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AFFIRMING DIGNITY

INTERFAITH WORKS OF CENTRAL NEW YORK

May 2024 Newsletter

*Family
Over Fear*
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A NEW CHAPTER

Dear Friends of InterFaith Works,

We are thrilled to announce the revival of our beloved print newsletter! After a hiatus, we are returning to the tried-and-true medium of print to connect with our cherished supporters who prefer the tangible experience of holding news in their hands. It feels like coming home.

We have so much to share and many stories to tell about the remarkable journey of growth and progress that InterFaith Works of CNY has embarked upon. Our agency has flourished, expanding its reach and impact across communities, touching lives in ways we never imagined.

In the pages ahead, you'll discover heartwarming tales of hope and resilience from the refugees we serve. You'll be inspired by the dedicated volunteers who go above and beyond to extend a helping hand. Our dialogue-to-action initiatives foster understanding and harmony in our diverse community, and we hope you'll find them transformative. We also want to share our excitement about the Center for Healthy Aging, which might inspire you to continue making a positive impact in the world.

But this newsletter is more than just ink on paper; it is a testament to the unwavering support of friends like you. Your belief in our mission fuels our passion and propels us forward, enabling us to continue making a difference where it matters most.

As we embark on this new chapter, we welcome your feedback, comments, and support. Your voices matter to us, shaping the narrative of our collective journey. Together, we can build a future where compassion knows no bounds and everyone's dignity is affirmed.

So, from the depths of our hearts, thank you for standing by us, believing in the power of unity, and being a beacon of hope in our community.

With warmest regards,

BETH A. BROADWAY

President & CEO



Carol Recker-Hughes smiles on a visit to the InterFaith Works office.

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VOLUNTARY KINDNESS

The first time Carol Recker-Hughes volunteered with InterFaith Works was 40 years ago. She picked up Polish refugees from the airport and vividly remembers them kissing the ground upon their arrival. That first time working with New Americans left a lasting impression. A physical therapist and educator, Carol didn't have the time required to volunteer. She promised herself that after she retired, she would volunteer her time. Two years later she has kept that promise, as a Conversation Partner at InterFaith Works.

Conversation Partners provide English lessons to New Americans in the comfort of their homes. This service is particularly beneficial for a client who looks after her three grandchildren, all under six years old, limiting her ability to leave home. The client found herself in this position because her daughter, who had been waiting in a refugee camp, finally arrived in the United States. Carol attended the daughter's welcome home celebration during a regular visit. She was moved by the love and support shown to a mother starting over by so many in the community.

Carol explains how the addition of children has changed their appointments. "Now I'm teaching her and, the children. I bring books and teach her how to read to them to the kids."

"Volunteering gives me purpose and the opportunity to make a contribution to hard working people who really want to learn."

Carol not only volunteers her time but also promotes volunteerism, constantly encouraging others to participate. While some are hesitant to engage due to fear of failure, she advises them to "just show up, and be open." She wants people to know that volunteering is rewarding, and what one gains is so much greater than what one gives. In her upcoming column for her church newspaper next month, she intends to write about volunteering at InterFaith Works.



Learn more about volunteer opportunities!

Jennie Prouty
Senior Volunteer Coordinator
jprouty@ifwcnyc.org
315-449-3552, ext. 128

A LEGACY OF GENEROSITY

Upon naming the agency as a beneficiary on her retirement account, Rev. Gail Wolling became InterFaith Works' most recent legacy donor. "My financial advisor encouraged me to think in terms of 'legacy' as I developed a financial plan."

The Rev. Gail Wolling explains her decision as an "extension of what I think has been important throughout my whole life."

"Our first thought is our children and dear ones, but you also need to think about your values—to look for ways to continue the work you began," she explained.

"For me, injustice tears at my heart, and I seek to live a more generous life." This is what she and her late husband Charles tried to model and teach their children. She firmly believes community work is everyone's work.

"InterFaith Works is the big player in building authentic community in Syracuse," Rev. Wolling says. "The agency is uniquely positioned to work across religious, ethnic, and racial divides."

Rev. Wolling became involved with InterFaith Works almost 15 years ago, after hearing a staff member's presentation at a meeting of local clergy. The presenter was the "spark," Rev. Wolling said.

"The work of InterFaith Works fell into my value house—assisting the elderly, helping refugees, doing the anti-racism work. InterFaith Works' reputation and skill set focus on the difficult issues and conversations that we—as a society—need to have to build harmony."



Rev. Gail Wolling



"It's not the size of my gift that's important, it's the work that gift will do in the future."

Rev. Wolling serves as the Lutheran representative on InterFaith Works Round Table of Faith Leaders, a body of 32 diverse faith leaders who are described as the "soul" of the agency by CEO Beth Broadway. The group convenes monthly to build cross-faith bridges of understanding, explore the true meaning of 'interfaith', and promote the programs and activities of InterFaith Works.

"The Round Table builds bridges across faith and ethnic communities where there is no other easy way to build them," said Rev. Wolling, who was ordained to the ministry in 2000, served a local congregation for 10 years, and was dean of the conference for eight years before retiring from full-time ministry in 2018. She then served as an interim pastor for congregations that were in transition.

Rev. Wolling's family includes three children (daughters Kate and Megan, as well as son David) and two grandchildren.

"My kids and grandkids are cared for, as well as the religious organizations that I served in my ministry," she said. "I want to give to an organization that has the history, structure, skill set, and reputation that is recognized and will continue. That place is InterFaith Works."



INTRODUCING OUR NEW DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT MEAGHAN SAMERE

Meaghan Samere recently joined InterFaith Works as Director of Development. In this role, she will focus on stewarding and growing our annual donations, which are essential to sustaining our critical programs. Before joining our team, Meaghan had built her career in the alumni affairs and development office at Harvard University, and she brings a depth of experience from her various fundraising and program management roles. She is passionate about contributing to her community and having an impact on the vulnerable populations InterFaith Works serves, helping our clients live full and meaningful lives with the dignity they deserve.

