

Together We Cope Bridging the Gap
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Together We Cope . Bridging the Gap

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They walked, ran and biked for us!

This summer community members laced up their sneakers to run, bike and walk in support of Together We Cope. The annual Race Around the World Duathlon and the Greater Chicago Food Depository's Hunger Walk provided excellent opportunities for individuals to get active for a good cause.



On June 24, local runners and bikers participated in the 12th annual Race Around the World Duathlon, which was bigger and better than ever before. A total of 650 athletes competed in the four-mile run and 11-mile bike ride to support Together We Cope's programs and services. TWC volunteer Val Chudy, who helps her brother Gil Hannon run the annual duathlon, said: "It's a great cause, and I'm glad to be a part of it."

TWC staff, family and friends also participated in this year's Hunger Walk, sponsored by the Greater Chicago Food Depository. The walk benefits pantries, soup kitchens and shelters in Cook County which are members of the depository's network. The 20-person TWC team earned more than \$300 in food credits alone, and pledges are still being totaled.

"It was great to see everyone show up to support us," said TWC fundraising assistant Kerry Nolan. "The money we raised will really help us purchase food for our food pantry."

TWC helps clients with LINK applications

Together We Cope staff has been assisting south suburban residents in applying for LINK cards (food stamp program), and to answer questions about the SNAP (supplemental nutrition assistance program) application process.

Assistance is offered two days per month, on the first Thursday and the third Tuesday. Clients are required to make an appointment for the one-on-one sessions, where they will be guided through the LINK application process. "Our goal is to see at least 10 people on each of these days," said TWC staffer Vanya Bankhead.

The new service already is producing results. In its first month of operation, about 10 appointments were scheduled in June. This number increased to 18 in July, with many individuals completing the application process.

"We've already begun booking appointments for August, and we're hoping that clients continue to show interest in applying," said Vanya. "We encourage residents who qualify for the program to use a LINK card to boost their grocery budgets."

For more information about LINK card applications or to make a reservation for a one-on-one session, contact Vanya Bankhead at (708) 633-5040.

Volunteers treated to annual picnic

Together We Cope volunteers will be honored during the third annual Volunteer Appreciation Picnic on Sunday, Aug. 26 at El Morro Park in Oak Forest. Nearly 200 south suburban residents give their time and talent to TWC's operation throughout the year.

Cate Dietz, volunteer coordinator, said the family picnic event has become very popular in the last few years. "This is a day that TWC staff cooks and serves dinner to the volunteers who are so valuable to our day-to-day operation," she said. "It's a day to say 'thank you so much' for all the volunteers do for us in so many ways." Games and raffles round out the day's events. This year staff will cook brats, sausages and hot dogs during the picnic. Other warm and cold dishes, as well as beverages, will be available.

Volunteers will receive invitations in the mail and are urged to RSVP as soon as possible. Family members can attend the picnic for a small charge.



TWC Happenings

Back to School Distribution
August 7, 8, & 9, 2012

TWC Volunteer Picnic
Sunday, August 26, 2012

TWC & Nu2u Closed
Labor Day September 3, 2012

Pasta Extravaganza
Orland Chateau
Wednesday, September 12, 2012

Alden Block Party
Saturday, September 29, 2012

Oak Forest Awareness Fair
Saturday, October 13, 2012

Midlothian Health Fair
October 20, 2012

Orland Park Community Expo
Saturday, October 13, 2012

Anonymous
Oral Rapid HIV Testing
3rd Monday of the month

Save the Date!

TWC Dinner Dance
Friday, March 1, 2013

TWC Golf Outing
Wednesday, June 5, 2013

Bring your gently used children's coats to our Nu2u shop after Labor Day and help us keep our clients' children warm this winter.

Back to School brings big smiles

Boxes fill the garage at the home of Together We Cope volunteer Dianne Peloso, each one neatly labeled and filled to the brim with school supplies. An assembly line of volunteers moves swiftly from box to box, putting supplies into plastic bags and packing them into cartons.

These are just some of the preparations for Together We Cope's annual Back to School program, which provides backpacks and basic school supplies to the children of our clients. Last year's drive served 1,166 children. This year, TWC hopes to help even more families and has invited more than 2,000 children to participate in the program.

