

The Journey Home

Cleaning Up His Act

By Ginny Weatherstone



Charles Clark

Charles Clark smiles at the irony of it. He tried to get into the Fifth Avenue Motel when he was living on the streets. He was using crack heavily then. “They would never let me in,” he says. “And now I’m at Minvilla Manor.”

Charles was born and raised in Knoxville, in the Lonsdale community. While he didn’t meet his natural father until he was nineteen, his stepfather was good to him and the two other children who came along. “He treated us all the same.” Their mother taught them to cook and clean and take care of themselves. She was a stickler about cleanliness. “You could eat off of her floors,” says Charles. The kids had everything they needed and were known as “the rich kids of the projects.”

Charles did not do particularly well at school. He was more interested in showing off than being a serious student. He started using marijuana at age 14; there was nothing unusual about that as it was part of the culture of his peers. He started working early but Charles’ temper would get him in trouble. He was also inclined to walk off the job if he became irritated.

Still, Charles was a hard worker and could always get a job. At age 26, he started using crack. “I got on it real bad,” shares Charles. He acknowledges that when his paycheck came, buying crack took precedence over rent, gas for the car or food. “Cocaine always came first.” Eventually, Charles ended up on the streets, sleeping at a local mission, working and using his money to fund his addiction. He admits that one time he stole from his mother’s house out of desperation.

In 1996, in a drug deal that went wrong, Charles was injured and ended up in a hospital with a traumatic brain injury. He needed to learn to walk and talk all over again and his short term memory was permanently affected. His family stuck with him through a long rehabilitation. It was enough to get him to straighten out. That is until a particular woman came along who led him astray. And then he descended onto the drug spiral once again.

I asked Charles what had helped him turn into the delightful gentle man who sat in front of me today. “I got tired,” he said. “I just got so tired of never having any money, of having friends who only showed up when you had drugs or money, of never having food, of being broke. I was getting older. It was time to do something.” Charles acknowledged that he needed to change friends. He also talks about how hard it was. “I used to dream that I had a crack pipe in my mouth,” he said. “Then I would wake up. The devil is a powerful person. I can only be as strong as God lets me be. But God helped me be strong enough.”

On May 13, 2011, Charles moved into Minvilla Manor. It has been a time of change and strengthening for Charles. He’s been away from crack cocaine now for 4 years. He has a part time job cleaning at a local business, thankful for the cleaning skills he learned from his mom. And it is noteworthy that the Minvilla staff tells me that you could eat off of Charles’ floors!

But something else is new in Charles’s life. He’s getting married! With a job and a good history now of abstinence from the drug that brought him down, Charles is getting married and moving out. The staff is happy for him!

I asked Charles if he felt like he was a success. “Yes, ma’am, I do. I surely do. God has been looking after me.”

That is surely true. But VMC has been looking after Charles as well. Most importantly, Charles has been looking after himself! Tall and straight, clear-eyed and healthy, Charles is very much a success. And he carries with him our very best wishes for happiness and continued success.



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September, 2013

Dear Friends of VMC,

My gosh, it's busy around here! I feel the slow and steady approach of all the activity that fall and winter bring. We've several fundraisers coming up and there is much to do for those. Close on the heels of all of that are the holidays which bring their own particular madness. Yikes.

But none of that is as important as the work we do! Helping Knoxville's marginally housed remain in their housing is a noble goal; it prevents homelessness in the first place. If someone should fall into the unfortunate circumstances of homelessness, VMC offers their best hope for getting back on their feet as quickly as possible. It is difficult work and it calls for qualified professionals and a cadre of dedicated volunteers, lots of patience and skill, a storeroom of supplies, etc. But this difficult work is successful. What we do works as a permanent solution. We're proud of that.

It is true that VMC couldn't remain open for a day without the support of the community it serves. We can only do so many fundraisers and we can only write so many grants. And while those things surely help, the true heart and soul of our agency is you, the person in the Knoxville neighborhood who is moved by the plight of our people. It is the donation of time and treasure that really makes things possible for us.

