



BRIDGING THE GAP



Our community keeps the pantry well stocked

Together We Cope's food pantry has experienced an outpouring of support this spring and summer, helping to fill the gap that often occurs after the traditional holiday giving at Thanksgiving and Christmas.

The "Stamp out Hunger" drive, for example, brought in nearly 13,000 pounds of food this year. That is the National Association of Letter Carriers Tinley Park Post Office campaign to pick up donated food at the front doors of homes and businesses in the community. Tinley Park residents have been very generous in this campaign every year, and this annual donation is of tremendous help in keeping our clients stocked with nutritious food during the summer months.



It's pasta time again!

Save the date: Our annual Pasta Extravaganza and Night at the Races is scheduled for Wednesday, Oct. 5 at the Orland Chateau in Orland Park. This family-friendly event draws a big crowd each year and is a major fundraising activity for Together We Cope.

Children love the great variety of food, choosing from pasta, pizza, meat and sandwich entrees all donated by dozens of area restaurants that support TWC's work in the region. Adults enjoy the "fun money" gambling on pre-recorded horse races and using the "fun winnings" to take chances on beautiful gift baskets.

"People love Pasta Extravaganza because there's something for everyone," said Tina Kessens of the agency's fundraising department. "Everybody has a good time, with good food and good company. It's a chance for families to be together in a fun atmosphere."

Tickets for the all-you-can-eat dinner are a great deal at \$25 for adults and \$5 for children ages 3 to 12. Further information is at 708-263-0302, Ext. 6107.

Pasta Dinner at a glance: Date and time: Wednesday, Oct. 5 — from 6 to 9 p.m.
Place: Orland Chateau, 14500 So. LaGrange Road, Orland Park
Cost: \$25 for adults and \$5 for children ages 3 to 12
Info: TWC Fundraising Department, 708-263-0302, Ext. 6107

Other smaller drives have been conducted in various neighborhoods or by organizations looking for ways to reach out to their neighbors in need. Gordon Collins, TWC's food pantry manager, said he is happy to work with anyone who wants to collect food staples for our clients. He can provide bins for collection, a pickup of the food if necessary, and a list of most needed items at our pantry. He notes that there is a particular need at this time for personal care items, which are requested often by our clients. Donations of bar soap, shampoo and conditioner, deodorant, disposable razors, shaving cream, toothpaste and toothbrushes, or mouthwash are greatly appreciated. Gordon can be reached at gcollins@togetherwecope.org.



Celebrating the generosity of some good friends

Sometimes you get a miracle just when you need it the most. That was the case with Together We Cope's aging truck, which has so many uses that the reliable old vehicle just wore out. In fact, two

of its wheels simply fell off one day as two of our volunteers drove it to the Greater Chicago Food Depository to pick up groceries for our clients. Those wonderful gentlemen actually got out of the truck and chased the wheels before they could do any damage to the traffic behind them!

During that time we got a visit from a representative of the Great Lakes Charitable Foundation. They'd just purchased a new truck for another local non-profit agency, and they were here to ask if we might also need a new vehicle. We filled out a grant request and in just a few months a \$50,000 check arrived in the mail. At the time, our poor old truck was back in the shop for more repairs.

We purchased a new vehicle from Rizza Ford in Orland Park, where generous employees also collected boxes of food for donation to our food pantry. Our new truck has a lift, something very much appreciated by our pantry volunteers who previously did the strenuous job of loading and unloading our old truck with no lift. Gordon Collins, our food pantry manager, reports that our volunteers are a very happy bunch these days! We've also had an offer from a local businessman to donate his services to put the TWC lettering on the sides of the truck. Our truck does double duty, picking up food for the pantry and also picking up furniture donated to Nu2u, our resale shop. The truck then delivers the furniture to customers who purchase it from our shop, where proceeds go to support TWC client programs.



Trying out the lift on TWC's new truck are, from left, Kevin Navas and Tom O'Neil of Rizza Ford in Orland Park, TWC Executive Director Kathryn Straniero, and Gordon Collins, manager of TWC's food pantry.

In our work at Together We Cope, we rely on the kindness of south suburban residents who genuinely want to help their neighbors in need. So many times over the years we've observed that a donation comes in at exactly the time we need it. Once, years ago, we struggled with the issue of providing healthy breakfast food to our clients. That very week we received a large donation of cereal from a local distributor. We want all of our donors and supporters to know how very much we appreciate their generosity. You need only to see the gratitude on the faces of our clients to know how deeply touched they are by your kindness.

—Kathryn Straniero, executive director

Equipped for success

More than 1,000 youngsters in need will head back to the classroom in August equipped with some of the most basic items necessary to succeed at school. They have what they need because of the tremendous generosity of Together We Cope supporters and donors who provided the funds for a new backpack and a box of school supplies for each child.

New this year in TWC's annual Back to School campaign was an outreach for new socks and underwear, a big essential that many parents struggle to afford when they have several children to outfit for school. Many individuals and organizations conducted a "Sock it to me" drive suggested by TWC as a way to provide youngsters with the socks and underwear.

Sincerest thanks to all who hiked, biked and swung for us this summer!

Together We Cope thanks all the generous people who attended our annual golf outing at the beautiful Odyssey Country Club in June. We also are grateful to our friends who participated in the Greater Chicago Food Depository annual Hunger Walk in June to earn food credits for our agency. We salute the brave souls who did the 2016 INTENT Duathlon benefiting our work in the south suburbs, running and biking for a total of 15 miles throughout downtown Tinley Park and the surrounding forest preserves.

We appreciate the many ways the community showed its support for our mission to assist area families in temporary crisis.

