



**SisterHouse
Chicago, IL
Sponsorship Review Report
Winter, 2012**



SSND: Transforming the World through Education

Table of Contents:

Page 3:
SisterHouse Mission Statement
SisterHouse Vision Statement

Page 4:
A History of SisterHouse: In the Beginning

Page 5:
A Letter from One of Our First Residents

Page 6:
A Ministry in Transition

Page 7:
Transforming Lives by Developing a Spirit of Community

Page 8:
Exploring the Blessing of Sponsorship

Pages 9-10:
Building a Sustainable Future

Page 11:
Financial Report

Page 12:
Defining Characteristics of School Sisters of Notre Dame Sponsored Works

Page 13:
Defining Characteristics: Introduction
How is it Already Present

Page 14:
Defining Characteristics: Introduction
Where it Needs to be Strengthened

Page 15:
Defining Characteristic #1
How is it Already Present

Page 16:
Defining Characteristic #1
Where it Needs to be Strengthened

Page 17:
Defining Characteristic #2
How is it Already Present

Page 18:
Defining Characteristic #2
Where it Needs to be Strengthened

Page 19:
Defining Characteristic #3
How is it Already Present

Page 20:
Defining Characteristic #3
Where it Needs to be Strengthened

Page 21:
Defining Characteristic #4
How is it Already Present

Page 22:
Defining Characteristic #4
Where it Needs to be Strengthened

Page 23:
Suggestions Regarding Priorities and For Strengthening Each Characteristic:

Page 24:
Commendations: Areas for Celebration

Page 25:
Recommendations for Action

Pages 26-27:
Sponsorship Review Process

Page 28:
Professional Development Opportunities

Page 29:
Conclusion

SisterHouse Mission Statement:

SisterHouse is a faith-oriented community of women:

- * which offers a temporary home to women seeking recovery from substance abuse;***
 - * provides a secure environment of respect, order and peace;***
 - * offers opportunities for growth in self-esteem and spiritual maturity;***
 - * requires accountability and responsibility;***
 - * helps residents to achieve responsible independent living;***
 - * empowers women to participate constructively in society.***



SisterHouse: Recovery is Possible

SisterHouse Vision Statement:

SisterHouse is a visible sign of hope for women seeking recovery.

SisterHouse is known and supported as a leader in its field.

SisterHouse engages a professional staff, a competent Board, dedicated volunteers and both public and private support in fulfilling its mission.

SisterHouse provides a dynamic community atmosphere, programs, and opportunities to empower women in recovery.

1. Historical Update: a description of significant developments and changes in the organization during the last five years and/or since the last self- study. This should include personnel, financial status, program changes, and student/client accomplishments.

**A History of SisterHouse
*In the Beginning...***



After years of volunteering at Cook County Jail and Dwight Correctional Center, Sisters Anne Mayer, Margaret Traxler, and Gladys Schmitt, all members of the School Sisters of Notre Dameⁱ, realized that there was a need to provide a “safe space” for women who were recently released from incarceration. Their associations with the inmates made them aware that in order to change the direction of their lives, they needed a positive and nurturing environment.

So, in October of 1982, the parish convent of Our Lady Help of Christians, located in the Austin Community on the West Side of Chicago became *SisterHouse*ⁱⁱ.

* Here women could live while studying for a high school equivalency test, or attending drug recovery programs, or just preparing for life after jail.

* Here women could live in what too often was their first safe and clean home with a private room and responsibilities like those in any family environment.

* Here women could live in an atmosphere that fostered the belief that they could transform their lives.

In 1984, Sister Anne formed a Board of Directors to set policy and determine the direction of this non-profit organization. Over the years, both the Board and Staff have changed in membership. The constant has been the vision and mission of SisterHouse, which have set the direction for these goals. Every non-profit organization knows that to meet future needs, it is necessary to plan and discern the best methods to move the mission ahead and continuously improve the services to the client. SisterHouse’s Board of Directors has made adjustments over time to periodically modify the organization.

SisterHouse alumnae have gone on to complete Bachelors and Masters Degrees, becoming professionals and experts in their fields. They also have become ambassadors to their own families and communities; today, many women come to SisterHouse because their sister or cousin or neighbor found help here. Our alumnae also continue to give back to SisterHouse everyday. Blessed Mother Theresa of Jesus Gerhardinger, SSND said that when you educate a woman, you educate the world. Our alumnae are a glowing example of how the time a woman spends at SisterHouse crafts their lives in a way that truly maximizes their full potential.

Recently, we received correspondence from one of the first clients at SisterHouse. This story encompasses the spirit of SisterHouse, especially in terms of scope and vision:

On a beautiful February morning in 1983, I walked up those front steps and into SisterHouse. I was met by Sr. Margaret Ellen Traxler, who welcomed me with a hug and showed me around. At the time, I was only 17 years old, one of the first few residents (SisterHouse had opened its doors only two months prior to my arrival), and the youngest. I was only a few months away from graduating high school, but fled my home in order to escape the terrible abuse that was happening to me. Not being a street-smart kid, I got into some minor trouble that landed me in Cook County Jail, where thankfully, it was quickly decided that jail was not the right place for me and I was referred to SisterHouse by Sr. Pat Lucas, who worked at Cook County Jail, and served on the Board of Directors of SisterHouse. I was filled with hope and looking back, realized that the day I came to SisterHouse was the first day of my new life. I cannot say enough about what SisterHouse did for me. They helped me to finish school and go on to college at University of Illinois at Chicago. My relationship with God was developed and nurtured there. Accountability and good work ethics were two very important things that were taught to me in the 16 months that I was there.

There were two major things I learned at SisterHouse that literally shaped the direction of my life, and that I carry with me to this day: giving back to my community, and working for social change and social justice. Sr. Anne Mayer, the co-founder and longtime Director at SisterHouse, Sr. Gladys Schmitz, and Ms. Beulah Samuel, another SisterHouse staff, were instrumental in instilling these values in me. This led me to become a community organizer and to join a national disability rights organization called ADAPT. In fact, Sr. Anne was directly involved in my introduction to the disability rights movement.

It may sound as if I'm bragging when I say I am one of SisterHouse's success stories, but believe me, my successes have humbled me. I am considered to be a national leader in ADAPT, helped to write a piece of legislation that went before both houses of Congress, was invited to the White House twice, and an article of mine appears in a book by noted historian, Howard Zinn. It is safe to say that if it were not for SisterHouse, I would merely be another lost statistic, not where I am today, almost thirty years later.

I am overjoyed to know that SisterHouse is still open and is now a recovery house for women struggling with substance abuse and addiction. Thank you for all of the wonderful work that you continue to do! I wish you all the best and hope that you will be around for many, many years to come. I will always keep SisterHouse in my heart and in my prayers.

Regards,

Anita Cameronⁱⁱⁱ
SisterHouse Alumnus
Disability Rights Activist/Writer



SisterHouse Alumnae Anita Cameron
Testifies before the House Judiciary Committee

A Ministry in Transition...

