

Inter-Faith Celebrates 25 Years!

On Saturday October 4, 2008 Inter-Faith Housing Alliance celebrated twenty-five years of providing services to homeless and near homeless families in the region. The celebration dinner was held at Bethlehem Baptist Church and attended by over 140 guests. Agency founder Lei Barry spoke with pride about Inter-Faith's long history of helping families in need. Board President James Logue presented Ms. Barry with flowers in gratitude for all she has done for the agency, and the community, for over a quarter century.

Perhaps the most moving part of the evening came from Beth Jenkins, Inter-faith's administrative assistant, and graduate of both our Network and Hope Gardens programs.

Beth spoke movingly about her own experience being homeless.

As she explained "The fact that physically I was homeless was obvious. But what I hid inside, and what was far worse than being without a roof over my head, was the shame of failure, the guilt over not being able to provide for my son, and the knowledge that I was utterly alone in the world."

But as Beth and her two year old son stayed with several host congregations in our Network, things began to change. She related that "the people in all the congregations we stayed at expressed an overwhelming message of love and compassion." A hot meal or bag of diapers may seem inconsequential to most of us, but as Beth explains "when you haven't

learned to take them for granted and someone goes out of their way to provided them for you, it makes a deep impression."

Beth remains grateful to the many Network volunteers who truly cared for her when she was in crisis.

"I have been given the gift of a new life because of the people who took the time to get involved." It is a legacy that Beth is "paying forward" as she offers hope and support to new families coming to Inter-Faith for help. ♦



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From Our Executive Director

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Lois Bowman, Program Director
Tamika Holt, Case Manager

Visit our website!

www.i-fha.org

As I reflect on Inter-Faith's 25 years in the community, I am honored to lead the agency and mindful of the increasing need for our services. The recent downturn in the economy is expected to significantly impact those we serve—families living paycheck to paycheck and in imminent danger of homelessness, and those already in crisis.

Inter-Faith is prepared to meet the challenges that lie ahead. We will continue to provide families with comprehensive support, and expand the scope of the services we now offer. To help our families achieve self-sufficiency, we have hired a full time Case Manager, Lesley Nasir. Lesley comes to Inter-Faith with extensive case management experience. In addition to working directly with our families, Lesley will develop new programs designed to ensure that when families leave us, they have the tools they need to be successful in their new, independent lives.

This is an exciting time of positive transition at Inter-Faith. As was said many times at our recent celebration dinner – here's to the next 25 years!

To all those who have volunteered for Inter-Faith Housing Alliance over the last 25 years—Thank You.

What we do is only possible because of what you do. ♦



Lois Bowman To Become Agency's New Network and Volunteer Coordinator

Lois Bowman has worked for the Family Promise Network for 12 years. She served first with Inter-Faith of Indian Valley, and for the last 4 years with our agency in a number of leadership roles.

In January 2009, Lois becomes the new Network and Volunteer Coordinator. She will work to ensure good communication between our agency and the congregations in the Network. She'll also help volunteers to receive the training and support they need to have a positive experience working with our families.

The phone number and email address you currently use to reach Lois will remain

the same. We believe this new position will provide added support for the volunteers who make our programs possible. ♦

Abington Food Cupboard

The Abington Food Cupboard has been in existence since 1970. Since 2006, Inter-Faith Housing Alliance has operated the cupboard, which is located at Holy Trinity Church.

The Food Cupboard is an *enormous resource* in the community. In the first six months of 2008 it provided 405 families with 1475 bags of groceries. Edna Miller is the cupboard's long time director, and Rebecca "Beck" Kelly coordinates donations and supports the more than twenty volunteers.

Since the recent downturn in the economy the cupboard has seen a *significant increase* in requests for food. As Beck explains "We had been serving an average of 62 families per month, but recently that's increased to 84. It's as busy now as it normally would be at Thanksgiving. People are having to choose between paying for heat or food, or between their medications and food."

While the cupboard had been running low, a recent significant donation from Temple Micah following the high holy days, helped to restock the shelves. And with several other large donations scheduled, Beck believes the pantry will make it through the new year.

The concern now is for the coming winter. Beck states that "especially come January, we really could have bare shelves." The cupboard predicts an increase in requests for food this winter and hopes that donations from the community will help them meet that need.

