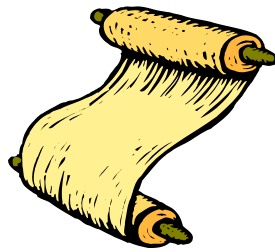


The ICS Scribe



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A Note from Joe's Pen

The other day I heard myself say to a colleague, “It never ceases to amaze me how many of our guests tell me how blessed they feel.” At the same time, when I see our guests standing in line in the dining room waiting to be served a meal, I often find myself thinking, “Here we are in the richest country in the world and this is a crime. A real crime.” They may seem like two diametrically opposed perspectives, but they are really the flip-side of the same coin: the guest who is houseless with every belonging he or she owns stuffed into two plastic garbage bags who feels blessed and the provider who wants something better for the people he is serving.

I’m no clinician but from everything I’ve heard or seen, most of our guests are suffering from early childhood trauma that has gone unattended to. Somehow, someway, they did not get the help they deserved to get. No one really knows why two people can have the same experience growing up and one will go on to have a productive life while the other might end up in our parking lot anesthetizing their pain with a substance. Mental health and substance use are health issues, but low on the priority list. Also, people suffering with a mental health or substance use issue are often stigmatized and looked upon as if they are morally bankrupt in some fashion, unlike those suffering from other health issues like cancer or heart disease. We have a guest who has been addicted to heroin ever since I got here. He is now clean for more than eight months, working, and about to receive a housing voucher. Whenever he comes by the shelter to help out after Resource Day, he thanks us profusely for all the help he received at the shelter. I always remind him, “Hey, man, you’re a good guy. However you need us, we’ll help you out.” That’s our job: to welcome, embrace, acknowledge

a guest’s humanity and pick them up when they fall down.

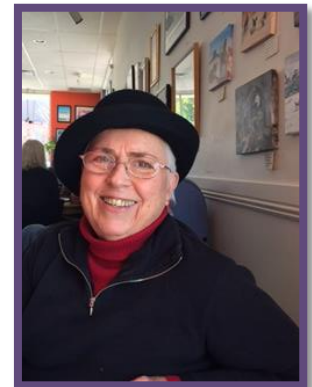
I recently read an opinion piece about homelessness in the New York Times and the byline was “Jesus never said to love the poor as long as they didn’t make bad lifestyle choices.” After all, no matter how you cut it – whether the guest has housing or is houseless, clean from substance use or using, working on a mental health issue or not – they are doing all the hard work. Our job is much simpler; to be there for them without judgement, however they may need us. That’s a sentiment I think we can all agree fits in very nicely with the spirit of this holiday season.

Peace,

Joseph Jordan-Berenis

ICS Volunteer Feature – Bo Keppel

Don’t ask Bo Keppel to go out on a Thursday night. And Thanksgiving Dinner for her family and friends is early in the day. Bo is committed to volunteering at Interfaith Community Shelter’s registration desk on Thursday nights and she doesn’t want to miss. It’s important to her.



Bo’s career is in education. With degrees in special education, she has taught students from pre-school to community colleges to universities to prisons in various cities and states in the East. Later she taught teachers how to be better teachers. And she often volunteered or helped in some capacity with the homeless.

Bo was a frequent visitor to Santa Fe and loved the city and its people. In 2008 when it was time to

retire (although retirement is a state that Bo really doesn't know), she took a position through Americorps and was funded by the National Aids Fund. She worked at the New Mexico Department of Health as an infectious disease prevention specialist. With her vast teaching experience, Bo found the work rewarding and believed she positively impacted those she helped. One of the sites she worked was the ICS shelter in its early days at another location. And she has been with ICS as a volunteer ever since.

On Thursday's Bo comes in the early evening to check guests in. She enters the required information into the computer database that has been developed for ICS. Before guests are admitted for registration, the team leader meets with the volunteers. The group reviews the Three C's in dealing with guests: Consistency. Communication. Confidentiality. Be consistent with the guests and treat them equally. Communicate with the team and team leader. A guest's information and story is confidential – what's heard at Pete's Place, stays at Pete's Place. For Bo, the "Fourth C" is Courtesy – but remembering that is not difficult for her. "The people who are homeless have taught me," Bo said. "I am in awe of their human spirit, their resilience. I admire their ability to face obstacles every day." Treating people with respect is the only way she knows.