By the early 1990's, the complexion of society had changed, and so did the demographics and characteristics of the population of our residents at SisterHouse. The clients evolved from women who were primarily committing felonies and crimes to women who were forced into an illegal lifestyle by addiction to drugs and alcohol. The two major problems contributing to this epidemic of social ills were homelessness along with the availability and addictiveness of crack cocaine and heroin (among other drugs and alcohol).

At the age of 86, Sister Anne Mayer, SSND, the founder, decided to go into another ministry. Sister Frances Lawrence, SSND assumed directorship. LaDonna Sanders, a former client who went on to further her education and training to become a Substance Abuse Counselor, was hired as well. LaDonna was brought in to assist in the day to day operations and she became actively involved in the time consuming task of obtaining grant monies. She also helped create the "Recovery is Possible" program and became an active community liaison by representing the needs of SisterHouse on a community level. Sister Frances handled all client selection, supervised the residents, managed finances, budget, and records.

It was at this time that SisterHouse emerged as a leading community institution in the Austin neighborhood. LaDonna represented SisterHouse on many committees; she was part of Mayor Daley's task force on Recovery Homes which was convened to write city ordinances to regulate recovery homes like SisterHouse. LaDonna also served as a representative on the West Side Drug Court Initiative steering committee, which was formed by Chief Judge O'Connell of Cook County and the Northwest Austin Council. SisterHouse was considered a "model" recovery home and the Northwest Austin Council considered adopting the program model to use as part of the services that the drug court would offer to people needing treatment.

During that period in SisterHouse history, another member of the School Sisters of Notre Dame left a lasting impact on the SisterHouse community. Assisting in the day to day operations of the house was Sister Gilmery Lemberg, SSND or "Sister Fix-it" as she was called by the ladies. She assisted by offering her building and maintenance expertise, handling repairs, painting, rehabbing old furniture for clients who moved out, and assisting with the purchases of large appliances when necessary. Sister Gilmery not only helped keep SisterHouse beautiful and functional, she educated the women on home maintenance and taking care of things. She also provided spiritual guidance and direction.

To get a better glimpse of the SisterHouse resident during the mid 1990's, in 1994 (12 years after the doors were opened), SisterHouse accepted 45 women, among them:

- 45% had no high school diploma
- 59% had no marketable job skills
- 45% had used illegal drugs for more than 10 years
- 50% had felony convictions
- 41% were on parole or probation
- 86% were mothers
- 73% of mothers had children in the custody of the Department of Children and Family Services
- the average age was 33

Transforming Lives by Developing a Spirit of Community...

The history of SisterHouse is the spirit of love, the sparkle of a welcoming smile, the comfort of a warm embrace, and the inspiration of a note of encouragement. The School Sisters of Notre Dame have brought the order's charism into our community in a way that is truly transforming. In 1999, Sister Shannon Scallon, SSND took over at the administrative helm of SisterHouse, along with the help of SisterHouse alumnae Rochelle Sims. Rochelle started working at SisterHouse in 1994 and after she furthered her education and earned her Certification as an Alcohol and Drug Counselor, she was promoted the role of Program Director in 2000.

Through the years of affiliation with SisterHouse, Rochelle embraced the love and spirit of the School Sisters of Notre Dame in 2001 by becoming a lay associate of the order, under the spiritual direction of Sr. Gilmary Lemberg, SSND. Sister Shannon's gentle manner employed a servant-leader model; she became a rock-like spiritual foundation for the ladies of SisterHouse. The vibrant community produced under Rochelle and Sr. Shannon's leadership led to the development of an organized SisterHouse Alumnae Association, a group of previous residents who sought to give back and spread the message of hope and recovery to the newest group of SisterHouse residents.



Sister Shannon Scallon, SSND and Program Director Rochelle Sims

This period also strengthened SisterHouse's position financially through increased grants support, and in the community through collaborative partnerships. Sister Shannon worked hard to secure donors, solidify relationships with supporters throughout the Chicagoland area, and maintain strong affiliations with vendors who offered services at a discounted rate. She helped through participation in community groups like the West Side Providers Network^{iv} and the West Side Ministers Coalition^v. This was also the period where collaborative relationships enabled SisterHouse to offer a much wider range of high caliber services.

Sister Shannon was crucial in strengthening our ties to the Cara Program^{vi}, founded by SisterHouse donor Tom Owens, which provides professional jobs training and life skills to the residents. The residents' needs began to so highly reflect a substance abuse treatment track that the first phase of the "Recovery is Possible" program began to include a 90-day Intensive Outpatient Program at Healthcare Alternative Systems^{vii}, a local non-profit that provides supportive services and counseling. Program Director Rochelle Sims managed that collaborative relationship masterfully and she was asked to join the H.A.S. Board of Directors. Additionally, relationships were built so that the residents began receiving formal computer training through the St. Joseph Services^{viii} and nutrition classes from the University of Illinois Extension Campus.

Exploring the Blessing of Sponsorship...

In 2009, another major change came when the School Sisters of Notre Dame formalized the sponsorship relationship within a two-tiered structure. When the Chicago Province merged into the larger community, SisterHouse was part of that change. The Provincial Council holds the top tier of governance where members hold reserved powers, accepting the primary fiduciary responsibility over the organization and providing counsel and guidance for administration and leadership. As a sponsored work of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, Atlantic-Midwest Province^{ix}, SisterHouse enjoys the benefits of spiritual direction and identification with a greater community. Provincial leadership spans the globe and the connectedness of the various SSND ministries enables SisterHouse's board and administrative leadership to communicate with the leaders of other sponsored works in many different regions, ministries, and fields.

These resources are valuable for many reasons. Overall, sharing in the identity and charism of Sponsorship has created a valuable sense of inter-connectedness between SisterHouse and Marian House^x, a very similar ministry in Baltimore co-sponsored by the Sisters of Mercy and the School Sisters of Notre Dame. Communication between sponsored works has also enabled a new working relationship with Corazon a Corazon^{xi}, the only other SSND sponsored ministry in Chicago. At first glance, the two organizations have little in common, in terms of the populations we serve, our operating methods, and ministry field. However, we share a common SSND rooted goal of empowering people to reach their full potential. This valuable connection enables leaders to share grant suggestions, funding knowledge, administrative solutions, innovative management ideas, and improvements. It was through this collaborative relationship that we began to share a bookkeeper with Corazon a Corazon, to transition our financial records onto the Quickbooks computer program, and use ADP as our payroll provider.

This period of transition was also marred by financial insecurity, albeit unrelated to the tiered structure. The Archdiocese of Chicago^{xii}, which serves as SisterHouse's landlord, had implemented a building lease that increased every year to slowly bring the monthly payments closer to the going market value rate for rental property in the neighborhood. Our fundraising was badly affected by a recession and many funders and donors faced hard times. Also, some of the reliable faithful SisterHouse donors had moved on, passed away, or found new causes to support. Operating expenses were at an all time high, and income was not coming in as needed.

