



NIGHTLIGHTS

SUMMER 2022

Paralegal with Lived Experience Helps Improve Client Access to Public Benefits

Every Monday, paralegal Beth Warner joins The Night Ministry's Street Medicine Team as it takes free medical care, survival supplies, and more to those living on Chicago's streets. Working alongside the team, Warner helps clients enroll for public benefits such as Medicaid and food and cash assistance.

Warner works for Legal Aid Chicago, a local organization that provides free legal services. Their presence on Monday morning Street Medicine runs greatly reduces the already heavy workload of the team. But that's not all they bring to the table.

"Beth has lived experience being homeless, so they were able to relate to our clients from the start," said Kyanna Johnson, Lead Street Medicine Outreach Worker.

In fact, Warner is a former client of The Night Ministry. "I was impressed with how they treated me and with their sincere interest in wanting to help me and others who were homeless. I am happy to now be in a position to help The Night Ministry in their work," Warner said.

With their lived and professional experience, Warner is well aware of how difficult it can be for those experiencing homelessness to access the benefits they need. "During the pandemic, for many, it could be impossible because the offices are hard to access in person," they said. "The wait times for assistance on the phone are so long that most people who are homeless could not get through."

But Warner streamlines the process for clients and staff. "Whenever we have Beth out with us, we can sign our clients up for benefits right away," said Johnson. "They don't have to wait a week or figure out how



Beth Warner (left), a paralegal with Legal Aid Chicago, joins the Street Medicine Team every week to help connect clients to public benefits such as food assistance.

they're going to get transportation to somewhere they can apply."

Once they are enrolled, public benefits can have a big impact on the lives of Chicagoans experiencing homelessness. "What I am hoping is that our work empowers clients, uplifts them, and brings them some of the independence and stability that they deserve," said Warner. "I have seen right away the difference that our outreach makes." ♦

"What I am hoping is that our work empowers clients, uplifts them, and brings them some of the independence and stability that they deserve."

- Beth Warner, Legal Aid Chicago

HOUSING • HEALTH CARE • HUMAN CONNECTION

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Meet Lead Outreach Minister Juan Roca

Lead Outreach Minister Juan Roca's passion for his work is palpable. He joined The Night Ministry in the fall of 2019, and since then has become an invaluable part of the agency's Outreach and Health Ministry Program.

Roca works on the Health Outreach Bus, a custom-built vehicle that visits neighborhoods across Chicago with high concentrations of poverty and homelessness. Bus staff offer community members food, health care, links to supportive services—and Roca's forte, human connection.

We sat down with him recently to learn more about him and his role.

What are your main responsibilities at The Night Ministry?

I make sure that everything goes smoothly on the Bus and that it's equipped with things that we need for the night—food, water, hygiene kits—and that everything is safe for staff and volunteers.

I'm also the supervisor of the Outreach Ministers on the Bus. We try to build relationships with the communities we serve. We help people who are experiencing homelessness, who are sick, or abandoned—we are here for them.

Before you joined the agency, what sort of work did you do?

I was the Director of Religious Education at my church, where I managed almost 400 students and nearly 100 teaching volunteers. I also worked for some time as a substance use counselor. That background helps me handle interactions with our clients who use drugs and alcohol.

What drew you to The Night Ministry?

During one class with the high schoolers at my church, we were looking for ways to help people who were in need and



Lead Outreach Minister Juan Roca providing coffee to a Health Outreach Bus visitor in Chicago's South Shore neighborhood.

found a video of The Night Ministry doing outreach—giving out coffee, hygiene kits, and taking care of people who were wounded.

It impacted me and the kids a lot. My role at the church was mainly office work, but I wanted to do more than that. I thought, The Night Ministry's work is marvelous—visiting people who are living under bridges, parks, and doing that work in wintertime too.

That was what sparked my interest. I applied one day and ended up here.

What is the most rewarding aspect of your job?

The job is hard, but when our clients tell us, "Hey, you are doing a good job," that gives us courage and helps

us to keep going. We depend on each other.

