



Friendship House

Newsletter

Christian Ministry Making A Difference In The Lives of Homeless People

Changing Lives...One Pair of Jeans At A Time! Reflections of 10 Years of Ministry

by Linda Harrison, CBD Director

When most people think of The Clothing Bank of Delaware, they naturally think of clothes. However, in the 10 years since the CBD began, the clothes have never been our end goal. They are really the means where lives begin changing at so many levels. I am often asked how I got involved with the Clothing Bank. I simply responded to a handwritten note posted at Christ Church and my life changed...it became richer! I became a member of the Friendship House family. I accepted the challenge to create and implement a job-training program for disenfranchised women. Imagine my first day: a garage bay at the Sunday Breakfast Mission; an old dented truck; a large wooden table; a few racks; piles and piles of clothes; 1 distribution partner. The room was bursting at the seams with clothes, but it was also bursting with potential...potential to make a difference...potential to change people's lives.

One key to our success is being blessed with strong relationships that have developed during the last 10 years. The first people I met were Max and Max. Both are still with us today. Max Dooley is still making monthly deliveries with the same faithful enthusiasm. Max Richardson was there to work with me on that first day and is still here in spirit! Max Richardson and I were a team. We fed off each other and always believed anything was possible. These two Max' exemplify the many volunteers and staff who have claimed ownership in CBD by their presence and always have our best interests at heart.

Likewise, women who have been in our job-training program become family. Every week someone from the



Rosie Grant, Pat Burrows, Linda Harrison, Karen Johnson

past stops in for a hug. Regardless of how their experience ended, during their time with us: they change and we change. Women who have struggled with life's challenges, develop self-esteem as their confidence grows. We witness this as they work with volunteer groups, greeting and assisting donors, and taking pride in filling orders for those in need. One poignant moment occurred watching the

women comfort a mother while selecting a suit for her son to be buried in. He had been shot. My "mother's pride" is strongest when I think about how often women walk through our door lost and soon discover themselves found. Their courage is to be admired!

Over the years, the greatest joys are still the most basic. Delivering a pair of sneakers to a homeless woman at the Women's Center and watching her walk away a little taller. Delivering Halloween costumes to an inner-city day care, hearing the squeals of joy coming from the soon-to-be goblins, princesses, and super-heroes. Talking to a group of 5th graders delivering 142 bags of children's clothes they collected and sorted. Their excitement showed in their smiles as they experienced how it felt to share and to care. Connecting with volunteers who return time after time, making the CBD a priority in their busy lives. Congratulating a woman who gets a new job, completes a recovery milestone, or reconnects with her estranged family.

We never know what path a person has taken to get to our door- donors, volunteers, clients, and staff. Everyday is different. While the clothes are never the end, focusing

on the clothing gives us a clue about the real power of what we do. Consider the pair of jeans in your donation pile right now. As the jeans pass from hand to hand, they also pass from heart to heart and lives are changed...

You bring your donation to the clothing bank where one of our trainees greets you, helps with your bags, and offers you a receipt. This woman, once on the outside without hope, now is beginning to get a glimpse of her potential. She receives and goes back to her work as part of a team to which she now belongs.

Later that week, a volunteer arrives to help sort donations. Your jeans are removed from the bag as the volunteer chats with the woman working next to her. Both get to interact with someone whom they might not meet in their daily life. Through simple conversation, both get a better look at how much we all have in common regardless of our past experiences.

That afternoon, another trainee removes the jeans from

the rack as she selects clothing for someone in need. She is on the helping end, thinking carefully about the needs of others and feeling empowered. She folds the jeans with care and places them in the bag.

The next morning a social worker picks up the order for her client. With those jeans in hand, she knows that whatever else she can or cannot do for her client, today she will offer something tangible and perhaps move someone a step closer to self-sufficiency.

When the client receives the bag and discovers both work and casual clothes, linens, shoes, and such, there are the jeans. The new owner wears the jeans without knowing the care, the thoughtfulness and the love that has gone into their journey. Likewise, the donor has no idea the full impact of her donation. These are the threads that sew us all together to form our community. All of this is built on a simple pair of jeans and yetwe are about so much more than clothes!

Clothing Bank Model Attracts National Donors

Partnering in the community is one of the things that make the Clothing Bank unique among outlets for donated clothing. Over 275 human service workers contact CB when a client needs clothing. By giving away clothing only with a referral, we can trust that not only has need been confirmed but that other issues might also be addressed. By being at the hub of a large network of service providers, more individuals are served with fewer falling through the cracks and we minimize overlap.

Over the past few years, this model has attracted the attention of several national organizations that look to the Clothing Bank to channel their donations into this community. Operation Warm, One Warm Coat, and retailer: Burlington Coat Factory forged noteworthy partnerships with us.