The SisterHouse community then learned the true blessings of Sponsorship as the SSND Provincial Council helped SisterHouse make ends meet with a loan while the organization sought to right itself financially. This aid, in addition to the money saving lessons learned from sharing resources with Corazon a Corazon, helped SisterHouse get on track to begin to operate under higher standards of business practices and transparency. The financial assistance came just in time, as the organization was entering into more transition and change.



Building a Sustainable Future...

SisterHouse's present day is the history of tomorrow. Today, we are cognizant of this important legacy, especially with regard to our Sponsoring Order and our founding SSND members. We strive to achieve a sustainable future for many years to come, in order to carry out their vision. In 2009, Sister Shannon Scallon, SSND decided to move on from SisterHouse and seek new ministry opportunities with her Province in Milwaukee. This left SisterHouse in transition to lay leadership, with an interim Executive Director serving between January and July of 2010, and current Executive Director Bonnie Johnson taking the helm on July 12, 2010. This transition marked the next chapter in the future of our organization. Through regular meetings with SSND mentors, Bonnie is focused on maintaining a strong Catholic and SSND identity within the organizational mission. Program Director Rochelle Sims has helped SisterHouse remain connected to its roots and its history.

As we have faced a volatile economic market, struggling times for many non-profits in the area, and an ever evolving client population, we do so in the spirit of Blessed Theresa and Sister Caroline. We do so reflecting on the vision and love of Sister Anne Mayer, SSND and the other founders, as well as the other Sisters, volunteers, residents, alumnae, board members, donors, neighbors, and stakeholders. We are securing our future with a number of unknowns ahead. Faith remains at the core of SisterHouse, as does the legacy of our founders. Finances are on a better course and under new leadership the organization turned the years of deficit spending into two years of restoring a savings account to begin looking towards tomorrow's needs.

We look towards the future with optimism and fortitude as our new leadership has brought in a new era of transparency, openness, and community. The SisterHouse Alumnae Association now sends a member to represent them as a voting member of the Board of Directors. The chatter around the dining table can be words of wisdom from a family of volunteers who came to make Sunday dinner, or the ladies continuing a discussion of recovery after a 12-step meeting or about Sister Caritas Wehrman's Bible study. Board members are invited to Alumnae Association or resident events. The ladies visit with members of the School Sisters of Notre Dame throughout the year, culminating with the annual Christmas celebration with the SSND community at the Mater Christi Convent. SisterHouse strives to encompass the spirit of community in all we do.

The population and the demographics of the women we serve has changed and evolved throughout the years as well. Here is a profile of the women served at SisterHouse in 2010 (28 years after the doors were first opened):

- 65% do not have a high school diploma
- 64% have a history of domestic violence
- 100% have no health insurance
- 37% have untreated mental illness
- 80% are verified as homeless
- 62% have at least one felony conviction
- 34% were regularly involved in some form of prostitution
- 49% have been released from prison or another institution with no place to go



SisterHouse Board President Mary Catherine Wygonik, Financial Administrator Sr. Joan O'Connell, SSND, Executive Director Bonnie Johnson, Sister "Fix-it" Gilmary Lemberg, SSND, Program Director Rochelle Sims, and SisterHouse Founder Sister Anne Mayer, SSND (seated)

At the age of 106, our founder, Sister Anne Mayer, has offered some wisdom about SisterHouse's identity and ministry. In meeting with SisterHouse Executive Director Bonnie Johnson, her perspective reveals much about the SSND charism and spirit. Some of the gems of wisdom are too extraordinary to leave out of this study. She said: "SisterHouse is about love. We love the ladies until they understand that they are deserving of love, and they are children of God's love, so that God's love can transform them into what they are to become." Sr. Anne also reflected on humanity. She said "human beings are exceptional because they are capable of searching into the nonexistent future; that's how human beings change the world." She also said: "From my father I got that forward look of achieving something that did not exist before and it is distinctly a human thing to believe that the present is going somewhere."

At SisterHouse we know that our present is going somewhere...

Financial Report

Much of SisterHouse's future is contingent upon fiscal responsibility, revenue cultivation, and development opportunities. We rely on the generosity of benefactors to continue our operation and we are dedicated to being responsible stewards of our donor's support. In 2010 we implemented a "Donor Bill of Rights."^{xiii} Fiscal year 2011 was a testament to the progress we've made at SisterHouse. As our community has grown and strengthened, church support, grants, and individual donations have also increased. Additionally, we streamlined our expenses to reduce our overhead.

We'd like to make a special mention of those who have helped us maintain thorough records. Special thanks to our accountant Gary Pater and the folks at his accounting firm Bansley and Kiener, LLC for their assistance and direction in maintaining a comprehensive vision of our fiscal health and future. Thanks also to Sister Joan O'Connell, SSND, our Financial Administrator, for her dedication and thorough attention to detail. The countless hours she commits to SisterHouse each week are vital to our operation and she brings the spirit of the SSND to our facility, as well.



2. Defining Characteristics: description of the organization in relationship to each defining characteristic, including the meaning of the characteristic to the organization, the indicators of success, and what needs to be done to strengthen the characteristic.

Defining Characteristics of SSND Sponsored Works:

Introduction:

As a response to the call of Christ and with the conviction that the world can be changed through the transformation of persons, SSND sponsored organizations pursue a Christian vision of what the human person is called to be and what the world is destined to become.

- 1. A conviction that educational excellence empowers those served to reach their full potential as individuals and enables them to direct their giftedness toward transforming the world;***
- 2. A sense of responsibility for the world, especially the needs of women, youth, and other persons who are marginalized;***
- 3. a commitment to work for unity in a divided world, unity that is evidenced by inclusivity, internationality, and community building at all levels;***
- 4. an openness to radical transformation, responding to issues of justice, peace, and integrity of creation, as well as to working for systemic change, as appropriate.***



Introduction: *As a response to the call of Christ and with the conviction that the world can be changed through the transformation of persons, SSND sponsored organizations pursue a Christian vision of what the human person is called to be and what the world is destined to become.*

How it is already present:

SisterHouse represents the dignity of the human person in our celebration and empowerment of women. Through our “Recovery is Possible” program, our residents are able to regain a sense of dignity and reflect on the sort of women they had become and the sort of women they would like to be in the future. Through our partnership with Ignatian Spirituality Project^{xiv}, a strong foundation in Alcoholics Anonymous^{xv}, and the spiritual direction of our SSND sponsors and Alumnae volunteers, we enable the women to grow spiritually towards a loving God.

