

OFFERING HOPE • PROVIDING OPPORTUNITY • CONFIRMING DIGNITY • ENSURING SAFETY • ESTABLISHING COMMUNITY • DEMONSTRATING HOSPITALITY

Sustaining First Light Throughout the Year

First Light is sustained by (a) our own fund raising efforts, (b) support from the community, which comes in the form of volunteer services, in-kind donations and individual or group contributions, (c) grants from community and civic foundations or government agencies. All of these channels serve to sustain our agency. We also have an endowment fund directed at long term sustainability of the agency.

We are very proud of the portion of our income which comes as donations from individuals, churches, civic groups. Furthermore, First Light raises a huge percentage of its budget through our own fundraising efforts—the largest of which is our Gala, and also includes our Holiday Lights program, sales of beaded crosses and items in the Art Shop and responses to newsletters.

In fiscal year 2007:

- 25% of our income came from our own fundraising special events
- 14% came from individual donations
- 12% came from churches or civic groups
- 6% came from First Light programs such as beaded cross, art and t-shirt

Now that the new fiscal year is upon us, we would like to ask folks to consider making contributions on a monthly or quarterly basis, which would perhaps, more evenly distribute income throughout the year. Summertime is, historically, a SLOW time for donations.

IF ---- you are first learning about the important work of First Light through this newsletter:

.....we welcome you as a new friend and respectfully ask for your support.

IF ---- you are already a donor:

.....we would like to challenge you to increase your giving level by at least 10% this year.

Our operating budget continues to increase as we have expanded our programs and services to include permanent supportive housing. Moreover, the economy is dictating that costs for power, water, food, supplies, are increasing.

Whatever you can do to partner with us to maintain the same standard of programs and services to this population of women with such deep and significant needs will be greatly appreciated! Thanks for being a part of First Light!!



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Volunteer of the Month

May 2008



Judy Smith

Fairfield Highlands Presbyterian Church

June 2008



Betsy Britain

Bluff Park United Methodist Church

FOOD

FOR

THOUGHT

by Deb



The phrase - "one woman, one day at a time" repeats in my mind over and over as I reflect about our work here at First Light. It has become a mantra for me. And I use that phrase in grant applications, requests for contributions and thank you notes a lot. If you've read the ancient mystics you will recall the story about a rock in the forest. One raindrop does not make much difference as it plops onto the rock. But, over time, after hundreds and thousands of raindrops splashing upon the stone, a deepening in the hard surface will begin to occur, and the stone will develop a cuplike impression, which then can hold a small pool of water. You pragmatics can call it erosion if you like. It takes ALL those raindrops, one at a time, to wash away the outer surface and deepen an impression into the stone. A more poetic view allows one to make the parallel: One must have faith that each small gesture, every understanding smile, every group therapy session, every bus token given, every safe night's sleep, every load of

laundry washed, each donation, each plate handed from a volunteer over the counter to a guest in the Dining Room...makes a difference for one woman, one day at a time. It takes all of these First Light "raindrops" to make a loving impression which, hopefully, will carve out a greater capacity for a woman's self preservation and her ability to love herself and others. May time spent here help each woman to move on with her life blessed with a new strength and a deeper sense of hope for the future. It happens....one raindrop, one woman, one day at a time.

First Light's New Web Site: Surf Away!!

We are delighted to announce that our new web site is up and running. The address is the same as before: www.firstlightshelter.org. The content and functioning of the site have been enhanced.

First notice the beautiful color!! We can now constantly add new photos and information for upcoming events. The Volunteer Calendar is now on line so folks can double check their dates or see where there may be an open spot. Donations and memorials can be made online, as well as Holiday Lights contributions. For the first time we will offer Gala ticket sales online next year. Shannon and Deb have worked for months to edit and streamline the text matter and create a fresh new look.

This is a colorful, vibrant site where people can really begin to experience what First Light is about. The great thing is that we will now be managing it ourselves and keeping it current. Shannon will be the true website administrator - because she is our techno wizard!

We want to thank Martine Craven, who donated her time to be the administrator of the previous site. She helped us to establish a presence on the Internet and her assistance over the past years has been invaluable.

Thanks to Molly Coke, of Firespring, who has been our consultant from Day One through the new website development process. She guided and led us with patience and grace.