And my coworkers, too. We are a great team. I laugh a lot with them. We protect each other at every stop. We take care of each other. That's the thing I like the most. ◇

"The job is hard, but when our clients tell us, 'Hey, you are doing a good job,' that gives us courage and helps us to keep going."

– Juan Roca, Lead Outreach Minister

Save the Date!

NIGHT LIGHTS 2022
Wednesday, September 21
River Roast, Chicago

The Night Ministry's Associate Board looks forward to returning to an in-person evening of fun and philanthropy! Guests will be able to enjoy drinks, appetizers, mingling, and a silent auction with fabulous dining, travel, and entertainment packages. Proceeds from the Associate Board's Annual Gala will benefit the mission of The Night Ministry.

The Associate Board supports the overall mission and activities of The Night Ministry. Acting as ambassadors of the agency, Associate Board members engage the community through volunteering, fundraising, networking, and advocacy opportunities targeted towards young professionals.

Good Neighbor Guide Provides Suggestions for Engaging with Unhoused Community Members

Should I give money to people who are panhandling? Why do some people experiencing homelessness stay on the streets instead of going to a shelter? What causes homelessness in the first place?

If you have ever asked these questions, The Night Ministry now has a Good Neighbor Guide on its website that provides some answers. You can access it at www.thenightministry.org/goodneighborguide.

“We created this guide to stop the perpetuation of myths about homelessness and to help prepare our communities to engage with our houseless neighbors with respect, kindness, and solidarity,” said Brittany Caine-Conley, Congregational Engagement Manager at The Night Ministry.

The 13-page guide provides statistics about homelessness in Chicago and explores its causes. It debunks common myths about homelessness, including the misbeliefs that people chose to be unhoused and that houseless individuals don't want to work. The guide also discusses some of the reasons why people do not stay in shelters, including a lack of available beds, privacy concerns, and religious or lifestyle requirements. And it outlines steps you can take to be a better neighbor.



“We created this guide to stop the perpetuation of myths about homelessness and to help prepare our communities to engage with our houseless neighbors with respect, kindness, and solidarity.”

– Brittany Caine-Conley, Congregational Engagement Manager

So, what should you do when someone asks you for money?

“The decision is up to you,” said Caine-Conley. “There is nothing wrong with giving people money if they ask for it. If you choose not to, for whatever reason, or are unable to, make eye contact and decline politely. The main thing is to honor the humanity of the person in front of you.” ♦

Lighting Up the Night

We look forward to gathering with our friends, supporters, members of our staff, and our Board of Directors at **Lighting Up the Night: An Evening to Benefit The Night Ministry on Monday, June 13**, at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, from 5:30 to 8:30 pm. It has been nearly three years since we were able to come together to celebrate and support our mission in person, so this will be a very special evening.

For more information about Lighting Up the Night, please visit www.thenightministry.org/lighting-up-the-night.

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Pregnant and Parenting Program Bedrooms Get Special Makeovers

The young mothers and children who reside at The Night Ministry's Parenting with Purpose transitional living program are enjoying homey bedrooms uniquely designed for the comfort and privacy of families, thanks to a partnership with nonprofit Humble Design Chicago.

Humble Design Chicago provides custom interior design services and furnishings for the homes of people exiting homelessness. The nonprofit recently transformed the eight bedrooms on the fourth floor of The Night Ministry's Open Door Shelter (ODS)-West Town, where Parenting with Purpose is located, turning them into living spaces that are more inviting for pregnant and parenting mothers and their children.

"Each room is designed to be homelike and make people feel cozy and comfortable," said Julie Dickinson, Director of Humble Design Chicago. "We tried to create a feel for each room, so each room is unique."

The rooms are furnished with essentials such as beds, cribs, and dressers, many of which came from the Humble Design Chicago warehouse. Volunteers with Humble Design Chicago also revived the spaces with special touches such as fresh coats of bright paint, area rugs, sheer curtains, toys, and canvases with the names of the infants and children residing in the rooms.