Throughout our three phase “Recovery is Possible”^{xvi} program, our community is structured so that each resident is seen and treated like a beloved daughter of God. SisterHouse provides a safe, supportive home where the women can learn to live a clean and sober life. The residents are taught to respect from the moment they enter the House. First, the ladies are taught to respect themselves, and second they are taught respect for the others they live and work around. The residents participate in Morning Prayer and Evening Meditation each day to instill Christian Values



Introduction: *As a response to the call of Christ and with the conviction that the world can be changed through the transformation of persons, SSND sponsored organizations pursue a Christian vision of what the human person is called to be and what the world is destined to become.*

Where it needs to be strengthened:

SisterHouse can improve upon its understanding of transforming the world by commissioning alumnae who can be of more service to the greater community. Also, we have a great legacy, but we can always expand upon the achievements of the past and highlight them better. This might be better advanced by more deliberately celebrating our success stories. SisterHouse would also benefit from a more in depth Scripture study and discussion centered on how it applies to the residents, to help them to see and discover their gifts. Also, the safe, supportive home is a very old building, with major facility related needs for improvement.



SisterHouse Residents pause for a photo at the 2011 graduation ceremony.

1. A conviction that educational excellence empowers those served to reach their full potential as individuals and enables them to direct their giftedness toward transforming the world;

How it is already present:

SisterHouse education begins with our Recovery Is Possible Program in Phase 1 when the residents attend Intensive Outpatient Treatment at H.A.S. which empowers them to begin this growth. SisterHouse capitalizes on partnerships with Saint Joseph Services, which offers computer classes at the neighboring San Miguel School. Also, members of the SSND order do one-on-one literacy training, tutoring, and GED preparation, meeting the ladies at their educational level. Beyond that, one of our tutors, Sr. Caritas Wehrman, SSND educates the residents on SSND Spirituality and history, as well as in a more traditional Bible Study.

The women at SisterHouse receive education in the broadest sense of the word, as we educate the whole person. They are empowered by learning to accept themselves as they gain self-respect and dignity and become viable citizens of the world. The ladies learn job skills and life skills. They learn the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous and are guided through the program. Giving back is a necessary step for them in order to maintain sobriety. During Phase 2 of our program, the Cara Program teaches them job skills and is another facet of learning and growth. Programs offered at SisterHouse include: computer skills, nutrition, spirituality, etiquette, and women's issues. They are helped to get their GED, attend classes to learn how to take care of their bodies and classes to learn life skills and find and work on their gifts

Education at SisterHouse is holistic, reaching the body, mind, and spirit. Also, our supportive environment enables the women to heal, grow and learn. The life skills they learn in Phase 3, by regular attendance at meetings, after-care at H.A.S., and the hands on experience in full-time work are empowering and formative. SisterHouse reinforces what was learned in primary treatment programs, as the building blocks of recovery are put into place. When asked, residents and alumnae all state that 12-step work will show the SisterHouse ladies how they can transform the world. They also speak of the transformation they personally undergo while going through the phases of SisterHouse.



1. A conviction that educational excellence empowers those served to reach their full potential as individuals and enables them to direct their giftedness toward transforming the world;

Where it needs to be strengthened:

SisterHouse’s Recovery is Possible program could be improved with more structured follow-up with our alumnae. Some graduates leave without having completed GED but with plans to take it. Thus, it could be beneficial to track their progress and continue to motivate them. Also, alumnae could be invited to participate in the workshops that are occasionally brought on site, as they did with a recent healthy relationships workshop. The Alumnae Association is working with Program Director Rochelle Sims to explore these opportunities.

We believe that the women need more one-on-one substance abuse counseling, in addition to their regular intensive outpatient treatment and AA meetings, in order to help them develop necessary skills to be successful in their recovery. Each woman’s needs are different and individual counseling enables the Program Director to serve the needs of each woman in her own particular capacity. We’ve begun to schedule and track the progress of residents in these weekly one-on-one sessions. Overall, it is our intent that the “Recovery is Possible” program will be studied and brought up to date with the latest best practices. This growth can help develop a more comprehensive alumnae program that goes beyond basic opportunities, which might include a long term or aftercare follow up group that meets on a more continual basis.

Our educational offerings could be improved by obtaining better computers on site (we currently do not have a room with the electrical wiring to accommodate that kind of improvement). Also, the residents have suggested providing more AA recovery literature. A recent partnership with the Hazeldon Foundation’s Chicago^{xvii} office has increased our residents’ access to more 12-step literature. We are also interested in developing a more structured community service program for the ladies and alumnae. Also, considering the current economic climate, it might be helpful to also offer more intensive career planning, and to increase in-service seminars.



2. A sense of responsibility for the world, especially the needs of women, youth, and other persons who are marginalized;

How it is already present:

SisterHouse serves women who are in recovery from addiction, alcoholism and substance abuse. It is our primary focus and we accept this responsibility very seriously. Overall, the women we serve are marginalized in many respects (victims of domestic violence, rape, prostitution). We serve primarily minorities; before coming to SisterHouse most residents lack basic medical care and educational opportunities. SisterHouse focuses on enabling women to reach their full potential: to go out into the world able to give back; to be good mothers. This was Mother Theresa of Jesus Gerhardinger’s vision: if you educate a woman, you educate the world.

With that in mind, we believe if you change a family, you can change society. Therefore, SisterHouse is the vision of Sr. Anne Mayer, SSND to create better mothers: sober, educated, employed mothers. We serve the youth by creating better mothers, aunts, sisters, grandmothers, and neighbors. SisterHouse recognizes the dignity of each woman we serve and encourages her to find her true self. We see it as our responsibility to empower the women through education; we also help the ladies to become better neighbors, employees, and citizens. As a result, they feel an increased sense of self worth. SisterHouse offers opportunities for growth in self-esteem and spiritual maturity, requires accountability and responsibility, and helps residents to achieve responsible independent living. We encourage residents to give back, be big sisters to those in the program, which creates a sense of “sisterhood” and family with the alumnae.

In addition to basic etiquette, the ladies are taught dignity of dress and speech (how to dress and speak like a lady). Residents are grateful for the structure they learn at SisterHouse. In a recent survey, our residents and alumnae have expressed an appreciation for the racial diversity and organic sense of equality and community that develops in our facility despite various differences like race, age, education, or socio-economic background. SisterHouse provides opportunity for women to return to their children, families, and community as someone ready to take her place in society as a responsible citizen. The ladies gain a sense of responsibility by working together and sharing household chores. They give back to the community by serving area seniors, handing out gifts for Toys for Tots, and serving meals. They realize the needs of the marginalized populations and learn compassion to give back to others. They also contribute to the Leamington Street Community Block Club and Chicago Police neighborhood CAPS (Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy) groups, and help to make the outside of the house look good by maintaining a garden, picking up trash, and keeping it free from snow and ice.

