

St. Vincent De Paul Center Newsletter Fall Edition 2017

Mutual Conversion on the Playground



This summer we noticed a peculiar pattern on our participant evaluations. Consistently, the same thing came up as a highlight of the experience: playing outside in the evenings with the neighborhood children and teenagers. Each day, after dinner was cleaned up, and our evening reflection was finished, our volunteers rushed to pull on their sneakers and to go outside to play with the neighborhood youth.

Kids from all ages joined our volunteers in the parking lot of the school across the street. Little kids brought their bikes and scooters, and delighted in the attention they got from our high school aged boys and girls. Teenage youth played pick up basketball games with our volunteers, sometimes neighborhood against volunteers, but most time just dividing everyone there into two, mixed up groups and seeing who won.

Pope Francis speaks about how there is often fear between groups from different backgrounds, fueled by misunderstanding and ignorance. He says, "There is only one way to overcome this fear, and that is encounter marked by friendship and respect".

When you get to know someone who is different from you, your stereotypes about them or a group they belong to get challenged and discarded, and the dismantling of walls that divide begins.

While we were busy with the day to day work of running the center, God was at work out on the playground. There was no volunteer and client, or helper and person being helped, but rather, just a bunch of kids recognizing themselves and God in one another.

St. Vincent De Paul
Young Adult Center



Retreat to the Street

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“There is only one way to overcome this fear, and that is encounter marked by friendship and respect.”

-Pope Francis, 2017

Community Spotlight: Harvey Silver

The following article was written by one of our summer intern's, Gabby Ciminera, for a blog she started entitled "Faces of Germantown". Go to www.facesofgermantown.wordpress.com to read more interviews by Gabby.



Also known as "Twin" or "Big", meet Harvey – a 61 year old man, originally from West Philadelphia, whose positive attitude and larger than life personality are infectious. A self-proclaimed "hell of a walker", Big enjoys strolling around the neighborhoods of Philly and even walking aimlessly for hours at a time. He reads nonfiction

books and is especially knowledgeable about the Nazi Germany period of history. What's not apparent on the surface is that Harvey had spent half of his life in a state penitentiary before experiencing homelessness following his release from prison. He's been unemployed for 9 years now and working where he can get it, as his record of incarceration puts him at a disadvantage to be hired by employers.

Harvey has been at St. Raymond's House, a permanent housing facility for individuals who are experiencing homelessness and have a chronic health condition, for 18 months now. He views the house as a blessing and feels he has been rescued by both St. Raymond's and by God's grace. He says this was a miracle because even though he didn't fit all of the criteria to enter the house, such as being in a shelter before coming to the house, DePaul USA still accepted his case and didn't turn him away. He quotes the Bible to describe the significance of this,

"A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity." Proverb 17:17

He knew that God was present in every step of his journey once he realized that God had taken him back to the same neighborhood that he had lived in before being incarcerated; it seemed like a second chance. Throughout this process, he lost many family members and friends and became estranged with them to the point that he heard from people outside of his family that his young Hollywood actor son, Harvey Silver, had passed away. Along the way, though, he had mentors and community members that helped him reach each next step in his life. For instance, his landlord took a special interest in Harvey and didn't evict him right away after he missed several rent payments. She bought him 6 months extra time and still waves to him today when she sees him around town.

People also looked out for Harvey during Code Blue, a period of extreme winter weather conditions when individuals who are homeless are taken from outside and put into shelters. Neighbors would take Big from the porch he slept on and allow him to stay inside their homes until Code Blue

passed just so he could avoid the shelter systems. These people who took him in treated him as if they had known Harvey for years and would light up whenever he walked by so much so that some people said he was the mayor!

When asked what he was most proud of, Harvey said that it was his ability, "To be able to love life enough to struggle for a better life."

He fervidly admitted that he could have been a drunk or dead at this point but the fact that he was still alive and still functioning with great health was a testament to his strength and perseverance. Big calls his journey a "growing experience" that has molded and shaped him in a positive rather than a negative way. He says that his worth outweighs the bitterness so that he is able to adapt and move on.

Harvey is currently writing a book. He feels that he has a calling in life to write and receives signs of this calling by finding pens on the sidewalks outside. He collects these pens as well as little pieces of paper where he writes his

thoughts down in the form of inspirational words of wisdom and sayings about life. He says that his son clearly takes after him with the talent of writing and shared a quote his son once said from memory, "Life is like a thin line; What's important is how well you stay balanced."

A main theme of The Faces of Germantown blog is to break down the stigma surrounding people experiencing poverty and homelessness. Therefore, I asked Harvey what were some common misconceptions that people, who have never encountered homelessness or poverty, might have about these two experiences. He said that the two main assumptions were that the person was either addicted to drugs or a "nut". However, the truth is that there are dozens of reasons why people end up on the streets or in a shelter system and the truth is not so black and white. Life is complicated and people are complicated and as Harvey says,

Nobody under the sun knows when they're going to face hard times. Like a fish in a net, you never know when you might face adversity."