We are so grateful. We are also emboldened to ask for your support once again. We must ask because, quite simply, we need your help. Encroaching cooler months will swell our numbers and our costs. Your gift will help us to keep up. Your gift frees us from financial worries and allows us to focus on what we do best – helping people.



You gift makes a tremendous difference. And we are grateful for it.

Thank you,

Ginny Weatherstone
Chief Executive Officer

From the Director's Desk

By Ginny Weatherstone

The first crisp air of fall greets me in the morning as I go out to walk the dog. It makes me so aware of the cycle of things. The year has a pattern to it and the seasons come and go. It seems sometimes like there are seasons to life as well.

I so enjoyed sitting down with Charles Clark, the gentleman featured on our cover this issue. It seems almost as though his life has gone through a very long winter and is emerging to a promise-filled spring. Even as our year begins its descent to colder days, Charles is feeling a warming of his heart. May God be with him. The other day I received a phone call from a woman who I first met when I started at VMC sixteen years ago. She was an addict and a prostitute. Always, she was looking for a way to buy her next hit of crack, selling herself if necessary. Feeding her addiction was more important than dignity or self-esteem. She sank as low as one can sink.

It must have been ten years later when she learned that her mother in Iowa was ill with Alzheimer's disease. This news grabbed her attention in a way that our best efforts had not. She returned to her home in the Midwest and straightened up. Her goal was to become the caretaker for the mother whose heart she had broken over the years. She met that goal. For four years, she served and loved her mother well.

Now her mother has been moved into a care facility as her needs can no longer be addressed at home. A whole new world of possibilities has opened up to our former client. She is currently working two part time jobs and just moved into an apartment. It is the first place of her own that she has had in twenty years. After way too long in the deplorable condition of homelessness and addiction, she is clean and sober and caring well for herself. It seems as though her long and cruel winter has given way to a brighter time for her. I do believe in seasons and I do believe that there is always hope. For some, transformation may take a long time. We never say "never" at VMC; we say "Not Yet." For the two people described above, the seasons have turned. And for every purpose under the sun – and for everyone – there is a season. And it will come.

Bush Family Refuge



Vanessa Hensley answers questions from Refuge volunteers Alana Marsh and Rosemary Kornreich

VMC's mission is two-fold: to facilitate permanent supportive housing for those who are homeless and to provide services to prevent homelessness. In 2006, the Volunteer Ministry Center intentionally aligned itself with the principles of the then newly created Ten Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness (TYP). This Plan redirected the focus from the maintenance of homeless people to the ending and prevention of homelessness itself. One strategy of the plan was the prevention of homelessness through activities that prevent an individual or family from losing their housing. These activities originate in the Bush Family Refuge.

The Refuge is open Monday through Friday from 9:30am – 2:30pm and is staffed entirely by volunteers, each of whom undergoes a comprehensive training program before beginning, and then commits to working at least one day per week. The volunteer work is done under the direction of professional social worker Vanessa Hensley. While still a student at the UT College of Social Work, Vanessa Hensley completed her internship at VMC. After graduation, Ms. Hensley began working as an assistant in the Resource Center before becoming an official Case Manager. This

year, Ms. Hensley was promoted to Refuge Director. "I'm very grateful for the opportunities I have had here at VMC to serve my community and I'm proud of the meaningful work that we do. I look forward to accomplishing even more in the future," states Ms. Hensley.

Among the extensive services provided to individuals and families that are in crisis are utility/rental assistance, distribution of clothing and toiletry items, birth certificate and ID retrieval, and vouchers for haircuts. Additionally, there are programs in place to help with medical prescriptions, co-pays, and other unexpected matters. Local opticians donate their services for eye exams, and Andes Optical offers the Refuge a discounted price on eyeglasses, which are then distributed to individuals in need. For those with upcoming medical appointments and job interviews, the Refuge even offers bus passes.

