



A place of help, hope & healing in Philadelphia!

*Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, but have not love...
(1 Corinthians, 13:1)*



November 25, 2009

Dear Friends,

When we look at the challenges that our nation struggles to resolve, we are reminded that a voice must be heard, a voice which can bring hope to all of us. How appropriate now to reflect on the many reasons for celebrating Thanksgiving. As people of faith, we have strong sentiments for expressing our gratitude. On behalf of the leaders and the staff at *The Place of Refuge*, let me briefly express how grateful we are for your continued support of our outreach—this small hand you extend to reach those who are hurting and broken in north Philadelphia.

A Student Shares Her Journey

Nancy (not her real name), is a young Hispanic woman in her twenties. She was raised by her mother in a single-parent home with regular contacts with her father. Her life in north Philadelphia is characteristic of many young people here. Every year, says Nancy, her family had to move from one apartment to the other—a string of sub-standard houses. This became a way of life for her and her family. Her mother worked full-time as a tour guide in center city, pulling together just enough to get by. As the oldest daughter, while her mother fought to pay the bills, the role of caregiver fell to Nancy. Despite the inconsistencies in housing and parental guidance, she stood out in school as an exemplary student. When the time came for her to work, to help her family with their financial needs, she took a summer job—this turned out, however, to be one of the most painful experiences of her life. It was there that she learned first-hand, the nature of trauma. Through other difficult circumstances, she became an unwedded mother. In spite of all this, she would not let her dreams be deterred. She wanted a good job—she wanted to become a pharmaceutical technician. Through counseling with us, and the support of a loving, Christian nurse, Nancy is now entering her second year in pharmacy school, and is once again, a star student. Some of her older classmates lean on her for tutoring in geometry and trigonometry. Although life continues to be difficult and the hardships of her daily experiences are real, Nancy lives with a sense of hope. The last time we met, she told me that she is back to her faith—which she sees as the anchor of her future. She wants you to know how grateful she is for your support.

Partnerships

- With Esperanza Health Center our **partnership is strengthening** and continues to grow
- We are sending a letter to 30 local universities to seek out interns and **new opportunities to collaborate**
- Our commitment to **reducing youth violence and suicide risk** alongside Temple University and our Communities Empowering Youth partners is being taken to new places with *The Place of Refuge* being asked to attend an inter-school conference on suicide awareness and play liaison to any who come forward
- Through a generous donation from the Enon Tabernacle Reinvestment Fund our outreach to local churches has begun taking shape. We are **challenging a local congregation** with a strong curriculum to help them move forward—The Emotionally Unhealthy Churches

Greasing the Wheel

- We hosted a half-day of **trainings for our staff**. Dr. Smith, our psychiatrist presented on suicide precautions and risk; Dr. Wisecup of the Esperanza Health Center, presented a training on blood-borne pathogens; Jason Martinez presented on anger de-escalation, and I presented on cultural awareness.
- Thanks in large part to Temple University, we are now developing a video that will serve to bring our work to new audiences
- **I finished my year of executive leadership training** at Bryn Mawr University's Non-Profit Executive Leadership Institute and am now officially an alumnus. This proved to be incredible training, far exceeding my expectations. It exposed *Refuge* to top, local non-profit sector leaders.
- Bryan and I received an all-day orientation at Community Behavioral Health—**the official welcome into the medical assistance provider network!**
- The Director of Member Services followed up with that orientation by meeting with Pastor Centeno, the Chair of our Board of Directors and myself—we discussed the structure for sending referrals to *Refuge*.

I must share with you what he said.

"In all the years that I have been involved with mental health services, I have never come across a place like this."

He was moved by the beautiful facility and the promise that it has to bring a true refuge to the people of this community.

The Road Ahead

- Finding therapists who can really push us to the next level
- Transition our counseling model from a subsidized effort into the network model

A Violinist in our Midst

Mary (not her name) has been in counseling with us almost two years now. She was referred to us by a local pastor. As we received one phone call after another, all expressing real concerns for her life, it became all too clear that she truly needed us. She is in her mid-life, the mother of three, raised in a Christian home. She admits anger has played a central role in her life thus far. After numerous disappointments and personal tragedy, she chose to go down skid-row—drugs and alcohol became her closest allies. As I got to know her better, I discovered that this was quite a remarkable woman. For example, upon graduating from high-school, she was called to audition with the Philadelphia Orchestra as a violinist. Fear gripped her in this moment and she experienced what we know as stage-fright. She ran away, and she never discovered what could have been. When our staff was told of her talent, they felt the need to do something more for her. Because of her limited income, she could not afford to pay for classes to return and perhaps sharpen her musical talents. Our staff insisted. As a result, she received financial support to rent a violin—it is amazing to think about what might unfold now that she has picked up her instrument again. She is looking for a tutor, and our prayer is that someone will come forward. As I discovered more and more, I found that she had even been a licensed carpenter. Today, she is picking up the pieces of her life. When I first started working with her, she barely gave me eye contact. Today, I get plenty. Her trust in the process of counseling has taken her some time, but I am already beginning to see a spark in her. You made this possible.

We are so thankful for your help these past few years, for your prayers and your donations, large and small. Truly you have all been gifts to us in this work. Our faith, you see, it points to the One Redeemer who is pursuing us with his love and his grace. Not only this, but he teaches us how to love one another—those near to us now, as well as those who were left behind, but are now found.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Hernandez
Executive Director