Excerpts from Harvey's Writings...

"Don't give in to adversity, find and gather strength and persevere through it."

"Sometimes it seems we have done the wrong thing. However, sometimes it is done for the right reason."

"Death is certain. Life is not."

"Growing plants are a good example. Nothing will stop them from growing out of the ground which it came."

"To be able to love life enough to struggle for a better life"

A Day at the Center with Loyola Blakefield

Loyola Blakefield, a Catholic, college preparatory school, established by the Jesuits and imbued with the spirit of Ignatius Loyola, forms men to serve with and for others. The Loyola student is preparing to graduate as a man of integrity, who, because he strives "to find God in all things," is open to growth, intellectually ambitious, religious, loving, and committed to diversity and doing justice.

The following article was written by chaperones Sheila Brune and Mark F. and featured on Loyola's website.

Today marked the third successful day in Philadelphia (How has it gone by this fast??). We started our day normally with a reflection in the chapel. We then split into two groups with one going to the famous Awbury Arboretum and one going to St. Raymond's Parish for a summer day camp.

The Awbury Arboretum is a 55 acre property of green space in the Northwest section of Philadelphia. It is home to open meadows, thousands of trees, plants, and 200 different species of wild life. Our task was to remove invasive weeds that were growing over a natural bed of grass and plants (lots of weeding!!)

The other group set out for St. Raymond's Parish where they spent their day entertaining 67 high-energy campers. They played boardgames, outside ball, and fussball. Needless to say the campers were very sad to see our Dons leave!

After a nice break, we embarked on a trip to Center City Philly to volunteer at Broad Street Ministries, an organization that aims to serve as a dynamic place of worship. Each night of the week, they serve a delicious hot meal to underprivileged Philadelphia residents. Upon arrival, our Dons were given jobs that ranged from servers, to bus boys, to even dinner hosts for the 100+ in attendance. So far, this trip was the group's vote for #1 work site. And to top it off, we treated ourselves to an authentic Philly cheese steak from Dalessandro's. Day Three, amen.



Servant Leadership Training at the Center



Marymount Service Justice Leaders Andrew, Alison and Elizabeth pose with Darcy at the end of their training

This year, Marymount University's Campus Ministry, sent a team of three students to be trained as Service Leaders to the Center. Over a three day retreat, the students engaged in service, reflection, and education to help them develop into student leaders. The goal of this training was to prepare students to be able to organize and lead service trips for their peers on Marymount's Campus.

The first part of the retreat focused around the Catholic Social teaching, and the role of service and servant leadership in the Church. Students participated in presentations, games and discussions to deepen their understanding of CST, and to put the service they would be leading into the context of their Catholic Faith and Tradition.

The second aspect of the treat focused on developing students individual leadership skills, such as group facilitation, communication and organization. The leaders learned how to put together and facilitate a structured debrief following the "What, So What, Now What Model", and even practiced leading their own discussions. They also practiced the more logistical skills of being a service leader—such as researching service sites, site preparedness, and decision making.

If you or your school would be interested in participating in a Servant Leadership Training, please contact Darcy— darcy.o'hara@doc.org . Retreat is available both at the center, and on site at your high school or college.

What Students Are Saying...

— Fall Groups —

September

- * Matsiko Choir
- * Malvern Preparatory School
- * Ozanam Scholars—St John's University

October

- * Villa Joseph Marie High School
- * Mission to Mission
- * Aquinas College

November

- * Devon Preparatory School
- * Malvern Preparatory School



On what they learned ...

“One thing that I learned is that we are all equal and no one person is better than the rest.” Loyola Blakefield

I learned that having actual face to face interactions and really taking action is very emotionally rewarding, and helps me to learn

and care about other people more than just donating money to a cause would.” - St Edmund's Preparatory School

On their relationship with God...

“I would say this week impacted my relationship with God because I was forced to think about how Jesus would view the poor and hungry and that's how I wanted to view them too!” Elizabeth Seton High School

“Yes I have learned to grow closer to faith and I've felt as though I have a vocation to draw others closer to each other in unity.” - St Edmund's Preparatory School

On their perception of people living in poverty...

“Yes before I got here I had a bit of stereotypes about this neighborhood but once I got to play with all the kids across the street, I found that they were really nice and we had a lot more in common than I thought.” Loyola Blakefield

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Visit us at:

www.svdpcenter.org

Follow us on :

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For more information about
booking a trip to the center,
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One of our longest running school partners, St Edmund's Preparatory School during their August 2017 Outreach Trip.