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Giving School Meals A New Twist

Modified Recipes Get Rave Reviews In Texas Schools

If a new chili concoction can pass muster in Texas where chili is regarded with the same high esteem as the yellow rose and the Lone Star, then it's got to be good.

That's the verdict on a healthful mixture of ground turkey, pureed broccoli, tomato paste, and spices that looks, smells, and tastes like the genuine article—hot, spicy, stick-to-your-ribs chili. And it's just one of the many modified items served in the Arlington (Texas) Independent School District's new and successful effort to provide school meals that are higher in fiber and lower in fat, salt, and sugar.

Making traditional recipes even more nutritious through substitutions was not a new idea to Arlington's assistant food service director Kellie Gragg. "Implementing this in our school lunch program had been at the back of my mind for a long time," she says.

When Barbara Patrick, then food service manager at an Arlington junior high school, took a summer course taught by Gragg at the local junior college, the idea and the way to put it into practice came together.

New approach was appealing

Gragg caught Patrick's interest with some of the food substitutions she introduced in her quantity food production course. "We did sloppy joes," Patrick says, "and I was absolutely amazed that you couldn't tell the difference between those made the traditional way and those made from the turkey-broccoli combination."

Patrick was so impressed, she tried a few substitutions of her own in the meal she served her family that night. Their rave reviews convinced her. "We

should do this for the children at school," Patrick told Gragg. "Wonderful," Gragg replied. "Let's do it at your school."

Even though Patrick knew the undertaking would be difficult, she did a good job of convincing her kitchen staff that the project was worth whatever time and effort it took. The staff got solidly behind the program and came up with several

modifications of their own, based on outside reading or other personal experiences.

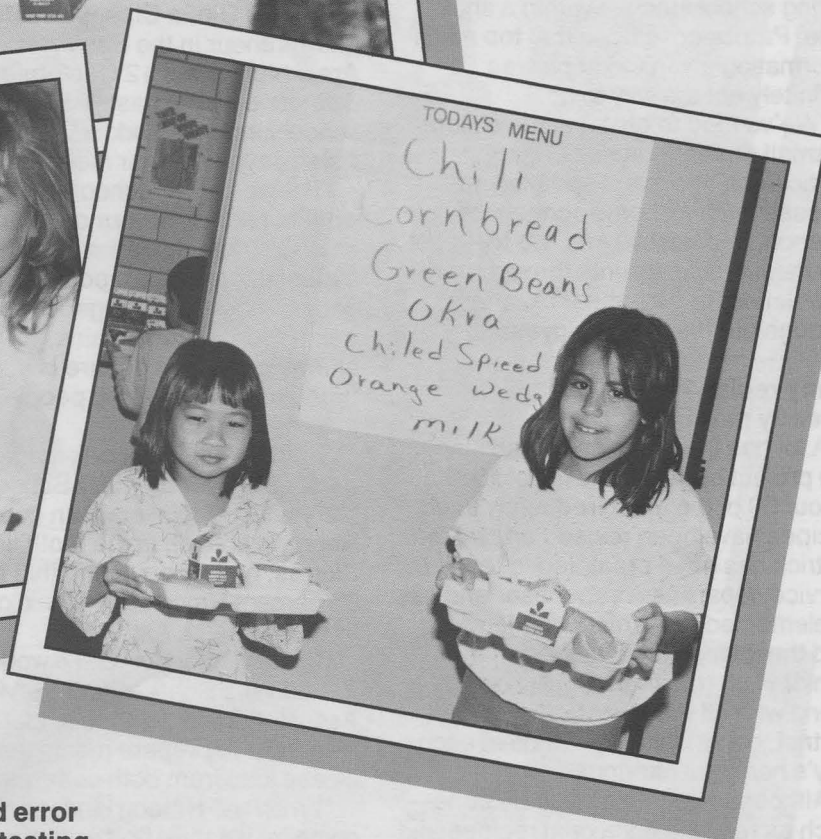
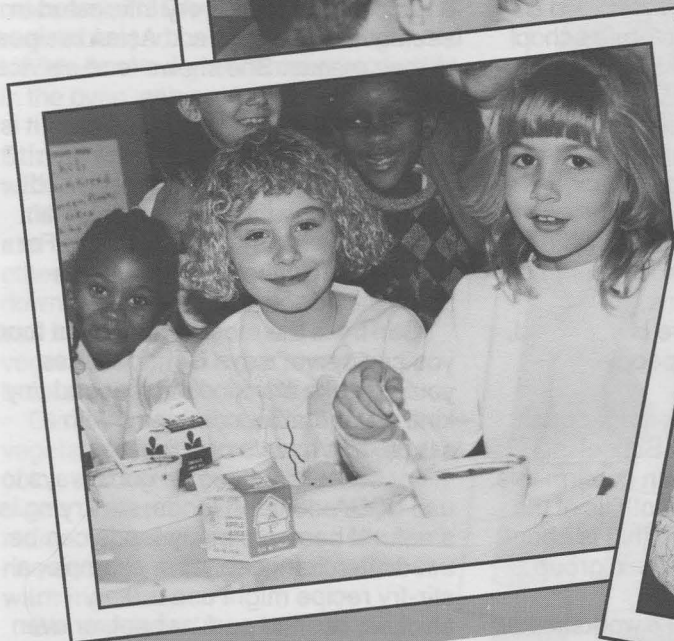
To date, the most commonly used substitutions in the district include:

- using a 50-50 mixture of whole wheat and white flour instead of all white flour in breads and other baked items;
- using ground turkey instead of or in combination with ground beef or pork;
- using lowfat yogurt or a mixture of yogurt and mayonnaise in salad dressings and foods like tuna salad and potato salad;





Food service supervisor Barbara Patrick (left) solicits comments from a few of her lunch customers. Patrick has been working on a successful project in Texas' Arlington School District to revise school lunch recipes so that meals will have less fat, salt, and sugar and more foods that are high in fiber.



- seasoning vegetables with herbs and spices rather than salt and butter or margarine;

- and using low-fat cheese such as mozzarella made with low-fat milk as much as possible.

"It's really not any harder to cook this way," Patrick says, "it's just a matter of changing some ingrained habits. Nearly every cook reaches for the salt at first, when a dish needs some extra seasoning. Our cooks had to realize that salt is now at the bottom of the list of options rather than at the top."

Most of the production steps are basically the same as in the original recipes, with a few exceptions. School staff, for example, take extra care to drain cooked meats, especially ground beef and pork, to remove additional fat.

Trial and error used in testing

Testing the modified recipes was done primarily by trial and error in Patrick's school kitchen. "Our cooks felt kind of like scientists, knowing that what we were doing would have a tremendously positive impact on the lives of all the children who eat the meals we prepare," Patrick says.

"We had lots and lots of failures getting to the recipes that worked. Our ultimate goal was to do this painlessly—to do it so the children found the new products as acceptable as what they had had all along. The proof of acceptability came in the form of no comments.

"If the kids never asked what was different with the chili, we took that as a sign of success—that we had given them a product every bit as acceptable as the original," she explains.

Do the children knowingly eat such foods as broccoli and plain yogurt? Well, not exactly. This knowledge is being shared with them slowly because of a dramatically telling experience at the beginning of the project.

"We had always had a high percentage of faculty participation at my school," Patrick explains, "so we

thought giving a faculty luncheon featuring some of the modified recipes would be a good way to gain their support."

After the faculty had enjoyed "Fiesta Salads" made with baked tortillas, modified chili topped with yogurt instead of sour cream, and brownies made from whole wheat flour, egg whites, and carob powder, Patrick and Gragg announced, "Now let us tell you what you've just eaten."

"They were so enthused, so excited, and so supportive of what we were doing," Patrick says. "They made every positive comment you can imagine. Then school started, and our adult participation dropped to nearly zero!"

Even though the teachers resumed eating school lunches within a short time, Patrick concluded that too much information given too soon was definitely not the way to go.

"We've tried to give it to the children in small doses," she says, "by participating as guest speakers in classes such as home economics, science, and health. And, we try to get the message to parents through our newsletter, through the PTA, and through our district employees."

Many recipes already modified

A lot has been accomplished since the project began in the fall of 1987. About 50 of the most frequently used recipes have been revised and tested; Patrick has been promoted to food service department supervisor and has implemented the project districtwide; and the kitchen crew at Workman Junior High (the founding school), along with all the other cooks in the district, continue to take pride in each day's healthful offerings.

Although a lot remains to be done—such as revising additional recipes and completing nutrient analyses—there is no doubt that the smiles on children's faces will provide the momentum to keep this successful program alive.

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*article and photos
by Kay Blakely*

California Schools Stir Up Some New Favorites

Tacos, pizza, spaghetti, burritos—school lunch menus are a melting pot of the various cooking styles that are fast becoming part of American cuisine. Now, Asian foods are being added to the stew.

Maggie Gin, a Chinese chef and entrepreneur in the San Francisco Bay Area, has visited 12 California school districts over the past year to help school lunch staff add a variety of Asian flavors to their menus.

"These days in school lunch, you want to represent your constituents," says Gin. "On the West Coast especially, the Asian population is getting bigger and bigger." By serving Asian foods, she explains, you're affirming that this culture is accepted. "Food and culture bind people together," says Gin.

Sharon Childers, cook manager at Cedar Lane Elementary School in Marysville, California, can confirm this. Her rural school, in the foothills of the Sierras, has a population that is about 65 percent Hmong, an ethnic group from Southeast Asia.

Childers attended Gin's workshop at a California School Food Service Association conference in March to learn how to prepare meals that would please kids from both cultures.

