a journey from texas to san francisco:

JAMES COMES A LONG WAY IN A SHORT TIME

As one of the wealthiest cities in the world, San Francisco receives its fair share of new transplants each year, people eager to enjoy all the charms the city by the Bay has to offer. But what if you arrived in San Francisco with only $30 to your name? When Social Work Center guest James did just that last year, he became familiar with a side of the city known perhaps only to those who travel the path from homelessness to housing. It’s a path that the Social Work Center helps guests traverse every week.

A native of Little Rock, Arkansas, James enjoyed a long career as a concierge manager in Dallas. When he transitioned away from this work for a time to care for his mother back in Little Rock, he had a hard time re-entering the workforce again when he returned to Dallas. Eventually, he turned to the shelter system there to sleep at night while he contemplated his next step. “I had gone through my money,” James said. “I wasn’t going to put myself on anyone.”

Though essentially out of cash, he did have a credit from Southwest Airlines. As someone who had traveled to and enjoyed San Francisco before, he had thought about the Bay Area as a place where he might be able to make a brand new start. When Southwest had a special sale on last-minute tickets to San Francisco, James used his coupon to buy a ticket for a flight scheduled to leave exactly one week later. He figured he would take that time to think about whether or not he was ready to make the move. The night before the flight was scheduled, James was unable to get a bed in a shelter in Dallas, and spent that night in a cemetery in the city. He took it as a sign that the Bay Area was beckoning, and the next day he boarded the plane.

He arrived in San Francisco on December 15th of last year, with no place to stay and no extra cash for temporary lodging. He spent his first weeks lining up at shelters at 4:00 and 6:00 in the morning in attempts to secure a bed. It was shelter staff who told James about St. Anthony’s, and helped him find his way to the Social Work Center, and to Social Worker Ursula Steck. Because James was interested in getting help with transitioning from the shelters to permanent housing, Ursula told James about an available room in the Cadillac Hotel, a non-profit SRO on Eddy Street, and helped him complete the application process. The Social Work Center also administered a grant to James to pay the deposit on his room. “I love having my space where I can go home and sleep,” James said.

Ursula also connected James to the Tenderloin Technology Lab, where he participated in the Tech Lab’s Desk Clerk Training Program, and worked with Transition Specialist Eric Kriyovitch on job search skills. While James already had experience in this area with his years spent working as a concierge, he said the course was important for the reinforcement of skills, and for self-esteem. “It was at the right time to give me that boost,” he said, and soon after completing the course he found a full-time job as a concierge at a high-rise apartment building in the city.

Now safely and securely housed in a hotel in the Tenderloin and working a full-time job, James has come a long way in a short time. While his move to a new city and a new beginning was certainly not easy, James says there was silver lining to his period of struggle. “If anything I’ve learned from it, and people can see that you can go through trials and come out on top,” he said. “I’m definitely in a different tax bracket than I’ve been, but that’s OK, I’m happy.”

As he moves ahead and continues to make a home for himself in his adopted city, he keeps his focus on taking things one day at a time and has hopes for the future. Like most rooms in Tenderloin SROs, James’ room has no kitchen, but he aims for his next residence to be equipped with one. “I would love to have someplace I could cook,” he said. “I thoroughly enjoy cooking.”
Every year in late August, children flood the pediatric wing of St. Anthony Medical Clinic (SAMC). They are both current and new pediatric patients. As the only provider of pediatric care in the Tenderloin, St. Anthony Medical Clinic is an essential service for local families, whose children need physicals and immunizations in order to enroll in school. Once these children have received their physicals and immunizations, Clinic staff can work with them and their families to make sure that all of their health needs are met through the wide range of preventive services and wellness classes offered.

To reach all children throughout the Tenderloin, staff have conducted extra outreach initiatives this year, not only directly to families, but through a variety of service providers. This work began with St. Anthony’s other service programs and then branched out to organizations in the neighborhood.

The first outreach initiative occurred in conjunction with St. Anthony’s Back to School Day hosted by the Free Clothing Program, which provided two full sets of new and high-quality clothing for each child that attended. In addition to new school clothes, the Clothing Program also gave away backpacks and school supplies donated by Walgreens. This was an extra boon to families who often cannot afford the supplies required by schools, and it ensured that children in the St. Anthony’s community were ready to start the new school year prepared and confident. A local mother of five who participated in the Back to School Day said, “It’s getting harder and harder to be low-income, so any help I can get is appreciated.” In saying so, she gave voice to the increasing number of families we are seeing coming to St. Anthony’s for help in the face of the shrinking safety net.