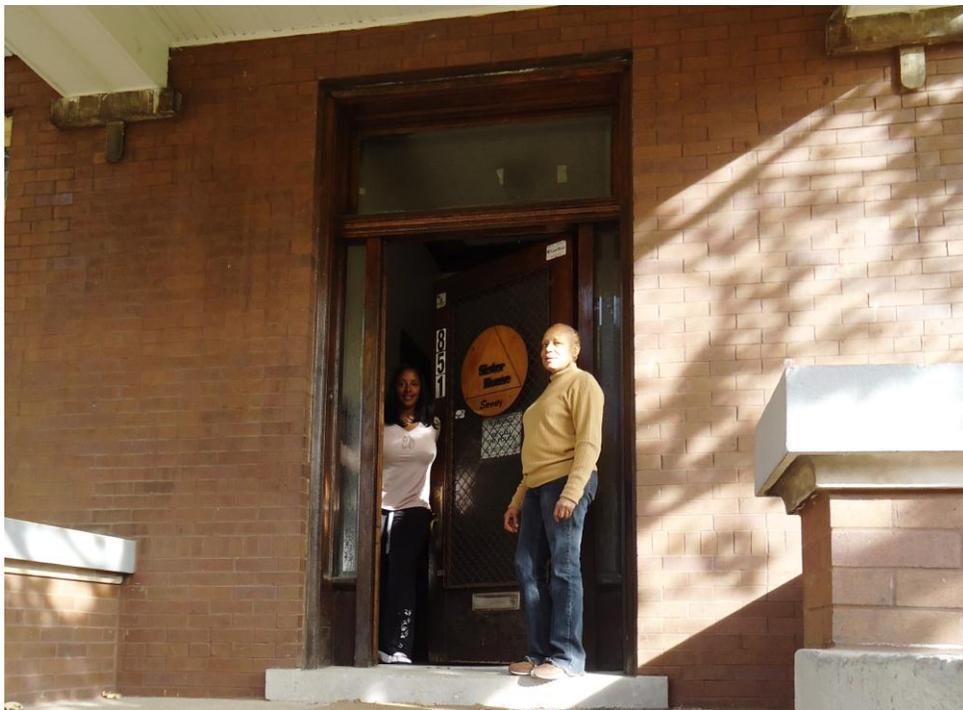


2. A sense of responsibility for the world, especially the needs of women, youth, and other persons who are marginalized;

Where it needs to be strengthened:

SisterHouse needs to challenge itself to call our residents and our alumnae to continually be of maximum service to others. We are planning on instituting a more structured and scheduled community service program where the residents find ways to serve others, by visiting old folks, cleaning up the neighborhood, etc. on a regular basis. We will continue to find venues to expose the ladies to the desperate need for human dignity for all. Also, we are looking into creating a more interactive relationship with the families of our residents and creating events and programs geared towards them, especially their children.

Part of our Alumnae Association's long term goals is to maintain a sense of responsibility when the women are no longer in the house. As a result, they alumnae are becoming more involved in setting and accomplishing these goals as well. Some members of the SisterHouse community have suggested new programs that promote awareness on women's issues. Also, others have requested an increase in community building events and social activities. We've also found it valuable to invite and engage alumnae, board members, SSND, and other stakeholders to community events. With this in mind, we are planning an open house to create a networking opportunity for all our partnering agencies, so that they may be better empowered to improve the Austin Neighborhood. As responsible neighbors, we also have to maintain our building, because recently the old windows have actually flown out of the building, which poses a threat to the safety of passers-by.



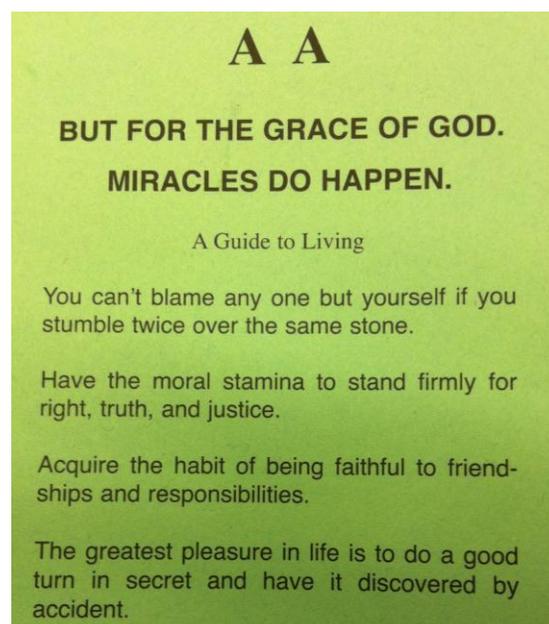
3. a commitment to work for unity in a divided world, unity that is evidenced by inclusivity, internationality, and community building at all levels;

How it is already present:

SisterHouse, a home for women, is open to any woman who is in recovery and whose needs would be met with our “Recovery is Possible” program. Successful completion of the three phase program includes a stay anywhere from eighteen to twenty-four months. SisterHouse operates as a family and this is conducive to our community development. The women accept the responsibility of cooking, cleaning and caring for one another. Not only is community building developed but also a caring and loving family is created. SisterHouse empowers women to participate constructively in society. We are together in a family environment that shares a commitment to increase the improvement of our lives in all dimensions. Each new member is welcomed with genuine loving care that will continue to speak in word and deed as together we begin a new life.

SisterHouse helps reunite families and recreate broken spirits of women. Our inclusive spirit has been deepened by a more diverse house as we have had women from African American, Caucasian, and Hispanic backgrounds all living in community. The unity is also present when our board members, community supporters, and volunteers come into the house and get to know the ladies, hear their stories, encourage their progress, and share in our community. We have a newly discovered appreciation for other cultures, with a resident from Poland bringing “polish coffee,” residents from Latin America sharing Puerto Rican recipes, and an SSND volunteer bringing families from Chinatown to teach the ladies to make authentic Chinese cuisine. We strive for simple and meaningful ways to celebrate ethnicity and diversity.

Involvement in the Alcoholics Anonymous groups, community events, and outings helps the residents feel a sense of being a part of and not divided from the greater community. SisterHouse residents learn to work for unity and inclusivity first by learning to live in community with each other then becoming aware when working outside the home within local groups. They are doing the best they can to give back to the community, while learning new ways to share their gifts. This grows further when they share their experiences of homelessness, addiction, family dysfunction.



3. a commitment to work for unity in a divided world, unity that is evidenced by inclusivity, internationality, and community building at all levels;

Where it needs to be strengthened:

At SisterHouse we are always looking for more ways to celebrate the cultural differences amongst our residents. At holidays, we share in meals and include traditions, customs or lessons connected with them. We could also benefit from our SSND heritage in this way, by asking the local SSND members to come and relate stories of international ministry, to expand the minds of our residents. We also are working on empowering the residents and alumnae to do more as a community (making more community decisions, being accountable as a community and growing together).