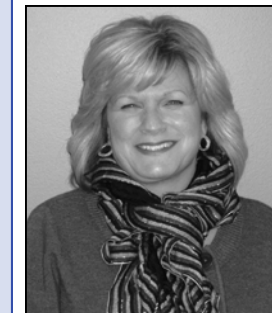
TWC staff and volunteers worked hard to collect donations. Little yellow school bus collection boxes popped up in more than 20 south suburban businesses, signifying drop-off points for donated school supplies. For Dianne, it's the children's smiles on pick-up day that is her reward.

The supplies will be distributed to children Aug. 7, 8 and 9. Further information on the program is with Tina Kessens at 708-633-5040 or tkessens@togetherwecope.org.



Volunteers line up to pack school supplies in Dianne Peloso's garage.

From the Director ... Kathy



August seems to be a time of gathering at Together We Cope, and that is always a happy time for us.

One of our favorite programs takes place in August, our Back to School initiative in which we equip more than 1,500 youngsters with new backpacks and school supplies. We love the crowd of parents and children who pack our office for a few days in August, all very excited to receive fresh new crayons, pencils, folders and notebooks. It gets the youngsters ready for a new school year, and we love helping to shape their attitude about learning.

The way those backpacks and school supplies got to our office is sort of a crowd story, too. As local families fill the stores this month to get their own children ready for a return to the classroom, many of them pick up extra school supplies to contribute to our program. Our little yellow school bus collection boxes pop up at area stores, banks, libraries, churches. A crowd of kind and generous people fill those boxes with everything our little ones need. It is a perfect illustration of how our community comes together to help their neighbors who are experiencing a temporary crisis.

Another sort of crowd gathers around us in August, again a very happy time. Our third annual

Volunteer Picnic is set for Aug. 26 at El Morro Park in Oak Forest. We are very fortunate to have nearly 200 area residents who regularly volunteer at Together We Cope, in many capacities, and we salute them during this picnic. Our volunteers bring a lifetime of wisdom and experience to their work for us. The picnic is a family day filled with good food and lots of games. It is fun watching our staff cook enough brats, sausages and hot dogs for such a big crowd!

That same staff and volunteer crew has been challenged this year to keep up with the crowd gathering at our food pantry door each day. We're experiencing a significant increase in the number of people seeking food assistance, as are other pantries in the region. Many of these clients are employed, but finding it hard to make ends meet as their hours or wages are reduced.

We're hoping for another crowd next month as we host our annual Pasta Extravaganza fundraiser Sept. 12 at Orland Chateau in Orland Park. Last year more than 300 people enjoyed the many dishes donated by area restaurants for the event, and they also had fun wagering at the Night at the Races that is part of this evening. Funds generated from this project go a long way toward meeting the cost of food to keep our pantry shelves stocked.

You can find details about all of these programs elsewhere in this newsletter. Take a look, and then come be a part of one of our crowds this season!

More than a bag of groceries

First step is the hardest: Asking for help

The grocery bag was filled with basic staples: a loaf of bread, a few canned fruits and vegetables, a small cut of meat and a small bag of potatoes. For many families, these items are standard dinner fare. But for Jackson, they made the first good meal he'd had in a long time.

For most of his life, Jackson was able to provide for himself. He had never gone hungry before now. But as the recession hit, the stable life that Jackson had built for himself began to crumble. Disabled, living on his own and unable to work, Jackson found it nearly impossible to make ends meet. Each day presented a new challenge: how to pay the bills, how to get food, how to make each disability payment last. Eventually, it became too much for him to handle. Bills were piling up. His house was in foreclosure. He needed help.

Jackson was wary of asking for that help, just like many other Americans who find themselves suddenly in need after being self-sufficient all their lives. He could not comprehend why he was suddenly unable to provide for himself after years without trouble. Instead of seeking help right away, weeks passed before he decided to take action. By the time he began to look for help, he hoped it would not be too late.

He had heard good things about the place on Oak Park Avenue in Tinley Park. He finally came in to Together We Cope, initially looking for assistance paying his utility bills. "He was in real dire straits," said a TWC case manager. "It was sad. We wanted to do whatever we could to help him get by."

