

Sozo Health Ministry: “Yes, we’ll take a look at that.” *by John Rich*

You feel terrible. Your head is pounding, your throat is sore, your nose is red and raw from constant wiping, and there is a knife in your chest that digs a little deeper every time you cough. You have probably had a cold like this before. What did it take to heal you from your disease, to save you from this torment? A warm bed, a companion to care for you, boxes upon boxes of tissues, the flickering light of the television comforting you with your favorite old movies or TV shows, buckets of fluids—water, broth, tea, and juice—and gallons of cough medicine, the really good stuff that knocks you out for at least 8 hours. What made all these things possible? A house with heat and running water, a working car, disposable income, relationships with loved ones, and so many other things.



Healing is not the same as curing. Whether it is the common cold or terminal cancer, healing is a holistic process that involves physical, psychological, environmental, social, spiritual, and financial dimensions. Freeing the body of disease is only part of the equation. That is why we started the Sozo Health Ministry at Patchwork Central (“Sozo” is a New Testament Greek verb that means both “to heal” and “to save.”)

It’s Monday morning and I walk into Patchwork’s Meetinghouse to start my day as the Health Minister. As always, there is that indescribable warmth and hospitality oozing from every pore of the building. Children’s artwork adorns the walls. The colorfully draped worship table meditates quietly underneath the large circular window. Darlene has already started brewing a pot of coffee, filling the air with the smell of caffeine (and I don’t even *like* coffee). I gather my screening equipment—stethoscope, sphygmomanometer (or “blood pressure cuff”), thermometer, penlight, pulse oximeter, and a weight scale with height rod. Throughout the morning, I approach our “regulars,” people who come in for showers, a free cup of coffee, and a place to get in out of the elements:

“Hi, my name is John. I’m the new Health Minister here. We’re starting a program to support people’s health.”

“So, what exactly do you do? Are you a doctor?”

“No, I’m not a doctor. I am a nurse and also a minister. I can answer questions about health conditions and medications. I can refer you to resources like places that will help you pay for your prescriptions. I can drive you to doctor’s appointments. I can even go into the appointment with you so you can have someone there to help make sure that you and the doctor understand each other. We can pray together about your health. I can do screenings to see if you might be at risk for certain conditions. Do you have anything I can help you with today?”

Some people say they’re not interested, but most have something related to their health that they want to share with a professional. There is almost always a question that has gone unanswered or a need that is not being met. I cannot answer every question or meet every need. Many times, though, these people have been to multiple health care professionals who have not even listened to the question or acknowledged the need. This is a big part of why we started the Sozo Health Ministry.

As a nurse, I constantly hear people say, “You’re a nurse? Would you take a look at this ...” There is even a T-shirt that is popular among nurses and reads: “Yes, I’m a nurse. No, I don’t want to look at that.” Like all nurses, I get compassion fatigue. I feel the weariness of having to smile and nod empathetically while inside I’m hungry, tired, and my bladder

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has been ready to burst for 6 hours. But I wanted Patchwork’s Sozo Health Ministry to reflect the willingness to really listen to people’s questions and needs. So our motto is, “Yes, we’ll take a look at that.” Sure enough, starting on the first day of the Health Ministry, I heard several people ask, “You’re a nurse? Would you take a look at this ...” And I proudly answered with our motto, “Yes, I’ll take a look at that.”

Tom (not his real name) is one of Patchwork’s regulars. He had hypertension (high blood pressure) and other health concerns. He had no teeth and his dentures did not fit anymore. He had been kicked out of ECHO, the largest clinic in Evansville for the homeless, uninsured, and underinsured. Fortunately, he had found a Nurse Practitioner at another clinic to take him on as a patient. I drove him to his appointment and went in to the exam room with him and the Nurse Practitioner. The three of us talked through all the issues and made a plan.

The next week, I picked up Tom from his small apartment to take him for some tests. I helped him find the facility, fill out the required forms, and get the tests done. Tom did not realize that he was going to need to get blood drawn. He is deathly afraid of needles and refused to let anyone take his blood. I finally convinced him to let them try. While the phlebotomist worked with the needle and test tubes, I hugged Tom tightly and practically sat in his lap to keep him from jumping out of the chair and running out into the lobby, a needle dangling from his arm.

While we were waiting for the test results, there was a snowstorm in Evansville. Tom called me one day to tell me he was having severe chest pain. I told him to hang up with me and call 911 right away and get to an Emergency Room. Tom did not want to go. He was scared of the ER (and hospitals in general), and did not know how he was going to get home again in all the snow. I finally had to agree to call the ambulance for him. Later that day, I was able to borrow a snow-ready vehicle and find out where they had taken him. I drove to the ER and went in to see how Tom was holding up. We talked and prayed for a long time. He hugged me and thanked me for coming to see him.

