

Springs of hope



Fontbonne Ministries
SISTERS OF ST. JOSEPH, TORONTO

spring newsletter 2009



Volunteering: “Everybody Can Do Something”

Margaret, above left, specializes in desserts; Marcela is the queen of savory salads. This volunteer twosome cook for Drop-in guests on Saturday mornings at Mustard Seed.

The story about their partnership began this way. Four years ago, Margaret heard a talk by Leanne Kloppenborg about the needs of Fontbonne Ministries. Margaret was looking for a behind-the-scenes volunteer position and enjoyed cooking, so she offered her services. When Leanne called Marcela for a reference, Marcela wanted to know what Margaret, her friend of 15 years, was volunteering for. When she heard, she followed up with, “What about me?” which took Leanne by surprise. Leanne had found another volunteer just by checking a reference. And the cooking team known as M & M was born.

The two plan menus ahead, but are flexible so as to use up perishable donations. Today, they whip up pasta bean casseroles, salads and bread pudding with vanilla sauce for about 40 people. They work quickly and at different tasks, and then come together for

the taste test. “What do you think?” says one of the casserole, and the other replies, “More cheese.” And after that addition they taste again, and Marcela decides it needs more pasta, and perhaps some peas and then more cheese...until they are satisfied.

They set high standards for themselves. Marcela said, “We like the way guests are treated here – with dignity and respect. So we raised our benchmark too.” Here she encouraged Margaret to tell about the course she took, and Margaret went on to explain, “I took a culinary arts course in pastry skills and I loved it. Just the same though, we always worry till we hear the first reviews.”

“Guests ask us about recipes,” said Marcela, “but you know we never follow a recipe the same way twice.”

About volunteering, Margaret says, “You’re finding the right fit. It shouldn’t be too taxing: it should energize you. I love cooking and because Marcela is here that makes it all the better. But you know, **everybody** can do something.”

This issue is dedicated to the volunteers who bring so much energy to each ministry. Both Sisters Gwen and Helen praise ‘occasional volunteers.’ Sister Georgette has helped design a course for our friendly visitors. Sister Anne Marie at Village Mosaic is delighted “the gift of oneself for the sake of others is alive and well.”

In other news, the Board of Directors is pleased to announce the appointment of Leanne Kloppenborg as Administrator of Fontbonne Ministries effective April 6, 2009. Leanne joined Fontbonne in November 2004 as Volunteer and Program Coordinator and, besides supporting our many volunteers, has been very involved in the ongoing development of our ministries. Joan Breech has assumed a new role, Chief Administrative Officer with the Sisters of St. Joseph.

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Fontbonne Ministries seeks to nurture community with the neighbour – welcoming everyone without distinction.



Gardening Angels

So many people to be celebrated for their help

We couldn't complete all that we do at Mustard Seed if it weren't for our wonderful regular volunteers. But the occasional helpers also need to be celebrated, especially in springtime when our thoughts turn to flowers and vegetables.

Our first "gardening angels" lived in a Toronto housing project. When they were relocated, they passed on their tools to us. Armed with their tools, we viewed the future site of our community garden, to the side of Fontbonne Place. Years ago, Sister Thérèse Cleary had grown vegetables there for patients of the Broadview Clinic. Now, it was covered with debris. Well, God sent us Laura Berman of Field to Table fame. Since she had written THE book on community gardens, we listened to her advice: "You don't need a squad of diggers or a rototiller. Do a lasagna garden! No, I don't mean tomatoes and pasta – put down layers of peat moss, compost and top soil." High school students helped to haul garbage bags of city topsoil, and our garden layering began.

Then teachers and students on a retreat/service day prepared five garden beds for the Fontbonne Place residents and Mustard Seed. Two neighbours created more plots shored up with watermelon cartons. Grade school students from Ralph Thornton Community Centre planted and raised seedlings.

