

Neighbors Helping Neighbors ENews Brief

7 January 2024

We had to close our services on Saturday, due to the storm. We served 180 people groceries on Friday. Denise got people warm clothes and blankets. And our heroes, Roddy and Matt, literally braved the storm to serve people Ready-2-Eat bags on Saturday. Thanks to all of you who came out, despite (and because of) the storm.

Ghena came on Friday! Here's the story of Ghena. We found Ghena on our doorstep last winter, near death with severe frostbite and hypothermia. Cultivate Initiatives, Concordia College, Hot Meals and pantry volunteers worked together to get him to the hospital, where they saved his life.

A few weeks later, another ice storm hit and nailed Ghena again. Next we saw him, he had both legs amputated and was unhoused, in a wheelchair. We didn't see him again for months. He later told me that he wouldn't come because he was ashamed that he was helpless in a wheelchair. How does one survive without legs on the street? How does one protect oneself? How does one sleep? How does one go to the bathroom?

IN THE SHELTER OF EACH OTHER

We have created a place where people can come to help meet their basic human needs. We provide food, clothing, personal care supplies, showers, laundry and medical care. And we are participating in a social process of crucial import. We are providing shelter to our neighbors and to each other.

*It is in the shelter of each other
that the people live.*

Irish Proverb

'Shelter', defined literally, is a place of temporary protection. However, there is a much more profound and nuanced meaning. It is this meaning into which we are living. Imagine what the word 'shelter' could mean in your life. You feel sheltered when you feel safe, when you feel nurtured, when you are treated as a person of inherent value and significance, when someone stands by your side...

Note the presence of other people in all these examples. The African word, 'Ubuntu' (pronounced ooboontoo), means that a person is a person through other people. 'Ubuntu' is about community. Community is central to our understanding of 'shelter'.

I assert that we are re-building and re-defining community.

True, community preceded us all. However, in the United States we have witnessed the slow dissolution of community these last 50 years, and the widespread devastation of community with COVID. In the presentation, [Fighting Hunger & Loneliness Through Community: The Woodstock Pantry Story](#), we share more about the epidemic of loneliness in our country caused by the breakdown of community.

So, in fact, we do need to re-build community. And we have an opportunity to re-define community in a way that transcends implicit biases and hurtful, exclusive ways of thinking to embrace inclusive, expansive and affirmative ways of thinking.

Consider the phrase, 'Neighbors Helping Neighbors'. It is based on the understanding that, at any time, any of us can be standing on either side of the table, sharing or receiving. Our socio-economic-political system can plunge any of us from wealth into

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poverty, acceptance into rejection...in an instant. And suddenly, we find ourselves unable to care for ourselves. We find ourselves shunned. We find ourselves alone.

Recognizing this horrifying reality can be ours, we stand together. We recognize every person's inherent value and significance. We treat each other with dignity and respect. Importantly, we are inclusive of us all. We are 'Neighbors Helping Neighbors'.

YOU DON'T SEE ME

I saw an elder homeless woman, resting on a bench.
She glanced at me, filling my mind with her story.

'I am here. Do you see me?
Here I am, sitting on this bench,
behind the facade of the *American Dream*.'

'I don't blame you for not wanting to look.
I embody the failure of our society.
I also wouldn't want to see me.'

'Yet, I live with this problem. I need to eat.
And I must find somewhere to relieve myself.
For I cannot stop my bodily functions...much as
I know that would make us both more comfortable.'

'And I must sleep, sometime, somewhere.
The night is dangerous on the streets.
I must stay awake during the night.
It, you must know, is my survival.'

'So, I try to sleep in my car during the day.
But I am roused by the tapping on my window
of the policeman with the billy-club, who tells me,'

"Sleeping in your car during the day is against the law!"

'I remember, so long ago, living in a house.
It had a bed and I slept at night. And it had a
bathroom where I could care for myself in private.'

'I never imagined that I would wake each morning wondering
where I could go to the bathroom, if I would be allowed in
the bathroom at the store, or if I might be kicked out
because my clothes were too dirty and smelly.'

'I never imagined that financial collapse would be
such a cascade of loss, or that one thing could
push me down again...and again...and again.'

'And yet, here I sit on this street corner,
in the rain and in my desperation.'

'And you don't see me.'

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2023 ANNUAL REVIEW

I am enclosing the *2023 Year-End Review and the 2024 At-a-Glance Report*. It has been a phenomenal year! And our incredible volunteers were at the center of it all! I'm honored to be part of this community! And I'm excited about our work in 2024!

VOLUNTEER SIGN-UPS

Woodstock Pantry - Volunteers sign up each week for the shifts they want to work.

[WP SIGN UP SHEET JANUARY](#)

Hot Meals 3rd Saturday Team, you are up! Your team lead, Debbie, will be in touch.

Clothing Closet and **Hygiene & Harm Reduction** are individually organized.

The more cross-over we have between programs, e.g., Hot Meals volunteers working pantry shifts, the more opportunities you have to participate in ways that interest you, and the stronger we will be as an organization.

So, if you are interested in any of our programs, even if it's just to experiment, let me know and I will set you up!

THE WOODSTOCK PANTRY FUNDRAISER & FRIENDRAISER

We are raising funds to pay for our new pantry facility. We need your help!

You can ask people to join us by:

1. contributing on our [gofundme.com](https://www.gofundme.com) page, or with this QR code
2. and sharing this request with their colleagues, friends and family as well as community organizations and businesses (add to your social media, send emails, make calls).



THANK YOU ALL FOR EVERYTHING YOU DO!

Celebrate...

It Takes a Community, And We Are It!