Betsy Carlson, Director of The Night Ministry's Youth Programs, said it was important to make the bedrooms feel like home.

"Parenting with Purpose is designed to offer up to two years of housing," said Carlson. "It's a program that gives young families the time to transition from a period of homelessness



One of the eight redesigned bedrooms at the Parenting with Purpose program.

and trauma into a more permanent living situation. It's meant to be home for a long time."

The transformation process was relatively quick. Humble Design Chicago's volunteers showed up at the nonprofit's warehouse on a Monday to pick out furniture. The following Friday, they spent the day at ODS-West Town transforming the rooms.

And the response has been overwhelmingly positive, with residents enjoying the coziness and special touches of their private bedrooms and staff marveling at how much more inviting the spaces feel.

Plans are underway to transform the shared kitchen, dining, and living areas of the fourth floor so the space is better suited for the young children who live there with their mothers. A visiting room will also be created on the first floor of ODS-West Town as a place for shelter residents to spend time with relatives and friends. ◇

"Each room is designed to be homelike and make people feel cozy and comfortable."

– Julie Dickinson,
Humble Design Chicago

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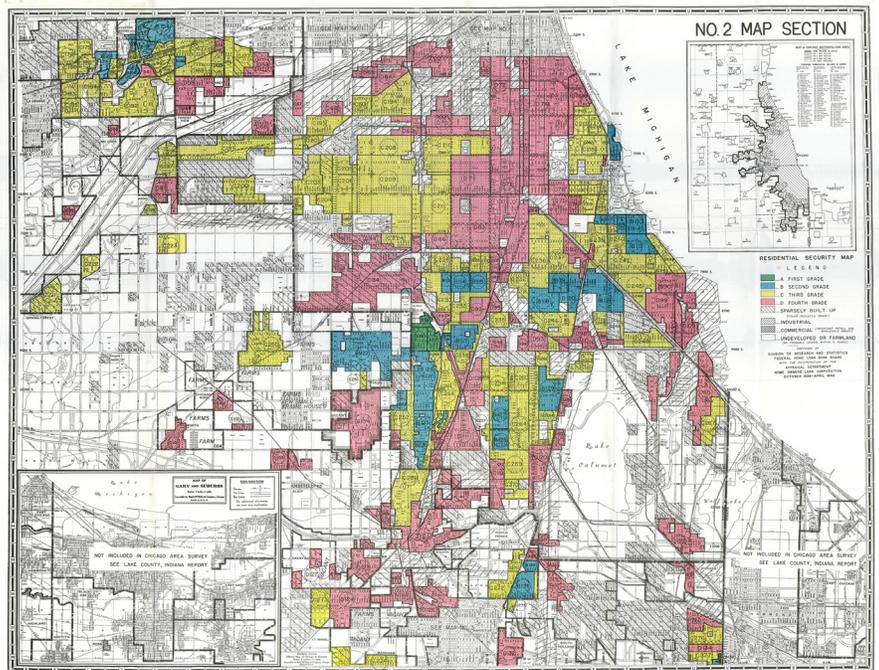
History of Systemic Housing Discrimination Contributes to Today's Housing and Wealth Disparities

According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, African Americans account for 39% of those facing homelessness in the country, despite making up just 13% of the general population. Among the major contributing factors to this imbalance is over a century of systemic housing discrimination. Racially discriminatory real estate practices have led to segregation, discouragement of investment in Black neighborhoods, and the restriction of Black families' abilities to build generational wealth, all of which play a large role in today's housing and income inequities.

"When you think about housing as being a pathway to economic mobility and opportunity—for far too many people in this country it's been a pathway that's been full of roadblocks," said Renee Willis, Senior Vice President for Racial Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion at the National Low Income Housing Coalition.

When Black Americans fled the Jim Crow South for the North during the Great Migration, they were met in cities like Chicago with racially restrictive covenants. White communities adopted these legally enforceable agreements, which prevented people of specified ethnic or racial groups from purchasing, leasing, or occupying local properties. As a result, in Chicago, African Americans were barred from living in much of the city and segregated into what became known as the Black Belt.