It is clear that a sense of community for everyone in the house must be constantly and diligently maintained as the population is constantly changing. Steps have been taken to integrate the participation of larger community groups into our organization. We have found that developing this needs constant monitoring and evaluation. If this is to include Alumnae participation, there needs to be a stronger commitment from the residents once they complete the program. We've recently instituted a family potluck, and we are looking into creating more activities to build community: bowling, movie night, museums, Navy Pier, etc. One of the challenges to the successful addition of all these ideas is that the main focus at SisterHouse needs to remain the recovery of our residents and the circumstances and stresses of recovery sometimes make these goals difficult.



4. an openness to radical transformation, responding to issues of justice, peace, and integrity of creation, as well as to working for systemic change, as appropriate.

How it is already present:

SisterHouse is a place of radical change: the women enter broken but determined to mend. When they leave they are radically changed in their perception of themselves and their understanding of how the world now perceives them. The structured life of purpose and trust at SisterHouse has enabled them to see the future as one of hope. Peace comes with an acceptance of one's self and one's life. The women have found peace with themselves and often with their families. They have internalized peace so that they can see justice is attainable as they learn that fairness is giving yourself and others not what they want but what they need. The integrity of creation is maintained in that they see they really are created in the image of God. Now they honestly believe they are good and can offer their goodness to others. Systemic changes must be made in their lives before they can facilitate change in others. The changes they see in themselves present the opportunity for changes in their relationships with others.

SisterHouse changes the lives of those who complete the process, especially in phase two of our program. The Cara Program, which residents participate in during phase two, is built upon the concept of radical transformation, so our partnership with them is the crux of the transformation message the ladies hear. Also, the concepts and process of 12-step spirituality is one of personal and spiritual transformation and growth. Both these components are integral parts of the ladies' experience at SisterHouse.

Beyond that, we respond to the aforementioned issues in some simple ways as well. We maintain our section of the neighborhood; maintaining our corner of the block can set a precedent to influence the neighborhood. We stand for safety and security, people in the neighborhood know we help people here; they encounter our spirit and sometimes they even stop in and ask questions. We provide a safe haven from domestic violence and all programs that are offered help transform most areas of their lives on a continual basis.



4. an openness to radical transformation, responding to issues of justice, peace, and integrity of creation, as well as to working for systemic change, as appropriate.

Where it needs to be strengthened:

SisterHouse is a crucial part of the Austin Community and in order to continue and further this, we hope to create a partnership with Fresh Moves^{xviii} to become a neighborhood location for local fresh grocery distribution. This sort of addition seems small, but will radically transform our neighborhood because we are located in a “food desert.” Also, the garden is a good way to show the ladies how growth and transformation comes from intentional living; in addition to getting fresh produce from it, we can use it as a learning tool, and maybe it can be integrated into the nutrition classes. Due to the fact that substance abuse recovery is such an intensive process, SisterHouse residents can only delve so far into topics like peace and justice and working for systemic change.

The SisterHouse residents have stated that they would appreciate more educational workshops regarding social justice issues, so we will use available resources for workshops on social justice and Christian motivational speakers to help empower good habits in themselves to find their gifts. This can potentially also help us increase SSND presence on site. Contributing to the neighborhood is very important, and we do our part as best we can. SisterHouse Executive Director Bonnie Johnson writes a weekly column in the Austin Voice Newspaper^{xix} and we’ve increased our presence through the local organizations like the West Side Ministers Coalition (which is giving us an award on March 9, 2012), the West Side Providers Network, and Austin Coming Together^{xx}. As we have to re-examine our lease with the Archdiocese of Chicago and make decisions about the facility, we should also keep in mind our role in the community in which we serve and seek to continually serve where we can make the most meaningful impact on this community. We want a facility that is inspiring and conducive to the sort of growth we seek, but we also want to remain rooted in the communities that give us our identity.

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FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 2010

Sisterhouse: Abundance at SisterHouse

In July, SisterHouse began a small partnership with Food Donation Connection, an organization dedicated to connecting restaurants with local non-profit agencies needing food donations. This creates a wonderful mutually beneficial relationship with major corporate restaurants which would otherwise be almost inaccessible to a small organization like SisterHouse. We began by receiving Starbucks pastries 3-5 mornings a week and this has been such a blessing. Each week we send a report so that the North Ave. store's contribution is recorded and they can take the appropriate tax deduction.

POLL FOR THE WEEK OF FEBRUARY 1

Is it still relevant to celebrate Black History month?

Yes

No

Suggestions regarding priorities:

It is the recommendation of the Sponsorship Review Committee that continued services and substance abuse counseling for the women would remain a number one priority, so that we are consistently focused on our primary purpose.

Beyond that, it might be beneficial to have the School Sisters of Notre Dame's framed "charisms" (defining characteristics) to see every day in the meditation room, in addition to art work from members of the order (specifically, Sister Gilmary Lemberg, SSND) to show the sponsorship spirit in the house.

Suggestions regarding what can be done to strengthen each characteristic:

First and foremost, we are open to suggestions from the Provincial Council regarding these defining characteristics and how we may more effectively practice them in our ministry.

Overall, we would like to improve the facility conditions, in some way, keeping in mind restrictions of finances and the lease agreement.

We would also like to increase our community networking, which we have been working hard on recently; the addition of new board members has helped this greatly.

Also, we are focused on broadening mutuality between the Board of Directors, Staff, Residents, Alumnae, Volunteers, SSND, and other stakeholders.



SisterHouse

3. Commendations: after reviewing points one and two, a description of the areas for celebration.

In examining our history as an organization and our work to meet the defining characteristics of a sponsored work of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, it appears SisterHouse has much to celebrate. The main focus of our celebration is the concrete examples of success we have amongst our community and the commitment the organization has held in encouraging and empowering our alumnae to contribute to the community in tangible ways. By giving a voice to those we serve, on the board, in this review itself, and beyond, we encompass the value of empowering women.

The Board of Directors and SisterHouse Program and Executive Directors must also be commended for their collaborative efforts and leadership in completing this and many new tasks. The new era of community building has begun and the spirit of the community is led through thoughtful participation of vested stakeholders. The self-sacrifice and dedication of the Executive Committee and Program Director Rochelle Sims must be recognized as the spirit that will, in fact “Save SisterHouse” as the initial gathering hosted by Board President Mary Catherine Wygonik challenged the whole community to brainstorm ways to do just that.



US Congressman Danny Davis and founding Board member Pat Smuck at SisterHouse's 2011 graduation.

“Moving forward” has been a theme in these recent times of transition and by bringing a spirit of transparency and open communication, the improvements that were needed all took place in a very natural manner. The spirit of SisterHouse remains in tact and many of the residents note that SisterHouse itself expels negativity. We have been so successful by striving for authenticity, remaining right sized, and being consistent. We do a few tasks very well instead of trying to do everything. Our partnerships and collaborative relationships are what enable us to offer so much in terms of services and programming from such a small operation.

