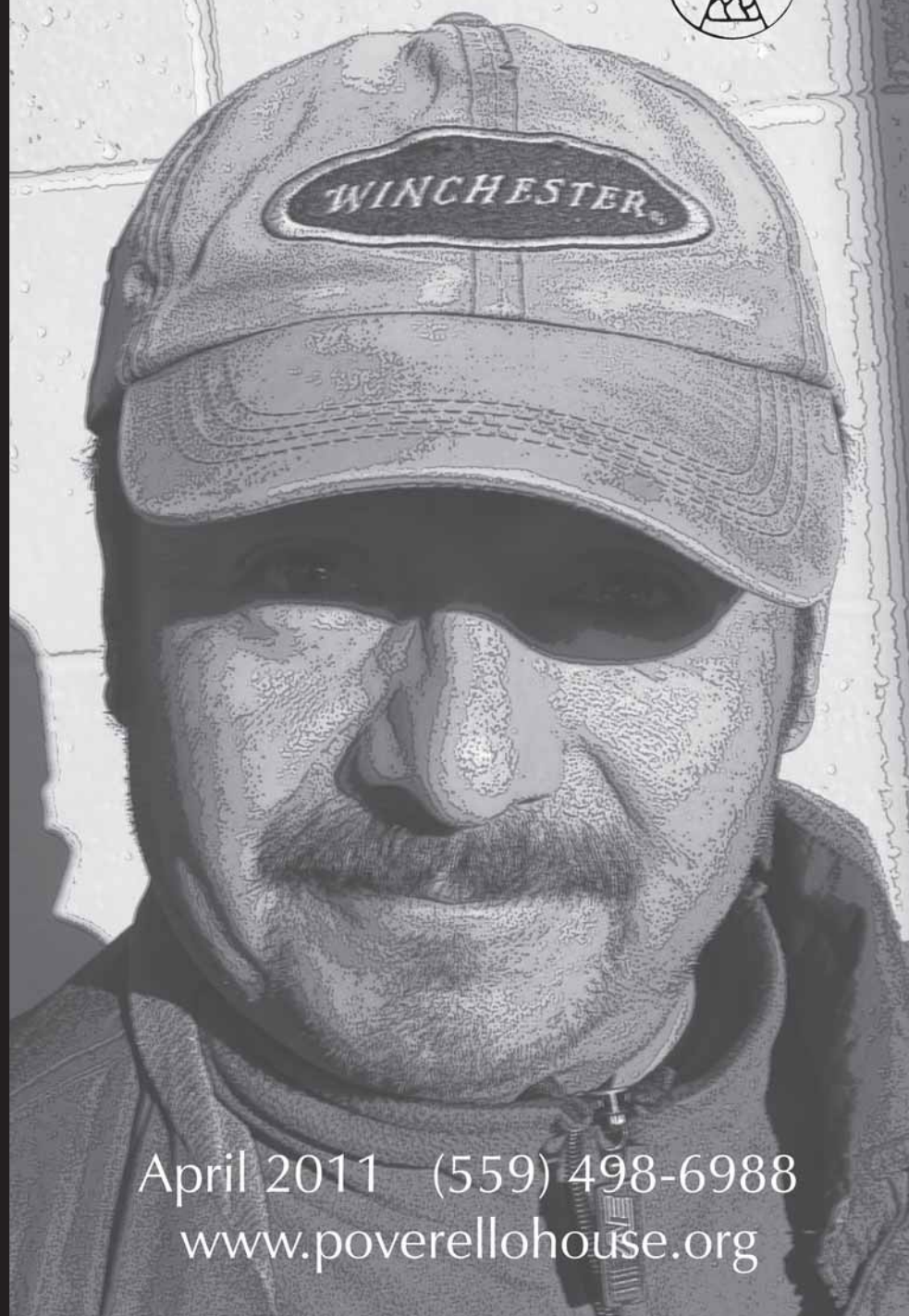


Poverello News



April 2011 (559) 498-6988
www.poverellohouse.org



A recent incident encapsulated a big problem for the homeless: dealing with bureaucracies. The fact is that the poor, by virtue of their poverty, often have to contend with bureaucratic entanglements much more often than the rest of us. Additionally, they are usually ill-equipped to handle these encounters constructively.

A Mexican man, who was in the United States legally, lost his green card and didn't have the money to replace it. Without that all-important piece of paper, he couldn't legally work, and was subject to deportation. In addition, he had family in Mexico who depended on his income.

