



# Together We Cope

Volume 40

November 2015

## BRIDGING THE GAP



### Adopt a Child brightens the holidays

The holidays are on the horizon, and Together We Cope needs help to make them brighter for our youngest clients through our popular Adopt a Child program. "This really makes a difference for families at an important time of the year, and we're grateful that so many people support us," said Executive Director Kathryn Straniero. The program serves 1,500 children and teenagers.

Monetary donations before December 9 will help TWC stock "Santa's Workshop," where volunteer "elves" like Sue Leigh (above) will choose two gifts from the wish list of each child we sponsor. People who enjoy shopping during the holiday season are invited to donate toys and other goodies on our wish list. Items that appeal to teenagers are especially welcome.

For information, contact Tina Kessens at [tkessens@togetherwecope.org](mailto:tkessens@togetherwecope.org) or 708.633.5040, x 7231.

### Our wish list

#### Classics

board games  
stuffed animals  
cars and trucks  
dolls & doll clothes  
story books  
Play-Doh  
coloring books  
Fisher-Price  
preschool toys  
art sets  
Legos  
basketballs  
footballs  
craft kits

#### Teen favorites

flannel sleep pants  
Axe toiletries  
wallets and purses  
makeup  
fashion scarves  
costume jewelry  
nail care kits  
t-shirts  
hats and gloves  
body wash  
lotion  
cologne  
hair accessories

#### Gift cards

iTunes  
Subway  
McDonald's  
Portillo's  
movie theaters  
Target  
Walmart  
Buffalo Wild Wings  
Wendy's  
Wingstop  
GameStop  
Simon Mall

### TWC makes appeal for increased support

Even though 2.4 million new jobs were created in 2014, America's poverty rate is stuck at the same place it has been for four years, the U.S. Census Bureau reported this fall. The news came as no surprise to staff at Together We Cope, where the number of people seeking help continues to rise. Many of them are the working poor—people struggling to support their families on low-wage jobs who need help to make ends meet.

The increasing demand for services means the agency needs more help, said Kathryn Straniero, executive director at TWC. "Despite the support we are receiving from the community, we find ourselves in extraordinarily tight financial circumstances," she said. "We are making a special appeal, and we hope people will respond."

Together We Cope relies heavily on community support, with 78 percent of necessary funding provided by area residents, businesses and organizations. Another 8 percent is generated by sales from Nu2u, the agency's resale shop. Only 14 percent is covered by government grants.

*"Despite the support we are receiving from the community, we find ourselves in extraordinarily tight financial circumstances."*

"We have always been extremely conservative when it comes to our expenses because our focus is on our clients," Straniero said. Of every dollar that comes to the agency, 93 cents goes directly to client programs and services. This level of fiscal management earned TWC its fifth four-star rating in September from Charity Navigator (see "TWC ranks among top 5 percent of U.S. charities," inside), which ranks nonprofits nationwide.

Straniero said she feels hopeful that TWC supporters will respond to the appeal for an increase in monetary contributions. "So many people want to help their neighbors," she said. "They truly care about this community, and they will do what it takes to keep it strong for all of us."

[To make a donation, click here](#) or send a check to 17010 South Oak Park Ave., Tinley Park IL 60477.



## It's hard to ask for help

As any of our clients can tell you, it's hard to ask for help. We all want to manage on the money we make, so we work hard and stretch every dollar as far as it can go. That's what we do at Together We Cope.

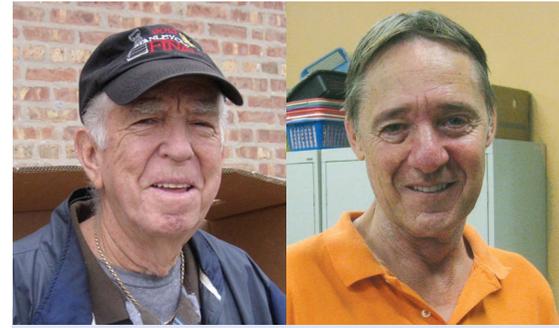
But there are times when it's important to let others know you're in need. For us, this is one of those times. Despite all the financial support, food drives and the countless contributions of winter coats, toys and warm pajamas we will gratefully receive this holiday season, we find ourselves in a tight situation right now. On behalf of our clients, I am asking for extra support.

Most of our clients have jobs, but they're still struggling to stay in their homes, to keep their children warm and fed, to keep their cars running so they can go to work. Although we hear the economy is getting better, the number of people who need our help isn't getting any smaller. In fact, it continues to grow. These are our neighbors, and they are counting on us to come through.