"When the Hmong kindergarten kids come in, it's their first exposure to American food and culture. They're used to hot, spicy food," says Childers. "For the other kids, it's often their first exposure to Asian foods."

A healthy way to eat

Gin says that Asian foods are the perfect addition to a school lunch menu no matter where a school district is. "Kids are used to eating out more these days," she explains. "They're used to different tastes, and they're liking vegetables more."

"Plus, it's such a healthy way to eat," she adds. Gin uses fresh foods as much as possible, along with sauces that have no monosodium glutamate (MSG) or cholesterol, and are lower in salt than traditional soy-based sauces.

Gin says the district supervisors and directors have been very interested in seeing how they can add Asian recipes to their menus. She shows food service staff how to stir-fry recipes, demonstrating how quick and easy it is to prepare foods with an Asian flair.

"We've gone into the schools, and regardless of what kind of equipment they have, we can do it," says Gin. For basic stir-frying, she recommends using the tilt-top equipment.

"Stir-fry is the most versatile hot food you can serve," says Gin, "because you can take any kind of meat and any kind of vegetable, combine it with a sauce, and have a new recipe."

For schools looking for good ways to use USDA-donated foods, stir-frying is a natural because many foods can be used interchangeably. For example, a stir-fry recipe might use turkey, chicken, canned pork or beef, or even salmon or tuna, with equally good results.

Recipes use variety of foods

Gin has developed a number of quantity recipes using a variety of USDA commodities, including raisins, rice, peanut granules and peanut butter, mixed vegetables, and ground pork.

"She's very imaginative, and she knows food," says Prudence Dorn, a San Francisco food editor who works with Gin. "She came up with some recipes for meals that even the school lunch directors couldn't believe—they tasted so good."

Eastside Union High School has a large percentage of Asian students and was one of the first to work with Gin.

"We serve Asian food about once a week," says Eleanor McKenzie, manager of one of the district's 10 lunch programs.

She especially liked the ideas Gin had for appetizing ways to use canned beef and pork. "We'll sometimes use stir-fry recipes to stuff pita bread, giving the kids a tasty, hand-held 'Asian Sandwich.'"

To help schools in other ways, Gin has also created recipes using American classics, giving them an Asian flavor. For example, she recommends baking chicken using an Asian marinade, and topping it with USDA-donated pineapple chunks and sweet-and-sour sauce.

She has also made very American "Confetti Macaroni" with the flavor of the Orient by mixing cooked elbow macaroni, USDA-donated mixed frozen vegetables, some chopped onions, and USDA-donated ground meat browned in the oven with an Asian sauce.

Stir-fry combined with other methods

Gin uses oil sparingly for stir-frying and combines stir-fry methods with other methods to keep use of oils down. She tells school staff that meat can be oven-browned first, and fresh vegetables parboiled or steamed before being added to other recipes.

Gin recommends undercooking the vegetables so they retain their flavor, color, and nutrients while being held in ovens or warming trays. She says many of the recipes, such as stir-fried rice and egg rolls, keep well in the warming ovens.

Gin developed her own line of sauces for use in a restaurant she opened in Napa Valley, California, because she couldn't find any local Asian staff to cook. "I know there's a lot of intimidation about cooking Asian foods because of the method," says Gin. Many schools she's visited are using her sauces to make preparing the Asian foods "almost fool-proof."

Whether using Gin's sauces or making their own, California schools are having good results with their adventures in Asian cooking.

*article and photos
by Dee Amaden*



Building Purchasing Power

A Look At How Volume Purchasing Works In Arizona

It is an economic fact that volume purchasing means lower prices. For years large school districts have been able to negotiate favorable contracts with food processing companies to turn their hard-to-use bulk supplies of USDA surplus commodities into portion-sized foods more easily used in school lunches.

Small and rural schools, on the other hand, have had a difficult time finding processors who will handle their relatively small quantities of bonus commodities. They also pay more for the products and have higher transportation costs.

Turning such products as flour and dairy products into foods like pizza and burritos is often not economically feasible. Rather than processing the bonus federal foods into finished products, small and rural schools are likely to purchase such school lunch favorites as pizza and burritos directly from food wholesalers or supermarkets.

Giving schools buying power

As assistant director of the Arizona Department of Education's commodity unit, Janet Lander wanted to give small and rural schools not only the purchasing clout the larger schools had long enjoyed, but also the variety of products possible through food processing programs.

Building on an idea advanced by James Mixon, a consultant hired by USDA to look at ways to improve the overall federal commodity distribution system, Lander came up with what's called the Master Supplier Program.

The program was designed to take advantage of the savings derived from

volume purchases by consolidating at the state level the surplus commodities local agencies receive from USDA. With thousands of pounds of surplus commodities to work with, the state can negotiate contracts for finished products at volume discounts and also save on transportation and storage costs by shipping commodities directly from USDA warehouses to the processing companies.

In a nutshell, Lander's Master Supplier Program calls for: selecting one processor for each group of finished products; stocking the finished product in a central warehouse where agencies can place orders and expect prompt delivery, often on a weekly basis; setting up a selection panel to evaluate products proposed for purchase; and contracting with a management company to market the program, and handle stocks, distribution and billing.

As a result of the program, local agencies can order the finished product at the same net price, whether they be large or small, located in the city or far out in the Arizona desert.

Finished products for the Master Supplier Program are determined by representatives of the local agencies. Price alone is not the determining factor. In selecting a product for the program, the state conducts a "blind cutting" where students, a state representative, and representatives from school food services from several schools and other recipient agencies—about 12 people in all—meet to sample the quality of the bidding processors' products.

The results of that "blind cut" are then submitted to a five-member advisory council that looks at the evaluations, product prices, and the processor's performance record if the company has worked with the state before. The council then makes a selection.

Recipient agencies have a choice

Schools and other recipient agencies do not have to buy the Master Supplier Program products. "If they choose not to purchase our product," Lander explains, "they can go out and buy it commercially. What they can't do is take their commodities to another processor to produce a like product. Once they commit their surplus commodities to the Master Supplier Program, we include that amount in our bid proposal to processors."

In the program's first 4 months, Arizona negotiated contracts for and regularly stocked 38 processed products. They expect to add seven more before the next school year.

All recipient agencies in Arizona—including schools, hospitals, prisons, health care operators, summer food programs and camps, and nutrition programs for the elderly—can order the products right off the shelves of the central warehouse in Phoenix at the net price (cost of the item less the value of federal surplus commodities plus the fixed fee) and all pay the same delivery charge.

"The state's workload," Lander says, "has not increased one bit. In fact, it has decreased because most of our processing activities have shifted over to the Master Supplier Program."



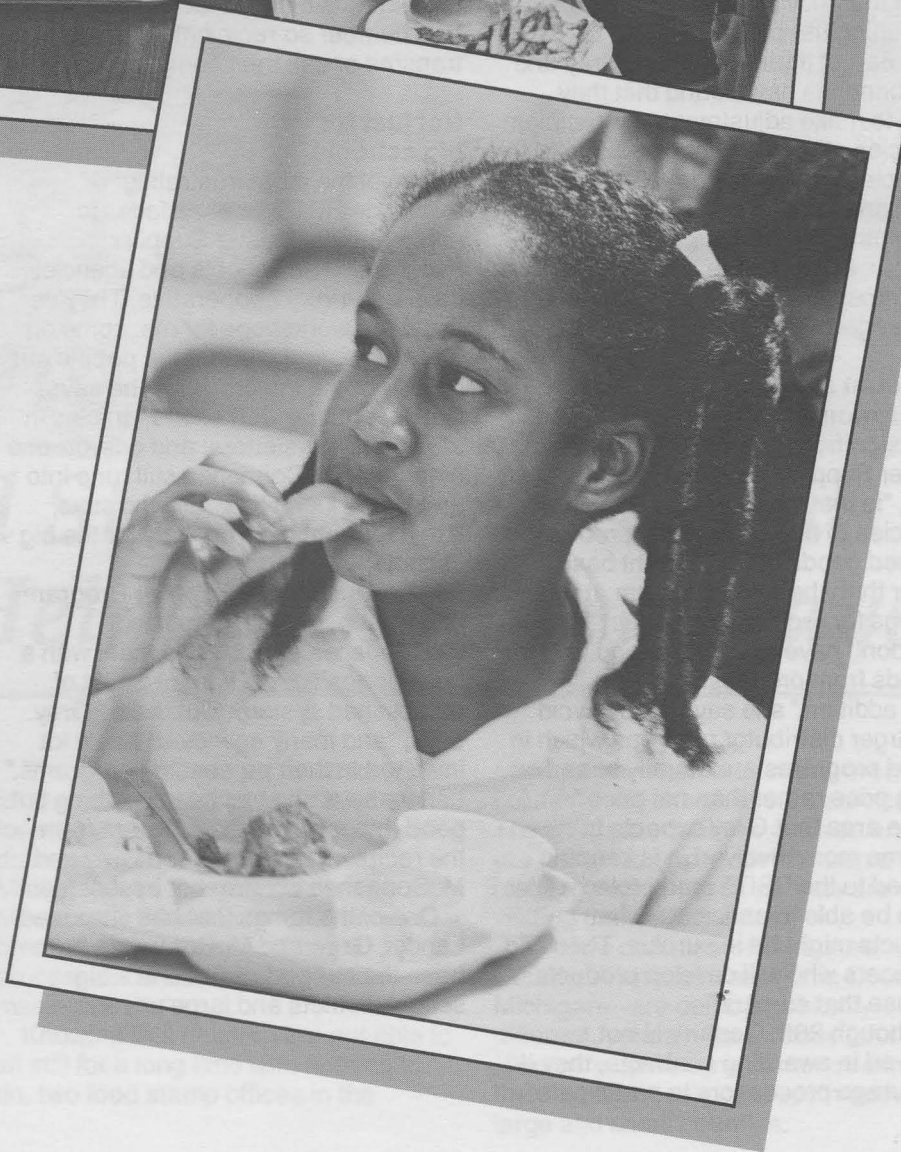
Students' favorites like pizza and hamburgers cost schools considerably less if food processors use USDA-donated foods in preparing them. Arizona's new purchasing program allows small schools as well as large to benefit from processing contracts.