We hope you will visit all the pages on the new site and enjoy the way our story is being presented. The site is meant for current friends and donors but it also is a resource for people doing research about homelessness in our area, possible guests of First Light, or potential donors seeking a reputable nonprofit agency like First Light to support or endow...

If you have any suggestions or find something that needs a little tweaking....please let us know. Most of all - enjoy the new First Light web site!



It is so humbling to hear the stories of our guests and, likewise, to witness what our wonderful volunteers do to care for the homeless women and children we serve. I thought it would be a good thing to share with you just why some people are First Light volunteers or why our donors contribute. So we've started this new column. Thanks to Jenny B. Nikoli for interviewing these special friends of FL!! D.B.E.

Judy Smith

Judy Smith is a volunteer in residence at Villa Glen, living in the same apartment complex with eight women who began to regain their footing in life at First Light and are now living semi-independently in the Bessemer HUD Permanent Housing Program. Judy regularly offers the women rides to-and-from the bus stop, the grocery store, the bank, and even their jobs. Her interaction with them is often varied and depends on what they need; she recently took one of them to the emergency room and often picks one of them up from work when her 11 p.m. shift is over. She recently helped organize a pizza-dinner-and-movie-night for them, and wants to host a picnic for them this summer.

When asked why she chooses to help them, often sacrificing her own comfort and time, she replied, "I don't do this to make myself feel good. I serve because I have been saved to serve, and not for any reason tangible or intangible in this life or the one to come."

Judy likens these eight women to butterflies, beginning their journeys at First Light as caterpillars, close to the ground, hungry, and motivated by their needs. First Light offered them shelter, security and a place where they can grow strong enough to one day spread their wings and fly in beautiful freedom.

Jeanette Bell

Looking back on my eighteen years as liaison for Our Lady of Sorrows, I realize my time with First Light has made me far more sensitive to the terrible effects that poverty, rejection, violence, and homelessness have on so many wonderful women in our community. I have become sensitive to my personal spending habits and means of living. I no longer spend as much on trivialities, and have therefore increased giving to those in need. I now see homeless women as human beings with normal human needs, and most poignantly, as my sisters and as daughters of God. This has truly been a labor of love, and my experience has taken me beyond a fear of the unknown. I can't help but feel empathy for the needs of these terribly abused women.

Not only am I motivated by the residents at First Light, but also by relationships I built with the staff and volunteers from my church, who willingly prepare and purchase food and other supplies, who donate their time and energy cheerfully. Around my church, some know me as "the First Light lady" or "the shelter lady," and perhaps hand me a ten dollar bill or leave a bag of toiletries on my doorstep. It is moments such as these and people I've met through my time with First Light that give me cause to reflect on the gifts which the Almighty God has bestowed upon me and allowed me to share with others. I am profoundly grateful for all these people: my fellow church volunteers, the First Light staff, and the women of First Light. Indeed, I am blessed to be a part of this ministry.

Budget-Relieving Wish List

8.5X11 white copy paper
Blue and black ink pens
White-out

Breakfast foods:

Individual pkts of instant oatmeal
Individual pkts of instant grits
Generic, bulk cereals
Fresh or canned fruit
Fruit juice

Milk - 2%
Coffee creamer
Sugar
Breakfast or granola bars

Disposable goods:

Plates
Bowls
Cups
Forks, spoons, knives

Napkins
Gift cards to Block Buster or
Movie Gallery for movie therapy
Snack items for group therapies
Bleach
Over the Counter meds
Wash cloths
Kitchen towels

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(Isaiah 6:8)

Phyllis' Birthday

Phyllis McCombs decided to celebrate her birthday in a novel way - instead of having her...uh... "over 50" birthday party at home or in a restaurant, she asked friends to contribute to a dinner at First Light. Phyllis just wanted to share part of her life with our guests instead of receiving gifts. On May 30th Phyllis came in with an entourage ready to serve numerous Mexican dishes!

Friends were assigned various tasks as they heated and served what looked like 30-40 different dishes. I managed to squeeze in a brief tour of the Emergency Shelter as we waited for the cooks to ready the food for serving. Three women served a savory and hearty soup as the appetizer. There were so many dishes at the counter they actually brought the soup out into the Dining room to ladle into bowls. Our guests LOVED it. One of the "friends of Phyllis" was fully costumed as a clown who handed flowers to all the ladies and the staff.