Federal programs begun in the 1930s—such as the Home Owners' Loan Corporation and the Federal Housing Administration—that were designed to make it easier for Americans to buy homes explicitly denied these opportunities to Black families. Neighborhoods with even small Black populations were deemed too risky to insure mortgages. This practice, known as redlining—as these areas were initially marked in red on coded maps—persisted for decades, restricting the ability of generations of African Americans to buy property and discouraging investment in Black communities.



A color-coded map issued by the federal government in 1940 showing the southern portion of the metro Chicago area. Neighborhoods in red, where African Americans lived, were deemed too risky for investment.

"When you think about housing as being a pathway to economic mobility and opportunity—for far too many people in this country it's been a pathway that's been full of roadblocks."

– Renee Willis,
National Low Income Housing Coalition

With mortgages largely unavailable to them, many African Americans were forced to rely on exploitative contracts that denied them equity when they purchased a home. Real estate speculators sold homes at highly inflated prices to Black families on a contract basis, under which the seller kept the deed until the home's price was fully paid. If the buyer missed a payment, they risked eviction and the loss of their entire investment.

Undoing the legacy of historic housing discrimination, as well as discriminatory practices that persist today, takes collective action, Willis said.

"It's about changing what we value as a society and people working together to address this huge issue. We have to shift our perceptions so that people of color are seen as human beings with an equitable opportunity for housing and wealth."

This is the second in a series of NIGHTLIGHTS articles exploring the intersection of race and homelessness. For a longer version of this article, please visit www.thenightministry.org/blog/housing-discrimination. ♦



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Young People Learn Life Skills through Fun and Engaging Workshops

The Night Ministry's Youth Programs have launched a series of in-person workshops to teach a range of life skills to the young people the agency serves. Held at The Night Ministry's Bucktown headquarters, the workshops cover topics ranging from budgeting and apartment living to professional communication and technology.

Instructors include staff, interns, and members of the Associate Board, the young professionals who support the mission of the agency through volunteering, fundraising, and advocacy.

"Based upon our wealth of experience working with young people, we knew the themes they have wanted in the past, what they could benefit from, where they always have questions, and in which areas they can grow," said Anthony Monterroso, Youth Diversion Specialist and host of multiple sessions.

Young people also shared direct input on which topics they would find the most helpful, he added.

During each workshop, instructors offer activities, a presentation, and a post-session evaluation form for attendees to share what they enjoyed as well as what could be improved.

Engagement in the workshops has been strong. "They speak up, they talk about their own personal experiences, they give their input, they ask questions," said Monterroso. "It's been very good for the young people in several different ways, not just from a



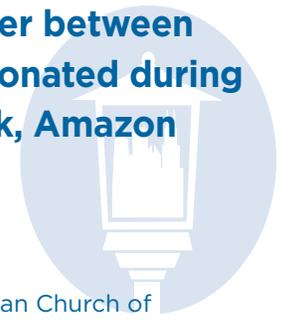
Program Specialist Ivory Hopkins (left) and Lead Case Manager Vichelle Frazier lead a workshop about technology and professional communication.

learning perspective but it also gives them the chance to speak up when they might not otherwise."

Case Manager and fellow instructor Sarah Warner agrees, "I'm surprised at how comfortable all of the participants have been in terms of sharing their personal experience as it relates to the topics. A lot of them will stick around and approach me afterwards and they'll say, 'I really learned a lot.'"

The care and planning behind each session have proven beneficial. "It's a very thorough, thought-out process. It seems like our hard work has paid off because the young people seem to be having fun as they learn," said Monterroso. ♦

Thank you to those who generously gave at the \$500 level or higher between February 1 and May 15, 2022. Thank you as well to everyone who donated during this time period through alternate giving portals, such as Facebook, Amazon Smile, Workplace Giving, and more.



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