Fortunately, it turned out that Tom had not had a heart attack. Unfortunately, the blood test showed that there was something wrong. I drove Tom to the Nurse Practitioner again and we had a long session. Tom was reluctant to see the appropriate specialist for his abnormal lab results. His blood pressure was still high, despite adjustments to his medication. And we still had not been able to find a dentist to see him about his ill-fitting dentures. We were all frustrated.

A few days ago, I finally found a dentist that would accept Tom’s Medicaid and worked with dentures (a surprisingly difficult combination to find!). We made an appointment. I finally convinced Tom to see the specialist he was reluctant to see, so we made that appointment also. And I checked Tom’s blood pressure ... it was normal! Tom’s healing still has a long way to go. But it is an honor and privilege to accompany Tom on this journey.

What does it take to heal a disease, to save you from the torment? It takes doctors and medicines, yes. But it also takes transportation, shelter, someone to speak up for you when you can’t or don’t know how, calling around to find the right dentist, and it takes a health professional who listens to your questions and acknowledges your needs. Perhaps most of all, healing requires overcoming your fears, whether it’s a fear of needles or fear of seeing a specialist who might give you a diagnosis you do not want to hear. The Sozo Health Ministry tries to give people hope to conquer the disease of fear.



Neighborhood Hospitality: Program Evaluation Summary

by Meschac Gervais and Amie Shipman, Masters of Public Administration Students at the University of Southern Indiana

From September to December 2014, we were privileged to conduct an evaluation of Patchwork's Neighborhood Hospitality Program. The Neighborhood Hospitality Program is probably one of Patchwork's most unknown programs, but it is popular and very meaningful to its beneficiaries. It is quietly meeting a different dimension of needs for many who are part of the homeless population of Evansville.



The program was created to address low income individuals' and families' lack of access to services. It provides resources to meet needs of homeless and low-income individuals and families that are not being met by other organizations, a place for social interaction for homeless people and low-income individuals and families, and a place for people experiencing challenging life circumstances to feel safe and supported. More specifically, the activities of the program include showers, coffee, extra food from the food pantry, clothing and miscellaneous donations, diapers, phone usage, help filling out documents, and a place to stay out of the weather.

The services provided align with Patchwork's overall mission in the way that they create a community atmosphere and provide resources for people to grow socially. While the program is appreciated and works properly, the Executive Directors of Patchwork saw the need to evaluate the program in order to understand what draws participants to the program and why people are interested in coming to Patchwork for services rather than going to other organizations with similar services. In answering these questions, Patchwork was seeking ground to respond more effectively and intentionally to the needs of participants.

We used a mixed methods approach to collect the information needed for the evaluation. First we conducted a survey to collect data related to participants' attendance, needs, and demographics. Then we conducted two focus groups that were led respectively by USI Professor Anne Statham and special collaborator Gail Knight Williams. Both surveys and focus groups were fairly representative in regard to the overall participants in the program: 18 people (67% male and 28% female) took the survey, and a total of 11 individuals (8 male and 3 female) participated in both focus groups combined. Only 17% were homeless veterans, and 44% had at least one dependent.

The respondents to our survey were, in large part, fairly regular in their attendance. Seventy-seven percent of them used the Neighborhood Hospitality Program's services 3 or 4 days per week, and 72.2% had been coming to Patchwork for over a year. Most had occasional absences that were usually caused by: inaccessibility to transportation, the weather conditions, their health conditions, a matter of choice, or having a seasonal work opportunity, and the services were not needed at the time. We found from both surveys and focus group responses that the services offered by the program are all valued, with some being more valued than others. Showers, clothing, phone usage, coffee, referrals, and friendliness of staff were the champions.

While all the services offered by the program are also available at other organizations in the community, participants showed a greater interest in using these services at Patchwork instead. The primary goal of the evaluation was crafted into a very straightforward, open-ended question in the survey: why do you come to Patchwork? We were surprised at the responses we received which fell into four main categories: services (38%), the staff (46%), location (13%) and other reasons (4%). That same question was asked in the focus group, and here are

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some quotes of how it was answered by many of the participants:

“Ever since we have been coming here the last few months, which you know is not all the time, but every time we come through the door we feel welcomed.”

“Well I come down here, like I said, I like the environment. I unfortunately... I have checked into that [other organization]. If I wanted to, they have got that day shelter and I don't have to come down here, but I am coming down here from practically [inaudible] walking down here to get out of that place. I don't like the environment there and I don't like the...well let's just leave it at that. It is worth it to me to walk this far.”

“When they are treated better people act differently, when you treated like a human being. Some places you go you are treated like a number or you treated in an insignificant way. You can tell when a person genuinely cares about you and your welfare.”

