

January 31st, 2006

Greetings,

This month we had a chance to visit an intentional community near Athens, GA called Jubilee Partners. Jubilee works refugees who are just entering the United States and attempts to teach them skills that they will need to function in the US. Over the years, these refugees have come from a variety of countries such as Vietnam, El Salvador and Sudan. Some of the people have never lived in a city or developed nation before, so there is nothing too basic to teach them. Depending on where they come from, the refugees are taught a variety of things, such as how to use running water, go to the supermarket, or how to speak English. The main goal of Jubilee is to prepare the people they serve for life here, and then place them with groups in a city that can help them find jobs and adapt to life in the city. As an intentional community, everyone lives, works and eats with each other. Each person has a specific job; some teach the refugees specific skills while others attend to the needs of the community by growing food or doing maintenance work.

I would like to tell you the story of one of the families that has come through the shelter while I have been there. The mother, I'll call her Mary, had been living with her fiancé, but they broke off their engagement. They had been living in an apartment which they could afford together, but which neither one of them could afford on their own. Mary had a job, but she was unable to come up with the money to pay for the apartment or find another apartment that she could rent before she had to move out. Like most of the mothers, a homeless shelter is the last place that she wanted to have to take her son, but it was a shelter or the street. Mary had a head start on most of the mothers because she had a job, so she was able to move out after about two weeks. This was definitely a very successful story for the shelter because she was able to get back on her feet so quickly, but it helped that she had only been homeless for a short time, so she had been able to keep her job and already had a storage unit where she was able to keep most of her possessions.

Many of our mothers who come to the shelter have little or nothing when they arrive, and have a lot of things to do in one month. Our shelter manager, Sybil works with all of the women on a variety of things, from finding jobs and housing, to things such as dealing with the emotions and stress they are going through. She does this through meeting with them privately and also working with them in a group setting. Sybil lets the women know that when they enter the shelter, they need to hit the ground running, and most of them are able to make significant progress toward finding a job and housing while they are at the shelter. Most women are able to move into either a transitional housing program or get some government assistance for housing once they move out, but some are not to that point yet and Sybil helps them find a spot in another shelter that can provide them with the support they need to continue moving forward.

I am able to work with the mothers on a few of these things, mainly those related to their job or housing search. Every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon, the mothers are able to come in and use our computer lab to work on their resume, look for and apply for jobs, and try to find housing. When the mothers come in during this time I help them in whatever way necessary. For some of the mothers, this means helping them make a resume and showing them how to search for jobs and apartments online. For mothers who already have a resume or do not need help searching for jobs, sometimes the best thing that I can do for them is take their children to our community room in the shelter so that they can work in quiet. I have found that it can be a very rewarding experience to help someone finish a resume because while it may seem like a simple task, it helps these women to find a job and start getting their life back together.

Sincerely,
Joshua Newton