holding families together

What does it take to hold a family together? The more fortunate among us would answer that it takes love, courage, commitment, persistence, and responsibility. Our low-income neighbors might answer in more concrete terms: housing, healthcare, at-home cooking facilities, new school clothes for the children.

Last year, the number of families coming to St. Anthony’s for free clothing rose by 60%. Sadly, the indicator for the increase in need was the number of families we had to turn away.

“We’re seeing a lot of newly homeless people,” says St. Anthony’s Free Clothing Manager Allan Shapiro, “many of them very young.” Allan also says that more families served are victims of domestic violence.

To meet the growing need, St. Anthony’s is taking steps to connect with low-income families in San Francisco and ensure that they have the tools they need to raise healthy, active children who can grow up to contribute to life in the city. St. Anthony Medical Clinic is the only clinic providing pediatric care in the Tenderloin. The Clinic is now refocusing their work to prioritize the needs of women and children. Clinic staff members visit neighboring low-income housing for families, presenting in several languages, both by themselves and with the help of volunteers. Faten Kamel, a regular Clinic volunteer and Social Services Outreach Coordinator at the Arab Cultural & Community Center, has interpreted for Arabic-speaking families at some of these visits. The clinic goal is to serve at least 200 more children in the coming year.

To prioritize the families who need us most, St. Anthony’s Free Clothing Program is reaching out to homeless families through organizations such as the Homeless Pre-Natal Program, Compass Family Services, Hamilton Family Services, Jelani, Inc., South of Market Childcare, and Homeless Connect. To accommodate more families, the program has created an extra family service day by cutting administrative time and recruiting more volunteers with a goal of serving families for an extra 250 hours a month. The Clothing Program has also increased the budget for socks and shoes. While the greater mass of these items are donated by individuals and companies, the new budget item guarantees that the program can accommodate more children in case sock donations don’t keep pace. The goal is to increase service to families by 40%, or 280 additional children.

All of this comes together once a year at the Free Clothing Program’s Back-to-School Day, where children and their parents can receive two sets of clothing, a backpack full of school supplies, MUNI student passes for each child, and flu shots. This year, Old Navy provided all new clothing and PG&E sent volunteers. Walgreen’s donated hundreds of flu shots.

This year’s Back-to-School event served 205 children, a third more than last year. Another twenty families who could not be served before the event closed were invited back the following week to finish equipping their children for school.

“New service to families does not change our commitment to seniors, veterans, and the working poor St. Anthony’s has served for six decades,” says Executive Director, Barry Stenger. “Rather, we are closing the holes in the safety net through which vulnerable women and children might fall when services by government funded non-profits are cut.”

St. Anthony Medical Clinic enjoys the support of Blue Shield of California Foundation, Kaiser Permanente, the McKesson Foundation, the Metta Fund, and St. Anthony donors.
addicts turned activists

The residents of the Father Alfred Center, St. Anthony’s drug and alcohol recovery program, have a history of being willing to step out of their comfort zones. This year, 15 participants and staff members of the Fr. Alfred Center participated in Hunger Action Day, an annual anti-hunger advocacy day in Sacramento. Many Fr. Alfred Center participants were so moved by the experience that they continued to advocate on anti-hunger policy issues after the event.

Victor, Levi, and Matt are three Fr. Alfred Center residents who became advocates. These “addicts turned activists” were especially excited to work for SB 283, a bill that would have lifted the lifetime ban on people with nonviolent drug felony convictions from participating in CalFresh, California’s version of the food stamp program. SB 283 was held in committee and won’t be eligible for signature by the Governor this year. Though these kinds of setbacks are frustrating, Fr. Alfred Center participants remained hopeful and vowed to keep educating.

Levi said that he was both intimidated and excited about the opportunity to advocate. “I always hid behind the idea that decisions are made by people who are smarter than I am or who know more about the issues. If everyone decided that they didn’t make a difference, there only would have been one or two people in Sacramento for Hunger Action Day.” Instead, he was part of a group of nearly 400.

Matt agreed. “I thought I had to be somebody for people in power to pay attention.” He learned otherwise. “Every word counts, especially if you have personal experience with hunger.”

Advocating on behalf of his brothers and sisters in recovery made Matt feel more comfortable about where he is today and the ways he’s trying to move forward in his life. “[Advocacy] helped me in my recovery. Before coming to St. Anthony’s, I never had the chance to be part of a solution. Doing advocacy gave me the chance to give back, speak my mind, be listened to, and be part of a solution.”

Victor was energized by the opportunity to talk about addiction and recovery in his advocacy efforts, especially because addiction is often stigmatized and misunderstood. He felt that he was able to put a human face to the issue and felt empowered by the realization that what he had to say could have a positive effect on policy.