The golf outing was a sell-out, with nearly 150 golfers enjoying the club's 18-hole golf course and later bidding on great items in the live and silent auctions during dinner. Master Sponsors of this year's event were Collision Damage Experts and Specialized Staffing Solutions Inc. Grand Sponsor was Country Financial – Bob Smith. Ball sponsor was Ray Kusinski. Eagle Sponsors were Action Sertoma and Edwards Realty. Major Sponsors were MB Financial and Molly Maid. Breakfast Sponsor was Vee Pak. We also are grateful for the many hole sponsors who supported us this year.

Two new smiling faces greet Nu2u customers

Together We Cope welcomes two new employees in our resale shop, Nu2u.

Tammy DeBevec joined the Nu2u staff in April, where she had volunteered since January of 2015. Her enthusiasm for Together We Cope was profound enough that she left her job at a local restaurant, where she had been a bartender and server.

Tammy, her daughter Ariel and her two dogs (Tinsel and Chloe), reside in Oak Forest. They have lived there since 2002, but her roots are in Tinley Park. She grew up just a few blocks from the Nu2u shop and can recall when the building housed a Ben Franklin store during her childhood. Tammy has a son who resides in Park Forest. She is also the proud grandmother of three grandchildren. She has volunteered for the Hunger Walk and the Intent Duathlon, both of which benefit Together We Cope, and the TWC "Luau on the Links" golf outing. She said she loves participating in the fundraising events and plans to help out at future events as well.

Lena Dunn started working in the Nu2u shop in May. She left another resale shop after five years of employment, seeking a "change of pace," she said. She was introduced to Together We Cope by another employee here who also had worked at the same resale shop with Lena. She said she enjoys the camaraderie



Tammy DeBevec (left) and Lena Dunn greet customers with big smiles at Nu2u, TWC's resale shop.

at Nu2u and is happy to be a part of the Together We Cope team.

Lena has lived in Orland Hills for more than 20 years. She resides with her parents, her brother Dominic, and three cats: Rosie, Josie and Binx. She is learning more about Together We Cope every day. "I like the way everybody here goes out of their way to help people" she

commented. She related a story where a client wished to purchase an item, but didn't have enough cash with her. An employee lowered the price to accommodate the client. It was a "win-win" for everybody, she said.

We welcome Tammy and Lena to Nu2u, and look forward to seeing them grow with Together We Cope.

TWC says 'thank you' to its wonderful volunteers

Three area residents took top honors when Together We Cope recognized its volunteers during an appreciation lunch this spring. Nearly 180 people volunteer their time and talent to the agency throughout the year.

Honored for giving the most volunteer hours to TWC during 2015 were Leonard Schaafsma of Oak Forest with 1,434 hours, Carmen Bagnola of Tinley Park with 1,197 hours, and Jan Schweig of Tinley Park with 948 hours.

Other volunteers were given service pins

for their years of volunteering. Recognized for 20 years were Cindy Beneventi and Robin Fredrickson. Honored for 15 years were Connie Evans, Joan Orrico, Gene Orrico and Nancy Rosian.

Ten-year volunteers are Cheryl Bruozas, Mattie Buckner, Valerie Chudy, Barbara Harris, Nellie Hayes and Nancy Lilly.

Five-year volunteers are Rose Bryda, Gordon Collins, Debbie Fickett, Cheyenne Gallai, Fred Hill, JoAnn Hillblom, Bill Hinz, Donna Holic, Larry Holic, Kenneth Humpf Jr., Mary Hunter, Donna King, Sandy Melton, Marie Miller, Jetz Moreno, Joan Onak, Mike O'Neal, George Rumbaugh, Kathy Scatena, Robert Smith, and Victor Vaca.



Together We Cope honored agency volunteers during a recent appreciation lunch. Receiving top honors for most hours of service are, from left, Jan Schweig of Tinley Park, Carmen Bagnola of Tinley Park, Executive Director Kathryn Straniero, and Leonard Schaafsma of Oak Forest.



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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



A client's story

When hard work is not enough

Carol worked hard all of her life and did her best to pay her bills on time. Because she was so independent, it was very difficult for her to ask for any kind of help. But there came a time when she did need assistance, and made the very difficult decision to contact Together We Cope's Homeless Prevention Call Center.

Carol came to Illinois with her mother and disabled son after leaving the child's father in Oklahoma. She hoped to get a fresh start in an environment with better job opportunities. Her child's father did not provide stability to the family and was an alcoholic. So Carol began a new job at an insurance company in Illinois, but the long hours kept her away from her autistic son at times and soon he began to have problems in school. There was little time to be in contact with her son's school, or time to provide the parental guidance he needed. Her mother could not care for the boy because of age related illnesses. To make matters worse, Carol became ill and missed two weeks of work, falling behind in her rent. This had never happened to her before, and she began to panic.

Carol took a new job that provided flexible hours so she could spend more time with her son. She gave two weeks of notice at the insurance company, but unfortunately that firm terminated her immediately and her new job did not start for two weeks. This left Carol with no income. Her son's father was already \$16,000 in arrears for child support and could not help. Carol's mother receives Social Security and her child receives SSI benefits, but this income would not cover the rent. By the time Carol would receive her first check from the new job, she'd be two months behind on her rent.

Carol was surprised and deeply grateful when Together We Cope assisted her with the overdue rent. Then she began receiving groceries from our food pantry. She was tearful in her appreciation, explaining how good it was to actually have some food in the refrigerator and freezer. She also received a voucher to shop at Nu2u, TWC's resale shop, for much needed clothing for her growing son. Carol was advised to use the money she saves on food and clothing to have funds available for rent and utilities in the future. Finally, this three-generation family was on its way to financial stability, and Carol's son would have more time with his mother.

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