Not all processing has shifted over to Master Supplier Program, however. For example, the state continues to handle meat and poultry processing and processing of entitlement or allocated commodities USDA purchases specifically for certain programs. "We want to start out slow," Lander says.

Marketing and delivery contracted

In September 1988, 20th Century Food Products, headquartered in San Clemente, California, was awarded a contract to handle distribution and marketing for the Master Supplier Program.

"We decided to contract out the distribution and marketing activities," Lander says, "because we didn't want to get involved in quality control complaints, warehouse inventory and control, ensuring accountability,



invoicing, working with manufacturers and marketing." For its services, 20th Century adds a small fee to each case of product delivered.

When the Master Supplier Program was begun in December 1988, it was accepted so well and so quickly that warehouse stocks were almost immediately depleted. According to 20th Century Food Products marketing specialist Ron McConnehea, it took about a month to get the inventory settled down. "We couldn't stock the warehouse fast enough," says McConnehea.

In the first 4 months of operation, the Master Supplier Program used 373,000 pounds of surplus federal commodities to produce 25,000 cases of finished product. Of the state's eligible agencies, 57 percent are participating in the Master Supplier Program.

Darrel Gray, 20th Century's commodity expert, and McConnehea admit that they are still learning and fine tuning the program.

As part of their education, Gray and McConnehea have found that they need to make adjustments for recipient agencies other than schools. For example, a single school-size portion often isn't large enough for prisons and some other institutions and two portions are too large. They have recommended changes to better serve these agencies.

Discount system saves money

"A significant advantage of the Master Supplier Program," Lander says, "is that it allows the recipient agencies to buy commodity processed finished goods on a discount basis rather than the refund system. It means savings for recipient agencies since they don't have to apply for and wait for refunds from processors.

"In addition," she says, "they avoid the larger distributor markups which in refund programs are usually based on gross price rather than net price."

One area that Gray expects to become more involved in is keeping attuned to the USDA marketplace. "I've got to be able to anticipate what products might be in surplus. Then find producers who will develop products that use that surplus."

Although 20th Century is not involved in awarding contracts, they do encourage processors to participate in

commodity processing by making it more cost efficient for them. "Instead of ordering honey in cans, or butter in 32 1-ounce prints," Gray explains, "we tell them they can get large drums of honey and 68-pound bulk butter from USDA. They don't have to open all those cans and packages, and it cuts costs.

"These are just some simple things the federal government and the state can do in working with the private sector to make the whole program work better."

Lander credits much of the initial success of the Master Supplier Program to Gray and McConnehea's commitment to servicing their clients. Initially Gray and McConnehea thought that they would hire one full-time person and that they could alternate visiting the program weekly. However, they have both become so involved with the program that both spend much of their time in Arizona.

To better serve their clients, they have installed a fax machine and a toll free number so recipient agencies can transmit or call their complaints in.

Not just for big schools

One of the most frustrating challenges McConnehea faces is marketing the Master Supplier Program. "The schools and agencies have been very cooperative. They've arranged workshops for me, some on Saturdays, and brought the people out to hear about the program," he says. But despite the workshops, articles in statewide newsletters, and one-on-one meetings, McConnehea still runs into the school lunch director who says, "Oh, I thought this was only for the big schools."

When the Master Supplier Program first began, Lander, Gray, and McConnehea expected to meet with a lot of opposition. "There are a lot of established systems out there," Gray says, "and many agencies have a lot invested in their processing programs." Lander says she has heard nothing but good things about the program from the recipient agencies, and Gray and McConnehea confirm her assessment.

One of the things that has surprised Lander, Gray, and McConnehea has been the support of Arizona's big school districts and large prisons.

"They obviously don't have as much to gain from the program as the small and rural schools," Gray says.

"The price for our products may not be much more competitive, and in some cases equal to what they have been buying. I think they realize that while it is not yet as beneficial to them as it is to the smaller agencies, it will get better. It's an option they want to keep available."

The Master Supplier Program can offer large schools and prisons additional savings. "We can arrange truckload shipments directly to them, bypassing the warehouse," Lander says. "As 20th Century learns their ordering patterns a little better, and if we can coordinate it, we hope to do more of this."

Adaptable to other states

Both Gray and McConnehea feel that Arizona's Master Supplier Program can be adapted by other states. "There are some large states and school districts that have the money, staff, and expertise that obviously don't need this program," Gray says, "but there are many more who do."

In their Arizona workshops, Gray and McConnehea tell participants that in a year or two the Arizona Master Supplier Program may look entirely different from what it is now. "We are getting a lot of suggestions from our clients," McConnehea says, "and a lot of them are very useful."

"The recipient agencies are shaping the program to fit their needs. All we ask is that they not 'cherry pick' the program. We need the volume to make this program effective."

Lander fully expects to increase the program's volume and reduce prices. "When we went out for our first bids, we had no real idea of what quantities we would be handling and couldn't go for better prices. The processors now realize that this program is going to stick."

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article by Dick Montoya



Helping Families With Young Children

Two Food Stamp Offices Find Day Care Helpful In Many Ways

"I m tired!"
"I want to go home."
"Aren't we done yet?"

Imagine yourself—a parent—waiting with your children in a welfare office to be interviewed by an eligibility worker. Talking with the worker, your attention is shifted to the children, who are tired and do not want to be there. You find it difficult to concentrate on questions and answers, and the children's presence is limiting your ability to be frank about family circumstances.

The situation can be uncomfortable for the caseworker as well. "It is hard for me to interview when children are dismantling my desk," says Jean Martin, financial assistance worker in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. "Distractions break down the communication process and increase the possibility of making errors."

Knowing that children are not able to sit still for a long time with nothing to do, two food stamp offices in the

Midwest have come up with a creative solution—on-site child care services. The child care facilities are free and are designed to provide children a place to be while their parents are visiting the welfare office.

The two counties—Milwaukee County, Wisconsin, and Ionia County, Michigan—are demographically different, yet both have successful child care operations demonstrating that this is a viable concept in both large and small counties.

Milwaukee County's Children's Corner

Milwaukee County Department of Social Services issues 46 percent of the food stamps used in Wisconsin.

Located in a converted department store, the Milwaukee County office handles AFDC, general assistance, child support, and other services. The child care facility, called Children's Corner, is located on the first floor near the main entrance.

"Children's Corner has operated since July 1987 under a contract with Carter's Child Development Center, a local child care provider," says Gwen Agee, supervisor of Children's Corner.

"At one time, the facility was located in the basement and was staffed by volunteers, but this was inconvenient and unsuccessful. Under contract with Carter's, we now serve an average of 100 children per month at a monthly cost to the county of \$1,200," she says.

The center is designed to care for children between the ages of 2 and 7 but will accept infants or older children under special circumstances.

Agee has had several years of child care experience in addition to having worked as a teacher's aide in the Chicago Public School system before moving to Milwaukee. She is assisted by Dorothy Myles, a former welfare recipient, who began working at Carter's through a general assistance workfare program.

Myles, now employed full-time by Carter's Child Care, has completed 80 hours of training offered by Carter's to receive certificates to work with toddlers and children.

"We are here to cater to the children's needs," says Myles, who is proud of having successfully made the transition from welfare to work. "We schedule a nutritious snack time, but if children come saying they are hungry, we arrange for something to eat."

After snacks is a story time, followed by a variety of activities and play. The center is stocked with games and toys appropriate to various age groups.

Agee says she structures the day at the Children's Corner to provide different activities, such as art and music, at different times throughout the day. "Art projects are always a favorite activity," she says, "and music gives the children a chance to unwind and express their feelings."

Ionia County's "Kid's Corner"

Ionia County, in Michigan, is as small and rural as Milwaukee County is large and urban. It issues \$200,000 worth of food stamps every month to 14,000 households. Like Milwaukee County, the Ionia County Department of Social Services handles AFDC, general assistance, child support, and other programs in addition to the Food Stamp Program. It has operated Kid's Corner since 1986.

Kid's Corner is directed by Ionia County social services volunteer coordinator Gary Grant, who recruits and assigns volunteers who work with Kid's Corner supervisor Reva Bell. Bell is a participant in the Department of Labor's Green Thumb senior community service program, which pays her salary.

"To participate in Green Thumb, Bell had to be over 55 and willing and able to do the job," says Grant. Although she has not had formal child care training, Bell has had plenty of first-hand experience. She raised 16 children and has 60 grandchildren.

Lynna Dygert, assistance payment worker, estimates that one-third of the mothers use the center. "Child care has been a help. I suggest it when a child becomes a problem," she says. Between 80 to 120 children from newborn to age 12 visit the center each month.

"My goal is to bring out the child's imagination in playing," says Bell. There is no set schedule for Kid's Corner—they learn ABC's, do crafts, and read. "We try to listen to what the children have to say—sometimes all they need is a hug," she says.

The center is run with very little financial support from the county. The annual budget is only \$300, and most of that money is earmarked for snacks. "We rely on donations and imagination to operate the center," says Bell.

Centers similar in many ways

While the Milwaukee County and Ionia County child care centers are very different, both have adopted certain practices that would be necessary in any well-run child care facility.