We will always do everything we can for them, but we cannot do it without you. We are fortunate that so many people think of Together We Cope at this time of year. Your generosity makes such a difference—something we hear from our clients many times throughout the season. I am grateful that our focus on "neighbor helping neighbor" truly brings out the best in so many people.

[To make a donation now, click here.](#) We are grateful for any amount you are able to give. Thank you so much. We wish you an exceptional holiday season.

Kathryn Straniero, *Executive Director*



## Who's volunteering at TWC now?

If you've ever made a donation to our food pantry, chances are good that you met Fred Hill (left). The Midlothian resident has been volunteering at TWC for seven years, coming in three to four days each week to stock the shelves, unload the truck, and pick up donations as well. "I have the Thursday route," he said. "We go to Family Harvest Church, Chick-Fil-A, Outback Steakhouse and Starbucks," where staff are "pretty appreciative of the work we do at Together We Cope." Fred became a volunteer at the suggestion of his brother, Ed Hill, a fellow volunteer. "Busy hands are happy hands. And I like the camaraderie," Fred said. He retired from Illinois Bell after 35 years.

Ed Hill is also responsible for one of our newest volunteers, John Murrhy of Oak Forest. Retired from truck driving and from his family's wooden pallet business, he was looking for someplace to volunteer. After church one morning, Ed recommended he come to TWC. "Everyone's great," John said. "And it feels good to help other people." John volunteers in the pantry three days a week, stocking shelves and driving our truck. "I'm really enjoying myself here," he said.

## In memoriam



We were deeply saddened to lose volunteer Dolores Rydberg, who volunteered every Friday morning at Nu2u starting in 2010. "Dolores was wonderful to work with. She always had a ready

smile and positive attitude. She will be greatly missed," said Cori Scanlan, manager of the resale shop. Our hearts go out to Dolores' family and friends.



## Nu2u's fresh approach

Anyone who's shopped at Nu2u lately has probably noticed a change. The layout has been reconfigured to make it easier for customers to find something special at a great price. And new signs through the store echo the message you can't miss on the back wall: Shopping at Nu2u supports Together We Cope and helps your neighbors in need in 27 south suburban communities. "We wanted to make it a better shopping experience," said Cori Scanlan, store manager. "And we want to be sure people know that they're supporting a good cause." More updates are planned for 2016, Scanlan said.



## Winter coat drive is top priority for Nu2u

It was still summer when Cori Scanlan started looking for 500 winter coats.

The annual coat drive is her top priority, Scanlan said. "From size 12 months to men's 5X, we need them all. And none of them will go to waste."

With this winter predicted to be a particularly cold one, Scanlan knows dozens of families will need TWC's help staying warm. "Every year, some families will come into the food pantry to pick up groceries on a really cold day, and our volunteers will see a mom just wearing a sweater, or a little boy in a zip-up hoodie. Because of our coat drive, we can send them home with groceries and with a warm jacket or coat, too," she said.

The annual coat drive has been well supported by the community. This year, Parkview Christian Church in Orland Park donated \$1,000 for the program and an anonymous donor offered to buy 100 new coats as well. "This is a huge help," Scanlan said. "We really appreciate the support."

For details on supporting the coat drive, go to [togetherwecope.org](http://togetherwecope.org) or call Cori at 708.633.9180.

## TWC ranks among top 5 percent of U.S. charities

In bridging the gap for families in crisis, Together We Cope has received its fifth consecutive four-star rating from the leading charity evaluator in America, placing it among the top 5 percent of charities nationwide.

"This 'exceptional' designation from Charity Navigator differentiates [the



agency] from its peers and demonstrates to the public it is worthy of their trust," said Michael Thatcher, president and CEO.

"Receiving four

out of a possible four stars indicates that your organization adheres to good governance and other best practices" for sound fiscal management and commitment to accountability and transparency, he wrote.

Charity Navigator, which applies data-driven analysis to the charitable sector, currently attracts more visitors to its website than all other charity rating groups combined.

Kathryn Straniero, executive director at TWC, said the agency was deeply honored to receive the top rating for the fifth year in a row. "We see both enormous need as well as continued community support, and our focus on 'neighbor helping neighbor' truly brings out the best in so many people. This recognition from Charity Navigator acknowledges the trust so many have placed in us."



## Rolling out the Red Carpet for you!

We're planning a great evening of dining, dancing and exciting prizes during Together We Cope's annual Red Carpet Event on Friday, March 4, 2016, at Odyssey Country Club in Tinley Park.

As always, a delicious buffet dinner will be offered during an evening that also includes silent and live auctions of great prizes, plus other fun raffles. A fabulous selection of jewelry, sports tickets and memorabilia and vacation getaways are among the items guests can bid on during the evening—or online. For those who want to support us but can't attend, Auctions by Cellular will once again conduct the silent auction via cell phone texts and online bidding. The popular band, Connexion, will be back to provide music for dancing all evening.