Later in August, Clinic nurse Jennifer Mangaccat spoke at the monthly tenants’ meeting at 111 Jones, a Mercy Housing property, in order to communicate the services available at St. Anthony Medical Clinic for parents and their children and to answer questions that parents might have about accessing services. Jen was accompanied by Faten Kamel, a regular Clinic volunteer and Social Services Outreach Coordinator at the Arab Cultural & Community Center, who interpreted for the Arabic-speaking families living at 111 Jones. Rochelle Fort, head of Tenants’ Services, said it was a huge benefit to have an Arabic interpreter there, who was also a woman, to make the program more accessible for Arabic-speaking residents. Ms. Fort noted that several tenants approached her after the meeting to express their gratitude for having translation available (in addition to Arabic interpretation, Jen interpreted for Spanish speakers and the Clinic materials were translated into Arabic).

One gentleman spoke up at the meeting just to show his appreciation for this level of outreach. He said that so many of the residents there did not speak English that to offer interpreters shows that St. Anthony’s “really care(s).”

St. Anthony Medical Clinic and Mercy Housing anticipate that this collaboration will mark the beginning of a more nimble sharing of resources across organizations and of stronger community ties for these families. Outreach efforts will continue with service providers working in the neighborhood, especially with those that serve children and families.

The Clinic has a track record of hosting successful community collaborations, but these outreach efforts are unprecedented, because the new eligibility rules mean that more low-income children can come to the Clinic for care. St. Anthony Medical Clinic now sees patients with coverage under Medi-Cal, San Francisco Health Plan, and Healthy Kids. Today, any child in the Tenderloin is eligible to make St. Anthony Medical Clinic their medical home.

In January, Healthy Kids and Healthy Families, both programs of the San Francisco Health Plan, will no longer exist, and children covered by those programs will instead be covered by Medi-Cal. Unfortunately, because the Medi-Cal reimbursement rate is lower than that of Healthy Kids and Healthy Families, fewer providers accept patients on Medi-Cal. In this environment the care that SAMC provides to vulnerable families in the Tenderloin is all the more crucial.
bridging the digital divide
IN THE HEART OF THE TENDERLOIN

Down the street from San Francisco’s burgeoning mid-Market tech corridor, St. Anthony’s guests are stepping into the digital age with courses that teach them how to connect with vital online services. Milton Aparicio spends a few hours in the Tenderloin Technology Lab several days a week. A San Francisco native, Milton says he has been in and around the Tenderloin for most of his life. He currently lives in a shelter and knows first-hand the difficulties that come with unemployment and homelessness.

Mr. Aparicio’s time in the Tech Lab has allowed him to explore a joint venture with Vayable.com, a boutique tour company that connects travelers with local experiences. As a man who has walked these streets for decades, he is uniquely qualified to give an insider’s view of what it is like to be homeless in the Tenderloin.

This expertise makes Milton valuable to Vayable.com and allows him to bring in a steady stream of supplemental income. SF Weekly named Milton “Best Homeless Tour Guide” in their “Best of” list for 2012. They applauded him for his willingness to share his personal stories and give you access to a world many people have never seen; it’s a nuanced and sober perspective,” one satisfied customer appreciated.

Milton says he knows a lot of people who have found jobs after learning skills in the Tenderloin Technology Lab, a collaboration between St. Anthony’s and San Francisco Network Ministries. “Every job requires basic computer skills these days,” he says. “It can be intimidating for people who didn’t grow up with computers,” but these opportunities give people confidence, give people hope that they can do something with their lives.”

Aparicio believes strongly in the ability of programs like the Tenderloin Technology Lab to strengthen communities. “It can be intimidating for people who didn’t grow up with computers,” he says, “but these opportunities give people confidence, give people hope that they can do something with their lives.”

As much as we will miss Shari’s presence, I am happy to join Fr. John Hardin, OFM, the President of our Board of Trustees in announcing the appointment of Barry Stenger as Interim Executive Director. Barry has over twenty years of nonprofit management experience. He has been St. Anthony’s Director of Development for the past seven years. He holds a Ph.D. in social ethics from the University of Chicago and has contributed to the work of the Franciscans in a variety of capacities. We have great confidence in Barry and the entire executive management team; together they bring over fifty years in management experience.

The ebbs and flows of change reminds us of what is constant. In September when we stood and watched the old building at Golden Gate and Jones come down, we were reminded that St. Anthony’s is more than a building. As staff come and go, we remember that St. Anthony’s is more than one person or another. St. Anthony’s lives on as a community of guests, volunteers, staff and donors who share a vision of a life where all people flourish. Amid all the changes and because of them, that community is life-giving for everyone who is a part of it.

Peace and all good,
Suzanne B. Swift
Chair, Board of Directors
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- Social Work Center
- Medical Clinic
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