Deborah Roach (above), coordinator of the Milwaukee County Department of Social Services, is pleased with the success of the county's child care center. Aside from helping parents, she says, "the center makes the children feel good."

For example, both facilities find it important for parents to register their children and indicate where they will be in case of an emergency. In Milwaukee County, a permanent card is kept which lists the child's name, parent's name, caseworker, age, and a space to indicate whether the child has medical problems or special needs.

Both centers emphasize the importance for children to express themselves, use their imagination, and improve their skills. The children are always given an art project to take home when they leave the centers. In one project in Ionia County, the children made napkin rings which they gave as presents to nursing home residents.

One food stamp mother in Ionia County, says, "My daughters love it here. My husband has put up a shelf for the things they make." Children have been known to ask to come to the centers for visits even if their parents do not have appointments that day.

Both counties are considering expanding child care services in a number of ways, including:

- recruiting and training more volunteers;
- serving older and younger children;
- increasing the hours the centers are open;
- distributing information about other programs;
- organizing classes for parents;
- offering babysitting services for workers or recipients when their regular sitters are sick;
- involving parents more in various ways.

Help to managers is recognized

"The Midwest region recognizes the important help to management the child care facilities provide in these two counties," says Midwest regional food stamp director Dustan Van Vleet. "We gave a slide presentation about the centers at a bi-regional conference for

state staff from the 13 Midwest and Northeast states last year."

Overall, the child care centers provide a pleasant, secure atmosphere where parents can leave their children and attend to business in a nonstressful atmosphere. According to Larry Leik in Ionia, "Quite often agency staff feel we are treating people like they are in a factory. Having a child care center allows us to bring things down to a personal level."

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*article by Mary Jane Getlinger
and Susan Young
photos by Gilda Karu*



Reva Bell, who supervises Ionia's "Kid's Corner," crocheted 100 Easter baskets last year to give to the children who use the center. Between 80 and 120 children visit the center each month.

Delaware WIC Clinics Begin Evening Hours To Improve Service

There used to be a pocket of people in Delaware who weren't getting all of the medical and nutritional benefits of the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).

Among them were working mother Brenda Lentz; 2-year-old Whitney Glass and her mother Bernadette, who doesn't know how to drive; and many others who couldn't take time off from work or who had transportation problems and couldn't get to WIC clinics for proper care.

But since state WIC staff expanded the schedule 2½ years ago to include mid-day and evening hours 1 day a week at the Dover clinic, they have seen a significant increase in the number of people participating in the program.

WIC provides supplemental foods and nutrition education to low-income pregnant, postpartum, and breastfeeding women; infants; and young children who are at risk because of nutrition-related health problems or inadequate diet.

Managers saw need for change

"In Delaware, we were getting more and more phone calls from people who said they couldn't come in because they were working or had transportation problems," says Beth Weatherbee, WIC program coordinator, who works closely with clinics throughout the state.

She asked the WIC staff for help in resolving the problem. "I think that if you're going to be a service for the clients, you're going to have to give a little bit," she says. "In most states, clinics run from 8 a.m. through 4:30 p.m., but most people work those same hours, whether in manual labor or whatever else."

WIC managers coordinated with other public health department staff in modifying the WIC schedule at the Dover clinic.

"It was all very easy," says Weatherbee. "We went to the service



center and asked if it was all right to offer WIC services on Wednesday nights. There was no problem because the building was already being left open for other services."

The WIC staff tried out the idea on a temporary basis to be sure they could adjust to working a different schedule.

"We decided we would still put in our 7½-hour day, but would stagger the hours. Also, we scheduled our lunch

hour later than most to allow those clients who work locally to come during their lunch hours. It's another good way of helping people who work. It's worked out for our staff, too."

WIC employee Sherry Vann says the shift change hasn't been a problem for her, even though during the summer she often works until 10 p.m., recertifying migrant workers who can't get to the clinic until after dark.

Vann schedules appointments, which are needed for all WIC services. She tries to reserve lunch and evening hour slots for those who truly have problems getting there.

Many participants like later hours

WIC participant Brenda Lentz is a full-time nurse's assistant at a hospital. After she gets off work at 3:15 p.m., she picks up her two children from a day care center. Some nights she goes to school. When Lentz can't fit WIC appointments into her daytime schedule, she takes advantage of the expanded clinic hours, which she says have been very convenient for her.

With the exception of inner-city Wilmington, there's no mass transportation in Delaware. Many WIC participants, like Bernadette and Whitney Glass, rely on family members for transportation.

"I live on the other side of town, and I don't drive," says Glass. "I have to get a ride from my mom. I like the later hours."

Other recipients carpool to clinics or

serve as proxies for each other for voucher pick up.

On his way home from work, Steve Jones bicycles to the health facility to pick up vouchers for his wife and their four children. The young man says the expanded hours meet his family's needs quite well.

"I can't take off a day from work. I'd lose hours," says Jones, who is a cook at a local motel restaurant. "I can't get down to the clinic until after work. It works out just fine."

Because of the Jones' transportation problem, the WIC staff schedules their children's appointments together to further help their family.

WIC clients who visit the Dover clinic after regular hours can also get other additional assistance at the same time. The health department offers well-child, prenatal, and dental clinics, and certifies people to participate in the Medicaid program on the same night the WIC clinic is available.

"Our goal has been to coordinate services so that certifications as well as immunizations and prenatal visits, for example, can be done together," says Weatherbee.

Other clinics also expanding

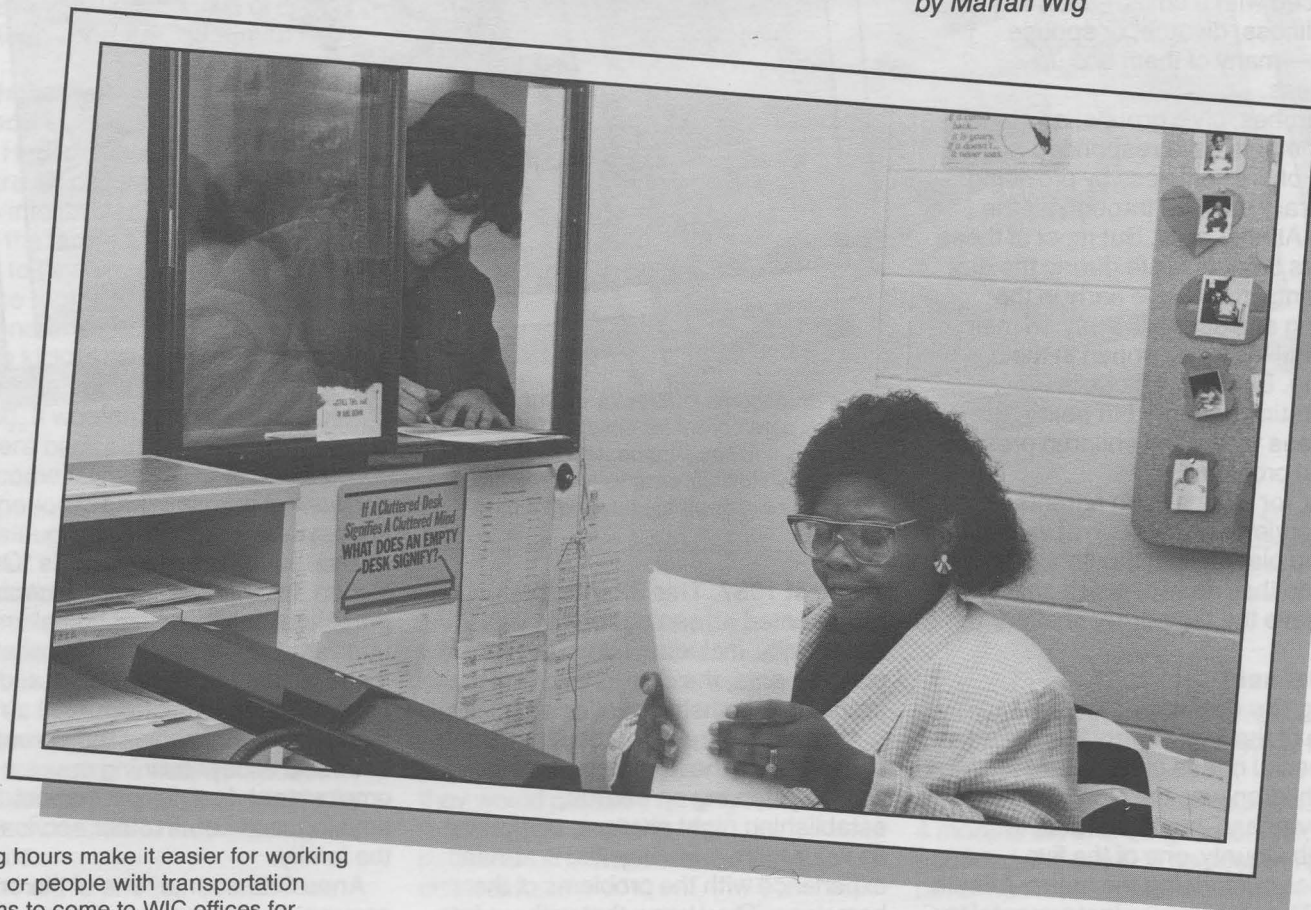
Another WIC center—in Milford, Delaware—also recently began offering expanded WIC clinic hours, which are coordinated with an array of other services. That site is open two evenings a month.

Recipients who go to the other 19 WIC clinics in Delaware may expect similar service in the near future, says Weatherbee.

"Three or four more clinics are looking into the possibility sometime by late spring of being open one night a week for all services," says Weatherbee. "I think more sites should have the additional hours, though. That's what we're moving towards, and we're not too far off."

