



Living Well Life Skills Empowerment Program

First Congregational United Church of Christ, Poughkeepsie, NY

Spring 2016

Building Christ's Diverse and Compassionate Community

On September 1, 2015, First Congregational United Church of Christ launched its second session of the Living Well Program. This program, that serves domestic violence survivors, introduced healing into the lives of families through a community environment. After a successful pilot program in the Spring of 2014, this cycle was increased by 8 weeks to a total of 22 weeks! By doing this, we were able to provide a d-

ditional support through the Christmas and New Year's holidays. Dinner at Christmas was provided by none other than our program coordinator, Sue Groman, along with crafts that were enjoyed by all ages including two ornaments, gingerbread men and homemade scarves

thanks to Cheryl Norton. The program held its graduation on February 19th concluding the 2nd cycle for FCC.

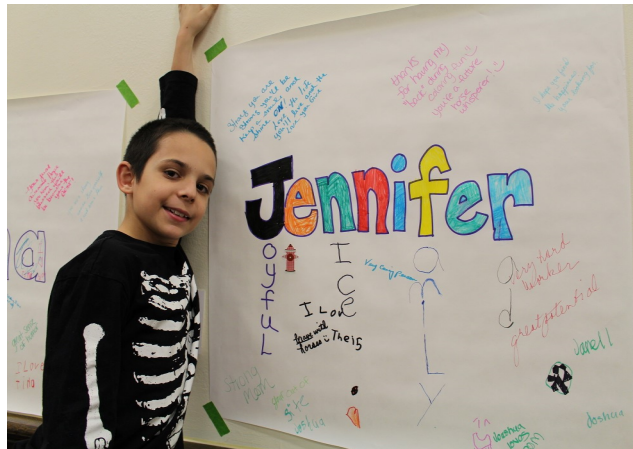
Achievements:

Total # of Sessions	22
Meals provided by FCC	15
# of community collaborators	8
# Served at each dinner	30-50
Children Served	10
Number of graduates	5
Increased empowerment of mothers	Priceless-
New Staff	2

Special Thanks

It has been my pleasure to be your coordinator for the last two years. The FCC community has taught me that so much is possible when people come together in a loving manner for healing. This newsletter was written to express my gratitude to all those who made this experience immensely memorable.

~Sue Groman~



Joshua Nerenberg, Age 11



2nd Year Success!

The Living Well Program Model

Living Well seeks to empower people who have experienced domestic violence and is an evidence-informed/well-established model, begun by Catholic Charities in collaboration with IAHH, with a track record of success and over a thousand graduates in the New York Metropolitan area in the past two decades. Participants work with facilitators and mentors to support personal healing and growth, skill development, and rein-

tegration into the community.

Each weekly session begins with a group meal, followed by a session on life skills, the sharing of personal stories in the context of a supportive group process, and one-to-one mentoring. Over the course of the program a family-like community is formed through the creation of an environment based on trust, support and respect.

Enormous healing occurs in the meal. This is a time that participants learn to sit together and authentically interact, often for the first time. Staff interact and sit in a different place and with different people each week. This provided a healing environment for all of our community.

Our program at FCC is in collaboration with the Beck Institute with leadership from Sue Groman, LMSW.

Poughkeepsie Restorative Community Project expands:

Our success at FCC inspired community members within Poughkeepsie. Building on their own cooperative experience with FCC, the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship launched its first Coming Home Program for the post-incarcerated community which also started in September of 2015. These two sibling programs have now graduated a combined 15 participants, served 55 meals and provided an amazing community healing experience.

Our Community

Mentors

This year we had 2 returning mentors—Cheryl Norton and Sandy Favata. Six new mentors attended the mentor training and lovingly supported our participants through 22 weeks of the program. A special thanks to our mentors:

Jean Craven
Sandy Favata
Judith Heilman
Carola Madrid
Eli Mann
Cheryl Norton
Mona Tobey
GINNY ZWIERANKIN

In addition to being a mentor, a special thank-you to Eli Mann who took on a second role of child mentor and worked tirelessly with the children each week.