TWC paid Jackson's electric, water and gas bills for one month, allowing him to get caught up and back on a solid financial footing. The staff also registered him for monthly food assistance, and gave him an immediate bag of groceries.

A week later, a TWC staffer received a fax from Jackson. It said: "I can't thank you enough for the assistance and food you gave me. That was the first good meal I had in a long time. I am so grateful for your help."

When he returned to TWC for his monthly food appointment, he wanted to express his gratitude in person. But he could barely find the words to thank his case manager for the help he received. He was too overcome with emotion.

While Jackson lives by himself, he wasn't alone in his crisis. Together, we provided a system of help and support that will be ready to assist him again whenever he needs it.

'Thank You' to everyone who helped to make the TWC Annual Golf Outing a success!

Grand Sponsor
Specialized Staffing Solutions
Eagle Sponsors
Southwest Sertoma
Action Sertoma
C.D.E. Collision Center
Kusinski Family Foundation



This foursome really got into the spirit on the 6th hole.

Major Sponsors
Ameriprise Financial-
Ed Moran
Bremen Youth Service

Beverage Sponsor
#1 Tobacco
Lunch Sponsor
Walt's Food Center

This year's outing was "Luau on the Links" and golfers and guests enjoyed a day of Hawaiian fun. Thank you to the wonderful sponsors listed below:

American Import Tiles
Archer Bank
Avenue Animal Hospital
Bettenhausen Automotive
Boyle, Flag & Seaman
Caption and Subtitle
Continental Honda
City of Country Club Hills
City of Oak Forest
CJ Erickson Plumbing
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Costco
Maggie Crotty, State Senator
Cus-Tel Wiring Service
Effluent Technology, Inc
Steve Hogan
House of Roland
Kevron Printing
Kirschner Vision Group
Kiwanis Club Tinley Park
Lawn Tech
Mama Vesuvio's

MB Financial
Pow-R- Sertoma
Prime Time Restaurant
Silver Lake Family Dental
Terry's Lincoln Mercury
Tinley Park Sertoma
Tommel Financial Services
Tom's Barber Shop
Traverso's Restaurant
Village of Chicago Ridge
Ed Zabrocki, Mayor,
Village of Tinley Park

TWC intern jumps right in



Paige Zidek of Tinley Park performed a summer internship with Together We Cope this year, assisting with public relations, marketing and fundraising. Paige is a junior at Drake University in Iowa. She authored several of the articles in this edition of the TWC newsletter. Here she helps prepare school supplies for our annual Back to School program. "I really enjoyed my internship at Together We Cope," said Paige. "Not only did I get to hone my writing skills, but I also got to help others while doing it. It's a great feeling."

Rock Bottom serves up food, fun and a Cope-a-licious brew



Rock Bottom Restaurant and Brewery in Orland Park hosted its second fundraiser for Together We Cope on June 21, and it was a success! The restaurant was packed with patrons and guests who enjoyed a delicious meal and some Cope-a-licious beer (Rock Bottom's Summer Honey Ale renamed for this event) to benefit TWC.

Guests also enjoyed a "split the pot" raffle and a silent auction with wonderful prizes, including a tower of toys and two beautiful bikes. A portion of food sales that evening, as well as the Cope-a-licious beer sales, was donated to TWC to support its programs throughout the year.

"We thank Rock Bottom for partnering with us again this year to host this spectacular event," said Kathryn Straniero, executive director of TWC. "We couldn't have done it without you!"

TWC sees spike in family assistance

Together We Cope has seen a 40 percent increase in the number of south suburban families seeking assistance in just the past year. A continued weak economy, stubbornly high unemployment and rising food costs are some reasons why families continue to struggle.

TWC benefits from the generosity of area residents, churches, schools, businesses and organizations. Unprecedented numbers of food donations have been received in the past year, and the community continues to donate generously to our resale shop and fundraisers. There is no lack of sponsors for children in the Back to School campaign or the Adopt a Child Christmas project.

Yet, the need in our region persists. Our activity report below indicates a 43% increase in families served this February over that month the previous year, and the year-to-year spike was 40% for March and 43% for April.

The Greater Chicago Food Depository, where we purchase greatly discounted food, reports similar increased need at other pantries in the region and often is out of stock on some of the staple items we seek to purchase. The depository declared recently that nearly one in six Cook County residents do not know where their next meal will come from on any given day.

