

Summer 2023

# Hope in Action

Your compassion to help neighbors in need

When she  
had no one...  
you were  
there.



Helping Our Neighbors In Need  
Society of St. Vincent de Paul — Madison



## Julie's Journal



**Heartbroken, Frustrated, Grateful:** a tangled ball of emotions for one situation.

I went on a home visit with my husband recently. There we met Carter\*. His apartment was empty, except for some clothes on the floor for his bed, a box of berries and two bottles of water. He offered the water to my husband and me.

**Heartbroken:** This young man, a father in his early 30s, has cancer.

**Frustrated:** His treatment has left him unable to work. He used his savings as long as the money lasted, then sold his belongings and moved in with a friend until he couldn't stay any longer. For five months now, his disability claim has been "backlogged." He has no income.

**Grateful:** When he was homeless, he was able to qualify for an apartment. He moved into his new home about three weeks ago.

The end of COVID-19 pandemic programs, combined with rising prices, make it harder for people like Carter to afford basic life necessities. Of the 100 largest cities in the USA, Madison has the fastest rising rent (14.1% in the past year and 30.4% since March 2020\*\*). To survive, more and more people turn to programs like our food pantry for help.

In Dane County, a quarter of renters spend more than 50% of their income on housing. Those on the margins, *those we serve*, spend even more.

A new book, *Poverty, by America*, by Matthew Desmond, describes public policy decisions that cause entrenched poverty in our country. Poverty in America is higher and deeper than any other developed country in the world. While I don't agree with all that Desmond proposes, surely, we can do better.

You are already doing better for those in need in our community. Your generosity gives food, clothing, beds, furniture, household goods and medicine to neighbors like Carter and his kids. You are helping thousands of neighbors with your faithful support. In addition to these material items, you give Carter hope.

**Heartbroken**, I pray for Carter.

**Frustrated**, I advocate on his behalf.

In **gratitude**, I say, *thank you*, for helping our neighbors in need.

*Julie*

Julie Bennett  
CEO & Executive Director

\* Name changed to maintain neighbor's privacy.

\*\* <https://www.apartmentlist.com/research/national-rent-data>

## Got goods?

**St. Vinny's will pick them up!** If you can't get to a store to donate your gently used items in-person, call St. Vinny's for a free home pickup. We'll pick up anywhere across Dane County; from Barneveld and Cross Plains to Edgerton and Evansville.

Call (608) 278-2920 x1 to schedule your home pickup. Scan here to view a packing guide or visit <https://svdpmadison.org/home-pickups/>.



# Fighting hunger, one volunteer at a time

For Dan Millmann, volunteering has always been on his radar.

After retiring from a 37-year career as a CPA, he volunteers at several places throughout town: the Catholic Multicultural Center, Queen of Peace Parish, Madison Children's Museum. He's the president of Madison South Rotary and joined the St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry team last fall.

"In my mind, I always knew that I would work and once I was done I would volunteer and give back," Dan said.

Growing up in Wauwatosa, Dan's father modeled volunteering. Dan also credits the Catholic education he received from kindergarten through high school for instilling the value of volunteering in him. He said it's a shared mission to help our neighbors.

"Through high school, there was always something [volunteering] there," Dan said. "My dad was active in the church and as a family, we would volunteer. It's always been in my mind that you do things like that and I'm just wired that way."

Volunteering is something Dan has modeled now for his kids, both graduating this year; one from high school, one from college. He acknowledges young adults and young professionals are often strained for time, as he was early in his career. Volunteering can fall down the priority list after raising a family, managing a home, or working full-time. Yet, he's impressed by the number of college students volunteering at the St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry today.

## Camaraderie

His awareness of the St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry began at his church on the west side of Madison and grew after a tour of the pantry several years ago. Looking for a volunteer opportunity close to home, he contacted the pantry and called to see how he could help. He didn't have any specific idea what we wanted to do, how he could help, or all that was going on, but the staff put him right to work!

As a table loader now for the outdoor, drive-through pantry, Dan gets to do an active role and connect with new people. He values the camaraderie of a diverse volunteer team.

"I was looking for something to itch the social side of me



Dan volunteering in the pantry.

and connect with people," Dan said. "What I do now does both of those things. This gives me the opportunity to give back. It makes me feel productive and I get to talk with a bunch of interesting people I never would have met. We're all people looking to give back and it's fun to be a part of and associated with this group of people."

## Helping people get food

Dan is passionate about helping people get food. He found that volunteering at the pantry was a natural and organized way to do that.

"Access to food and food insecurity - covering basic needs for families - were some things that were important to me personally," Dan said "So giving people what they need so they don't go hungry and have access to food. I wanted to do whatever I could to help with that."

The need for food is great, Dan continued, and it's everywhere. Just about every town across the county has a small pantry of its own, he's learned. The work of the St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry and all of the pantries in the area is so important; they're filling a huge need.

"I don't know what we would do without pantries like this," Dan said. "I can't imagine a country like ours having people who didn't want to take care of their community."

Join the volunteer team! Visit <https://svdpmadison.org/join-us/> or contact Zoe Lavender, Volunteer Coordinator, at [zlavender@svdpmadison.org](mailto:zlavender@svdpmadison.org) or (608) 442-7200 x71 to help.