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*article and photos
by Marian Wig*



Evening hours make it easier for working parents or people with transportation problems to come to WIC offices for services. Above: A young father stops in to pick up food vouchers for his wife and baby.

Reaching Out To The Homeless

Our House Offers Free Day Care And Other Help

Atlanta, Georgia, has stood as a beacon of opportunity over the past few decades to families throughout the Southeast. Unfortunately, as the city's service-based economy has boomed, so has the cost of living.

The result has been a growing number of unskilled people who barely earn enough to maintain a minimal standard of living. When these people are faced with a crisis—such as job loss, illness, divorce, or spouse abuse—many of them end up homeless.

Churches, civic groups, and local governments have responded to the needs of the homeless by providing temporary shelters throughout the metro-Atlanta area. But most of these shelters don't operate during the day. Residents must leave early in the morning and spend the day on their own until facilities reopen in the evening. Being homeless is devastating enough, but being homeless with small children presents special problems.

How, for example, do parents go for job interviews or show up at work if they have no place to put their children? What do they do with a sick child once they leave the temporary shelter?

Special help during the day

One of the first groups to recognize the special needs of homeless families with children was the North Decatur Presbyterian Church, located in DeKalb County, one of the five counties comprising the metro-Atlanta area. The church was instrumental in forming the DeKalb County Children's Shelter Development Committee in the



Anne Branscome is director of Our House, a free day care center for children from homeless families. The center cares for the children while their parents look for housing, jobs, or obtain needed training.

spring of 1987. This 32-member group represented all sectors of the community, including churches, local governments, the courts, and health, training, and shelter service agencies.

Most committee members had been involved with the homeless in some way—by serving on boards, establishing night shelters, or working as volunteers—so they had first-hand experience with the problems of the homeless. They knew that without free day care, helping the parents of these children move out of shelters and into

permanent homes would be impossible.

The result of this concern is "Our House, Inc.," a free day care center for preschool children from homeless families. Our House provides shelter for up to 30 children at a time and is open 5 days a week from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. This enables the parents to seek and accept training or employment, look for permanent housing, and obtain other services for the family.

Anne Branscome, one of the original committee members, is director of Our House. "Something had to be done," she says. "We found it increasingly

difficult to turn small children out on the street—especially when they were sick or the weather was bad.”

Our House opened March 28, 1988. “In the first year, we provided day care for 316 children, served more than 9,000 meals, and arranged for more than 500 medical examinations,” Branscome says. “This enabled more than 100 parents to go to work and nearly 60 families to obtain their own housing.”

Contrary to the stereotype of homeless children, Branscome says 40 to 45 percent of the children at Our House are from two-parent families—and most of their parents have full-time or part-time jobs. “Most of these people hold minimum wage jobs, although we have had some parents with college degrees who ran into a bit of bad luck,” she says.

“Two-parent families have a better chance of getting out of their homeless situation,” she notes. “It’s next to impossible for a single mother or father with more than one preschool child to solve their homeless problem when they earn only minimum wage. Unless we can get them into public housing, they have very little chance of climbing out of their economic quagmire.”

Free day care and food aid

Our House provides 90 days of free day care for children after a family moves into its own housing. This allows the family to catch up after having to pay expenses such as advance rent, utility deposits, and phone installation.

“If we kicked the children out just as soon as their parents obtained housing, it wouldn’t be very long until they were back out on the street,” says Branscome. “These people need a grace period before they can withstand the onslaught of even minor financial setbacks.”

In addition to routine day care, Our House takes into consideration that homeless children may be more likely to get sick. The day care center has three “sick rooms.” One of the rooms is used for twice-weekly visits by a public health nurse and a nurse practitioner. The other two rooms are available for homeless parents to stay with a sick child.

Food help is another contribution Our House makes towards the well-being of homeless families. Children receive breakfast, lunch, and a snack

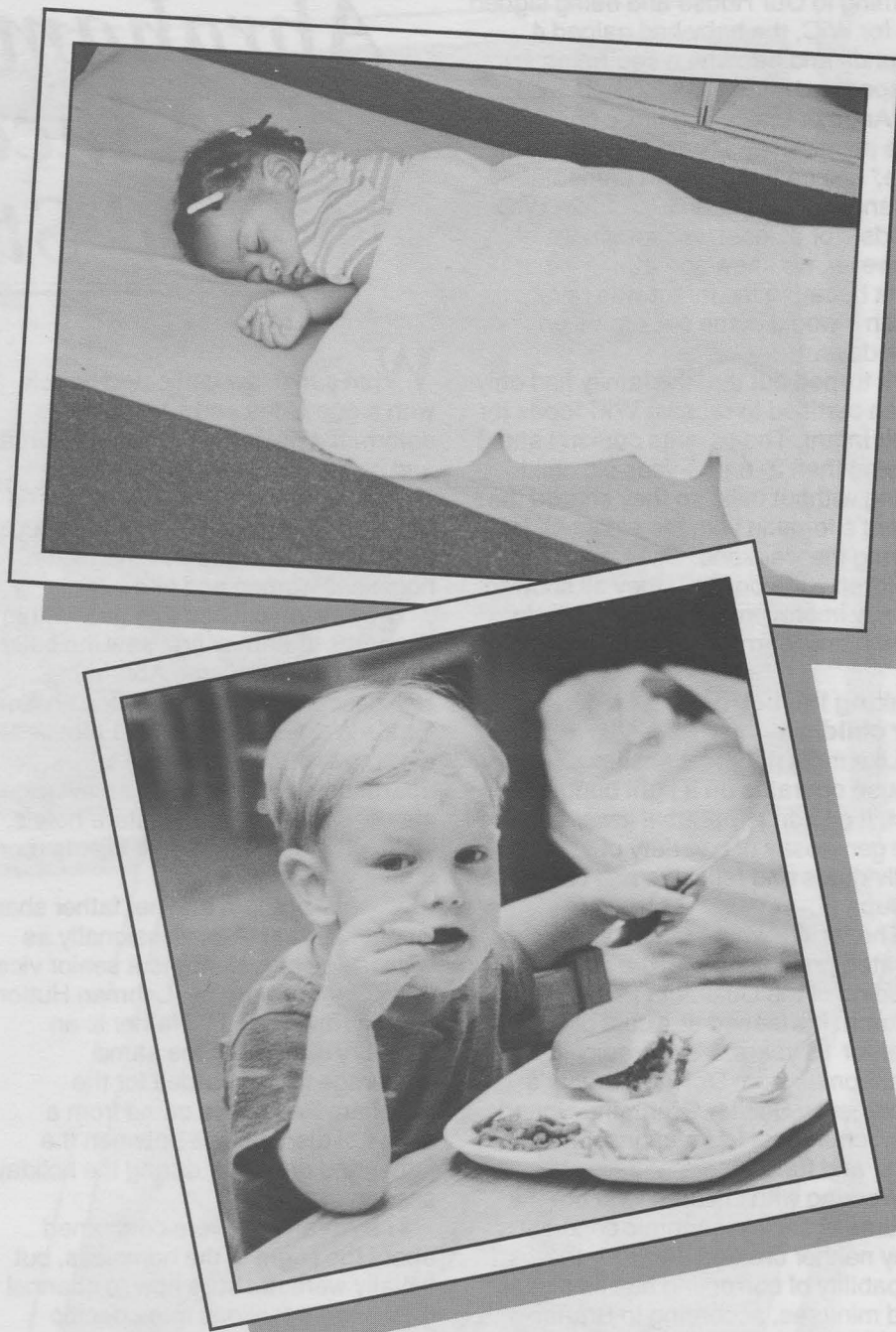
each day. “All the medical care in the world won’t make children healthy if they don’t get enough to eat,” Branscome says.

“One of the first things we do for the parents of these children is explain that they would probably qualify for USDA food stamps and WIC. WIC, in particular, is a Godsend for these children.”

Branscome says she has seen several instances where children began making significant

improvements in their health and mental alertness after receiving regular, balanced meals.

“We had one infant come in who was 4 months old and weighed only 8 pounds,” she says. “The poor thing had never had much more to eat than nonfat dry milk. His parents were homeless and simply couldn’t afford formula. Within a month or so of



coming to Our House and being signed up for WIC, the baby had gained 4 pounds and become a squirmy, responsive infant.

"Another family had three children—one an infant and two under 5 years of age," she continues. "We immediately arranged for the family to obtain WIC foods—or at least we thought we did. However, we knew something wasn't right because the infant was ravenous when it would come back to us on Mondays.

"It turned out that the family had only been certified to receive WIC foods for their infant. The parents couldn't stand seeing their 2- and 3-year-old child doing without milk, so they shared the infant's formula with the older children during the weekend. Once all three children were on WIC, they all showed steady improvement in their attitude, health and learning ability."

Making life better for children

Like most nonprofit shelters, Our House operates on a tight budget. In fact, it couldn't operate if it weren't for the generosity of a variety of individuals and religious and charitable groups.

The facility where Our House is located previously was the activities building of the Columbia Presbyterian Church. It's leased at a cost of \$1 a year for 15 years. Main funding this year comes from DeKalb County's Emergency Shelter Grant, the United Way, churches, foundations, private gifts, and fundraisers.

Working with children who are the victims of socio-economic conditions they neither created nor have the capability of correcting has its pluses and minuses, according to Branscome.

"All of us at Our House realize we aren't making a dent in the need for day care for the homeless," she says. "However, if we can make life better for even a small number of these children and their families, we as individuals and society in general will be the better for it.

"Somebody has to be willing to care for these children. After all, they are our future."

