Depaul USA Fights Student Homelessness

Depaul USA has been a leader in the fight to end student homelessness since it created its Dax Program to assist homeless and housing insecure DePaul University students in 2015. The Dax Program began as a host-home program, placing students with families. In 2017, Depaul USA opened its first Dax House in Chicago’s Pilsen neighbourhood. Last year, the Dax House relocated to a former convent in Ukrainian Village. Six students live there now.

The Dax Program recently garnered favorable media attention. CBS Sunday Morning did a cover story on university homelessness and highlighted the Dax Program as a creative and effective response to the problem. WGN-TV in Chicago also aired a cover story on its 9 pm news that featured the program and the students’ stories. Last year, the program worked with 19 DePaul students. Three students graduated and the remaining 16 are enrolled in the university.

The Dax Program is expanding in Chicago and nationally. In February, Depaul USA purchased a bungalow near Midway Airport that will be home to four more DePaul students. A 24-room Dax House is planned for the former convent of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Philadelphia. In February, the Philly project, which will serve students from several universities, won community support. Administrators at St. John’s University in New York City are also working on bringing the Dax model to their campus.

"I want to thank Depaul USA, especially Abe and Sr. Judy, for everything you have done for me and the role you have played in my growth and becoming. Thank you for believing in me and giving me a chance. The Dax family will always be my favorite miracle story. The things you do without knowing us, the risks you make taking in college students will never go unnoticed and unappreciated. You are changing lives through love and faith in us and I am forever grateful that I was fortunate enough to be one of the lucky ones to be touched and changed by the Dax Program."

– Sharon, graduate of the Dax Program
At Home

Earlier this year, Chicago was gripped by a polar vortex. It was so cold that restaurants, offices and businesses closed. Workers were instructed to stay home. I had a long-scheduled doctor’s appointment, so I ventured out. On my way home, I took a picture of a sign indicating that the temperature was -20°F. I keep that photo on my phone as a reminder of the historic nature of this past winter.

What I also remember about the vortex is how it inspired citizens to come to the aid of Chicago’s homeless men and women. A dance studio was converted into a makeshift emergency shelter in the Pilsen neighborhood. A woman visited a homeless encampment along the Chicago River and then, with friends and supporters, paid to move the camp’s residents into a hotel.

Sometimes the extraordinary brings out the extraordinarily good in each of us. Yesterday, I read that a homeless refugee aged 8 won the State of New York’s chess championship for his age bracket. As his fame spread, a Go Fund Me page sprouted to support his family. His teacher told media outlets that the boy and his family should soon be housed.

It is indecent that folks live in tents when it is twenty degrees below zero. However, let’s draw inspiration from the good we see as well. One of Depaul USA’s myriad roles is to provide a structure or forum for people to engage their ‘goodness impulse’. We provide places to volunteer, to develop relationships with our homeless neighbors, and yes, to donate, so we can fund our services. In all the cities where we are at work, you have responded generously time and time again.

The vortex is gone. Read on and see how you and other Depaul USA allies are creating hope and change. Spring is coming.

Thank you for your support.

Charles W. Levesque
President & Executive Director

Inspired by Vincentian Values

Depaul USA is inspired by the values of Saint Vincent de Paul, a major social reformer in 17th Century France. These values include a commitment to help the poorest of the poor and to place actions ahead of words.

“Extend your mercy towards others, so that there can be no one in need whom you meet without helping. For what hope is there for us if God should withdraw His Mercy from us?”

- St. Vincent de Paul
New Housing in Little Rock

On March 12, 2019, Depaul USA broke ground on its first new construction project. The project, a duplex on State Street in Little Rock, combines high quality design with affordability. Each unit in the duplex will be rented to a very low-income individual at a rate equal to 30% of his/her adjusted monthly net income. Prior to the groundbreaking, Depaul USA’s housing initiatives all involved the rehabilitation or repurposing of existing buildings.

Depaul USA has managed Little Rock’s day resource center since 2015. The duplex represents an expansion of Depaul USA’s programming in the Arkansas capital to include affordable housing. In addition to the State Street project, Depaul USA plans to build another duplex on a lot donated by the City of Little Rock this summer. Additional duplexes will follow. Individual donors and foundations have provided all the funding for the Little Rock housing initiative.

The duplex was designed by Jeremiah Russell of Rogue Architecture in Little Rock. At the groundbreaking, Jeremiah told those assembled that he became an architect because he wanted to work on affordable housing. “Today is one of the proudest days of my career,” he announced. Mike Orndorff of Orndorff Construction Company is the builder.

Wear in the Macon Community

Wear is a social enterprise of Depaul USA, where shoppers can have fun finding a bargain while supporting transformational services at Daybreak day/resource center.