Operation Warm (www.operationwarm.org) is a PA based charity that raises funds and purchases new coats for children across the country. OW has seen our existing network of distribution partners as a key to getting thousands of coats to children in NC County and S.E.PA. The Clothing Bank will coordinate the distribution of an estimated 6000 coats from O.W. this coming season. Scheduled for an October distribution, we are pleased to be expanding our relationship with Operation Warm.

Three years ago, the San Francisco based, One Warm Coat www.onewarmcoat.org, asked CB to receive and distribute coats collected in this region under the O.W.C. initiative. O.W.C. advocates for grassroots groups to collect and donate gently worn coats, as means to address critical needs in their own communities. Groups receive support materials, and then in DE and S.E. PA, O.W.C.



Every year the Clothing Bank distributes more than 150,000 lbs. of donated clothing to 12,000 men, women and children in need

refers them to the Clothing Bank.

This is very popular with Scout troops and area schools committed to community service. An increasing number of area businesses have collected among their employees and provided collection bins for their customers.

This past season, we were introduced by O.W.C. to Burlington Coat Factory who had a nationwide promotion for customers to donate used coats for area charities. We received over a thousand used coats through the University Plaza store. When you're at Burlington Coat Factory, thank them for supporting us.

Learning to Work: Lessons from the Clothing Bank

By Patricia Hunt Burrows, CBD Associate Director

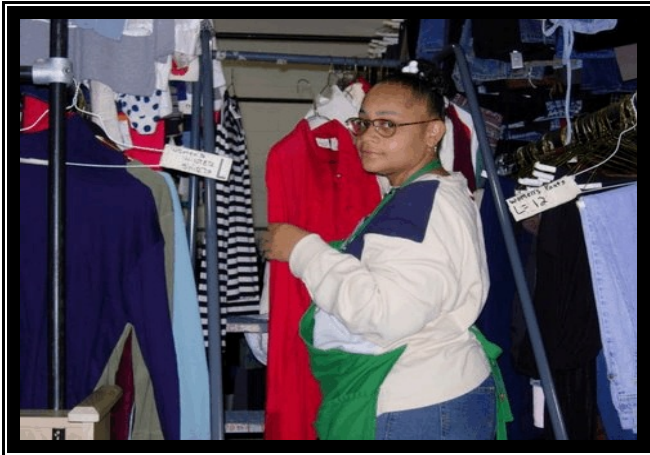
Each year dozens of women come to work in our warehouse. They apply from Prison, Work Release, Drug Rehab, and Shelters hoping for everything and expecting rejection. Because of FH commitment to empowering these women, we are able to say: “Yes” when the world is saying: ‘No’. Trainees receive encouragement, structure, accountability, and the opportunities for success from which confidence is born. Some of our trainees have never worked before. Most have been out of the paid workforce over years of addiction and/or incarceration. For the recovering addict, the previously incarcerated, and the battered woman- the turmoil of transition, the past ‘failures’, the realities of limited resources, and the lack of supportive community are all holes in the personal safety net upon which most of us rely. Regardless of how they

arrive, we affirm that within each woman is the potential to succeed in work and in life.

What were your early lessons about work and where did you learn them? At FH Clothing Bank, the lessons are basic and foundational. The first lesson is about priorities... Getting to work every day, on time, ready to work. No excuses. Obstacles-as-opportunities is the 2nd big lesson: problem solving and relationships, learning new things, risking mistakes that come with the unfamiliar. Third is “I can do it!” This simple work requires attention to details, following directions, doing it the right way, taking pride in the product of one’s labors, finishing something. Good work feels good! The fourth lesson, of many, involves the sense of satisfaction that comes with teamwork, getting things done, helping others, seeing the big picture where your work feeds into something bigger than your part and knowing your part is essential.

At the Clothing Bank, women are given a chance. For those who are ready, the opportunity can become a stepping-stone to a better life. Our trainees are ready to work, committed to building a life, and reclaiming family. Then what? Without even considering the broader social issues of livable wages and affordable housing, they simply need to work.

For employers who are willing to “look past the deed and consider the need”, women who make it through the CB program come with a great reference. They are tested and ready. They have gained skills in Customer Service, attention to detail, and teamwork. They have respect for themselves and for the workplace. They are in the ‘habit’ of working well. They might just work as if their life depends on it...because frequently, it does.



In the last ten years, 245 women have participated in the employment training program.

“Being at the Clothing Bank, I’ve gotten more “treatment” than I ever got in the system. I learned that women can really care for you and not want something from you. I’m not afraid to ask for help. I know I can learn things. I learned how to work... When I got locked up, it was right in front of the Clothing Bank. Today, coming in here is the start of all new things. If I make one person smile today, I feel good. I also learned that on bad days someone here will make me feel better. Before, I thought everyone could have this life except me. Being here, I learned that I can be who I am and you guys will respect me and encourage me. It’s not about a paycheck. It’s a about belonging here”.