As a sponsored work of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, SisterHouse exists as an educational ministry seeking to empower women to reach their full potential. Our founder, Sister Anne Mayer, SSND, explained what the order's identity has come to mean for her. She said being a member of the order has made her life full, exposed her to the world and human experience in so many ways, and made it worthwhile. She chose the SSND because it was founded by "a peculiar woman back in Europe who quite was extraordinary" and she is proud to be part of the order, which she says is distinctive and special because they "were pioneers in making happen the position of women in society." So we at SisterHouse can certainly take pride in what we have made happen for the position of women in our community, in a very tangible way, through the lives we've transformed.

4. Recommendations: after reviewing points one and two, identifying the recommendations for action during the next five years.

In the coming years, the future of SisterHouse is contingent upon making a clear plan for the future of the facility, as the building is old and deteriorating. There is now a small sum of money saved up and hopefully, as that saving grows, we can begin thinking about a capital campaign to either restore the current building or find a more suitable facility.

Also, as the Board of Directors grows and new members join, the long standing members need to remain connected to our organization, even as term limits begin to be enforced. We are looking to establish an advisory board of experts in various fields who can help with financial planning, networking, and other challenges in the years to come. These individuals can become an asset without the necessary intensive commitment of Board Membership.

Forming committees can help craft the future of our organization in many positive ways. We recommend the following:

1. A building/facilities committee, with the goal of determining the best course of action regarding the building, to research rental or purchase options, negotiate the lease or make recommendations regarding relocating the operation. This committee would consist of:

- The Executive Director
- 1 Executive Committee member
- 1 Board Member
- 2 Advisors (1 contractor or commercial real estate expert, 1 capital campaign expert)
- 1 SSND

2. A programming committee with the goal of recommending improvements and updates to the “Recovery is Possible” program with the changing needs of our ever evolving population in mind. This committee will consist of:

- The Program Director
- 1 Executive Committee member
- 1 Board Member
- 1 Advisor (Substance Abuse Treatment expert)
- 1 SisterHouse Alumnae
- 1 SSND

3. An events committee with the goal of engaging SisterHouse community supporters and donors with meaningful, enjoyable, and consistent fund-raising and friend-raising events. This committee will consist of:

- 1 Executive Committee member
- 3 Board Members
- 3 Advisors (1 networking expert, 1 event planning expert, 1 honorary host)
- 1 SSND

5. Process: outlining the process used during this self- study including the involvement of Board members, faculty/staff, administration, students/clients, and others.

The Sponsorship Review self-study officially started with a meeting between Executive Director Bonnie Johnson and Sister Marianne Kempa, SSND, followed by a site visit. It was then determined that some of the progress made during the previous year, as the Board or Directors prepared to begin a 5-year strategic plan, could be used to inform the Sponsorship Review process. That dialogue began when we first held a “Save SisterHouse” meeting in the fall of 2010 where participants included members of the Board of Directors, alumnae, current residents, staff, donors, and volunteers. Those who care so deeply about the future of SisterHouse gathered together in a joyous, prayerful, and constructive meeting in which we performed a SWOT analysis identifying the organization’s Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats.

The “Save SisterHouse” meeting was a great success because it motivated the community to continue growing and examining the institutional identity. It was followed up by internal reflection and examination, some minor changes to the house and staff, and increased transparency, communication, and board participation. The following summer we had a strategic planning session, where the analysis was further utilized, this time, with the Sponsorship Review process in mind. After that, a Sponsorship Review committee was formed, consisting of the Executive Director and the Program Director, a number of individuals from the Board of Directors, and local members of the School Sisters of Notre Dame order who have become more involved in SisterHouse and could represent the sponsoring order with a more hands on perspective. This team collected feedback from the greater community and researched the SisterHouse history.

The Defining Characteristics worksheet was handed out to all board members, former board members, volunteers, alumnae, staff, and current residents. Information was gathered and analyzed in a committee meeting amongst the Sponsorship Review committee and the various perspectives proved to be extremely helpful. What seemed to be most helpful was interviewing the current SisterHouse residents themselves and discussing the importance of these values in our organizational identity. The tone of the meeting remained positive and community oriented. This further injected a mission focused spirit into all the participants, which has, in turn, set a great tone for all the following board meetings this year.



SisterHouse Board Treasurer Sue Lescher and President Mary Catherine Wygonik celebrate at the All That Jazz fundraiser at St. Giles Parish in Oak Park

The Executive Director began discussing the Sponsorship Review project and answering these questions through one-on-one interviews and meetings with various stake-holders. The historical gathering was assisted by the maintenance of archival records at SisterHouse. In addition to that, individual meetings with our founder, Sister Anne Mayer, and discussion with founding board members like Pat Smuck and Shirley Hermes, and regular discussion with Board President Mary Catherine Wygonik also proved to be very helpful in the process.

As we are still in the process of looking towards the future and developing our 5-year plan, much of this Sponsorship self-study will be utilized by our strategic planning committee. It is our goal to comprehensively craft notions of sponsorship and SSND heritage and identity into our long term goals and vision. The spiritual and mission driven nature of this Sponsorship Review self-study has been incredibly helpful in setting a meaningful and purpose-driven tone for our gatherings and meetings. Hopefully, this conviviality and service-planned tone will continue to extend that spirit into the formal Strategic Planning sessions, as it has recently. It is safe to say that this process has already been transformative and contributed to our growth as a community.



6. Professional Development Opportunities: Listing the initial and ongoing development in place for Boards, administrators, faculty/staff and others. Include a brief description of each and whether it was sponsored by the organization or by SSND.

The Board of Directors meets regularly and has begun implementing community building events in their regular calendar as well. Board members are encouraged to attend events and seminars along with staff members. They communicate regularly with Executive Director Bonnie Johnson regarding development opportunities and have attended various seminars alongside staff members. Most of these professional development opportunities come through membership in the Young Nonprofit Professional Network^{xxi}, West Suburban Philanthropic Network^{xxii}, West Side Provider Network, West Side Ministers Coalition, and Austin Coming Together. Also, online groups through linkedin.com help keep staff informed of events with our partnering agencies in recovery, like the Hazeldon Foundation, which chose SisterHouse as its adopted charity this year.

There was also a wonderful opportunity to work alongside a group of Masters of Public Service Management students from DePaul University^{xxiii} regarding a strategic plan, focusing on marketing, online presence, and attracting tomorrow's donors. We capitalized on this as Executive Director Bonnie Johnson and Board President Mary Catherine Wygonik met with the students to explore new opportunities in online social media, twitter, facebook, and other resources.



Grant Writer Christine Flood and Financial Administrator Sr. Joan O'Connell, SSND

Also, the Board of Directors has begun mentoring and encouraging the SisterHouse Alumnae Association, in order to help them develop themselves into a stronger resource for SisterHouse. The experience that the Board of Directors has gained through creating new events is being passed on so that as the Alumnae work to create fundraising and community building events, they can have the benefit of our previous experiences.