Wear is committed to being an active contributor in the Macon community. Recently, Wear donated ties to L.H. Williams Elementary School. The young men learned proper “tie techniques” in an after school program, Tie Tuesday. Two frequent Wear customers hosted the program.

Support individuals facing homelessness in your community.
Visit depaulusa.org

Depaul USA is a registered 501 (c)(3) not-for-profit organization.
In Memoriam: Ernest Melvill

Ernest was only in Depaul USA New Orleans’ Rapid Rehousing for Chronically Homeless Individuals (RRCHI) Program for four months before he passed away. His story may not be considered a happy one, but during his brief journey with Depaul USA he shared his hope, determination, resilience and gratitude.

Ernest was considered an “old timer” on the streets of New Orleans. Homeless off and on for more than 10 years, Ernest was accepted into the RRCHI program last fall and finally had a place to call home. It was only a few days after moving into his home that Ernest was devastated by a diagnosis of Stage 4 Lung Cancer.

As his condition worsened, Ernest had difficulty breathing and could no longer enjoy his long walks. Ernest’s health continued to decline and he was admitted into the hospital. He tried to remain hopeful. He was always pleasant and patient; despite his physical pain, depression and anxiety. Ernest had to come to terms with the devastating irony that although he was finally no longer homeless, he had to stay in the hospital and could not enjoy having a home.

The hospital is located across the street from the Rebuild Center, where the Depaul USA New Orleans offices are located. To staff and volunteers at the Rebuild Center, Ernest was well-known and well-liked. Director Jessica, and Case Manager Jonathan, made a point to visit Ernest 2-3 times a week. They had close contact with his doctors, and would always try to lift his spirits. He would say all he needed was “a good book and his Bible”. Jessica and Jonathan would bring him a different book and surprise him with one of his favorite treats such as a burger, coffee, king cake, or chocolate muffins each time they visited.

Jessica says, “It became our job not to keep Ernest in housing, but instead, to keep his spirits high, help him make medical decisions, and give him emotional support. Many difficult decisions had to be made. It was a true honor to get to know Ernest, his story, and walk with him during his final steps of life.”

Testimony from St. Louis

“Since moving into St. Lazare House, I have maintained employment for over six months, which is a huge achievement for me. In the past, I have only held a job for a month or less. I moved into St. Lazare House a year ago and feel much more secure and stable. I no longer have to move from place to place and worry about where I will sleep or eat. I am thankful to St. Lazare and the staff here. Most of all, I am proud of myself and how far I have come in only one year.”

St. Lazare Resident
Meet Thomas from Philadelphia

Thomas entered the Rapid Rehousing project in May 2018 when the home he had been living in was sold to another landlord. He was working part-time at a grocery store, but could not save enough money for a security deposit for a new apartment, so he started staying at a homeless shelter.

Thomas was referred to Depaul’s Rapid Rehousing Program. Once he arrived, Thomas worked with the staff in the Employment Department to update his resume and look for higher paying work in his field. Thomas was diligent and, after a month, found a job working as a Residential Aide at a local mental health agency.

Once he had a better paying job, he started working with his case manager to identify an apartment within easy bus transportation of his worksite. After only 60 days in Rapid Rehousing, Thomas moved to his new home and now returns monthly to volunteer at Depaul. His landlord says, “Thomas is one of the most helpful residents we have. I’m glad that I partner with Depaul House to give guys like Thomas a second chance.”

Macon’s Sleepout Has Record-Breaking Results

The 6th Annual Greater Macon Sleepout was held on February 28th to raise funds for the men and women experiencing homelessness in Macon, Georgia. The Sleepout is an annual event to support the variety of services at Daybreak – a project of Depaul USA.

For one night, guests show solidarity with Macon’s homeless, reflect on the humanity of Macon’s residents, and are mindful of what it means to live in an intentional, inclusive community.

This year, the Sleepout had a goal of $140,000 -- about one third of the center’s annual operating budget. Nearly 125 people from across Middle Georgia came to sleep out and support Daybreak. Thanks to the generosity of many individuals, sponsors, churches, and foundations, we raised more than $160,000. A special thank you to our presenting sponsors: Geico and Subaru, and our gold sponsors: Blue Bird School Bus Foundation, Childers’ Children, Dorothy V. and Logan Lewis Foundation, Sheridan Construction, and the Sheridan Family Foundation.

Support individuals facing homelessness in your community.
Visit depaulusa.org

Depaul USA is a registered 501 (c)(3) not-for-profit organization.
Volunteer Spotlight: Queen of All Saints
St. Vincent DePaul Conference in St. Louis

The question posed to St. Vincent DePaul on his deathbed was, “If there is one thing you would have done, what would it have been?” His answer was simply, “More.”

This embodies the spirit of the Queen of All Saints St. Vincent DePaul (SVDP) Conference. On any given day, Depaul USA staff in St. Louis will encounter one of the members of the Conference offering his or her time and talents to help our St. Louis programs. These volunteers are instrumental to our day-to-day work with homeless men and women.

