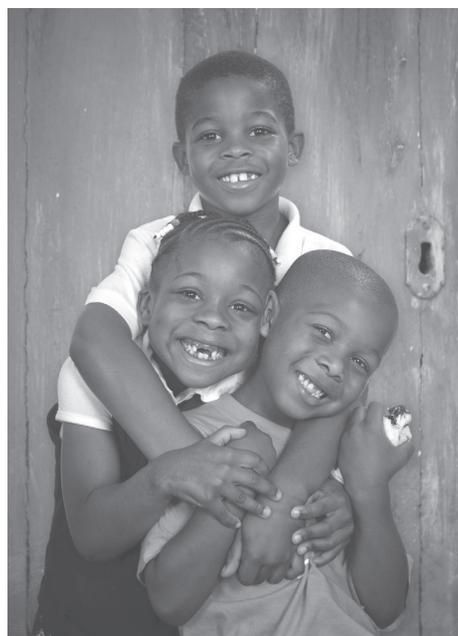


Help Where It's Needed Most

City of Refuge helps the homeless transition to normal life



By Tina Chadwick

“The Lord Helps Those Who Help Themselves” seems to sum up the driving force behind the 13-year success of City of Refuge.

Far from simply doling handouts to those in need, COR first “restores dignity” with a shower, good meal, clean clothes and a warm bed complete with roof over head. The very next thing they require (yes, require) of the people in the four to nine month programs is “increased responsibility.” This can mean any kind of job needed to maintain the 210,000 square-foot facility that is a temporary but life-changing home to hundreds of families and people needing help.

One option is to learn culinary skills through the 180° Kitchen program. But it's not a half-day of cutting potatoes for a certificate of completion. The kitchens put out two meals a day for 263 people. Not only are participants learning food prep and actual cooking, but they learn to work in a group, learn responsibility and what success feels like when that many people are eating what their hands made. The 180° Kitchen program boasts 100 percent job placement for the 18 to 24-year-olds who finish.

Another option is to work at the onsite clinic, a new addition of the HEALING Community Center. Started by Dr. Charles Moore, who teaches at Emory and works for Grady, the clinic provides services for 500 people monthly and hosts over 60 volunteer physicians from Atlanta's prominent medical centers including Emory, Grady, Morehouse School of Medicine and Piedmont.

Other programs run at the City of Refuge to support the families living there while preparing to transition back out, include the Georgia State After-School All Stars Program, where kids learn the importance

Helping Atlanta's homeless through classes, such as the 180° Kitchen (right) and activities for youth are helping to keep families intact. Photos courtesy Lylephotos.com & CoR.

of physical activity from actual athletes or those studying sports science. This group also provides vital tutoring. The Atlanta Ballet also teaches dance classes, and the children can participate in “Carrot Seeds” to help with raising and caring for an organic garden that provides fresh food to the kitchen.

The iron gates that surround the City of Refuge are open. Although most inhabitants come through Gateway 24/7, which identifies candidates for the program, anyone wanting help can come in and ask for it. Those entering to stay are placed in Eden Village 1 (families), 2 (single women) or 3 (men). Program Director Rena Simpson says, “Once they go through our complete program, they will have all the necessary skills to succeed in mainstream society.”

There is, though, a staff of both paid and volunteer people who keep the program rolling along and even growing. At the head of this group is Pastor Bruce Deel, the executive director and founder. Deel laid the beginnings of the City of Refuge in 1970, after what was supposed to be only a six-month street feeding assignment. That assignment never ended for him and his family.

Asked how he finds the financial support to keep a giant undertaking like City of Refuge afloat, he smiles – “faith and a lot of asking.” He got the entire City of Refuge property donated in 2003 after returning each month for six months to ask for it. He said the downturn in the economy, especially last year, had made finding funds more difficult.

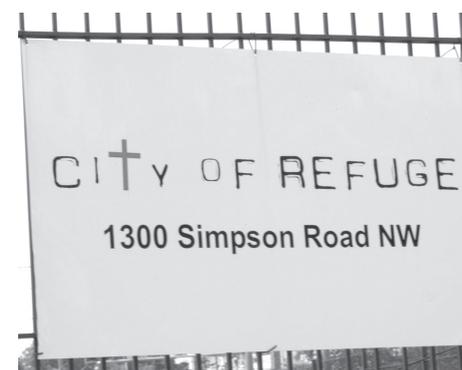
“The big corporate donations are steady,” he says. “It's the micro-givers who donate \$100 a month or so that have had to cut back.”

Another dynamic changed by the downturn is the profile of those being helped.

“We have a lot more intact families who find themselves homeless for the first time after losing a job that has supported them for years,” Deel says. “We have a lot of single parents who can't afford daycare and they lose one paycheck caring for a child and they find themselves out of a job and then, out of their home.”

Ever the optimist and fiercely committed to a “half-full” attitude, Deel says “as the dollars are harder to find, volunteers were actually easier because people wanted to help and if they can't with their wallets, they do with their hands.” **IN**

For more about City of Refuge, visit cityofrefugeinc.com.



Letter from the Editor

Collin Kelley, Editor

We usually plan our cover stories several months in advance, but as we were putting this issue together (much of it by phone and email during Atlanta's snow and ice storm), the cover story suddenly shifted gears because of chickens.

We've reported in the past on Intown residents' fascination with raising chickens in their own backyard coops and enjoying the fresh eggs. When Stephanie Van Parys sent me a press release about the upcoming Chicks in the City symposium and fellow Inman Alley tenant Mark Cohen sent photos of his chickens, it just seemed like synergy.

In this case, the chicken came before the egg, but we hope you'll enjoy the stories on urban chickens as much as we do.

Other big stories in this month's issue include an update on the Center for Civil and Human Rights (Page 4), eating heart healthy (Page 29) and how staging is selling homes faster and for more money in Atlanta (Page 32).

Back to the snow and ice storm for a moment: While our office was closed for most of the week, we were praising the technology gods for being able to work from home laying out the February issue.

Since I'm the head tweeter in charge, I was also trying to keep readers abreast of closings, road conditions and what was open in our coverage are via Twitter. From Jan. 9 to Jan. 14, I sent out roughly 200 tweets, many of those retweets by our readers, contributors and fellow media outlets.

Many of you told me that you were relying on Twitter for news about the storm, so my goal was to provide as clear and concise information without relying on hyperbole. We gained 150 new followers that week, and we are close to having an amazing 10,000 followers at @ATLINTownPaper.

We appreciate each and every one of you. We're planning to hold a “Tweet Up” at our office in the very near future, so keep watching those tweets.

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