Tickets are \$100 each, or \$950 for a table of 10 reserved in advance. For information, contact Katlin Bewley at [kbewley@togetherwecope.org](mailto:kbewley@togetherwecope.org) or 708.263.0302, x 6107.

"This event is always a fun evening with family and friends. It's also our biggest fundraiser of the year, and we count on this to support our client programs all year long," said Kathryn Straniero, executive director at TWC.

Several levels of sponsorship are available and include free tickets and advertising space in the program book.

More information is at [togetherwecope.org](http://togetherwecope.org).

## Thanks for a great evening!

More than 300 of our best friends joined us for the annual Pasta Extravaganza at Orland Chateau on Oct. 7. The popular annual event, which provides a fun family night of great food and betting on exciting videotaped horseraces, was topped off this year by a new treat—a sundae bar provided by Plush Horse Ice Cream Shoppe in Tinley Park.

Executive Director Kathryn Straniero said, "We were grateful to see so many loyal supporters. And our wonderful volunteers made it possible including teams from Kohl's stores in Frankfort and Tinley Park." Kohl's also donated \$500 for each team.

Please support the local businesses that supported us, including:

Al's Beef; Angelo's Fresh Market; Aurelio's Pizza; Baby's; Bailey's; Barraco's Pizza; Beggar's Pizza; Bella Mia; Buca Di Beppo; Buffalo Wild Wings; Chick-Fil-A; Creative Cakes; Culver's; Cuzin's; Durbin's; EAT Enterprises; Ed & Joe's; Eurofresh; Famous Dave's; Fat Rickey's; Francesca's; Frankie's Ristorante; Gatto's; Hooter's; Isabella's; Jewel; Jimmy John's, Crestwood; Jimmy John's, Tinley Park; Kenootz Pizza; Labriola Baking Company; Let's Do Lunch; Little Joe's; Mama Vesuvio's East; Marcotte's; McDonald's; Nancy's Pizzeria; Nick's Barbeque; Olive Garden; Panera Bread; Papa Joe's; The Patio; Plush Horse in Tinley Park; Rich's Pizza Joint; Rubino's Italian Imports; Salina's Pasta & Pizza; Subway; Walt's; Winston's Market; Wooden Paddle Pizza.

### TWC Board of Directors

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17010 S. Oak Park Ave.  
Tinley Park, IL 60477  
708.633.5040

### Administrative Center

17728 S. Oak Park Ave.  
Tinley Park, IL 60477  
708.263.0302

### Nu2u Resale Shop

17010 S. Oak Park Ave.  
Tinley Park, IL 60477  
708.633.9180

### Website

[togetherwecope.org](http://togetherwecope.org)



## A client's story

### Medical mishap threatens family's finances

Erica and Justin have always played by the rules. They worked hard and bought a house, where they are raising their two children. When Justin lost his job three years ago, their savings supported them until he found work again this summer. Erica, facing a hysterectomy, found a job at a south suburban company where health insurance would help pay the cost. She worked for three months until coverage kicked in, then scheduled the 90-minute surgery. But an error during the operation extended it to over four hours, put her in the hospital for two days and left her with severe complications. Recovering meant being off work for a month. To help his wife through the ordeal and to keep the family going, Justin took several days off as well.

As Erica focused on moving beyond the unexpected medical ordeal, her children and husband did all they could to help. But the family fell behind on

some bills. Justin's paycheck covered a utility bill, but with school on the horizon, they worried about coming up with fees that totaled more than \$600. Making their mortgage payment also seemed impossible. That's when they turned to Together We Cope.

The agency came up with funds to cover their mortgage for a single month, enabling Erica and Justin to spend their paychecks on all their other bills.

While they were offered access to the food pantry as well as vouchers for the resale store that could have helped them make sure their children had new clothes for the school year, they declined, said caseworker Tina Hennis.

"Erica had been a volunteer at Together We Cope at some point in the past," she said. "She said she felt others needed the food and clothing more than they did."

### Bonefish Grill event benefits TWC

For the second time since it opened in 2013, Bonefish Grill in Orland Park hosted a fundraiser for Together We Cope. On September 19, the restaurant donated 15 percent of the total check when diners presented a special event-day flyer.

The restaurant selected the agency as the beneficiary for its grand opening, selling tickets for a tasting event that quickly sold out.

"Bonefish Grill is one of the area's most popular restaurants," said Kathryn Straniero, executive director at TWC. "We're honored and grateful to be chosen for their support."