Dagmar Baur, the heritage seed saver, and Solomon Boye, the urban farmer, gifted us with marvelous seedlings. Other gardening angels like Elizabeth Ballentyne offered plants, and Michael White provided expert advice. The East Toronto Rotary Club members, who come every May to spruce up the front garden they helped set up, now include the community garden and the deck where residents container-garden.

One of our participant-volunteers has been so inspired by the good that gardening does that she dreams of involving the youth on her reserve on Manitoulin Island. So the circle widens as everyone contributes something to make our plots and planters thrive. At this time of economic downturn and global warming, the community garden is truly a Spring of Hope!



Sister Gwen Smith, director of Mustard Seed, oversees the planting of bulbs by two volunteer helpers. It was a perfect day for preparing the community garden beds which provide residents, program participants and neighbours with the opportunity to grow their own vegetables and flowers. New raised beds are currently being constructed to meet the growing need.

Effective Visitor Training

Exciting new course now open to the public

"Learning about listening skills was most helpful," said one volunteer about the new friendly visiting course. Another found it helpful to hear peoples' expectations and questions while a third needed more in-depth information on boundary issues.

"We designed the course material with the help of a Management Advisory Services volunteer," said Sister Georgette Gregory, director of In Good Company. "There wasn't a course being offered at this time so we prepared one."

The course's sessions, totaling eight hours, take place over two days and provide the visitor with information on listening, problem solving and boundary setting, also touching on legal, ethical, religious and mental health issues.

Two instructors, qualified members of the Canadian Association of Pastoral Practice and Education, join Sister Georgette in teaching and also use role-playing and slides. Previously offered to volunteers with the In Good Company Program, the course is now open to the general public.

The visiting program provides one-on-one visits to individuals' homes in the greater Toronto area. Visitors need listening skills, background knowledge and ethical standards, hence the need for this training.

Most visits in our program are with persons who have limited contact with the community and who are seeking emotional, spiritual and social support. Feedback from our volunteers indicates that they now feel better able to provide this support and are more knowledgeable about issues that may arise when visiting those who are older or less able to join in with the community.

Sister Georgette mentioned another advantage of the course.

"In developing this training program, my own learning has increased," she said. "My knowledge of the elderly has grown and I am more aware of the many issues they face as they age. I have also learned from the friendly visitors themselves, who shared how they dealt with specific situations that arose. Being an effective visitor requires many skills and we try to address these with our new course."



“Phone Anytime”



Behind-the-scenes volunteers keep the studio open to its many clients.

When asked who she would like to feature in this newsletter dedicated to volunteers, Sister Helen Kluge doesn't hesitate,

“Volunteers have been a wonderful addition to studio life. I'd like to share my experience with the hidden or behind-the-scenes volunteers. They help when no one else is around and do jobs that go unnoticed but are absolutely essential.

“Take Darryl. I usually call him in a panic: the kiln isn't working, I don't have kiln power, the Double D breaker has burned out and the elements need changing. He comes to my assistance, frequently after a long day at work, and he has been doing this for more than seven years. When I thank him it's always the same: 'I just want to help you save some money.' I sigh with relief, knowing I have someone knowledgeable to turn to.

“Recently there have been two other helping men in my life – Alvaro and Nicolas. Members of this Columbian family started coming to the studio two years ago just to visit. They began doing odd jobs and are now 'regulars,' bringing boards, bowls and plates back to the studio area from the basement. They have cleaned batts, scraped and washed the kiln shelves, re-taped the exhaust pipes in the basement and many more unseen and often unnoticed jobs that are part of running a pottery studio.

“For their part, they always say, 'We're glad to help. Phone anytime – day or night.' I am filled with gratitude for their generous service.”



“What can I do to help?”

“What can I do to help?” Happily, this question came from many of the first guests at Village Mosaic in south Etobicoke by the lake. Our invitation to seniors is: come, meet others, make connections **and** be prepared to showcase your skills, leading others in interesting activities. And it is happening!