With the increase in demand comes an increase in manpower needs to keep our agency up and running. The men and women, and even children, who volunteer at Together We Cope are essential to our operation. We are gratified to see their numbers increased also this past year.



Kathryn Straniero (left) and Nancy Rosian pack a freezer with donated meat.

Number of families given food each month

| | 2012 | 2011 |
|------|-------|-------|
| Jan. | 1,148 | 852 |
| Feb. | 1,177 | 823 |
| Mar. | 1,204 | 856 |
| Apr. | 1,198 | 836 |
| May | 1,235 | 967 |
| June | 1,233 | 1,011 |

Pasta Extravaganza Dinner buffet, beer, wine & pop included

Orland Chateau
14500 S. LaGrange Road
Orland Park



Wednesday
September 12, 2012
6:00 pm Dinner
7:00 pm Horse Races

Adults \$25
Children \$5
(ages 3 to 12)

Call Karen M. for tickets or to name a horse. 708-633-5040

That's right!

Place your bets on your favorite horse. We will have six photographed horse races for your entertainment.

Name your horse!

Name your horse for \$50! Reservations are now being taken by Karen or Kerry.

Example: **Bubble Gum** Won't rise to occasion. Has tendency to stick to the rail.

Volunteer you should know!

Bill Hinz



Bill Hinz of Tinley Park has no trouble finding things to do in his retirement. He golfs, spends time with his wife Lucy, children and grandchildren, and takes oil painting lessons through the park district. But what really keeps Bill busy is volunteering. He has logged more than 100 hours so far this year as a Together We Cope volunteer.

A Tinley Park resident for 40 years, Bill had long known about TWC and its services. When he was looking for a place to volunteer during his retirement, he knew where his first stop would be. "I live about a block from Together We Cope, and always passed it on my way to go somewhere," he said. "I was really looking for a charity where I could put in my time, and I knew Cope would be the right place."

For the first six months of his time with TWC, Bill volunteered in the food pantry. "When I started, we were feeding nearly 25 families a day," he said. "Now we're at 50 to 75 families. It's interesting to see how things change."

Now, Bill's volunteer duties run the gamut from working booths at events to representing TWC at chamber of commerce and Rotary club meetings. He is often seen through-

Nu 4 U at Nu2u

Together We Cope's resale shop, Nu2u, has a new look and lots of good deals after a bit of a makeover this spring.

New bookcases line the walls, providing beautiful displays of merchandise. The cases are the gift of a donor who obtained them from a local bookstore that went out of business.

Store manager Pat Hosman reports that customers are commenting favorably on the new displays and the generally pleasant and organized look to the shop. She also reports there was a successful conversion to a new pricing system in the shop that offers low prices every day instead of the previous half-off reductions offered on some items in the past.

"It took some explaining to customers who thought they were paying more without the previous half-off discount, but once they saw their bills were lower at checkout they understood our new pricing offers better deals on many items," she said. "It also gives us the opportunity to put things on sale for really special prices." Proceeds from the resale shop support Together We Cope's programs throughout the year.



Together We Cope volunteer and board member Len Schaafsma measures one of the many bookcases recently donated to the Nu2u resale shop by a benefactor who wishes to remain anonymous. The bookcases, which come from a recently closed bookstore, have given a new look to displays in the resale shop.

out the Together We Cope office, helping out with a variety of tasks. "Anything that they want me to do, I'll gladly do it," said Bill, who has given his time to the agency since his retirement.

Bill's professional background assists him in performing tasks for Together We Cope. He retired more than a year ago after 25 years as an Allstate insurance agent in Tinley Park. This position allowed him to interact with many individuals in the south suburban community, a skill that he also uses to spread the word about Together We Cope. "Most people have heard of Cope before, but don't know what all of their services are," Bill said. "I enjoy explaining to them what Together We Cope does."

Like most of TWC's volunteers, Bill keeps coming back because of the wonderful people involved with the agency. "All of the people who work here are so passionate about what they do," he said.

Bill's advice to those interested in volunteering? "Don't wait until retirement," he said. "There are so many things you could do at Together We Cope, and there's always time for it. You could do two hours a week or two hours a month if you wanted to."