



## BRIDGING THE GAP

### Red Carpet Event

## Are you ready for the best party in the south suburbs?

Don't miss Together We Cope's Red Carpet Event, a night of dining and dancing at Odyssey Country Club on March 4.

Tickets are going fast for this popular evening, a celebration for all those who support our mission and a chance for new friends to join us.

We're excited to welcome back painter and performance artist Elliott From of ArtBeat Live, who amazed the crowd last year by taking over the dance floor and creating a one-of-a-kind painting to high-energy music while the audience watched. Like last year, this year's artwork will go to the highest bidder that evening.

Silent and live auction items will include great prizes for sports fans such as tickets to upcoming games, special Chicago Cubs memorabilia and much more. Guests also can bid on jewelry, airline tickets and other great prizes.

Online bidding provided by *Gesture* will enable all to get a head start on favorites a week in advance (see [togetherwecope.org](http://togetherwecope.org) for the link) and let everyone bid using their own smart phones or tablets furnished by the company's roving staff the night of the event. Bidders need not be present.

Tickets are \$100 each or \$950 for a table of 10 reserved in advance. The cost covers an elegant buffet dinner, open bar and an evening of dancing to the popular band, Connexion.

Katlin Bewley, fundraising coordinator said, "The Red Carpet event provides key support for our client programs and services all year long."

### Dine and dance while you support TWC!

Whether you gather your friends and buy tickets or support us as a sponsor—or both—make sure you're part of the best party around on March 4. Our sponsors come back year after year because they can reach a broad audience of area residents and business owners with an ad in the Red Carpet Event program. Buy tickets online at [togetherwecope.org](http://togetherwecope.org) today or call Katlin Bewley at 708.263.0302 to secure your sponsorship for this year's celebration.



### Kids help kids stay toasty warm with mitten drives

Lots of children were able to play in the snow, help parents shovel, walk to school or wait for the bus in greater comfort, thanks to the generosity of other children.

When Together We Cope asked local elementary schools and junior highs to host a mitten drive this winter, 18 schools responded.

As a result, hundreds of warm winter accessories—new and gently used mittens, gloves, hats and scarves—were donated in time to make a big difference for the youngest of our clients.

Since a festive display helps get kids excited and allows them to see how they are helping, some schools set up an artificial Christmas tree in a central location and used clothespins to attach donated items to it. Others covered a cardboard box with wrapping paper for collection.



Among the donors was Scarlet Oak School in Oak Forest. Kristen Timm, a fourth grade teacher, said, "By participating in the mitten drive, the students at Scarlet Oak School experienced pride and satisfaction from helping others in their community."

The donations made a difference for dozens of families, said Cori Scanlan, manager of TWC's resale shop, Nu2u. "When children came to us needing a winter coat, we not only had coats, we sent them home with mittens—and more."





## Stars will be shining brightly

We know the stars will be shining brightly for our annual Red Carpet Event on March 4. And after that, the promise of warmth and new life as spring descends upon us!

Everyone is looking forward to this year's dinner dance, when friends old and new who support our mission will join us for a wonderful celebratory night. We are thrilled to welcome back artist Elliott From, who electrified us last year by creating a gorgeous painting right on the dance floor that we auctioned off on the spot. We can't wait to see

what he creates this year! There also will be much to choose from in our live and silent auctions, delectable food and a fabulous band. I look forward to seeing you there.

Your support enables us to bridge the gap during times of crisis for our south suburban neighbors. As with all of our contributions, the funds raised by this evening are gratefully shared locally. We see everything from young families facing home foreclosure to senior citizens struggling to raise grandchildren.

What never seems to change is the resolve of our community to meet problems head on and find a solution. We enjoy our role of bringing those in distress together with those who can fix the problem. We are blessed with a network of support that sees the need in our community and takes action, rather than merely debating the cause of our problems. Spring brings the promise of hope, and it is just around the corner. As always, my thanks for your support. See you on the Red Carpet!