I was glad to provide the money for the replacement card. However, the application process from the Department of Homeland Security was ridiculously convoluted and complicated. This poor man was at a loss.

One of our Spanish-speaking staff members stepped in and helped him through it. Without her assistance, he probably would have given up. This is a common experience for many of the people who use Poverello House services.

There have been countless sociological studies written on homelessness, and many of these point out that the average homeless person has to daily face many levels of government bureaucratic tangles. This happens for two reasons.

First, the lifestyles of many homeless almost guarantee that they will have to contend with the welfare department, the police, the health department or the county hospital. Drinking, drug use, and mental

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illness lend themselves toward poverty, violence, and health problems that force people to come into contact with bureaucratic organizations.

Second, desperate need drives homeless people to accept whatever government benefits are available. Food stamps, medical care, or mental health services provided by the local, county, state or federal government are often the only recourse for these people. However, these services are often overburdened, clogged with cumbersome paperwork, and not in the least user-friendly.

In advocating for the homeless, I've had to deal with many social service employees, eligibility workers, health care professionals and law enforcement personnel. I have to say that many of these folks are dedicated, compassionate, and work hard to be helpful. However, just as many are overwhelmed by the frustrations of dealing with broken systems and too many needy people. They get worn down and discouraged, and start to become part of the problem themselves.

At Poverello, we try to foster an atmosphere that is kind of an "anti-bureaucracy". We know that day in and day out, our clients have to deal with the aggravation of long waits for medical help, confusing and sometimes contradictory regulations, and unfeeling bureaucracies. We can't change that for them, but there are a few things we can do.

We can keep things simple here at Poverello. If you need a meal, just show up, no questions asked, no paperwork to fill out. If you need medical treatment and can't afford it, come to the Holy Cross Clinic, where you can be seen in a fraction of the time it takes in an emergency room. Need a shower, or some clothes, or help filling out a form? Just ask what door to go in to get all of these things accomplished.

In my 38 years here, I've seen the ugly side of bureaucracies, and in trying to help homeless people, experienced the frustration of dealing with endless policies and paperwork. If I get fed up with it, I can only imagine how a sick, bewildered homeless person must feel when he is told that he didn't fill out a form correctly and thus won't receive help.

There is a danger that any organization can become so big that it becomes a small bureaucracy, creating impediments for people attempting to get assistance. My prayer is that this will never happen at Poverello House, and that we can always be a welcoming, easy-access alternative for the poor.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Rest in Peace, Sparky

Years ago, Poverello House would find stray dogs on the streets, care for them, and try to adopt them out to loving homes. Sparky was a terrier-Chihuahua-pug-and-Lord-knows-what-else mixed-breed dog who was wandering the streets dirty, hungry, and lonely. Poverello kept him in our kennel until he was healthy, and a family with a home, a yard, and three young kids eager for a pet adopted him.

Sparky thrived in his new abode. He was a diminutive package of nervous energy, and although he wasn't very bright, he was loving and entirely earnest in his affection. When he was happy, he would absurdly run around the yard in circles, his short legs pumping furiously and his strange little ears flapping frantically like the wings of a cherub.

Sparky only learned one trick: to sit. He never did discover the secret of refraining from jumping on people, no doubt due to his lively nature. His owner used to say that when you looked in his big bug eyes, you could see all the way to China, a reference to the vast emptiness in his skull behind the eye sockets. However, in spite of a limited I.Q., over the years Sparky made himself useful. He was a champion rat killer, and he even dispatched a few possums. His high-pitched bark let anyone approaching know that the house was guarded. And where he lacked intelligence, he compensated for that deficit with undying loyalty to his adopted family.

Most of all, however, he was the unwittingly humorous object of affection for this family of five. He was a goofy-looking and often bizarrely-behaving mutt who never failed to elicit laughs for chasing his own tail, running full-tilt into solid objects, and seeming to always have a silly grin on his face.

Last February, much to his family's grief, Sparky's kidneys failed and forever stilled the little furry bundle that was always vibrating with an overabundance of enthusiasm. After living the good life in suburbia for over a decade, he left behind five heartbroken people. He is buried in a courtyard garden at the family's home.



Sparky blessed this family for twelve years, and he, in turn, was blessed by his adoption. This is truly a Poverello success story. Had not Poverello taken him in so long ago, Sparky would no doubt have met the tragic fate that awaits most homeless dogs. We're glad when we can help to change the destiny of some of those we meet, whether they are human or canine.

