

Renewal Through Serving

In March 2003, I was invited to join the volunteer staff of the CVEM direct service office in LaGrange. This month marks an anniversary for me – seven years with this ministry, which has become known as the Phillips House Ministry. As with anything meaningful in life, the years have flown by.

So what makes this work so important that I want to continue to invest my time and energy in it? Helping the poor is, of course, something Jesus wants us to do. He is quite clear and specific about that. But to continue to do that year after year could become quite draining. There must be something in it that nurtures the soul of the helper. For me, that comes from the people I meet, and whose stories I am privileged to hear. Many of the persons I meet at Phillips House are individuals whose resilience and determination in the face of overwhelming obstacles fill me with admiration and awe. I see people whose expressions of faith and gratitude to God bolster my own faith on days when it is lagging.

My friends sometimes tell me they would find this work depressing. In reality it is often quite the opposite; it is uplifting. When I lock the door to the Phillips House at the end of the day, I have the satisfaction of knowing that someone I met that day will continue to have a roof over her head this month, another will have heat and lights in the family home, and yet another will be going to a college class because we helped pay the tuition. And all that will have happened, because of the generosity of the members of two small churches. It is truly amazing to see the Spirit at work!

Anne Gentry

Investment in TAP Multi-faceted

In spite of the hard work and seasonally hot weather, participating in the TAP program is like standing in the midst of a rainbow every summer. Rainbow hues color our TAP tee shirts, and since 1996 I've photographed the radiant faces of TAP children wearing them. Each color reminds me of some aspect of TAP:

First, I think of **green** and smile at the many birds and animals we've brought to TAP to instill in our children a love of creation. Who could guess the children, and I, would bond with a fuzzy possum?

Orange is the *Child of the Light* artwork my son created for the first year, a work I've used each time I've brought the labyrinth to TAP. I've waited at the center of the labyrinth to pronounce the walkers "children of light" as they spontaneously crossed their hands over their chests. **Blue** is music flowing through the years, from the TAP's first *Siyahamba*, to Debbie Anderson's own *Callings*, to last summer's Bee Dance.

Red is artwork, the Unity Pieces, the vibrancy of all that TAP contributes to the community. A particularly special Unity Piece- the Thread Project -is international, and ribbons representing my family members are woven into the panel. **Purple** represents serious discussions that we have with the children on how to handle conflict and loss. Deep **pink** is the heart of the faiths and cultures we share. Did I really stand in a Sukkot booth, touch Native American artwork, and learn to say *As-Salamu Alaykum?* **Turquoise** is the sky over the Peace Tree in Uptown Columbus and the river of peacemaking and kindness that winds through every TAP year.

And **yellow** is joy which permeates our work with TAP. TAP is a warm, golden light that shines in the hearts of the children, teens and adult volunteers as they go out to live in a challenging world. I want to continue to provide the joy that this rainbow of colors represents.

Barbara Danner

Student's Passion Blooms into Leadership

As a young teen, I was a *TAPPER* who became attached to the program because of its art, music and devoted volunteers. Later, as a Teen Mentor, I formed a close bond with other youth and the children. TAP helped me become who I am today; my passion led me to become TAP's Program Director in Troup County. The Thompson-Pound Art Program is a positive and powerful way to better our future as a society because it starts with our most open and innocent: our children.

Rebecca Jones Mitchell

*"I was surprised when the lady
said she had to make sure it would be OK
for us to come to coal mining country
because there were black people
in our group."*

- Teen in Infusion program

New Beginnings

Easter is a time of celebration, not only the raising of Jesus from the dead and the fulfillment of a promise from God, but also a special time for new beginnings in life.

CVEM has been a very big part of that new beginning in my life. Upon my first visit to the ministry, I was living in my car at the end of a bitterly cold winter. Unemployed, flat broke, hungry, depressed and physically sick, I depended on my car not only for transportation but also for shelter and heat during long, cold nights.

I requested help to put gas in my car. Ms. Sandra greeted me with a kind smile, took my information and prayed with me. Then I was on my way. Little did I know that a twenty-minute meeting was the beginning of a new life and wonderful friendship.

I didn't see Ms. Sandra again for a few months until I requested help with food, a bus pass and prayer. Ms. Sandra and Ms. Vicky said yes without hesitation or judgment. CVEM gave me far beyond the help I desperately needed.

Ms. Sandra has become a spiritual mentor and my friend. Her time, prayers and unconditional love have given me courage to rise above the obstacles and lies that filled my life for so many years.

I have turned my life over to Christ and learn daily about God's grace, love, forgiveness and promises. No longer am I the scared, lonely forty-year old girl that walked into the CVEM office.

