traditions. Anshe Emet Synagogue has long celebrated the season through its annual Festival of Lights alongside the Youth Outreach Van, with food and presents. Meanwhile, young people served by The Night Ministry have enjoyed a holiday party featuring games, gifts, and an abundant restaurant-style meal.

And while COVID-19 has precluded such a large indoor gathering recently, staff have found ways to make the holidays special for participants in Youth Programs. Last year, for example, residents of The Night Ministry’s shelters received specially catered, individually plated holiday meals.

Despite the changes The Night Ministry’s holiday traditions have undergone, at their heart they have always been about bringing people together.

“We build relationships all throughout the year with the individuals and families we serve. So, it really means a lot for us as staff to spend time celebrating the season with our clients, people we care about,” said Wywialowski. ◇



Janice Feinberg

## FOUNDATION SPOTLIGHT: THE JOSEPH AND BESSIE FEINBERG FOUNDATION

For The Joseph and Bessie Feinberg Foundation, philanthropy is about more than financial support. The Chicago-based family foundation concentrates on making investments in community-based organizations working to improve lives and affect social change at the local level.

“It goes deeper than writing a check. It’s about how we interact with the nonprofits we support financially—giving time and energy and fostering collaboration among our grantees to maximize their resources and realize their goals,” said Janice Feinberg, who directs the foundation with her brother, Joseph Feinberg, and his wife, Rhonda Feinberg.

Janice provides resources such as nonprofit management consulting, grant writing assistance, and executive director mentorship, for example, in addition to connecting organizations with potential partners.

And while The Feinberg Foundation has a legacy of philanthropy dating back to 1969, in its more recent history the foundation has shifted where it concentrates its investments.

“Several years ago, we made a strategic decision to fund organizations that are on the ground providing direct service to people in their communities, recognizing that those people working in the communities know best what the community needs, and that they are frequently the kind of organizations that aren’t getting philanthropic dollars from other sources,” said Janice.

For the past ten years, the foundation has been focusing its investments in Chicago’s Englewood neighborhood, where Janice has helped bring together many organizations serving young people. The Feinberg Foundation has also been a major supporter of The Night Ministry for nearly a decade, empowering the agency to further its reach across the city and deepen the impact of its services to Chicagoans experiencing homelessness and poverty.

The Night Ministry is grateful to The Feinberg Foundation for its support of our mission and its commitment to making Chicago a better place for all its residents.



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Suite 2000  
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# Happy Holidays!

*Wishing you and your loved ones peace and good health this season. Thank you for supporting our mission.*



## Young People Share Pandemic Experiences in “Straight Outta Quarantine”

The adversities brought by the COVID-19 pandemic have been met with persistence and matched by progress. That is the message underlying “Straight Outta Quarantine,” a creative video presentation by members of Youth 4 Truth, The Night Ministry’s leadership development program for young people who have experienced homelessness. The video premiered at Night Lights, the virtual fundraiser held by The Night Ministry’s Associate Board in October.

“COVID-19 is a silent bully that doesn’t leave me alone,” shared Malika, who lost her job and had to scramble to make ends meet, in addition to welcoming a child into the world, during the pandemic. “It took away my life temporarily,” she said, “but never my courage to keep fighting.”

Persie found the strength to keep going, despite the challenges he encountered. “I had to get back up after each bad news. I could either choose to give up or push through, and I kept choosing to push through,” he said.

Maria, who was also laid off early in the pandemic, said, “I couldn’t find a steady job. I couldn’t find any job. I didn’t have any money, so I had to rely on Link (food benefits) and unemployment. It wasn’t easy.”

But, she added, her situation has improved. “I don’t feel so locked in and I’m able to go out, still wearing my mask, but at least I’m protected, vaccinated, and I have a brand-new job,” Maria said.

As an essential worker, Julie was left vulnerable to the coronavirus at her place of employment. “I was lucky not to lose my job during the pandemic, but there were people coming in not wearing a mask. As workers, we just had to be there with them,” she said.

Also parents, Maria and Julie both struggled to find educational experiences and growth opportunities for their young children during lock-down. But Julie said she did appreciate spending more time with her son.

“I feel really blessed to say that being with Miguel during the pandemic really made me know who my kid is, and it makes you such a proud mom to see him turn into the teeny tiny person he is,” she said.

Visit [www.thenightministry.org/blog/straight-outta-quarantine](http://www.thenightministry.org/blog/straight-outta-quarantine) to watch “Straight Outta Quarantine.” ♦



“Straight Outta Quarantine” presenters, clockwise from the upper left: Malika, Persie, Maria, and Julie.

**Thank you to those who generously gave at the \$500 level or higher between August 1 and October 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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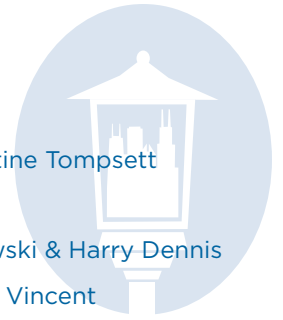
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