Our Intern

Each program is assigned a graduate student specializing in social work. Our students assist with case management and connecting our participants to resources. Our intern, Barbara Muratore writes:

“Interning for the Living Well program has been such an inspirational experience. Seeing the participants each week gradually open up to the group and supporting one another was an experience that I will always highly value. A lot of the meetings were memorable for me, but a couple of instances really stand out. The times where the participants would express their gratitude for the group because it was a place they felt comfortable enough to engage in a variety of discussions, and laugh and have a sense of humor. They were empowered by the group to voice their opinions and thoughts on the curriculum and sanctuary check in, which in turn gave the participants’ ownership of the group. I am very fortunate to have had this opportunity to work with these participants, mentors, volunteers and facilitators who have made this program valu-

able; offering a safe space for everyone to meet and open up with no judgement or scrutiny, inspiring others to embrace themselves as they are, and helping others see the strength they have within themselves that they may have not seen before.”

Meals

Special thanks to all those who contributed to the meals. Many of the following contributed to multiple meals and clean-up.

Kathleen Garrison & Maryann Williams
GINNY ZWIERANKIN
Cheryl Norton- 4 meals
Judith Knauss
Liberty Restaurant- 2 meals
Linda Gregorius
Women in the Wind
Dotty Martinez
Deb Bucher & Mark Colvson
Linda Riedeberg
Patty & Pete Driever
Marist College Campus Ministry
Kathryn Fore
Elizabeth Clifton
St. Paul’s Episcopal
Pat White
Mona Tobey & Gene Scholtens
Suzie Novak and the Girlscouts
Margaret Namulyage

Child-Care

Our program provided support for 10 children age 6-10. These children joined us each evening for dinner and then had the opportunity to explore healing together while working with adult mentors. Our program acted to model appropriate behavior in a healthy environment that is intended to have long-term effects on their lives. They were provided healthy community experiences, with food that was new that often stretched their palates and care-takers who genuinely cared about their well-being.

“Today was the last day of Living Well. I’m still not sure the kids or I really understand that it’s over. I’ve been reflecting on all the growth I’ve seen over the weeks. Especially with Tina’s kids (5 children) and Jen’s kids (3 children). When we started the program, the kids



were largely untrusting, distant, and quiet; some were even nonverbal; certainly not affectionate or even very friendly. Each week they’ve become increasingly more verbal, playful, helpful, relaxed. Tonight they were all clamoring for my attention and affection—high fives, sitting on my lap, asking to be picked up and carried, and for piggy back rides.

When I formerly worked in the church nursery in my youth, I took trust and affection for granted. With these kids, I learned that trust and affection needed to be earned. 22 weeks we were together. I would argue that it took about 15 of them for the kids to open up. Joshua was probably the kid I had the most connection with, and he regularly impressed me; most weeks he was able to tone down his competitiveness and take on a more nurturing, mentoring role with the younger kids, teaching them how to do things. I feel this experience with Living Well showed how greatly important “nurture” is in shaping a child’s life, and what a relatively small amount of time it takes to make a difference.”

~Eli Mann~



Minions lovingly created for the children

Our Adventure

Coffee House Fund-raiser: Our second cycle began with an amazing opportunity to show-case talent and raise money to support the Living Well Program. \$1000 dollars was raised for our program which paid for transportation, art supplies, our peer-facilitator stipend and several meals. Many people shared their talents for singing, playing instruments, dancing, reading, telling stories, and lip synching. We enjoyed home-made delicious food and special treats, and wonderful coffee donated by The Crafted Kup. We deeply appreciate those who showed up early to set up the space with tables, chairs, and sound equipment. Also deeply appreciated were those who stayed late to wash dishes and take down all that had been set up.

Staff Additions

⇒ Letitia Butler– Peer Facilitator. Letitia graduated from our program in 2014 and returned to take a leadership role in this year’s program. Bringing her experience of circle work, Letitia was a true leader to her peers. Her 6 year-old daughter, Geneva, joined the children and acted as a role model for the children through both meal time and play time. We are very grateful to the Butler family for their amazing contributions.