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article by Connie Crunkleton

Abraham Residence: A Place To Stay And Start Over

What can a few dedicated people with a good idea and a lot of determination do? Ask Nancy Abraham and her father, who along with a committed team of volunteers raised \$1.7 million in private and public sector funding to open their own home for homeless women and children.

They accomplished this goal within 7 months after they first saw the building that would become Abraham Residence. Now the residence on New York's West Side houses 31 families—who move out on their own to apartments and jobs after an average stay of 6 to 8 months. Welfare hotels, by comparison, keep their clients more than a year on average.

Nancy Abraham and her father share similar interests—professionally as well as socially. Nancy is a senior vice-president at Shearson Lehman Hutton, Inc., in New York. Her father is an advisory director at the same brokerage firm. The idea for the Abraham Residence came from a series of discussions between the father and daughter during the holiday season of 1985.

The Abrahams were concerned about the plight of the homeless, but initially were not sure how to channel their good intentions into specific action. From volunteer experiences during her college days, Nancy Abraham felt frustrated by the lack of planning and follow-through that seemed to hinder many of the projects set up to help the poor. "Many of them just didn't seem to work well," she says.

In the summer of 1986, Nancy and Alexander Abraham decided they would set up their own residence for homeless women and children, but neither their financial resources nor their business savvy prepared them for the pitfalls that lay ahead.

In trying to develop a strategy, the Abrahams found that there were all sorts of issues that needed to be raised. What type of private or public

support was already available? What types of support would be needed for residents besides basic shelter? What federal, state, and local regulations would have to be met?

How much money was needed? Where would the cash flow come from to meet the mortgage payments? How would ongoing expenses be met? What type of personal commitment was needed to get the project going and to maintain it permanently?

Finding building was first goal

The Abrahams' first goals were to find the right building and the right nonprofit sponsoring organization to maintain it. Then legal help would be needed to negotiate the sale, and financial support to cover the mortgage.

Luckily, they not only had a vision of what they wanted to accomplish, but also a dedicated group of professionals who supported the idea and helped turn it into reality. The group included two lawyers from a New York firm who donated time and resources that could have cost the Abrahams more than \$30,000.

But as one of the lawyers noted, the benefits were not all one-sided. Gerry Blume of the firm of Willkie, Farr and Gallagher says, "I found it to be one of the best things I've done here." If given the chance, he says, he would do it again.

Tangible support also came from some unexpected sources. For example, two Greenwich, Connecticut-based interior designers helped plan and decorate the interior of the building. Jane Stanicki, a loan officer at the Bowery Savings Bank, developed a mortgage package so that the nonprofit sponsoring organization—Women in Need—could assume the financial responsibilities.



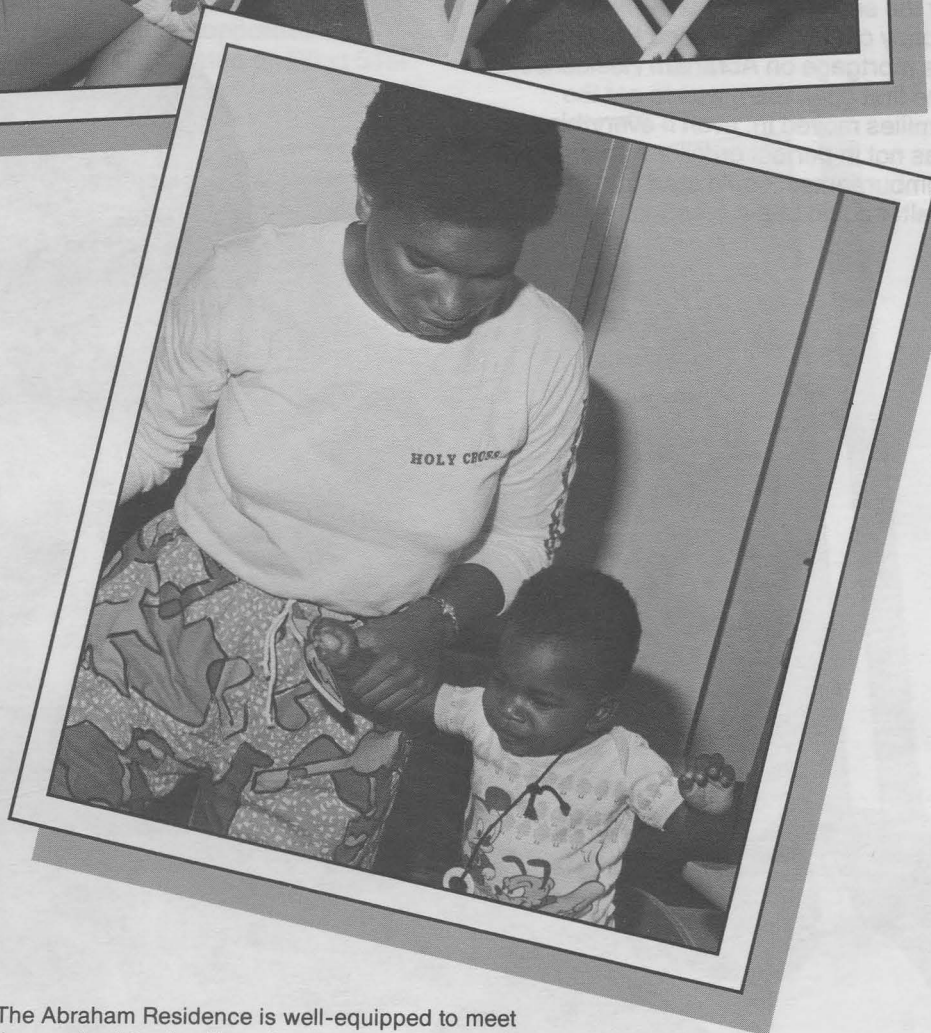
Women in Need came about 6 years ago through the efforts of Rita Zimmer, who initially worked as an alcoholism counselor for the State of New York. There, Zimmer realized that there was one segment of the low-income population that needed special attention: women—many with children—whose lives were in crisis.

Starting with individual donations and a small federal grant, Zimmer developed several shelters for homeless women and children, a “drop-in center,” and support programs that include alcohol rehabilitation and child care services.

Zimmer was recently honored as one of the first recipients of the \$10,000 Brock Russell Astor Award for her “distinguished leadership and outstanding achievement” in improving the lives of hungry and homeless New Yorkers.

Government help was essential

While private-sector support got the Abraham Residence started, its ongoing success would not have been possible without government help. This



The Abraham Residence is well-equipped to meet the needs of the families who stay there. Help with planning and decorating came from two Connecticut interior designers, who were among many professionals donating time and expertise.

included the cooperation and support of city and state officials in meeting deadlines and approving structural changes for the building, sometimes on very short notice.

Even more important was government financial support. The Abrahams initiated the project with \$100,000 from a family foundation, but they planned for revenues and support from three main sources: foundation grants, time and money from individuals, and, mainly, government funding.

The government sources would be the New York State Department of Social Services, but the funds would be a combination of 50 percent federal (Department of Health and Human Services), 25 percent state (New York State Department of Social Services), and 25 percent city (Human Resources Administration).

Women in Need would "earn" payment from the government each day for the services it was providing. That money could then be used to pay off the mortgage on Abraham Residence. The first goal, then, was to get the families moved in, even if everything was not in perfect order, so government reimbursement could start and the shelter could begin meeting its goal.

A project of this size does not get planned and implemented without its share of problems. Deadlines had to be extended at times; the budget had to be revised; portions of the sales contract to buy the building had to be renegotiated more than once to satisfy all the parties; conflicts over details of building codes had to be resolved.

Nancy Abraham frequently asked members of the team, "Should I be losing sleep?" "No," thought banker Jane Stanicki on more than one occasion, "I'm losing sleep for both of us!"

