

OUR CO-FOUNDERS

Sister Mary Scullion
Joan Dawson McConnon

We can hardly believe that it has been twenty years. We have seen tremendous changes, many of which we couldn't have imagined. But when we think back to those early days of going out on the streets and talking with our friends such as Otis, Billy, Chico, Horace, and others, we know that all we see today is the fruit of the seeds that were planted back then. And the basic truths we learned from the men back then remain the guiding force of all we do today: All persons have dignity. All persons have basic needs, including housing, opportunities for employment, medical care, and education. All persons, despite their circumstances, have potential and gifts. And when people come together sharing hope and vision, great things can happen.

It's not hard, given the daily dose of bad news, to become cynical. We are inundated with stories of human corruption, arrogance, and greed. One is tempted to think that violence, oppression, and injustice are the harsh and inevitable realities of our world. Yet at Project H.O.M.E., we have infinite reasons to be grateful. We have seen the immeasurable richness of the human spirit. In these past two decades, we have witnessed overwhelming expressions of generosity and goodness. Countless persons from all walks of life have come forth to share of their talents, time, and resources. Hundreds of wonderful and committed people have worked at Project H.O.M.E., supporting and enhancing our mission. Volunteers, board members, donors, neighbors, and others have all given of themselves selflessly.

And of course, the greatest gifts have been the men and women and children themselves who have known homelessness and poverty, addiction and mental illness, and have survived and even flourished against all odds. We have been privileged to share their lives. We have learned from them so much about goodness, truth, love, and integrity.

We are often asked if we ever get discouraged or overwhelmed. It's true that there are enormous challenges. Of course we get frustrated with the economic forces that continue to keep people in poverty and even increase their numbers. Or the intransigence of the political system that often rewards the powerful while abandoning those at the bottom. Or the myths, stereotypes, and fears that continue to segregate people. And yet, on a daily basis, we witness the undeniable reality of transformation. We draw strength from the hundreds of residents who have broken the cycle of homelessness. We congratulate the young person who achieves his or her dream of going to college, a dream that seemed impossible a few years earlier. We walk down the block that was once mostly garbage-strewn boarded-up homes that is now a clean, fully occupied neighborhood. We have seen former opponents become allies. We see elected officials making commitments to end homelessness.

We also know that growth and success come with challenges. We know we must stay true to our vision. The best way to do that is to make sure that we continue to stay rooted

in what was at the core of our work twenty years ago: relationships and community. That has been and continues to be the greatest blessing of Project H.O.M.E., the amazing relationships and friendships that are formed. We are constantly astonished at the community of hope and vision that is the heart of Project H.O.M.E. People from all parts of society come together, breaking down the many social barriers that normally keep them apart. We discover a common bond between us, despite differences. We recognize that, whether we live in the suburbs or the streets, the inner city or the corridors of power, we all have our vulnerabilities and our gifts. We share common yearnings and struggles. We all flourish in community. As Dorothy Day said, “The only solution is love.”

While we celebrate the truly miraculous accomplishments of these twenty years, and the community that has made it possible, we cannot rest content with what we’ve accomplished. There are still women and men on our streets, without access to health care or other supports. There are still too many children who face enormous obstacles to a decent future. There are still many wounds in our society that need healing.

But we also know that the community of hope and vision continues to grow. We are grateful for all those who have been part of it, and we look forward to continuing our work together on our common journey home.