Finally, the School Sisters of Notre Dame have provided invaluable mentorship: Sr. Judith Schaum, SSND meets regularly with Executive Director Bonnie Johnson, Sr. Gilmary Lemberg, SSND serves as an advisor to Program Director Rochelle Sims (who is also an SSND Lay Associate). The School Sisters remain a crucial part of our Board of Directors (including two new SSND board members). The regular SSND Sponsorship meetings in January help members of our leadership remain connected to the leadership of our sponsoring order and fellow sponsored works, and the summer retreat helped maintain a spirit of mission and connectedness.

Conclusion:

From the beginning of this Sponsorship Review process, it was apparent that this was going to be a rewarding experience that strengthened our understanding of our ministerial mission and how we at SisterHouse are called to serve with our hearts and minds rooted in the charism of the School Sisters of Notre Dame. Overall, this process was timed well because it did just that, and at a time that our community was completing the transition into new lay leadership, and was focusing on our crafting our identity base on our SSND roots in a new way.

We have had the opportunity to reflect on why we are committed to SisterHouse, why this cause is so worthwhile. We've had the opportunity to celebrate our victories, not just the fundraising goals and event victories, but the ministerial ones. We celebrate our 74% success rate, and how we define success as employment, independent living, and abstinence from drugs/alcohol. This past year we've had the opportunity to celebrate the 80 year Jubilee of our founder Sister Anne Mayer, and every day in our work, we celebrate her dedication and vision! We celebrate the SSND vision of empowering women by helping them restore their families, by igniting hearts & minds. We celebrate small victories, like Jennifer's new business cards and Theresa's visits with her children. We reflect on the impact we make, for example, thanks to Sr. Caritas, Rosele can now read aloud in group & Joanna learned to make authentic Chinese stir fry. We all reflect individually on what makes us proud to be a part of SisterHouse; what warms our hearts.

We thank you for this opportunity to reflect and challenge ourselves to further our mission as an SSND sponsored work. Oftentimes in the chaos of everyday ministry in the "trenches," we forget to pause and reflect on the dedication of Mother Theresa of Jesus Gerhardinger and Mother Caroline Friess. Thankfully, every time we forget, we get a reminder. We are surrounded by empowered women, seeking education and striving to exceed a new level of their potential. Sister Anne Mayer, SSND, once said "God is the destiny of the world." So as we journey towards our destiny, we do it in the spirit of the community that breathed life into an old convent in the West Side of Chicago and made it a transformative force in the lives of many women.



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- ⁱ SisterHouse is a sponsored work of the School Sisters of Notre Dame (www.ssnd.org)
- ⁱⁱ To learn more about SisterHouse or to keep up with our community's on-going events, check out our website at: www.sisterhousechicago.org
- ⁱⁱⁱ To follow the career and accomplishments of SisterHouse Alumnae Anita Cameron, see <http://www.linkedin.com/in/anitacameron>
- ^{iv} The West Side Providers Network was founded by the now-defunct Chicago Anti-Hunger Federation and has worked to organize local service professionals and organizations in the community (www.westsideproviders.org)
- ^v The West Side Ministers Coalition is an organization of religious leaders and social service providers to connect clients and groups with resources in the area (www.westcoalition.org)
- ^{vi} The Cara Program provides life-skills, transformation and empowerment, job training, parenting classes, job placement, and follow-up supportive services for SisterHouse residents in Phase 2, 3, and as alumnae (www.thecaraprogram.org)
- ^{vii} Healthcare Alternative Systems provides counseling, Intensive Outpatient Treatment, and aftercare supportive services to the residents of SisterHouse in Phase 1 of our program (www.hascare.org)
- ^{viii} St. Joseph Services has a satellite location in the San Miguel School next door to SisterHouse, they provide computer classes and tutoring to SisterHouse residents in all phases (www.stjosephservices.org)
- ^{ix} Originally part of the SSND's Chicago Province, SisterHouse is now a part of the SSND's Atlantic-Midwest Province (www.amssnd.org)
- ^x Also founded in 1982, Marian House is an SSND co-sponsored ministry that provides housing and supportive services to women in recovery in Baltimore (www.marianhouse.org)
- ^{xi} Operating in Southeast Chicago, Corazon a Corazon offers one-on-one ESL tutoring, an After-School program, and Computer Literacy classes, all of which are volunteer-based. Corazon a Corazon is the only other SSND sponsored ministry in the Chicagoland area (www.corazon-chicago.com)
- ^{xii} The Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago manages the property of Our Lady, Help of Christians Parish, which serves as home to SisterHouse. Also, many of the parishes and organizations that have supported us throughout the years are part of the Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago (www.archdiocese-chgo.org)
- ^{xiii} For the complete listing of the Donor Bill of Rights, see this link: http://www.afpnet.org/files/ContentDocuments/Donor_Bill_of_Rights.pdf
- ^{xiv} The Ignatian Spirituality Project is a Jesuit organization, affiliated with Loyola University of Chicago, which utilizes 12-step spirituality to create retreats and programs that are relevant for homeless people. Based in Chicago, they operate throughout the country (www.ignatianspiritualityproject.org)
- ^{xv} Founded in 1935, Alcoholics Anonymous has operated with minimal organization and maximum effectiveness based on the simple model of one alcoholic helping another (www.aa.org)
- ^{xvi} The Three Phase "Recovery is Possible" Program consists of structured community living including meditation in the morning and evening, in addition to daily AA meetings and community events at all phases. The first phase is Intensive Outpatient Treatment at H.A.S., the second phase is job readiness at the Cara Program, and the third phase is transitioning to independent living while working and maintaining recovery within our community structure.
- ^{xvii} One of the best known recovery centers in the country, Hazeldon has a location in Chicago. In addition to their treatment services and publishing operations, they also host many professional development opportunities (www.hazeldon.org)
- ^{xviii} Founded in the Englewood neighborhood, Fresh Moves has recently begun bringing fresh produce into Chicago's Lawndale and Austin neighborhoods (www.freshmoves.org)
- ^{xix} The local weekly paper in the Austin neighborhood, which also generously prints a weekly column for SisterHouse (www.thevoicenewspapers.blogspot.com)
- ^{xx} Founded by longtime Sr. Anne Mayer fan Mike Ivers, of Goodcity Chicago, Austin Coming Together is one of the newer community organizing groups that has opened a lot of doors regarding new funding and networking opportunities (www.austincomingtogether.org)
- ^{xxi} Young Nonprofit Professional Network of Chicago offers networking, educational, and professional development opportunities for leaders in Chicago's nonprofit sector (www.ynpnchicago.org)
- ^{xxii} The West Suburban Philanthropic Network provides a wide array of networking and development seminars, which are especially helpful in reaching donors in that area (wspn.wildapricot.org)
- ^{xxiii} <http://las.depaul.edu/sps/Programs/Degrees/PublicServicesManagement.asp>