Each of these services is made possible through the dedication of volunteers, for which VMC is extremely grateful. If you are interested in volunteering, there are Volunteer Orientation dates and times posted on VMC's website at www.vmcinc.org or you may contact Lisa Hutton at 865-524-3926 ext. 230 for more information.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Keepin' the Lights On



Robinella

Volunteer Ministry Center is excited to announce “Keepin’ the Lights On.” The concert is a fundraiser featuring local singer/songwriter/artist Robinella, to be held Friday October 4, 2013 at the Square Room located on Market Square. Originally named Robinella and the CCstringband, and later shortened to simply Robinella, the band blends Bluegrass, Country, and Jazz with Pop and Funk. The group has released 6 albums and performed at Barley’s Taproom and Pizzeria for 10 years. Robinella has generously offered to donate 100% of the proceeds from the show to VMC’s programs. Advance tickets are \$20 and will be \$25 the day of the show. Doors open at 7:30pm. Purchase tickets online at www.vmcinc.org or by calling Lee Turner at (865) 524-3926 ext. 223.

16th Annual VMC 5K Race and 2nd Annual Dunkin’ Donut Dash

March 2, 2014 at 2pm marks the 16th Annual VMC 5K Race and the 2nd Annual Dunkin’ Donut Dash. Beginning at the World’s Fair Park Festival Lawn, the course for these 2 races winds its way through the downtown area. Participants of the Dash will be challenged to stop at the halfway mark and consume a box of Munchkins before completing the rest of the run to World’s Fair Park. This year’s event will have a Mardi Gras theme complete with activities, games, and face painting for kids. Teams are highly encouraged to participate. Check the VMC website at www.vmcinc.org for more information and participant registration.

Carry the Torch Knoxville 2014

Save the date! April 23, 2014 will be VMC’s next Carry the Torch Knoxville, featuring *New York Times* best-selling Author Pat Conroy. Mr. Conroy is a Southern writer whose award winning novels include *The Prince of Tides*, *The Great Santini*, *Beach Music*, and *South of Broad*. Two of these novels have been made into major motion pictures. The event will begin with a Mission Fair at 10:00am. Agencies which serve the homeless, along with VMC, will present booths and interact with visitors who are looking for volunteer opportunities. The luncheon and program will begin at 11:45am and be followed by a book signing at 1:00pm. For more information, visit www.carrythetorchknoxville.com.



Pat Conroy

So Far this Year:

- 80 people have successfully moved into housing with a 93% retention rate.
- 16,978 meals have been served by 2,075 volunteers.
 - Volunteers have spent 8017 hours helping our community in need.
 - 2,733 people received help from the Bush Family Refuge.
- The VMC Dental Clinic has served 374 individuals and performed 642 procedures.
- Minvilla Manor has maintained a 95% occupancy rate (54 out of 57 units).

VMC’s Wish List

- Zippered cases for important documents. (ID, Social Security card, Medical Alert)
- Patio table umbrella
- Zippered sandwich bags
- Ibuprofen
- Toilet paper
- Travel size Kleenex
- Pocket Calendars
- Craft supplies of all kinds
- Commercial mixer with dough hook
- Office supplies
- Copy paper
- Post-it Notes
- Socks and Underwear
- Toiletries
- Laundry detergent
- Trash bags

Community Life at Minvilla Manor



Bianca DeLange helps prepare the afternoon's lunch

This year marks the 100 year anniversary of the building formerly known as Minvilla Manor, located on the corner of Fifth and Broadway. Originally built as town houses in 1913, the buildings became the Fifth Avenue Motel in 1962 and spent the next 40 years serving as multi-family housing. In 2002, after years of neglect, the buildings were eventually condemned and abandoned. In 2006, they were purchased by Volunteer Ministry Center and rehabilitated extensively, transforming them into Minvilla Manor. The residence offers 57 ENERGY STAR certified units for formerly homeless men and women.

For the residents of Minvilla Manor, it's a chance at a new life. And with that new life, comes a chance to try new experiences. Bianca DeLange is the Resident Support Coordinator at Minvilla and she sees to it that the residents' days are filled with meaningful activities. While Minvilla offers a fully independent lifestyle, Ms. DeLange and staff offer a variety of outings, activities, and classes that encourage interaction between the neighbors, allowing them to get to know each other better.