For more than 10 years, our St. Louis programs have benefited from the support of the Conference. The volunteers started with bringing Christmas gifts to our residents. What started as a “little” Christmas project has turned out to be a tremendous blessing for Depaul USA.

The Queen of All Saints SVDP Conference’s services expanded and soon, they provided a moving company, the Holy Haulers, to assist our clients with furniture and move them into their apartments. The Holy Bakers provide healthy nourishment for the annual 5K Run/Walk, and in 2016-2017 this group of volunteers made sure St. Lazare House was ready to host our new youth program. These volunteers even assist with basic needs like paying utility bills and providing food and home goods. As their present leader says, “We are able to do this because of the generosity of the whole parish. The money we have is meant to be used.”

The success of Depaul St. Louis housing programs is partially due to the work of staff but as Gretchen, Director of St. Lazare House, says, “It takes a village.” Depaul St. Louis’s village is the Queen of All Saints SVDP Conference. Their generosity has not only changed our organization, but has changed the lives of our participants. Thank you to every member of the Queen of All Saints SVDP Conference. There are no words that truly express how grateful we are for your service.

Daybreak: Radical Hospitality in Action

Daybreak volunteers, community members, and staff form the chorus of contributors who tell the story of hospitality in Macon, Georgia. These Daybreak supporters have written and published a beautiful hardcover book outlining the history and work of Daybreak. Edited by Sharon McElhaney. Daybreak: Radical Hospitality in Action, includes ten original portraits by local artist Yvonne Gabriel. All proceeds from book sales benefit Daybreak.
Director of Jericho Way Named Arkansas Social Worker of the Year

The Arkansas Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers has named Mandy Davis “Arkansas Social Worker of the Year” for the outstanding work she is doing at Jericho Way, Depaul USA’s day resource center in Little Rock, AR.

The Social Worker of The Year Award honors a member of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) who exemplifies the best of the profession’s values and achievements through specific accomplishments.

In an interview with the University of Arkansas, Johanna Thomas, the president-elect of NASW-AR, said Mandy “epitomizes the values and ethics of the social work profession. Her passion, drive, and advocacy on behalf of our unsheltered neighbors is not only inspiring, but is making a real difference in the lives of so many people.”

Mandy Davis joined Depaul USA in May 2015 as a social worker at the Jericho Way Day Resource Center before becoming the director in 2017. She says she “found a home at Depaul USA and couldn’t be happier serving those in Little Rock who are experiencing homelessness.”

Foundation Support Provides Critical Funds for Depaul USA Programs

Polk Bros. Foundation was instrumental in helping Depaul USA meet its goal to purchase a second Dax House in Chicago. Only $4,000 was needed in order to receive a matching gift from an anonymous donor. Polk Bros. Foundation awarded a discretionary grant of $4,000 to help us complete the challenge!

Geico Philanthropic Foundation awarded the Daybreak program $10,000 to support program operations. Geico has been in partnership with Depaul USA since 2012 providing charitable grants, volunteers, and supporting Daybreak’s 6th Annual Sleepout.

The Beneficial Foundation awarded $5,000 to Depaul House in Philadelphia. Depaul House can accommodate 27 male residents in transitional housing for one year. Depaul House serves more than 60 men annually and provides additional resources through its After Care Program.

Support individuals facing homelessness in your community.
Visit depaulusa.org
Depaul USA is a registered 501 (c)(3) not-for-profit organization.
SAVE THE DATE! Upcoming Depaul USA Events:

April 12th - St. Louis, MO
“Hare’ Raisin Dance Concert
St. Catherine Laboure Parish Hall

April 27th - Philadelphia, PA
Scavenger Crawl
East Passyunk Avenue

May 11th - New Orleans, LA
Fund-Raise the Roof
Basin Lakeview

June 4th - Chicago, IL
2nd Annual Dax Gala: Unlocking the Future
Cortelyou Commons

October 5th - St. Louis, MO
“No Place Like Home” 5K Run/Walk
Tower Grove Park

October 5th - New Orleans, LA
“Unmasked Dreams” Masquerade Ball
Generations Hall

October 12th - Little Rock, AR
Sleep Out in the Rock
Murray Park Pavilions

November 2nd - Philadelphia, PA
“Feels Like Home” Gala
Germantown Cricket Club

Help End Homelessness

We hope you enjoyed reading about the work of Depaul USA in this edition of Homeward. If you would like to support us, please either:

☐ Mail a check. Please make checks payable to Depaul USA and send to:
Depaul USA
P.O. Box 756
Chicago, IL 60690

☐ Donate via credit card by visiting give.depaulusa.org/donate

Depaul USA is a registered 501 (c)(3) not-for-profit organization.
Our vision is a world where everyone has a place to call home and a stake in his or her community