Kathryn Straniero, Executive Director



## Gifts from the heart

One sign of the season is the touching generosity of teachers who helped our youngest clients create handmade gifts for family members. Giving their time and talent has become a wonderful annual tradition at the popular Gifts from the Heart event.

In December, teachers from the Beta Beta Chapter of Delta Kappa Gamma, an educators' service society, helped dozens of children create many homemade gifts at Zion Lutheran Church in Tinley Park. Other volunteers wrapped the presents.

"Kids really enjoy learning that Christmas is for giving as well as receiving," said TWC staffer Tina Kessens, who coordinates the program every year. "Everyone gets something from Gifts from the Heart."



## Adopt a Child provides hope for the holidays

Were you among the hundreds of people who offered us a helping hand during the holidays? Community support makes all the difference for our annual Adopt a Child program, a time when area residents, businesses and community groups really come through for our youngest clients.

From footballs and dolls to Qixel, the latest hot toy, donations poured into TWC, helping our "volunteer elves" find the very item on hundreds of children's Christmas wish lists. Many more gave generous cash donations that also helped stock our shelves. Everyone got pajamas, and in some cases, we added blankets, hats, gloves and mittens, too.

"We're grateful people are generous during the holiday season," said Executive Director Kathryn Straniero.

## TWC interns drawn to 'special place'

Brenton Blisset of Alsip (top) and Ishmael Komeh of Chicago's Woodlawn neighborhood have joined TWC as interns in client services as they work toward their bachelor's degree in social work (BSW) at Governors State University.

"My grandmother was always cooking for her community and she did a lot of volunteering," Blisset said of his career choice. He plans to become a social worker helping children, families and senior citizens.

Komeh said instructors at Kennedy King College, where he earned an associate's degree in addictions counseling, urged him to broaden his professional reach with a BSW. He also was motivated by Peace Corps volunteers, who taught him to read and write in his native Sierra Leone in West Africa. "What I like about social work is that it gives a voice to the voiceless," he said.

Both interns have been impressed by the kindness of staff at TWC. "Everyone treats the clients with real kindness," Blisset said. Komeh echoed the thought. "It's a very friendly atmosphere. There's something special about this place."



## Who's volunteering at TWC now?



One of our newest volunteers in the food pantry may be one of our most experienced. Thelma Douglas moved to Tinley Park to live near her two daughters. "I had volunteered for a food pantry in New Jersey for eight years," she said. In looking at her local options, Thelma quickly chose TWC. "The people here were very friendly, and I could see the food was top quality, just like the pantry where I volunteered in New Jersey," she said. Thelma, who retired from teaching and office work, spends Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays at TWC from 9 am to 3 pm, greeting clients at the pantry door. "I like to talk to people," she said with a smile. "I love it here already after just one month!"



Another pantry volunteer, Larry Holic, just marked his four-year anniversary at TWC. The Orland Park man spends four hours every Wednesday and Friday as part of the crew that picks up food donations, unloads the truck, and helps stock the shelves. "You're helping people who are less fortunate," he said. "I also like the camaraderie. And it's good exercise if you're in pretty decent shape." Larry, who retired from a career as a lab tech first with Reynolds Aluminum, then with the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District, said TWC is "very well organized. And everybody gets along with their bosses. Gordon Collins, the pantry services manager, pitches in with the rest of us."

## TWC Board of Directors

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## Families First program

### We're looking for landlords

Do you own rental property, or know someone who does? We are in need of two-bedroom units located in Cook County (but not Chicago) owned by landlords willing to work with a 6-month lease for our Families First program, a supportive housing program that works with families who were literally homeless as we assist them through intensive case management to get them to self-sufficiency.

Client families live in apartments selected to meet each family's income and personal needs. They receive intensive case management services, employment and income counseling, life skills training and housing counseling services. Case managers help each family identify, assess, address and resolve issues that may be an obstacle to success.

Families First participants also are eligible to receive food, clothing, furniture and personal care items from TWC.

One client said, "Families First is amazing. They have helped my family so much in our time of need. They have gone above and beyond to get us what we need. We have been truly blessed to be in the Families First program. If it wasn't for this program, I don't know where we would be."

