

Newsletter Spring 2022

VNA | Visiting Nurse Association
Easterseals Nebraska



VNAtoday.org



vna



**a vna nurse
in every shelter**

Celebrating 25 years

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Shaping tomorrow's care. Today.

From VNA President and CEO, James Summerfelt



Not a single person has gone untouched by the COVID pandemic. While far too many lives have been lost, most of us have been merely inconvenienced.

From the beginning, Visiting Nurse Association (VNA) has proudly served on the frontline of our community's battle against COVID. We started drive-thru COVID testing in 2020, and we were one of the only post-acute options for COVID patients discharged from the hospital in the early pandemic stages. VNA healthcare professionals have cared for COVID patients in hospice, and educated community partners in infection control. Today, there are over 70 VNA nurses who continue to partner with the Douglas County Health Department to give COVID vaccinations and boosters.

This spring newsletter focuses on VNA's work in local homeless and domestic violence shelters, where the stress and trauma of COVID is heightened. Try to imagine having no home during COVID. While everyone is asked to socially distance, try to imagine your only option being a communal living shelter. Imagine no healthcare, no sense of safety or security, and no advocacy for your mental health diagnosis.

2022 marks the 35th year VNA has partnered with local homeless and domestic violence shelters – providing public health nursing, education, advocacy, and caring relationships. We don't charge the shelters or their clients for our services; the presence and expertise of our nurses is 100% funded by donations and grants.

2022 also marks the 25th anniversary of Art & Soup, a fundraiser unlike others you've experienced – with proceeds funding VNA's work in Omaha and Council Bluffs shelters. It's a festive atmosphere where our community's finest restaurants cook up innovative and delicious soups, and local talented artists from varied mediums sell their art and donate 50% of sales to VNA's shelter nursing program.

Please read the pages that follow and you'll learn more about the people we serve in the shelters and those with whom we partner. If you can't attend Art & Soup on March 27, I ask you to consider a donation that directly impacts VNA's work with the homeless by using the enclosed remittance envelope or giving online at www.vnatoday.org/donate. Without a doubt - your support changes lives!

Thank you for believing in the mission of Visiting Nurse Association –

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James C. Summerfelt". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "S".



a vna nurse in every shelter

In 2021, VNA nurses had 5,465 face-to-face visits with 1,464 adults and children in Omaha and Council Bluffs' homeless and domestic violence shelters. In the shelters, our nurses are trusted caregivers and confidants. They provide frontline care for many of this community's most vulnerable, while collaborating with shelter staff to transition residents to long-term medical resources.



Shelter Chefs & Cooks

MISTYESHA WALKER: SIENA FRANCIS HOUSE

MisTyasha Walker has a heartfelt understanding of the Siena Francis House clients she feeds. She was once homeless with nowhere but the shelters to turn for meals and beds for her and her one-year-old son. “Food is a source of comfort and a means of survival for the homeless when your head is spinning and you’re praying for solutions and seeking a way out of a hole.”

A shelter case manager connected MisTyasha and her son to Salvation Army, who helped them transition to an apartment. Through grant funding, she started working as a dining room assistant at Siena Francis House. When there was an opening in the kitchen, MisTyasha was excited to accept an opportunity where she could directly serve shelter guests and learn more about cooking and operating a commercial kitchen.



“I love feeding our guests. I love cooking food they like and encouraging them through whatever struggles they’re experiencing. It’s a job and a calling both,” says Walker.

Walker is also a witness to the daily healthcare struggles of those who are homeless. Her participation in Art & Soup is not only a chance to highlight the importance of good food in the shelters, but also how valuable VNA nurses are to the clients. “Every day, I see people who are struggling with illness; some are close to death because of the effects of cold weather and conditions that have gone too long without help. We really need the nurses. I wish everyone knew how important it is to have the nurses.”