As we get to know our guests, we discover an abundance of talent and generosity to channel into the program. Jane has taught line dancing to seniors, Irene

knits up a storm, Diana has published books of poetry, John has taught euchre...

Our Sisters have also volunteered their talents: Helen Kluge offers clay, Marie Allen bridge and ESL, Roberta Freeman and Rita Smith knitting and Virginia Varley art.

But besides the contribution of the programme participants, many others have volunteered their time: Mary to teach computers, Lise to help with art, Rebecca with crafts, while Marie, Nan and Mary have of-

fered to welcome guests, answer telephone enquiries and help set up programs and refreshments. It takes a full team to keep the place humming and exciting so as to entice seniors out of the isolation of their homes.

Volunteerism, the gift of oneself for the sake of others, is alive and well in this friendly neighbourhood. Concern for the wellbeing of seniors is strong. We could not accomplish our mission without the help of volunteers. We are grateful for their support.



A Warm Welcoming Space

“The renovated building at 791 Queen St. East was one of the first signs of positive change in South Riverdale,” said a neighbour of Fontbonne Place. With the Sisters' creation of these 18 rent-geared-to-income apartments for single older women needing affordable housing came many other benefits to the neighbourhood.

At the same address, the outreach programs offered at Mustard Seed build a sense of community. Close relationships with nearby organizations – the Ralph Thornton Community Centre, South Riverdale Community Health Centre and the BIA – also help increase

awareness of the needs of the neighbourhood.

“Fontbonne Ministries at Mustard Seed has been instrumental in the Riverside District Business Improvement Area's events over the years,” said Elizabeth Andrew, Coordinator, Riverside District BIA. The front garden has become a place for community activity including: the Riverside BIA Christmas Tree lighting ceremony and Riverdale Art Walk activities, a space for people to sit and enjoy coffee or lunch, a gathering space and stop for local historical society walks. Plots at the community garden allow residents and neighbours to grow their own food.



A tree planting and blessing in 2003

All this has led a neighbour to call Fontbonne Place “a warm and welcoming space” and it continues to strive to be so, both inside and out.



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Fontbonne Ministries is a non-profit, charitable organization of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto. True to the charism of the Sisters, Fontbonne responds practically to social needs by nurturing community with our neighbour, especially the homeless, alienated, economically poor and women at risk. Fontbonne Ministries welcomes everyone without distinction and offers opportunities for participants, volunteers and staff to be nourished in body, mind and spirit.

The ministries are funded by the Sisters of St. Joseph and individual donations.

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 SISTERS OF ST. JOSEPH OF TORONTO

Our Volunteer Appreciation Event April 26, 2009



Sister Georgette gives Justin a gift in appreciation for his service at Mustard Seed during his field placement.



Sister Margaret enjoys the volunteer event with Joan, the newly appointed CAO, left, and Leanne, the new Fontbonne administrator, right.



Being Fully Present

“My first few months volunteering at Mustard Seed have been enjoyable. People are so ready to open up their hearts and tell stories of their lives to a listening ear,” said Justin of his experience at Mustard Seed’s Drop-in. He and Pio, from the Hamilton Archdiocese and the Toronto Archdiocese, are attending St. Augustine’s Seminary and now completing a field placement. Justin and Pio join the Drop-in participants, listening without judgment and without any anticipation of outcomes.

“I am learning in a practical manner how to be fully present to those that I interact with at Mustard Seed,” said Pio.

Since our first community field placement from St. Augustine’s Seminary during the winter of 2006, our numbers have grown: an average of 45-50 men and women join us on Saturdays. But the ministry, with its offer of coffee, conversation, games and most of all, acceptance, stays the same.

“I have heard about struggles that I had never dreamed of,” said Justin. “Also, I really love people and receive great joy in being able to serve them – whether it’s lunch, a smile, a friendly conversation, or a game of scrabble. Mustard Seed has allowed me to do all of the above and more. I trust that my experience here will remain valuable in my upcoming years of service in the Catholic priesthood.”