There are other organizations in Santa Fe that benefit from Bo's volunteering spirit. As a matter of fact, the title on her business card is "Volunteer Extraordinaire" – remember, she doesn't do retirement. Yet, ICS doesn't need to worry about "losing" Bo. If it's Thursday night, she's at Pete's Place.

ICS Alumni Feature – Josh Duran

Heartbreaking circumstances brought Josh Duran to homelessness. He would rather not share the details except to say that it was extreme poverty which resulted in him leaving Pojaque. He had grown up there and graduated from high school but life had always been difficult. When the "bottom" hit and the courts got involved, Josh headed to Santa Fe.

Josh connected with a counselor at the Santa Fe Guidance Center who talked with Josh about his circumstances and ways to begin to manage them. Since he had nowhere to sleep that night, the

counselor referred him to the Interfaith Community Shelter.

"I needed a place to sleep at night and somewhere to be during the day. Food to eat, Josh said. "I had to adjust to the shelter, though. But I did. I made friends. I stayed positive."

Josh was still seeing the counselor at the Santa Fe Guidance Center. He started helping at Pete's Place to keep busy and because that's who Josh is. He likes to help out. He feels it is important to give back to others.

As Josh continued to deal with his circumstances, the next steps for him were housing and returning to school. He worked with people from The Life Link who found some funding for an apartment and money to attend school. It's difficult to make ends meet, but he figures it out each month. Sometimes it means coming back to ICS for a meal and to check in with his friends that he made there.

Josh is enrolled as a full-time student at Santa Fe Community College. He's met new friends at school and knows he is more secure than when he arrived at ICS. He began his studies

in solar energy, but later changed his emphasis to greenhouse management – specifically, hydroponic and aquaponic production systems. Currently he and three other classmates are competing in an Innovation Challenge sponsored contest. The group is growing basil and Bibb lettuce hydroponically and will learn of the results of the Challenge sometime in February.

"I still volunteer here at Pete's Place," Josh said. "And I also volunteer at Warehouse 21 where I sometimes DJ at dances and parties."

And the future? "I want to grow healthy food for non-profits after I graduate," he said. That's Josh – helping out and giving back are part of who he is.



ICS Provider Partner – The Life Link, Mark Voss

How do you talk to someone who is homeless? How do you connect with him or her to help them? Meet Mark Voss from The Life Link, who has an office at ICS. Mark has thought a lot about these questions in his position as the Outreach Services Program Manager and mental health counselor. The Life Link placed Mark at Pete’s Place (along with outreach specialists Avi Golenberg and Quill Head, who were featured in the last issue of The Scribe) through a PATH grant from the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. PATH, which stands for Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness, funds services for people with serious mental illness experiencing homelessness.

“Talking with the homeless starts with listening and caring,” Mark said. “I try to establish a relationship with the individual and I recognize that mental health issues are one of the main obstacles facing individuals in getting out of homelessness.”

Mark was inspired by Bernie Glassman, a Zen Master and founder of the Zen Peacemakers. Glassman established an international, interfaith network called the Peacemaker Order, stressing the integration

of spiritual practice and social action through Three Tenets:

- Not-knowing, thereby giving up fixed ideas about ourselves and the universe;
- Bearing witness to the joy and suffering of the world; and,
- Loving action for ourselves and the world

These tenets provide a framework within which Mark, Avi and Quill work. The first tenet, not knowing, reminds Mark not to make assumptions about the issues a homeless person bears and how to resolve them. “I ask questions and listen to the answers,” Mark said, “and provide opportunity for the person to determine what it is they want and need. It can be difficult amidst the stress of living

homeless for them to recognize their obstacles and how to overcome them.”

The second tenet reminds Mark that after listening, “bearing witness” means he should be with them where they are. People need to know and feel that we are with them in their difficulty, sharing it with them, and that we won’t run. It is only then that “loving action” comes in.

“I can then refer them to the services that the person has said he wants and needs – and is ready to work toward that goal,” Mark said. “And then I can be with them, if they want, while they work to achieve their goals.”

As a licensed professional clinical counselor, Mark meets individually with clients who need mental health counseling. These sessions occur either at his office at Pete’s Place or at The Life Link offices. Mark also instituted and facilitates a women’s support group at Pete’s Place that meets weekly.



Day Services at ICS