We found that the key elements that drive people to Patchwork are not the services alone but rather the size of the program, the sense of safety, and the support they receive from the staff. Obviously, all the three elements mentioned are not the service per se, which is why our conclusions demonstrate the meeting of an intangible psychological need that is not met elsewhere where they felt they were being treated very differently:

“Ain't nobody is smiling [referring to other organizations], everybody look like they are mad at me...then I am pissed, then I am down again”

“If you feel down and you coming to a place and you get that smile [referring to Patchwork's administrative staff], it can save your life”

Participants insisted that they like Patchwork because it's not too crowded and because not only do they feel safer with their belongings but more importantly they are given much more attention and are treated with respect. Some identified the Hospitality program as a “private time.” They would give anything to keep the program out of sight and avoid overcrowding. They expect no changes in the program except to add features that will meet some additional needs such as a laundry facility, computer access, warm meals, assistance to locate available housing, more men's clothing, Friday service, worship time during the week, tax assistance for workers, some job training, resume workshop and other opportunities to help them reintegrate into society.

The Neighborhood Hospitality Program is a unique program, a more innovative approach to homelessness services. The results show how much human connections and the service delivery process matter more to the program participants than the actual services that service providers may see they require. Patchwork shows that every individual counts not as a number among others but as a person who needs to be treated with love, respect, and dignity, and that is what makes this organization attractive.

It is shocking and surprising to hear some of the stories that are told when people open up and share. Being homeless demands true courage, emotional and spiritual support even more than services. Nonprofit organizations and service providers in general should strive to keep homeless people in the real circle of society, because only then can they easily get back on their feet. Otherwise it will take a lot of effort to pull them out of the vicious cycle of homelessness.



Soup, Salad, & STYLE! at Patchwork Central

February 26 was an icy, snowy winter day, but inside Patchwork it was warm, cheery, and blossoming with the first hints of spring. At our annual Soup, Salad, & Style fundraising luncheon, a sold-out room full of guests enjoyed a delicious lunch, Spring artwork by the children in our Arts & Smarts program, and a spring fashion show from Wildflower Boutique.

Thank you so much to everyone who attended! Proceeds from the event will provide important support for our programming.

Thank you those who provided the meal: Acropolis Restaurant & Catering, CRS OneSource, Just Rennie's Catering & Cookie Co., Madeleine's Fusion Restaurant, and Scott Schymik Owner of Sauced/Kirby's Private Dining.

Additional thanks goes to our event sponsors and silent auction donors:

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MVS Farewell

Patchwork has hosted a Mennonite Voluntary Service (MVS) Unit since 1988. It is one of many MVS units in cities scattered throughout the United States. MVS is a service opportunity within the Mennonite Church that allows young adults to engage deeply with local communities and churches while living in intentional community and gaining work experience in nonprofit organizations.

Unfortunately, the national MVS organization has seen a significant decline in the number of participants in recent years. In response, MVS has been restructured, and nearly half of the MVS units will close, including Patchwork's.

We will hold an Evansville MVS Unit Decommissioning Service on August 2. It will be a time to celebrate the lasting contributions our MVSers have made to Patchwork and the broader Evansville community, and it will be a time to mourn the end of MVS in Evansville. It will also be a homecoming for past Evansville MVSers and friends. Everyone is welcome!

If you would like more information about the activities planned for August 2, or if you would like to let us know you'll be joining us from out of town, please contact Patchwork's main office.



Electronic Newsletter

While many of our supporters still enjoy receiving Patchwork news delivered by the US Postal Service to their mailboxes, others may prefer to switch to electronic news—or would love to receive *both* printed and electronic news!

It's easy to sign up for bi-weekly electronic updates from Patchwork: simply visit our website, www.Patchwork.org, and click "Join our mailing list" to subscribe. You'll receive stories, photos, and facts from Patchwork's programming, so you'll know how your donations are being used every day and you can share the information with others.

You Can Help! Immediate needs for our programming:

- A 75 gallon fish tank in new or like-new condition (We've got the rest of the equipment, all we need is the tank.)
- Coffee, sugar, and creamer (We serve up about 100 cups of coffee every week.)
- Men's clothing (clean and in limited quantities)
- Diapers (all sizes)
- Dog & cat food
- Travel-size shampoo, deodorant, razors, shaving cream, and new socks for the men (and a few women) taking showers at Patchwork.



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Please be generous as you consider sending your cash contribution in the envelope provided for your convenience. Your generosity will help us continue the Patchwork tradition of providing these many creative programs.

PATCHWORK'S MISSION STATEMENT

Based in Evansville, Indiana, Patchwork Central, Inc creates community and encourages spiritual and social growth

- by offering hospitality,
- by providing opportunities for learning,
- by fostering creativity and involvement in the arts, and
- by working toward a more peaceful and just world.

SUNDAY WORSHIP

The Patchwork Community meets for worship every Sunday at 5:15 p.m. at the Meetinghouse, 100 Washington Avenue, followed by a covered dish supper. All are welcome!



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