With two young children, Beck Kelly sometimes finds it hard to summon all the energy her volunteer position requires. But, she explains "I need to do this. Whenever I meet with the clients, I think, 'yeah, this is why I do it.' They're so grateful for the food that it really makes it all worth it." Individuals wanting to make a donation of non-perishable food items may deliver them to the cupboard *Monday-Friday, from 9:00am-3:00pm*. The Abington Food Cupboard may be reached at 215-885-2234. ♦



Agency Founder Lei Barry Wins National Award

Inter-Faith Housing Alliance founder Lei Barry, a sales associate with Keller Williams Real Estate in Blue Bell, is one of five individuals chosen by the National Association of Realtors® to receive REALTOR® Magazine's 2008 Good Neighbor Award. Lei won the award for her decades-long commitment to helping homeless families get back on their feet. Lei's work in establishing the hospitality network helped grow Inter-Faith Housing Alliance into a full-service nonprofit that has helped more than 2,500 homeless people improve their lives through an array of services, including Hope Gardens, our two year transitional program.

On behalf of the board, staff and families, we offer our congratulations on this important and well-deserved award. ♦

Congregation Spotlight

In upcoming quarterly newsletters, we will highlight the work of one or two congregations, and the vital support they provide to our families. In this edition, we profile Temple Beth Or in Maple Glen, and St. John's Lutheran Church in Ambler.

Temple Beth Or

Temple Beth Or has worked with Inter-Faith Housing Alliance for nearly 20 years, beginning as a “buddy” congregation in 1990. Buddy congregations partner with the congregation hosting our families overnight. Buddy volunteers cook for our families, stay overnight, and provide transportation, but they do so at the host congregation's building.

In addition to working with families in the Network, Temple Beth Or was an original sponsor of Hope Gardens. In 1994 Inter-Faith's founder Lei Barry approached Debbie Schwartz to ask if the Beth Or Women's Group would sponsor a brand new program—transitional housing where women and their children could stay for up to two years.

Debbie was excited by Lei Barry's vision. She approached her group, asking for a \$10,000 donation to sponsor a Hope Gardens apartment. The money would be used to turn an empty shell apartment into a space a family could call home. The group quickly agreed to the donation and to the long term commitment of supporting the families who live in the sponsored apartment. *It's a commitment they have honored to this day.*

But it's not just the Women's Group who are involved. Members of the men's group have helped families move into and out of apartments, and this past September men's group member Gary Hershman arranged to have an apartment painted for a new Hope Gardens family. Although Gary believed that his donation “wasn't a big deal,” to the family who benefited from his kindness, it was enormous!

Women's Group member Ellen Werther has been a volunteer for many years. She has arranged for families to receive furniture as they move into their new apartments, has donated mulch for Hope Gardens' grounds, and has even provided outreach to other congregations on Inter-Faith's behalf.

Since moving into a new larger building three years ago, Temple Beth Or now hosts our shelter families one month per year, fulfilling a promise Rabbi Greg Marx made to the women's group. Being a Host Congregation takes the efforts of many volunteers who cook for our families, transport them to and from our day center, and stay with them overnight.

The Inter-Faith/Temple Beth Or partnership is a dynamic one, and the benefit to our families has been significant. As Debbie Schwartz explains “*these families are my passion.*” Clearly that passion is felt by many, many members of Temple Beth Or's congregation.

To all those who have volunteered for Inter-Faith Housing Alliance over the last 25 years—*Thank You!*

What we do is only possible because of what you do. ♦

Frequently Asked Questions

How do I become a volunteer of the Inter-Faith Housing Alliance?

If you would like to volunteer for the Inter-Faith Housing Alliance, please fill out our Volunteer Form* and bring it or mail it in to our Volunteer Coordinator. Or call us at 215-628-2334.

How can I make a donation to Inter-Faith Housing Alliance?

Mail in our Donation Form* or if you prefer, call us at 215-628-2334.

Where do your volunteers come from?

Inter-Faith's volunteers come from all over the communities in which Inter-Faith serves. The majority of our volunteers are members of the more than 20 local congregations that support our efforts as Host and Buddy congregations. We are extremely fortunate to have over 2,000 active volunteers. You can apply to volunteer by mail, in person or call us at 215-628-2334.

* Volunteer and Donation Forms can be found at our website, www.i-fha.org.