ROBERT WILSON: STEPHEN CENTER

Robert Wilson started cooking at Stephen Center by default. He was staying at the south Omaha homeless shelter after a 30-year path through alcohol and drug use forced him to make a choice between death and recovery. On one particular day, Stephen Center’s cook was a no-show and shelter staff needed help to feed everyone.



Robert knew plenty about cooking. In Omaha, he worked at Caniglia’s Italian Steakhouse and Indian Oven, then found his love for cooking as the chef garde manger at the French Café. Over many years at the French Café, he worked his way up to sous chef. When Wilson’s father persuaded him to move to California, he landed a job at Wolfgang Puck’s Kitchen in Costa Mesa. Then he learned his father managed an interstate operation delivering drugs and guns to Nebraska. Though Wilson never joined his dad’s operation, he spent time in prison for possession. After prison, he resumed his culinary career in upscale establishments in Laguna Beach and Huntington Beach, but fell back into addiction.

Robert returned to Omaha, but felt like life was stacked against him. The victim of child sexual abuse and the product of an alcoholic mother and drug addict father, the only coping mechanisms he knew led him further down the path of addiction. One night – while drunk and curled in a fetal position on the floor – Wilson decided that he wanted to live. After detoxing at Campus for Hope, he landed at Stephen Center and that fateful day when the homeless shelter staff needed someone to cook.

Ten years later, Robert remains at Stephen Center as the head chef and food service director. Perhaps more important, he is a living example to the clients he feeds that homelessness and addiction can be overcome. Food created by Chef Robert has a message for every homeless client he serves: No matter who you are, you deserve good food. And life will get better if you let it!



CHEF KENNETH VAHLENKAMP: OPEN DOOR MISSION

Chef Ken arrived at Open Door Mission a broken person, feeling like he didn't have anything to offer anyone. Drug addiction, toxic relationships, a brutal divorce, and other life circumstances made it tough to keep going.

In April of 2020, Vahlenkamp was arrested for possession of a controlled substance with intent to distribute. Deep depression accompanied his seven months in jail, and by the time his sentence was over, he had no friends, no possessions minus what he was wearing, and no place to go.

Because of the COVID pandemic, some shelters weren't accepting new clients. After spending three days in the cold November weather, Ken made his way to Open Door Mission where they fed him, allowed him to shower, and offered him a warm bed.

Vahlenkamp applied and was accepted into the New Life Recovery Program, an addiction program at Open Door Mission. There he found compassion, understanding, accountability and salvation through Jesus Christ. "I was surrounded on all sides with people who were either going through it with me or had already gone through the obstacles of overcoming addiction. I felt like I had a purpose, a home, and a family."

Ken started working in the kitchen as part of his recovery program. It was a role that came naturally since he had worked as a Chef most of his adult life. After completing the recovery program, he was hired as a full-time chef at Open Door Mission.

OUR LOCAL PARTNERS

Art & Soup raises funds to ensure VNA nurses can serve clients alongside these partners:

Siena Francis House

MACCH Street Outreach

Youth Emergency Services

Catholic Charities
(Phoenix House and The Shelter)

MICAH House

MOHMS Place/New Visions

Heartland Family Service
(Sanctuary House and Safe Haven)

Open Door Mission

Mater Filius

Stephen Center

Bethlehem House

John L. Hoich Center for Recovery

Thanks to our Honorary Chairs for making VNA's 25th Anniversary Art & Soup one you CAN'T miss!



For more information and to purchase tickets, go to vnatoday.org/artandsoup



Hal and Mary Daub

Mary has impacted so many lives through her community engagement and careers in public school teaching and real estate. And many of you know Hal as an attorney, member of the US House of Representatives, Mayor of Omaha, and a member of the Nebraska Board of Regents. VNA knows them as gracious and generous supporters of our mission, and we're grateful for their support as we celebrate 25 years of Art & Soup.