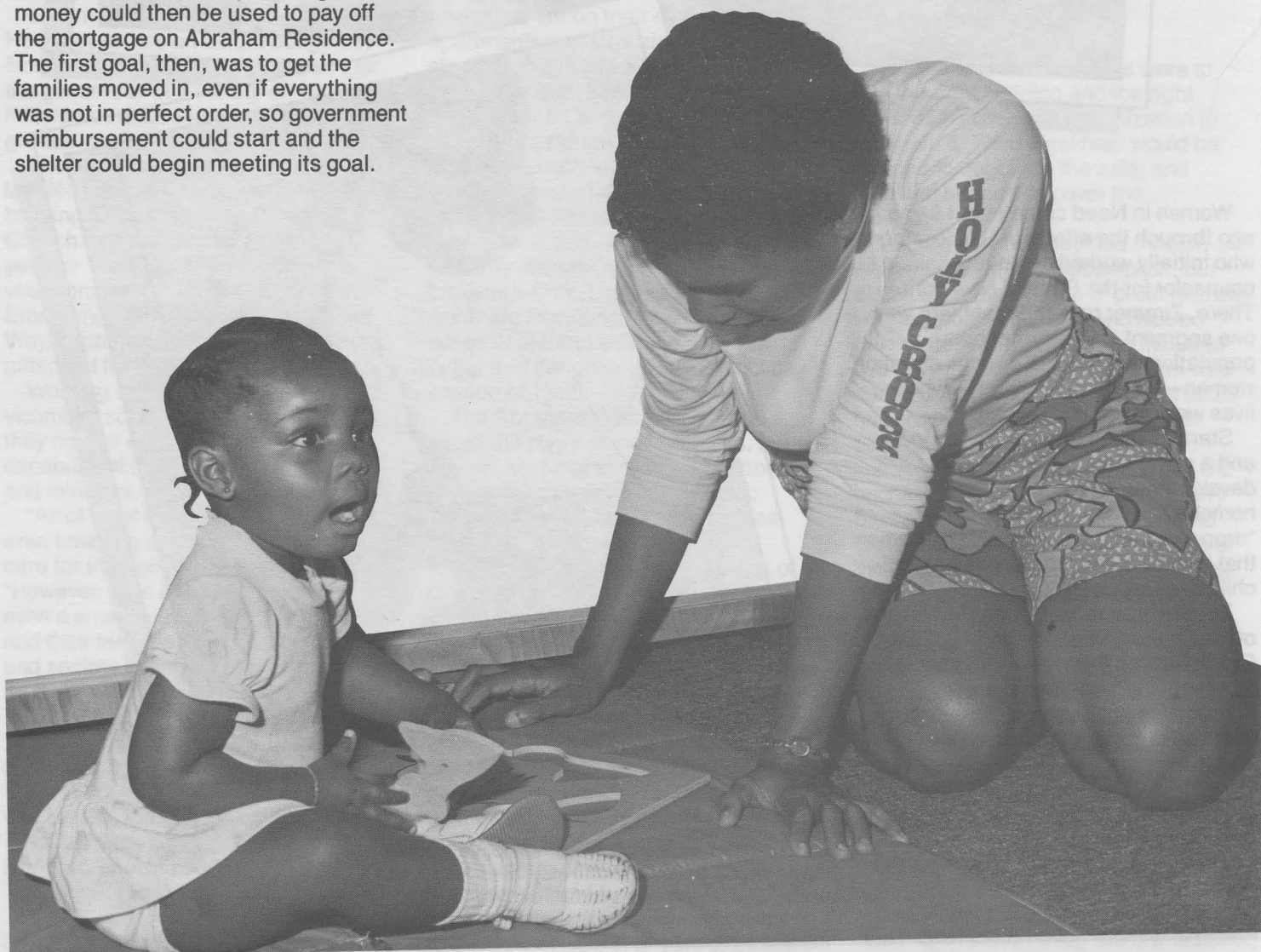
Support services were available

All their efforts resulted in the dedication of the Alexander Abraham Residence on West 51st Street on

June 1, 1987. Thirty-one families now have a safe, clean haven in which to rebuild their lives. The residence is not only a roof over their heads, but provides on-site support services to help them.

Each new resident family is assigned a counselor, and weekly meetings take place to monitor their progress. A housing specialist helps tenants locate permanent housing. Special services are available to help women with personal problems or in dealing effectively with the social services bureaucracy. There are child care facilities so mothers can look for work or an apartment. Even laundry facilities are available.

Early last year a newly renovated kitchen went into operation and now provides dinner each night. Families



prepare their own breakfasts and lunches. Each room has its own refrigerator, and a grocery store is located within a few blocks.

Nutritional support is an important component in the services provided by the residence. USDA's Food Stamp Program currently benefits all of the residents, and the WIC program is used by almost 50 percent of the women and infants. Federal government commodity assistance is the newest part of USDA's support.

Maura Kelly, the coordinator of administrative services, sees federal food assistance as an integral part of the package of services offered by the Abraham Residence. "Without it," she says, "all the other good things we try to provide would not work as well together."

Child care and food assistance help families rebuild their lives. Dinner is provided every night, and families prepare their own breakfasts and lunches. All of the families get food stamps and many also receive help through WIC.

Support also comes from the local community in the form of donations of clothing, toys, and prepared food. This becomes especially important to women who have been living in shelters or who recently have been discharged from the hospital. The impact of these donations helps make their transition into the Abraham Residence easier, especially when there is a baby involved and personal finances are a concern.

Getting "back into the swing of things"

Kathy McLean is an example of someone who moved up and out. "Everything started to turn around once we moved to the Abraham Residence," she says. After 3 years of living in shelters and 6 months at the Abraham Residence, McLean and her young son, Kevin, took steps to move into their own apartment and, as she puts it, "get back into the swing of things."

The positive, supportive environment created on West 51st

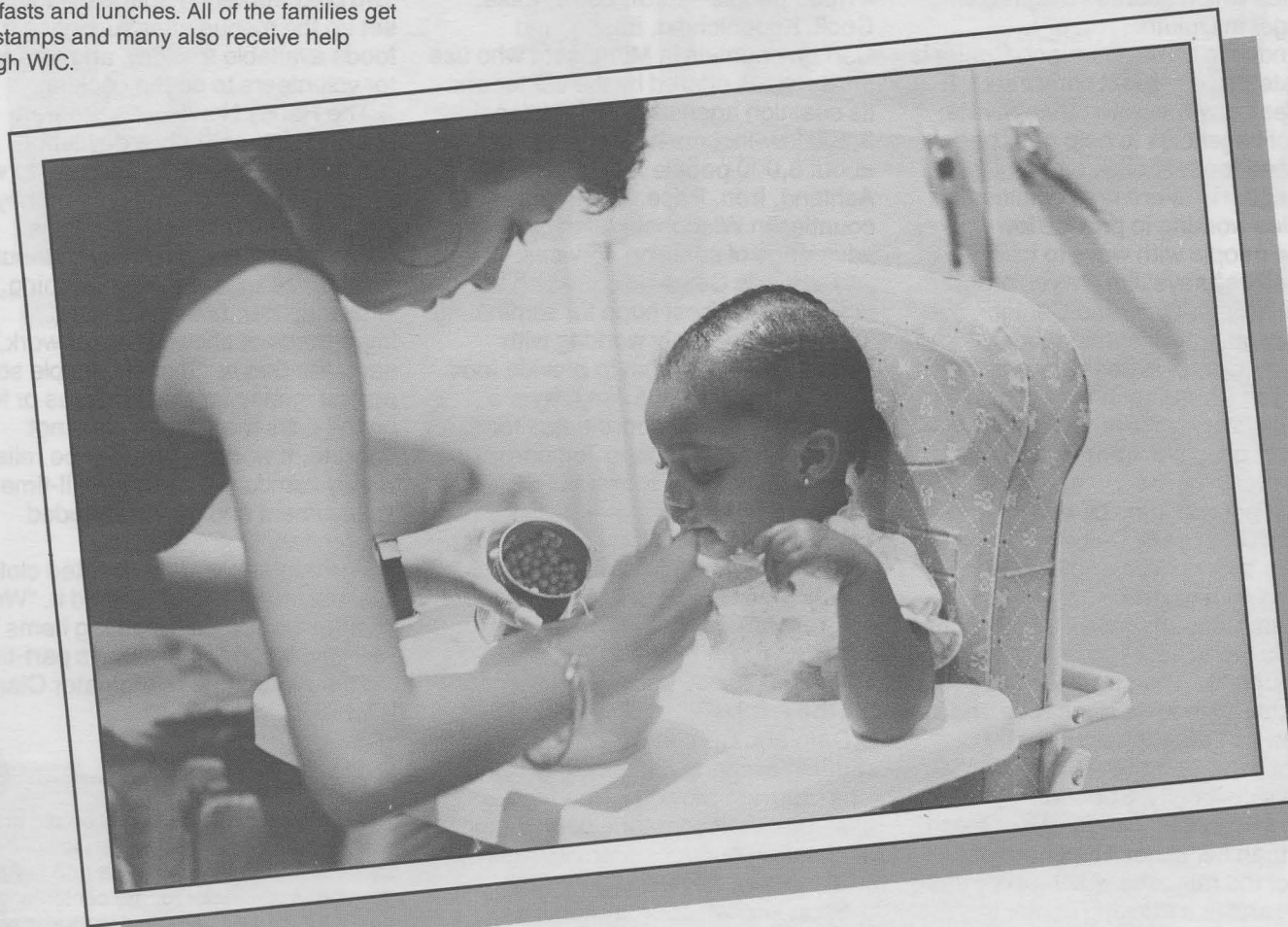
Street goes beyond benefitting the residents. It brings a sense of pride and accomplishment to those who donated their services.

While Nancy Abraham has been thoroughly involved in the planning and operational aspects from the beginning, her father's personal interest has also directly touched the lives of the families who live at the residence. For example, Alexander Abraham recently became godfather to one of the residents' infants.

The Abraham Residence is not the answer to the plight of New York's homeless, but it is an additional resource and an example of how public and private sector interests can work together to tackle an important problem.

For 31 families living on the West Side of New York, that creative partnership has made all the difference in the world.

article by Peter Manning



Coordinating Services In Creative Ways

Damiano Center Helps People Help Themselves

From the "Land of Sky Blue Waters"—Minnesota—comes a model of a successful public-private partnership working toward a common goal of food self-sufficiency. Damiano Center is located in Duluth, Minnesota, and forms a network with four nonprofit agencies which address the problems of hunger in Duluth.

Founded in 1982, Damiano Center is a private, not-for-profit corporation that provides networks with other private, nonprofit agencies to help poor people who need food, shelter, or clothing.

"Our goal is to create a coalition of agencies working to provide low-income people with ways to help themselves," says Jim Dwyer, program coordinator for Damiano Center.

Although non-denominational, Damiano Center is based on the ideals of the San Damiano monastery, where St. Francis of Assisi received his calling to go to work among the poor. The center is housed in an old Catholic grade school building owned by the Catholic Diocese of Duluth. The Diocese allows Damiano Center to use the building rent free.

Duluth (population 84,000) stretches 23 miles along a mountain bordering Lake Superior. The city's primary products relate to its resources and its position on Lake Superior.

Across the St. Louis River lies Duluth's sister city, Superior, Wisconsin (population 32,000). Much flatter than her sister, Superior has many of the railyards which serve the region, and is a trucking center for foodstuffs. Together the two cities are a major port where ores, grain, and other bulk cargoes are shipped throughout the world.

Years ago, the livelihood of the northland people was tied to the land's resources—mining, logging, and fishing. Although these industries still remain strong, the focus has shifted.