...Words from a 2007 grad, now employed full-time at a Grocery Store and settled into permanent housing.

The Clothing Bank At Ten Years Old Crossroads and Challenges

by Bill Perkins, Executive Director

Looking Back

At ten years old, The Clothing Bank has had a history like no other Friendship House ministry. Begun as a joint pilot project of Friendship House, the Sunday Breakfast Mission of the He Is Pleased. Job Program (HIP), the Clothing Bank was conceived as a self-supporting non-profit corporation that would provide employment to homeless women denied benefits by the Welfare Reform Act of 1996. Friendship House's role was as general administration and case management of the women trainees. Within a few months, it was obvious to all that the Clothing Bank pilot project would be stillborn without a capable leader to give the vision flesh. It was at that crucial crossroad that God blessed Friendship House with Linda Harrison, who accepted the position of program coordinator.

By the conclusion of the pilot project in 2000, the Clothing Bank had achieved all of its ministry goals, but was not generating any significant income. The boards of the Sunday Breakfast Mission and HIP both voted to withdraw from the project. Having lost their involvement and financial support, Friendship House had to choose whether to terminate the project or go it alone. Its own motivation for the project had been less as a clothing ministry than as a creative and collaborative employment program for women. To carry on the Clothing Bank on its own would cost Friendship House nearly 20% of its annual financial resources. Once again the Friendship House board found itself at a crossroad with no clear path forward. In the end the board's choice was less a logical decision than a spiritual discernment. Touched by the stories of the women trainees, the board voted to continue to midwife the Clothing Bank ministry with the hope it would ultimately form its own non-profit corporation. This decision was affirmed by grants to Friendship House from the Trinity Church 21st Century Fund and the Jessie Ball DuPont Foundation that provided 50% of the Clothing Bank's operating costs for the next five years.

By 2002, the Clothing Bank had once again outgrown its leased space at the Kalmar Nyckel Shipyard. While the ministry was thriving, it was no closer to becoming a financially independent non-profit organization. As Bill Perkins approached local foundations for the funds to purchase a permanent warehouse for the Clothing Bank, they made it clear that grants would only be forthcoming if Friendship House remained the ministry's corporate sponsor. The Clothing Bank leadership and staff also requested that they be allowed to continue as Friendship House employees. Once

again, the Friendship House board had to decide whether to end the experiment or incorporate the Clothing Bank as a core Friendship House ministry. That fall, the board voted to realign its ministries, removing the Clothing Bank from women's ministry and establishing it as a co-equal Friendship House ministry with Linda Harrison as its director. In 2003, it purchased the warehouse at 1305 N. Jessup St. to serve as the Clothing Bank's permanent home.

At each stage of the Clothing Bank's development, Friendship House recommitted itself to this ministry because it remains vitally important to the fulfillment of the Friendship House mission. It does so less in its *matter* than in its *manner*. In New Castle County, there are several excellent clothing distribution centers and employment training programs to which Friendship House could refer clients in need. None of them, however, possess that unique *manner of ministry* that is characteristic of Friendship House in general and the Clothing Bank in particular. It can be seen in the work environment at the Clothing Bank warehouse where permanent staff, trainees and volunteers work side by side as peers. It is present in the Clothing Bank's unique business model where nearly three hundred churches, businesses, schools, human service agencies and community organization collaborate in a common purpose. Lastly it can be experienced in the manner in which every volunteer is welcomed and every clothing order is treated as a personal act of ministry.

Looking Forward

At ten years old, the Clothing Bank has truly come of age. Still, new crossroads and challenges remain. Since moving to its current location, the Clothing Bank has seen the volume of donated clothing increase exponentially. At a processing cost to Friendship House of \$.80 per lb. of donated clothing, the Clothing Bank's operating expenses have risen as high as 25% of the organization's total budget. As the foundation grants that subsidized the Clothing Bank's development have all expired, Friendship House pays most of the Clothing Bank's operating expenses out of its limited general funds. As with all Friendship House ministries, the Clothing Bank is constantly challenged to live within its means— never sacrificing quality for quantity. Bigger is not necessarily better. Ironically, the Clothing Bank's unique grace is less about the clothes that the manner in which it touches so many lives in their collection and distribution.

Donating Clothes Is Not Enough

Please Consider Becoming A Sponsor of This Vital Friendship House Ministry

With operating expenses at nearly \$1 per pound of donated clothing, it costs the Clothing Bank:

- \$25 to fill a typical clothing order for one person in need
- \$75 to gas up the CBD van to make deliveries
- \$250 to pay the personnel costs of one trainee for one week
- \$1,000 to process a typical clothing drive

Make your check payable to "Friendship House", writing "Clothing Bank" in the memo space.

Address Your Donations To: Friendship House
P.O. Box 1517
Wilmington, DE 19899