Congregation Spotlight

St. John's Lutheran Church

In 2008, St. John's Lutheran Church of Ambler set a goal to raise \$10,000 for Inter-Faith Housing Alliance. They then increased that goal to \$15,000. And now Pastor Sandra Ellis-Killian states the congregation is "*contemplating raising that goal to \$20,000.*" What makes this all the more remarkable is that St. John's Lutheran Church has 58 members.

2008 is St. John's Centennial year and the congregation decided to celebrate its significance by working with an organization close to home. They chose Inter-Faith Housing Alliance.

As Pastor Killian explains "We knew that our donation to Inter-Faith wasn't going for a quick fix. Inter-Faith helps turns things around for people for generations to come. It helps break the cycle of poverty and homelessness. Now that's staking a claim in your community."

To meet their goal, St. John's held a "Kids For Kids Festival of the Arts." The event featured music, art, drama, and poetry created and presented by St. John's and Inter-Faith's member children. Adults participated as well, and several of our families told their own stories. One of our mothers spoke to the audience, telling us, "What does homelessness look like? It looks like me. I am the face of homelessness."

The event was very moving and that was the idea. Says Pastor Killian "We wanted the event not to be just about raising money. We wanted it to be about raising awareness; about raising consciousness. We wanted to blast the stereotypes of what homelessness is. The education piece is equally important to the financial piece."

St. John's committed congregants are now planning a Christmas Jazz Vespers fund raiser, scheduled for Sunday December 7 from 7:00-9:00pm. While the admission is free, a Free-Will Offering will be taken and 100% will be donated to Inter-Faith's programs.

Why do so few people give so much to benefit Inter-Faith? Pastor Killian states that it's because of Inter-faith's ability to really change people's lives. She explains that "in society in general people are frustrated because they see so much wrong and don't know how to make a difference. Well, we're not helpless! Here is a way for you to impact a problem that keeps on making a difference!"

And through the efforts of those 58 committed individuals, *real change* is taking place in the lives of our families. ♦

Special Thanks to Total Restoration



In early September, a broken water heater caused a flood in two of our Hope Gardens apartments. The families, a total of 8 people in all, had to be relocated to a hotel while we made arrangements to repair their apartments. Dave Snyder, owner of Total Restoration, arrived the same days as the flood to evaluation the situation and begin clean up. Dave was aware of the special nature of our situation - families who had already been through a lot, with small children who were about to start school. Dave assigned us a dedicated crew who worked on Hope Gardens every day for a full month. They became part of our Inter-Faith family.

The crew's concern was evident. Even though work was on-going for over a month, they got our families back into their homes within a week - in time for the children to being school! They were always ready to lend a hand - helping staff carry heavy items and more.

Our staff and families extend our heart-felt thanks to Freddy, Tommy, Dominic, Steve, Ron, Paulie, and Nick & Stevie, as well as Dave Snyder and office manager Collette Gensits.

We sincerely appreciate their hard work on our behalf - and we miss them! ♦

MISSION STATEMENT

Inter-Faith's mission is to serve God by providing charitable services to persons located in Montgomery County whose life situations have become unstable. These charitable services shall include homelessness prevention, temporary shelter, guidance in life skills, and assistance in locating appropriate housing opportunities thus enabling families at risk to remain in or return to independent living.

Inter-Faith Housing Alliance is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. All contributions are tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law. The official registration and financial information for the agency may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State, 1-800-732-0999.

How We Help - Programs That Make a Difference!

You may not think homeless families inhabit our suburbs, but they're here...in growing numbers. These families may have been very much like yours and mine until a personal tragedy like a job loss, or family break-up left them without the financial resources necessary to cope. When that happens, most families quickly exhaust the support of relatives and friends. Finding adequate employment, health care, and affordable child care can seem insurmountable. Long-term goals and dreams that enhanced their lives before disappear in the daily struggle for food and shelter.

Fortunately, that's when a simple phone call to Inter-Faith Housing Alliance can start a family on the road back — by extending a helping hand and providing them with a place to live, enough to eat, and help developing new skills, finding a job, and becoming independent.

Maybe you've heard about Inter-Faith, but aren't certain how it works. We're a non-profit, inter-faith organization made up totally of caring volunteers – and a small staff – all dedicated to helping the area's homeless get back on their feet. We rely on contributions of time and money from local churches, synagogues, service organizations, businesses, and caring individuals like you.