Therman Statom

Therman is a renowned sculptor, glass artist, and painter whose beautiful creations and public artworks are on display around the world. He impacts lives, not only through the beauty of his art, but also through his commitment to incorporate art and its message into communities in need of social change. Therman has worked alongside local students to create commemorative 25th anniversary bowls and tureens for Art & Soup. And we couldn't be more grateful for his commitment to help VNA care for those who are marginalized.

Participating Restaurants and Artists

ARTISTS

Shelly Bartek
Lynn Bowes
Frank Costanzo
Mari Dailey
John Dennison
George Garrett III
Tim Guthrie
Annette Guy
David Guy
Judy Haney
Jeremy Hoich
Marcia Joffe-Bouska
Dan Klima

Patricia Kounkel
Mahatma Largaespada
Nancy Lepo
Jan London
Margie Magnuson
Katrina Methot-Swanson
Charles Nolder
Curt Norman
John Prouty
Phil Rich
Rose Rutherford
Angie Simonsen
Therman Statom
Anne Steinhoff

Kelli Sweet
Steve Tamayo
Dorothy Tuma
Bart Vargas
Margaret (Peg) Watkins
Carl Weiss

RESTAURANTS

Avoli Osteria
Big Mama's Kitchen & Catering
Fernando's
JAMS American Kitchen
Kitchen Table

Le Voltaire
No More Empty Pots
Ono Pinay Kitchen
Open Door Mission
MCC's Sage Student Bistro
Siena Francis House
Slattery Vintage Estates
Stephen Center
Stirrella Bar & Kitchen
Stokes
Bold Southwest Grill
The Woodcliff Restaurant



Celebrate 125 Years With VNA

**THURSDAY, APRIL 28
FROM 5 TO 7:30 P.M.**

**JOSLYN CASTLE
3902 DAVENPORT ST.**

In 1896, Anna Millard Rogers founded Visiting Nurse Association (VNA) to bring healthcare and support **into** the streets and homes of Omaha. She saw people living in poverty – sick and injured with no access to healthcare - and she took care directly to them.

125 years later, VNA continues to provide care wherever people call home. For some, that's a homeless shelter. For others, it's an apartment or a home where they want to remain independently. For everyone, it means access to healthcare and supportive services when they are marginalized, uninsured, and under-resourced.

We invite you to applaud a momentous anniversary with us that was postponed last year because of the COVID pandemic. Join us at Joslyn Castle on April 21 for hors d'oeuvres, drink, and a celebration of the history and future impact of Visiting Nurse Association.

Tickets are \$125 for you and one guest, with proceeds benefiting VNA mission-based programs that serve adults and children who can't afford care on their own.



**For more information & to purchase tickets:
vnatoday.org/125years**

Continuing to Impact Our Community

125
YEARS



Who We Are

In 2021, VNA transitioned our government and commercial insurance-funded home health and hospice programs to Amedisys. Our focus today continues a 125-year legacy — serving marginalized people in Omaha and Council Bluffs who need access to expert and compassionate healthcare and supportive services. With your support, we will strengthen and expand these proven programs:



HOMELESS SHELTER NURSING SERVICES



PARENTING SUPPORT



EASTERSEALS NEBRASKA



HOME HEALTH AIDE, HOME HEALTH & HOSPICE FOR THE UNDER/UNINSURED



PHYSICIAN-DIRECTED MOTHER/CHILD SERVICES



FLU AND IMMUNIZATION SERVICES

How We Operate



ENDOWMENT FUND

VNA formed an endowment with proceeds from the Amedisys transition. Our endowment functions as its own revenue generator, helping to cover administrative and operational overhead.



CONTRIBUTING REVENUE

VNA's state-of-the-art infusion pharmacy, immunization clinics, and events, like Art & Soup, generate annual revenue.



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Because of You

Support for VNA and ESN today is more important – and impactful – than ever.

Our programming is driven by the generosity of this community, including fundraising events, grants and the support of donors, to continue providing meaningful care to those who depend on us.

All contributing revenue is reinvested into VNA Programs.