Today there are more than 18,000 low-income households—roughly 41,000 people—in St. Louis, Lake, Cook, Koochiching, Itasca, and Carlton counties in Minnesota who use the services offered by the center and its coalition agencies. An additional 3,200 low-income households, or about 8,000 people from Douglas, Ashland, Iron, Price, and Bayfield counties in Wisconsin, also take advantage of coalition services.

"Damiano Center is based on the belief that the best hope for eliminating hunger is in actively working with people, enabling them to provide food for themselves," says Jim Dwyer's brother, Paul, who coordinates food stamp outreach and the Temporary Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) at the center.

"Once their basic food needs are met, we try to create opportunities for low-income people to learn to be more self-reliant."

Help with food, clothes, jobs

Damiano Center's soup kitchen, clothing exchange, and Handy Hands jobs program provide immediate assistance. "If someone needs a meal or clothing, our volunteers will assist—immediately," says Jim Dwyer.

Soup kitchen coordinator Jean Gornick says the kitchen has plenty of volunteers. Many churches in the area provide cooking staff—a head cook and 6 to 10 helpers 1 day each month.

Grade schools, confirmation classes, Outward Bound groups, and other service organizations also volunteer.

Last year the kitchen served nearly 53,000 meals on a budget of \$77,000. The kitchen serves all-you-want-to-eat meals at 11:30 a.m., 5 days a week. Two paid workers manage the kitchen, set up the menus after surveying the foods available that day, and arrange for volunteers to do the cooking.

The Handy Hands jobs program offers the community a day labor service and gives people eager to work opportunities to make some money. The program offers jobs such as painting, unloading trucks, distributing and harvesting food, and cleaning.

"Handy Hands teaches the importance of showing up for work," says Jim Dwyer. "It gives people some pocket money for the bus fares or food on the days the kitchen does not operate. If workers prove to be reliable, Handy Hands will push for full-time employment and provide needed references."

The center also has donated clothing available for those who need it. "We distributed 100,839 clothing items last year to 16,500 people," says part-time clothing exchange coordinator Clare Ritchie.

Damiano Center is housed in an old grade school building owned by the Catholic Diocese of Duluth. Jim Dwyer (top right) is program coordinator for the center, and his brother Paul (left) coordinates food stamp outreach and the Temporary Food Assistance Program (TEFAP). The center works with several other nonprofit agencies.

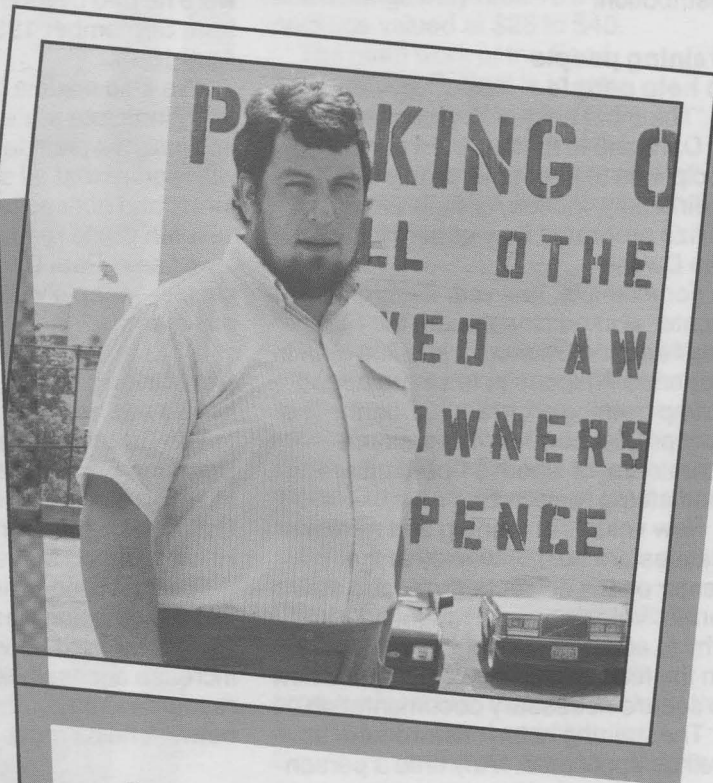
Money comes from public, private sources

Damiano Center's \$225,000 budget is funded 40 percent from private donations, 30 percent from private foundations, and 20 percent from other agency sources. The remaining 10 percent comes from federal sources, including the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Housing and Urban Development community block grants, and USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) food assistance programs.

"Although our center receives only 10 percent funding from governmental agencies," says Jim Dwyer, "our interaction with government programs is even greater because we assist people using the center in applying for and receiving federal aid."

The Damiano Center has been

responsible for distributing USDA-donated foods through TEFAP (the Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program) in Duluth since 1983. Since that time Damiano has set up 83 distribution sites in Duluth to allow easy access at a minimal cost for the elderly.



"This was especially important in Duluth because of the steep hills," says Paul Dwyer. "It is next to impossible for an elderly individual to carry a 20-pound bag of food up or down one of these hills in the winter, so we set up a network of volunteers to take commodities to the highrises for distribution."

Training people to help people

"The most unique approach we use at Damiano is that we train our recipients to help other members of their family, friends, or neighbors to utilize programs they qualify for," says Jim Dwyer.

For example, last year Damiano Center worked closely with the Food and Nutrition Service field office staff in Superior, Wisconsin, to set up a food stamp training program in Duluth. The pilot project now has 144 trained volunteers, of whom 81 percent are food stamp recipients.

New volunteer training and refresher classes are held bi-weekly at the center on the correct use of food stamp forms. Volunteers are taught how and why to accurately fill out each question on the food stamp application, and how to secure necessary documentation.

The training helps caseworkers as well as applicants. "Any time a person comes into our office with an

application which is completely and accurately filled out, it helps the caseworker," says Arlene Bjorkman, St. Louis County food stamp administrator. "We know the client has a better understanding of the questions. There will be fewer errors."

The Dwyers believe 520 households were helped by food stamp volunteers from September 1987 through April 1988.

"We also made a big push for the Minnesota state legislature to implement a plain language law that will require that all state application forms and notices be written for seventh grade reading comprehension level," says Paul Dwyer. "Keep it simple—people who understand do not make errors."

Networking is key to success

The Duluth Hunger Coalition links Damiano Center, the Food and Nutrition Council, the Community Garden Program, and the Central Hillside United Ministries.

"The decision to link the agencies into the coalition was formalized in 1984 to expand networking and to increase accessibility to outside resources," says Jim Dwyer. "The network helps move people from

immediate need to longer term self-sufficiency."

A quick look at some of the other components of the coalition networks:

- The Food and Nutrition Council provides nutrition education for low- and moderate-income families.

The council also has a resource center for pregnant teenagers, provides food consultants to teach nutrition and food preparation at the emergency food shelves, and operates a cannery program, providing equipment and hands-on instructions in safe food preservation techniques.

- The Duluth Community Garden Program provides 3½ acres divided into 15 garden plots throughout the city and offers gardening instruction for low-income families. "The plots are fertilized, tilled and ready for planting," says Mary Beth Nevers, Community Garden executive director. "We also provide a tilling service to more than 250 elderly or low-income gardeners who have access to their own plots. About 135 households use the 15 community plots."

The garden program also purchases bulk seeds in the spring. Volunteers package the seeds and sell packets to



Damiano Center has donated clothing available for people who need it. Last year, the center distributed more than 100,000 items of clothing to nearly 17,000 people.



Betty Dickinson, registered dietician from Iowa City, Iowa, used her vacation to work as a volunteer at Central Hillside United Ministries food shelf in Duluth. Dickinson helped with workshops on preserving food.

gardeners for 10 cents each. The Agricultural Extension Service holds workshops on gardening techniques, and experienced gardeners are available to answer questions.

- The Central Hillside United Ministries administers the Emergency Food Shelf, the First Street Drop-In Center, Fare Share Program, Men's and Women's Sleeping Shelters, and the Food Accessibility Program.

Each year the Emergency Food Shelf provides a 5-day food supply in crisis situations to some 8,000 individuals and families. People using this service generally live independently and are able to prepare food themselves.

The First Street Drop-In Center is an informal, supportive, chemical-free setting for street people and those with drug problems, perhaps the community's most vulnerable population. The Drop-In Center offers a safe haven, with coffee, bakery goods, and sandwiches for guests.

Fare Share is a self-help food distribution system where people work together to lessen their food shortage problems and to save money. There are no eligibility requirements or screening processes. Participants pay \$12 (cash or food stamps) and do 2 hours of community volunteer work each month. In exchange they receive a food package valued at \$25 to \$40.

The main work of the Food Accessibility Project is to refer individuals to food assistance programs, help them through food program application processes, and counsel them about food buying and menu selections.

The coalition's network in action

An example of coalition networking would be Damiano soup kitchen users enrolling in Food and Nutrition Council cooking classes to learn about low-cost nutritious foods and ways to expand the buying power of food stamps.

While taking cooking classes, clients receive information about the Community Garden Program. Some choose to apply for and use a community garden to grow fresh produce for themselves throughout the summer. The Food and Nutrition Council's cannery is available to help gardeners preserve produce for the winter.

"Workshops have been set up to help other northern Minnesota communities follow the Duluth Hunger Coalition networking pattern," explains Jim Dwyer. "We teach these communities how to form a coalition similar to ours."

"The Damiano Center will stay in operation as long as there is a need for our services. When that need no longer exists, we will be satisfied that our job is done," say the Dwyers.

For more information about the Duluth Hunger Coalition and the Damiano Center contact:
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*article and photos
by Mary Jane Getlinger*

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