If you can help, please contact Families First Coordinator Melanie Bagnola at mbagnola@togetherwecope.org or 708.633.5040, x 7233.

## Supporters share spirit of generosity

From 13-year-old Emiyah Twietmeyer's astounding collection of five tons of food in November to the donor who dropped off 2,500 sheets of wrapping paper, the holiday season brought out the best in those who support Together We Cope. Dozens of individuals, school and scout groups, business employees and church members helped stock the pantry, contributed a mountain of goodies and shared their time and talents with TWC.

Emiyah, a Tinley Park teen, reached out to two schools—Prairie View Junior High in Tinley Park and Palos Elementary School in Palos Heights—and broke her own record, jumping from 3,800 pounds of food in 2014 to 10,050 pounds brought in just before Thanksgiving. A month later, Boy Scouts helped restock pantry shelves with a donation of over 12,000 pounds from the annual Scouting for Food drive.

Texas Roadhouse invited 200 clients to a turkey dinner, while Horton Insurance (above) and Miller Coors/Hayes Beer Distributing handed out the ingredients for a holiday meal to hundreds of clients in November and December, enabling them to prepare a turkey with all the fixings.

For others, hoisting a pint was a fun way to generate funds for TWC. In December, three Tinley Park establishments—The Open Bottle, Hailstorm Brewery and 350 Brewing Company—agreed to donate a dollar to TWC from each pint of a particular draft beer sold during December. The program, called Tinley Craft Beer Cheer, capitalized on the growing popularity of craft beer. "This was a really fun fundraiser," said Katlin Bewley, fundraising coordinator. "Plus it generated new supporters for us and we really appreciate it!"





BRIDGING THE GAP

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TINLEY PARK, ILLINOIS 60477

## Return Service Requested

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U.S. Postage  
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**Client Service Center**  
17010 S. Oak Park Ave.  
Tinley Park, IL 60477  
708.633.5040

**Administrative Center**  
17728 S. Oak Park Ave.  
Tinley Park, IL 60477  
708.263.0302

**Nu2u Resale Shop**  
17010 S. Oak Park Ave.  
Tinley Park, IL 60477  
708.633.9180

**Website**  
[togetherwecope.org](http://togetherwecope.org)



## A client's story

### Supporting a single mom when a crisis hits

A south suburban single mother of two, Maureen is working hard to raise her children. After three years waiting tables at a local restaurant, she was excited and proud to be promoted to a supervisor's role, which will mean greater financial stability for her family. Eager to obtain the necessary certification, she made sure she could attend several training sessions without disrupting the family schedule. But on her way to one session, the brakes went out on her car. Roadside assistance responded to the emergency and a mechanic fixed the problem, but Maureen was suddenly facing towing and repair costs of \$850—an unexpected expense that put her behind on her electric bill.

Prepared to put a \$200 charge on her credit card to keep the power on, she phoned the company but was put on hold. That's when her power was turned off. That not only left Maureen and her children in the dark, it meant facing a

charge of \$475 to turn the electricity back on—a situation that threw her into a panic because her 4-year-old son suffers from acute asthma. That's when Maureen turned to Together We Cope.

Case managers were able to pay the bill and have her power turned back on quickly, bringing relief to the entire family. TWC also was able to provide Maureen with groceries from the food pantry, a voucher for the resale shop to provide warm winter clothing, and even Christmas gifts for her son and daughter.

Maureen told her caseworker she tucked away the \$200 she was going to pay towards the electric bill. Since she has cervical cancer and is awaiting a hysterectomy, she is trying to save enough money so that she can afford the six weeks required for recovery.

"I could never have gotten through this on my own," Maureen told her case worker. "I am so grateful for Together We Cope."

**Nu2u**  
RESALE SHOP



Dress with style  
without breaking  
the bank!

Sign up for our monthly coupons  
and get an even better deal while  
you support TWC.

Contact Patty Houlihan at  
[poulihan@togetherwecope.org](mailto:poulihan@togetherwecope.org)