I am now a Christian lady filled with peace and joy for the future. My love and faith in God grows everyday because his plan for me is greater than I could ever imagine. I now have a loving, forgiving family, cute apartment, cat, bird, and friends full of God's love. I am important to God with much to offer others and myself.

Dorothy Thornton

Rediscovering My Smile

A smile is one of God's many gifts. My parents, friends, and even strangers have always commented on what a beautiful smile I have and how I seem to always light up a room with just a simple smile! As a child raised before seat belt laws were enforced, I lost most of my front teeth when my dad hit the back of a city bus. I suffered from low self-esteem for many years because our family of ten could not afford new teeth for me. After several years of waiting, I was finally fitted for an upper partial and my new nickname *Sunshine* was born!

Over the years I had not been able to replace the partials and I often hid my once contagious smile. I love my volunteer work as a Spanish translator, so I finally shared my concerns with Vicky Partin (whom I deem my own personal guardian angel). CVEM helped me get fine dental work, including new dentures. Today I am proudly smiling again and sharing one of God's most precious gifts with my community, as well as with the wonderful volunteers at CVEM's Direct Service program. Now I am the Ministry's Latino connection. I even sang in Spanish during the annual CVEM family Christmas party. God is wonderful, and with CVEM's help I again share one of my greatest gifts... my smile!

Anna Woodall

"Infusion is helping me... I will know how to approach others so no one feels excluded."

- Teen in Infusion Program

Trusting God to See Me Through

Today in an economy that changes by the minute, nothing seems certain. Gas prices change when you lie down to sleep at night, and when you rise for work, there is no guarantee that you have a job. But I know that no matter the situation, I can trust God to see me through.

When I received help at CVEM, I was a single parent of four kids, had just graduated from nursing school, and I did not have any income. I needed to pay for my nursing boards and license and did not know how I was going to do it. I went to one agency and they told me they could not help me but gave me the number for the Chattahoochee Valley Episcopal Ministry. I went on my way thinking that if they could not help, the next place would not either. I was sad because I do not handle rejection well.

I tried five times to reach CVEM by phone and finally got into my van and drove there. To my surprise, the people were very pleasant and happy to help me. Easter is a story of resurrection. When they told me they would pay all my fees, I felt alive again. Going to school had not been in vain; they helped me when I felt helpless. Just like *Footprints in the Sand*, I felt God carrying me through these hard times.

Thanks to CVEM, I now have a job and am on my way to purchasing my first home. I also got married. CVEM's help made me feel like I was somebody and that I deserved the best that life had to offer. I am forever grateful for their assistance.

Crystal Cofer-Williams

Shedding Our Secrets: A Legacy Leads to Hope

In death, Frances Morris has found her voice. Her legacy reaches out to those who are suffering and silenced from that dread *dis-ease* of incest.

For many years as a behavioral health nurse, I've heard clients reveal their stories, hesitantly and riddled with guilt about abuse, often not knowing how to feel or what to do. No one, not even they, understood their unusual behavior, which finally led them to seek professional help. The fear of uncovering this dreadful secret could be paralyzing. Suppose someone knew about the abuse and didn't acknowledge it or, worse, blamed the victim. Is Momma or Daddy too old to accept responsibility? How do I explain why I can't leave my children around a family member who abused me? Do I prosecute? How can I forgive?

These abused persons are often midway through or even close to the end of their lives. They've been locked and chained in prisons with invisible walls.

Frances Morris never told her own story; she only requested in a letter that CVEM support incest victims, as she had been one herself. We are here to set her free so she may finally rest in peace, in hope that her legacy may bring peace to others.

This new ministry, "Shedding Our Secrets," has become one of my passions. I want to invest my energy and empower victims and survivors to find a safe haven for healing.

Agnes Shelton

Why I Invest in CVEM

God has been good to me. While I am not a wealthy man, I am financially comfortable and feel responsible to help those in need. Because I have adequate, though not unlimited, resources, I am accountable to God and myself to make the best possible decisions about how and with whom I will share them. I have chosen CVEM as one agency with which I share for two simple, yet telling reasons: the first is that every penny I contribute goes to help someone in need. I suppose there are other agencies that can honestly make that claim, but I cannot think of one. The second is Vicky Partin and her devoted staff and volunteers. Each and every day they make prayerful, thoughtful, and compassionate decisions about how each dollar can best be used to help people in the greatest need. I have absolute trust in them and their process. God has richly blessed us with these devoted Christians and the ministry of CVEM.

Charlie Kankel

"Here's a little something for the Ministry. Remember I told you when you helped me that I'd pay you back when I got a settlement from the wreck.

*I don't know
what I would have done
without you.*

I was desperate.

So I'm making my rounds to all the places that helped me."

Michael walked into CVEM with a \$300 check, a far greater sum than he received.