This fundraiser was attended by some of our church members as well as many people from the wider community-- about 40 people in all. We give thanks for all who gave so generously.

Generous contributions:

Many people donated time and energy to the success of this program including the following: Laural Masse’ donated money from her cd’s to the program in addition to performing for our coffee house; Jean Berasi arranged for participants to take free classes at H&R Block; Eli Mann took photos of the graduation to document the event; Kerry Hamilton arranged a fund-raiser on her own and contributed \$70 to Living Well in addition to arranging lunch from P.C.’s Paddock for our day at the

horse farm.

Our Participants: Our participants take part in a survey, to document their progress, conducted by the Beck Institute on Religion and Poverty. This cycle our data showed an increase in ‘empowerment’ which has been linked to the ability of a person to make the changes needed to improve their life. Other improvements included– two finalized divorces; two new jobs and reports of increased self-esteem, use of boundaries and self-care. We continue to support our participants and will have a reunion dinner in August to monitor additional changes in their lives to assist our program to improve.

⇒ Vicki Smith– co-facilitator. 2014 introduced Vicki to the Living Well healing group during our trip to the Lucky Orphan Horse Rescue where Vicki has honed her skills as an Eagala horse therapy leader. 2015 saw Vicki step into the role of co-facilitator bringing her group skills and leadership with working with trauma survivors.

I truly loved the experience in so many ways. The interaction between my co-workers and the impact that I felt that I left in both the eyes of my peers who were participating in the group and the way I view myself. I feel that I have made a difference in the path of life. I have grown up!
~Letitia Butler~

Honorable Mentions

⇒ Reverend Heather– It takes great time and commitment to arrive each and every week and lead us all in grace before dinner. The children took a special liking to the “lady that sings” and loved to sing grace even when she was not there. Thank you Reverend Heather for your continued amazing leadership in this excellent program and for your support in adopting this as part of the community service of FCC.

⇒ Cheryl Norton– FCC member- Thank you so much to Cheryl for

taking the lead as the meal liaison. Cheryl was able to not only coordinate the meals with congregation members, but also found new additions within the community.

⇒ Sarah Tripani and Isabella– FCC members- Sarah volunteered to work with our children and for all 22 weeks set an excellent example for them which included healthy social interaction and how to calm yourself when you are upset. Her 6-year old daughter also attended every session and was instrumental in modeling and creating a healthy environment for our partic-

ipants children.

⇒ Terrence O’Toole– FCC member. There are many volunteers that make our program work. This year, one person was consistent in showing up for many of our program weeks. Terri was incredibly dependable in arriving to assist in meal clean-up. The youngest child became enamored with the kitchen sprayer and Terri supported all of the children in being a part of the clean-up. His gentle demeanor enabled everyone to feel comfortable and able to be a part of the incredible evening.

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An Open and Affirming Congregation

Living Well works to restore social justice by fostering communal accountability and care of all persons. The program encourages congregational involvement by providing opportunities for education and awareness, community welcoming and celebration, and volunteer opportunities such as mentoring, meal preparation and community outreach.

The Beck Institute on Religion and Poverty, Fordham University, provides congregations with the necessary support services for a successful Living Well program including: mentor training, program facilitator development, program management support, social work interns, program resources, education, program evaluation, and participant outreach, selection and development.

The Beck Institute's mission supports the faith communities tradition to embrace and respect the poor, marginalized and oppressed members of society. The Living Well Program evolved from a healing model, developed over 25 years ago by the New York Archdiocese of Catholic Charities and the Interfaith Assembly for Homelessness and Housing. Living Well provides a faith-in-action community experience tailored to meet the needs of isolated persons experiencing challenging life transitions.

The Beck Institute specifically assisted the funding of the coordinator, the co-facilitator and the supervision for the student intern through funding from an anonymous donor.

On behalf of the Beck Institute, Sue Groman, Coordinator and co-facilitator, Vicki Smith, co-facilitator and Letitia Butler, peer-facilitator we would like to thank First Congregational United Church of Christ for continuing to build bridges to healing.

Living Well Core Components