Victor had some powerful words of encouragement for anyone who may feel discouraged by the political setback on SB 283. He said, “We shouldn’t stop fighting. If we give up fighting, who else is going to fight? Who else is going to talk about hunger? We come back stronger, come back with more people and more advocacy. This can ignite people to work harder to help end hunger. It’s not a hopeless cause. It’s doable and it just needs to be brought to the forefront of the public eye.”

St. Anthony’s advocacy work is supported in part by MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger, a national non-profit dedicated to preventing and alleviating hunger among people of all faiths and backgrounds.

Have you moved or changed your email address? Please let us know by emailing info@stanthonysf.org, or calling 415-592-2858.
Of the 1800 people who use the Tenderloin Technology Lab annually, only 25% are women. Low-income people of both genders find themselves on the wrong side of the ‘digital divide’ and experience difficulty accessing technology needed to compete in today’s job market. But for low-income women, these barriers are more pronounced. In an effort to connect women with recent advances in digital literacy, engineers from Twitter partnered with St. Anthony’s Tenderloin Technology Lab and the Women’s Building to host a “Women in Technology” workshop.

Technology offers an increasingly essential space to reconnect low-income women with critical employment skills. “Women should feel empowered and confident, and we believe that computer literacy is a critical skill-set for any individual looking to improve their chances of success,” said Twitter’s Jenna Sampson, one of the organizers of the event. “More and more women are starting local businesses as well, so knowledge of online marketing is a great asset.”

Twenty-two women from the Tenderloin and the Mission were in attendance at the workshop, which featured both individual tutoring and a class focusing on online marketing for small businesses. Attendees learned how to set up a Facebook page and a Twitter account to promote their small businesses, and were invited to join the Twitter group “Women in Engineering” (@womeneng) as a way to keep in touch and carry on the conversation long after the event’s end. Many participants reported feeling especially comfortable asking questions and voicing comments or concerns during the event.

Jennifer, a ‘Women in Technology’ attendee and regular Tech Lab student, appreciated an event promoting the use of technology among women like herself. “For me technology is so integrated into my life that I really can’t do much without it,” she says. Jennifer, who enjoys writing, is looking into ways to publish and sell her written works online, and also recently opened an Etsy account, a website that helps people sell their crafts. “Having an event like [Women in Technology] was a really big handshake and a pat on the back,” she said.

For Mollie Vander, a Twitter engineer, a highlight of the workshop was the opportunity to see technology through a different lens. “At Twitter, we talk a lot about seeking diverse perspectives,” Mollie said. “The best part about the day for myself—and I think for many volunteers—was the chance to experience tools and technology we literally stare at all day, every day from a completely new perspective.”

As more cutting-edge technology companies move into the mid-Market district, St. Anthony’s sees increasing opportunities for people with vastly different perspectives to connect with each other. Tech employees introduce our guests to innovative and elegant new tools that can lead to increased opportunities. Our guests share the qualities that are required to build a good life in the Tenderloin—resourcefulness, resilience, and grace—that just may inspire innovation in turn.

We are grateful for support for the Tenderloin Tech Lab from the Alexander M. & June L. Massin Foundation of the Jewish Community Federation Endowment Fund, Craigslist Charitable Fund, the Google Community Grants Fund of Tides foundation, the Hitachi Foundation, and San Francisco Network Ministries.

A WORD FROM
BARRY J. STENGER
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Connecting to our better selves, that’s the true joy and the gift of this season. That glimpse of joy on the face of a mother when her child is being helped by one of our pediatricians; the look of appreciation in the eyes of a Dining Room guest when a tray of food is handed to them, that’s the connection, the recognition that we celebrate in this holiday season. We see it when after a year-long rehab program is completed and one of our guests is beaming with pride and purpose. The volunteer from mid-Market high tech and the guest she’s helping, sitting before the computer screen making a connection that could lead to meaningful work.

We connect with what gives meaning to our lives, with what reminds us of who we truly are. It’s why we travel across the country to rejoin family; it’s why we stay up late wrapping that special present; why thousands come to volunteer here at St. Anthony’s during this season.

As the Executive Director of St. Anthony’s, I have the privilege of being a link in these connections. One such connection that stands out for me involves a supporter and friend of St. Anthony’s, San Francisco Giants pitcher Barry Zito. Earlier this fall, I had the honor of presenting Zito with the distinguished Fr. Alfred Award, an award given to individuals who embody Fr. Alfred’s vision that every person should be treated with dignity and respect.