## Neighbor story



Rachel and Marina

## Preventing family homelessness

Living in shelters, outdoors, or in their cars, between 70 and 100 Dane County families are homeless any day of the week. Far more local families are at risk of becoming homeless while doubling up with family or friends. Schools and service agencies report that most of these fragile families consist of a single custodial adult (mom, dad, aunt, grandparent, etc.) raising minor-aged children.

Rachel\* and her children, Marcus and Marina, are one of these families. They were staying with Rachel's cousin and two kids for several months before it became too crowded and the landlord threatened to evict them for violating the lease.

Rachel connected with YWCA Madison, which helps doubled-up families find permanent housing. But once in her new apartment, there was still a good chance Rachel's family would fall back into homelessness without additional support.

Placing homeless and at-risk families in housing is not enough. National data on housing with long-term supportive services overwhelmingly shows greater housing stability, improved enrollment in early education, and better child welfare outcomes.

Local nonprofit housing providers, YWCA Madison and Catholic Charities of Madison, receive funding to place

families in housing. But this funding does not cover ongoing help that keeps families in their new homes. Without supportive services to address challenges with transportation, mental health, financial literacy, employment, childcare, parenting skills, addiction recovery, and health care, families are likely to return to homelessness.

This is where you and St. Vincent de Paul — Madison's new St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Program step in.

The Seton Program was created in the fall of 2022 to fill this glaring gap and help fragile families on the path to stability.

The Seton Program provides wrap-around, flexible, individualized supportive services to newly housed single adult families. Seton Program staff and volunteers accompany families to work on issues negatively impacting their well-being and help them create manageable goals that bring stability, prevent future homelessness, and help them thrive.

Up to 20 families will be enrolled in the Seton Program in its first year, with the capacity to grow over time. Support is provided with no term limit; however, a two-year enrollment is expected.



## Getting help to thrive

In Rachel's case, the help she receives through the Seton Program goes beyond material necessities. It's a chance to connect with a trusted person and receive encouragement to push through challenges. Emotional support and accompaniment means she's not alone during this stressful point in life.

Seton Program Director and social worker, Priscilla Lentini, is that trusted person.

"I tell people, 'You're not a mess. You're going through a lot of challenges right now. And you have a lot of strengths that you're bringing to the issues you're facing,'" Priscilla said. "Their attitude flips to, 'I can do this. I have the capability to face what I'm going through right now.' Sometimes you just need to hear it from someone else to believe that you're not your issues."

You have made the St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Program possible. With you, Rachel's life, and those of her children are changing for the better.

"The Seton Program complements existing efforts from SVdP Madison such as the food pantry and pharmacy that address the immediate needs of our neighbors," Susanna Herro, Board Secretary, said. "So many of us care deeply about our brothers and sisters in need and are eager to walk alongside them on a path of greater stability. This program makes that possible."

To effectively and efficiently support fragile families, a central program space is under construction where families can meet with Priscilla, mental health, and human service professionals, search for job opportunities, identify affordable child care, and access additional resources.

The Seton Program will be housed above the St. Vincent de Paul Williamson Street Thrift Store, currently undergoing an extensive building redevelopment (see sidebar). Completion is expected in the fall of 2024.

Because of you, Rachel is participating in an addiction recovery peer group, has landed a job with good benefits, and is learning how to advocate for her children at school. Marcus has a tutor to help him with math and Marina is excited about art class in Pre-K. They are happy to have a place to call home where they can heal from the trauma of homelessness, and set a course to move from surviving to thriving.

*Please keep Rachel and her children in your prayers. To share your volunteer time or to make a gift to the St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Program visit, <https://svdpmadison.org/>.*

*\* Names changed to maintain the neighbors' privacy. Photos are representational.*



The former St. Elizabeth Ann Seton House Office (left).



Demolition on April 25, 2023.



Seton Program Suite rendering.

## Reinvesting in our first neighborhood

Since 1925, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul — Madison has had a presence in the Williamson-Marquette Neighborhood. We're reinvesting in this community by expanding St. Vinny's Williamson Street Store and building new program space for the St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Program office. St. Vinny's Thrift Store will remain open through construction.

Visit <https://svdpmadison.org/baldwin-street-project/> to view additional construction photos.





District Council of  
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Society of St. Vincent  
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### Our mission

We are a Catholic lay organization in which members join together in friendship to grow spiritually by providing person-to-person services to our neighbors in need.

### Your crucial support

Your compassion and generosity changes the lives of thousands of people each year in Dane County. Donate online now by scanning the below QR code or call (608) 442-7200 x34.

Contact Eric Fleming at [efleming@svdpmadison.org](mailto:efleming@svdpmadison.org) or (608) 442-7200 x34 to leave a bequest in your will or estate to care for future needs of our community.



## With you... lives change.

With you... families have full dinner tables, patients heal with needed medications, children sleep safely, and people are clothed with dignity. Thank you Care Café sponsors for leading the way!



**AprilAire** **UWHealth** **HAUSMANN GROUP**



Missed out on sponsoring Care Café this year? Never fear! Planning for next year's breakfast is underway. Come join the club! Contact Eric Fleming, Director of Development, at (608) 442-7200 x34 or [efleming@svdpmadison.org](mailto:efleming@svdpmadison.org) to get your business in front of 400+ dedicated community members.