Phyllis thought she would surprise the ladies with her birthday cake but she didn't know I had already informed the women of this gracious gift she was giving to them. When she brought the cake out for the ladies they all broke out into the "Happy Birthday" song. One guest even gave her a private rendition of the song in Hebrew! I think Phyllis left here feeling truly blessed. She had been surrounded by many friends who obviously think she is very special, and she left FL feeling all the richer for having shared with us the bounty of her life—good friends with generous hearts like hers.

Thank you, Phyllis McCombs, and the host of friends you brought with you, for sharing your birthday with First Light. D.B.E



Chandra gets her GED!!!!

Chandra (pronounced Shawn-dra) is a First Light 4th floor permanent resident. She came to Birmingham from India several years ago. A tragic car wreck left her seriously injured and suddenly without resources or means to support herself. Back home she had the equivalent of a business degree; but now she found herself with brain injury and unable to function as she always had. Coming to First Light was an important step in her attempt to reclaim her life.

Staff at FL encouraged Chandra to enroll in the GED program offered by Jefferson State Community College. Over the course of the past year and a half, Chandra has gradually made her way through the Jeff State program - with lots of support from teachers and friends. The language barriers and other issues made it slow going for awhile.

On May 29th Chandraprabha Ghagare achieved her goal. She not only graduated from the GED program, but gained membership in the National Adult Education Honor Society. Moreover, she was one of eight students asked to say a few words to those in attendance at the graduation ceremony. Longtime volunteer and soon to be Board member, Emma Taylor, and Deb Everson, Assistant Director, went to the graduation and were very proud of Chandra's accomplishments.

She thanked First Light and her teachers for supporting her. It was very clear that this class of 72 students has many touching stories of individuals who worked very hard to get through the curriculum. It was also very obvious how deep their appreciation was to the Jeff State GED faculty and staff.

We are so very proud of Chandra and know she will continue to pursue her education and regain that sense of accomplishment she knew back home in India.



Linen Shower for First Light

The Zonta Club of Birmingham hosted the first-ever Linen Shower to benefit First Light, the YWCA and Interfaith Hospitality House on June 21st. The shower was a huge success, with several tables of sheets, comforters, towels, pillows, shower curtain liners and rolling clothes hampers donated for the homeless women, children and families

served by the agencies benefiting. First Light would like to give special thanks to:

- The Zonta Club, especially Susan Livingston and all members present at the event who welcomed Shannon Horsley, Volunteer Manager, with warmth on the day of the shower;
- Emma Taylor, FL liaison for St. Peter the Apostle Catholic Church, and all members who donated linens for the women and children at First Light;
- YWCA CEO Suzanne Durham for allowing the shower to take place at the YWCA;
- Everyone who donated linens!



Will you help?

You can make a difference in the lives of Birmingham's homeless women and children.

You can provide shelter from a life on the streets where there is no place to go.

You can make a sanctuary available to women and children 24 hours a day with social and counseling services. Because First Light exists, no woman or child has to sleep on the street, in a car or stay in an unhealthy situation.

You can help provide specialized programs geared to chronically mentally ill women, those who cannot complete traditional day programs.

No one plans to be homeless, abused, mentally ill or addicted to drugs or alcohol.

No one aspires to be homeless.

I (We) give the following gift, offering a physical example of commitment, care and concern for the homeless women and children in our community:

Yearly gift of:

\$10,000 or more.... Benefactor
 \$5,000-9,999..... Patron
 \$1,000-4,999..... Investor
 \$500-999..... Sponsor
 \$250-499..... Sustainer
 \$100-249..... Advocate
 \$1-99..... Friend

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Fill in below if this gift is made ☐ In honor of ☐ In memory of

Name: _____

Send acknowledgement to: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

☐ Enclosed is my check for \$_____ (please make payable to First Light)

☐ Please bill my (MasterCard or Visa) in the amount of \$_____

Acct Number: _____ Exp. Date: _____ Signature: _____

☐ Check here if this is an anonymous gift.

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