Our Social Media Maven

Thanks to our Director of Volunteer Services, Gabriela McNeil, Poverello House has entered a new era of connectivity in the social networks. Poverello is now reaching out to people through Facebook and Twitter. At last count, we had 2,909 Facebook friends and 295 followers on Twitter.

Some might wonder, "That's nice, but what good does it do?" Here's an example of the benefits of being active in the social media. We recently had a desperate need for blankets during a cold, foggy spell in Fresno. Gaby Facebooked and Twittered it (yes, those are now acceptable verbs), and received an immediate response from the news media and from social media friends. People donated in droves, and the news covered the shortage, which led to even more donations.

Poverello House was founded on principles that are centuries-old, and remains true to those principles, but that doesn't mean that we can't take advantage of modern phenomena to help the poor. The social media has been a huge blessing to us, and we are thankful for all the people who have connected with us via the internet. We are also thankful for Gaby, who used her computer know-how to start these connections, and keeps the pages current.

If you would like to stay in touch with Poverello through your computer, I-Pad or multi-tasking phone, you can check out the following Poverello pages:

Twitter: www.twitter.com/PoverelloHouse

FaceBook: [www.facebook.com/#!/pages/
PoverelloHouse/100825778328](http://www.facebook.com/#!/pages/PoverelloHouse/100825778328)

No Wonder We Get So Much Done!

It always seems as though there are a lot of people volunteering at Poverello House, but when you stop to actually crunch the numbers, it's truly astonishing. Last December alone, over 1,500 people came to help serve food, hand out clothes, wrap gifts, and clean up the grounds. Over the course of 2010, a total of over 8,300 volunteers gave us a hand. One of the big reasons we are able to keep our costs down is the huge volume of volunteer assistance we receive. That 8,300 number surpasses our 2009 count by about 500 people.

In addition to all this help at Poverello House, people volunteer to do fundraisers, food drives and clothing drives at other sites. In November and December of 2010, there were at least 30 food drives of which we were aware, and there were others that we never knew about. What it all resulted in was a huge amount of food donated that will provide direct help to the hungry and needy.



Words are entirely inadequate to express our gratitude toward all of these generous people. It is safe to say that without our volunteers and donors, our mission would cease to exist.

If you've never had the opportunity to volunteer some time at Poverello House, please consider doing so. By the way, orientations for new volunteers, interns, students and group leaders are held Fridays at 10:00 a.m. There will also be orientations held on the second and fourth Saturdays of each month from January through March, and from August through October. Please check out our website at www.poverellohouse.org for more information about volunteering, to view a calendar of events regarding Saturday orientations and special orientations, or to contact our Director of Volunteer Services. You can also give us a call at (559) 498-6988.

Amici Helps Fresno Get All Shook Up



It's coming! The Amici del Poverello Guild's annual ***Brunch With Elvis***, featuring the FABULOUS Jeremy Pearce, will be held on Saturday, May 14, 2011 from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at Grand Occasions, located at 4584 West Jacquelyn Avenue in Fresno. *Brunch With Elvis* is an annual fundraiser that benefits the mission of Poverello House and not only a great show, but a delicious brunch and a fun raffle.

You really don't want to miss this event! Tickets can be purchased by calling Mary Lou Cancio (291-8375) or Carol Maul (229-7709). Tickets are \$25.00. A great meal and a chance to see the King perform! What could be better? Get your tickets while they are still available!

April Wish List

Meat * Ground beef * Chicken
Blankets
Pens * Sticky notes
8 1/2" X 11" Copy paper

Remember, we now take credit card donations. Please see the enclosed envelope for instructions.

To donate online, visit our website at www.poverellohouse.org

Poverello House

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FORWARDING SERVICE REQUESTED

Who Are We? A nonprofit, nondenominational organization that believes in the dignity of every human being. Our mission is to enrich the lives and spirits of all who pass our way, to feed the hungry, offer focused rehabilitation programs, temporary shelter, medical, dental and other basic services to the poor, the homeless, and the disadvantaged unconditionally, without regard to race, color, religion, national origin, age, sex or disability, through Providential and community support. We have been operating since 1973 and are governed by a Board of Directors, consisting of local volunteer business men and women.

Future Goals? To provide additional facilities for increased services.

How Are We Funded? Primarily through private donations from individuals, churches, businesses, and community organizations; and through United Way. Rules for acceptance and participation in the programs of Poverello House are the same for everyone, without regard to race, color, national origin, age, sex or disability.



United Way of Fresno County
Member Organization