As Zito took the microphone and addressed the crowd, he recalled his first days as a professional athlete. “I didn’t give a ton of credence, early in my career, to giving back. I think I speak for most athletes when we think it’s all about us for a while.”

As he continued, he shared how that perspective changed for him. “You start to realize you’re in a position to bring influence and open people’s eyes to a place like St. Anthony’s.”

The personal transformation that Barry Zito spoke about is a hallmark of St. Anthony’s mission, when we open our eyes to the world around us, especially to those in need, we reconnect with the human family and in doing so we reconnect with what is the best about ourselves.

As the holidays approach and we all yearn for that deeper connection, I invite you to connect with the people of St. Anthony’s community and rejoice in the true meaning of the season.

Happy holidays,
Barry J. Stenger
Executive Director
As a teacher of physics, Leiana Payawal wanted to show her students that physics was much more than mathematical formulas and theories. She wanted them to formulate a deeper understanding of the subject matter through applying its concepts to the world around them. This past summer, she taught in the Magis Summer Program at St. Ignatius College Preparatory.

One morning, the class was discussing Newton’s Laws, and it dawned on Leiana that they could do a service project that would help them understand Newton’s 1st Law of Motion, which states that an object in motion will remain in motion until interrupted by an unbalanced force. She explained to them that being a part of Magis means being a part of something greater, as Magis means “the more” in Latin. The students decided to apply the idea to serving others in need. They discussed how those serving others in need can be like the object that keeps moving until an unbalanced force causes them to stop. The students brainstormed ideas. They collectively proposed the idea of making birthday bags and cards for St. Anthony’s guests who are homeless, filling each bag with basic items like toothpaste, soap, mittens, tissues, hand sanitizer, and much more.

What moved Leiana most was to see her students, who themselves come from financially difficult backgrounds, be in a position to serve others who are like them or may be in even more need. Her ultimate goal for the project was that “the students’ positive words and the birthday bag idea will spread hope for others and bring smiles to many.” Leiana continues to encourage her students to be that object in motion, to serve others, and understand that they have the capacity to effect change in our world.

At St. Anthony’s, dignity is always in season. This is especially true during the holidays when people yearn for a place where they feel welcome and appreciated. As the days get shorter and the temperature drops, we invite you to reconnect with the most sacred meaning of the holiday season: being part of a world where we celebrate the inherent dignity of all people.

VOLUNTEER

Spend a day at St. Anthony’s serving meals, decorating the Dining Room, carving turkeys, or pouring some piping hot cocoa. One of the best gifts you can give yourself is the chance to reconnect with hundreds of San Franciscans who spend a part of their holiday season at St. Anthony’s. In 2013, for the first time most volunteer shifts are just a click away. Check out our new online volunteer sign up system at stanthonysf.org/volunteer and choose a day that works for you. (If you are interested in volunteering on Thanksgiving or Christmas day, please call our volunteer hotline at 415-592-2829.)

DONATE

Drive by and drop off donations at our annual Curbside Donation Drive the week before Thanksgiving and the week before Christmas. You’ll find teams of volunteers clad in bright red jackets lining the sidewalk outside of our temporary Dining Room at 150 Golden Gate Avenue. This year, we are collecting turkeys, hams, pantry items, unopened travel size hygiene items (especially shampoo, body wash, and toothbrushes and toothpaste), and new socks.

We hope to collect 1,000 turkeys the week before Thanksgiving and 500 hams the week before Christmas. For more information, visit the events page on our website, stanthonysf.org/Events, or LIKE us on Facebook to get the real-time turkey tally and other updates.

KNIT FOR ST. ANTHONY’S

Join thousands of crafters who send us hand-knit scarves and hats from around the world. Along with handmade cards, the scarves and hats will be given away as gifts for anyone who eats in our Dining Room on Christmas Day. Our goal for 2013 is to collect 5,000 scarves and hats. Find out how you can become a Scarving Artist at stanthonysf.org. We’ll share stories of people who have found a unique and heartwarming way to connect with the guests at St. Anthony’s, often times from miles away.

TUNE INTO THE FIGHT HUNGER BOWL

Huddle for hunger by tuning into the annual Kraft Fight Hunger Bowl on December 27th, the only collegiate bowl game that includes a philanthropic mission. The bowl will be a showdown between a team from the Pac-12 conference and BYU. St. Anthony’s will play host by including all of the players and staff of one of the teams as volunteers in our Dining Room on Christmas Day while Glide Memorial will host the other team in a friendly rivalry that has brought opponents together in the fight against hunger. Proceeds of the bowl have provided over 300,000 meals to people in need over the past 3 years. To find out more, visit fighthungerbowl.cauctions.com.