Among the activities are group discussions on personal responsibility, recovery classes for alcohol and drug issues, and a guide to acknowledging and coping with the daily stressors of life. At least once a week, there is an additional off-site outing planned. Recently, the residents were treated to an afternoon of sun and fun with swimming at Big Ridge State Park. Other activities include trips to Cade's Cove, weekly shopping trips to Kroger, Walmart, and McKay Used Books, CD's & More, and even local museums like the McClung Museum of Natural History and Culture at the University of Tennessee.

For those with a green thumb, local volunteers come by on Mondays and Wednesdays to help with the Minvilla Gardening Club. Last spring, the group planted a variety of fruits, vegetables, and berries. This summer, the group has been harvesting the edibles and they couldn't be more thrilled with how well everything has turned out. Participating in the garden's growth helps instill a sense of purpose and ownership in the members, of both their garden and their residence.

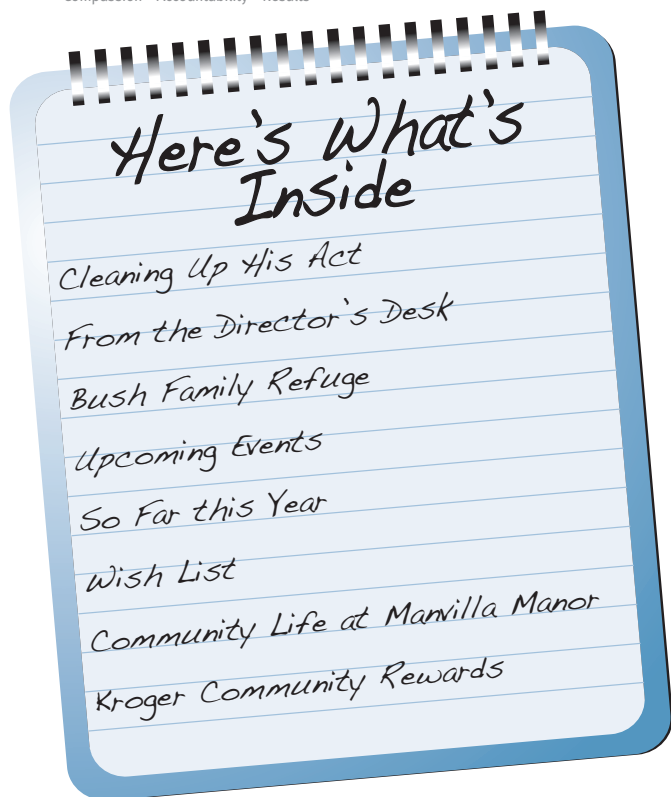


The residents gather for a community meal

Minvilla Manor even has the Minvilla Literary Society. Each week, VMC Board Member Jerry Askew brings a story based on requests from the group, then reads it to them and moderates a discussion forum with some interesting facts about the subjects. Just recently the group learned about Robert Rogers, an American colonial frontiersman who served in the British army during both the French and Indian War and the American Revolution. Resident Billy Courier was quite excited about the group and said, "I enjoy them a lot because they give me something to look forward to every week." He is eager to learn more about author Mark Twain at a future meeting.



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Kroger Community Rewards



Earn money for VMC just by grocery shopping! This fall, The Kroger Co. is rolling out an all-new rewards program geared specifically toward assisting local charitable organizations and schools. Beginning September 1, 2013, and continuing through August 31, 2014, Kroger has dedicated \$750,000 to be distributed through their new Kroger Community Rewards program. Wouldn't it be great if VMC was able to use some of that money to help improve our community? It's as easy as using your Kroger Plus Card. Simply visit Kroger's secure Rewards website at www.krogercommunityrewards.com and enroll your Kroger Plus Card by selecting Volunteer Ministry Center. After that, every time you shop at Kroger using your Kroger Plus Card, you'll not only earn rewards for yourself, but for VMC as well! Even better, once any household member enrolls his or her card, all linked

Kroger Plus Cards within that household earn them too. VMC is proud to partner with the The Kroger Co. in this easy and effective effort to help make a difference in people's lives. For detailed instructions, click on the "Help Us" tab on the VMC website at www.vmcinc.org.