If you're interested in learning more about our annual giving program or our flagship InterFaith Leadership Award Dinner event, please contact Meaghan at 315-449-3552 ext. 120 or at msamere@ifwcny.org.

INTRODUCING THE CENTER FOR HEALTHY AGING

They say "It takes a village to raise a child." I say, it takes a village to grow older in. As our bodies, our minds, our wishes and our hearts age, we want and need a healthy and attentive community around us. The older adults in our village want and need to be socially connected, to contribute their wisdom and experience, practice their purpose, receive care, and live out their final years with dignity. Our community is aging at an unprecedented rate older adults now account for 18% of Onondaga County's population, up from 14% a decade ago. This trend will continue. It is time for us to consider what an aging friendly village should look like, and what we need to do to build one.



InterFaith Works volunteers support fellow older adults at the Spectrum Digital Inclusion graduation ceremony.

That is why InterFaith Works recently created the Center for Healthy Aging. Our mission is to empower a strong, connected, and educated community that understands the needs, desires, and abilities of its older neighbors. We will do this by raising awareness about ageism and its impact, convening partners to provide equitable and just services, and meeting with community leaders to ensure that their plans are inclusive of our aging members.

We will also continue to provide the life-changing services we have offered for almost 30 years. We will create volunteer opportunities for active seniors to practice their purpose. We will visit with isolated elders in nursing homes. We will teach English to older New Americans. We will help low-income older adults stretch their budgets. We will teach older adults to use the internet safely.

The Center for Healthy Aging's village is big. It is inclusive. It is growing. If you are an older adult looking to contribute your experience a community member looking for an intergenerational volunteer opportunity an elder in need of our services; or a leader who wants to learn about ageism come join us. Together, we can create the kind of village we will all want to grow old in.



Lori Klivak, PhD
Senior Director,
Center for Healthy Aging
P:315-449-3552 Ext: 109



SENIOR COMPANIONS NEEDED IN CAYUGA, OSWEGO, AND MADISON COUNTIES

What is a Senior Companion?

The AmeriCorps Senior Companion volunteers serve as a friend and companion to older neighbors making sure they can live in their own homes for as long as possible.

Who can be a Senior Companion?

- Senior Companions are volunteers 55 years old and over.
- Senior Companions who meet income requirements are eligible for a stipend.
- Senior Companions provide assistance and friendship to older adults who have difficulty with daily living tasks.

Senior Companion volunteers report better health and longevity having served their community.

If you or someone you know would like to become a Senior Companion, please contact:

Serena K. Jackson

Assistant Director for Volunteer Programs
skjackson@ifwcny.org | ext. 214

FAMILY OVER FEAR

When the Russian military took control of their small Ukrainian town of Nova Kakhovka, Ihor and Sabina knew they had to escape. The fear and oppression of living in an occupied area, on the frontlines, intensified with the destruction of the Nova Kakhovka dam. Amidst the chaos of war and the deadly flooding in Kakhovka, Ihor, Sabina, and their 5-year-old daughter Arina found their home unrecognizable.

Their escape proved challenging and dangerous, with Russian soldiers stationed at the border ready to fire at anyone attempting to cross. Concerned for her child, Sabina ruled out that route. Meanwhile, Ihor, a truck driver already working in Poland, awaited his family.



Arina proudly shows off her sweatshirt, representing her home country.



Ihor, Sabina and Arina pose for a family portrait outside of their home.

“Ukrainians fleeing conflict seek better opportunities, with some in the US rebuilding their lives through the Uniting for Ukraine program. New arrivals after September 30, 2023, lack resettlement assistance due to Congress not extending support, highlighting ongoing humanitarian needs.”

Justin Deyo

With courage, Sabina journeyed further into the occupied territory to reach her husband. She had an arduous journey with two cats, luggage, and her daughter. Traveling first to Crimea, she feared losing her passport to Russian soldiers. From there, she ventured to Moscow before boarding a bus to Latvia. At the Latvian border, she waited for three days to reunite with her husband. Together, they traveled back to Poland and eventually completed the necessary steps to enter the United States.

Upon reaching Syracuse, their journey continued as they sought assistance. They contacted InterFaith Works and were connected with Ukrainian case workers Kateryna Kolesova and Justin Deyo. Justin and Kateryna have assisted them in finding and furnishing an apartment, supporting Ihor in resuming his truck driving career, and connecting the family with essential resources to rebuild their lives.



ART WITH A MISSION

Local artist Judith K. Hand expressed her deep concern over the Ukraine conflict by creating a series of watercolors to show solidarity with those affected by the war. This initiative led to the launch of her "Ukraine Project," where prints and cards of her watercolor artworks were produced to raise funds. Through this project, \$750 was donated to support Ukrainians resettling either permanently or temporarily by InterFaith Works.

Furthermore, Hand generously contributed five framed prints of her paintings as welcome gifts for newly resettled Ukrainians.

“I plan to continue to market the prints, so I hope I can raise even more funds.”



Judith K. Hand

FINDING COMMON GROUND



Janell Gage and Officer Richard Solomon smile outside of the InterFaith Works building.

Officer Solomon and Gage both walked away from the dialogue with a deeper understanding and respect for one another. They agree that with more resources, conversations, and funding, bridges between community members and police in Syracuse will continue to be built.



“I definitely expected there to be way more tension. I was anticipating more disagreements, and it was actually the complete opposite. The respect shown by everyone there to each other, even during that conversation, far exceeded my expectations.”

Janell Gage



Officer Richard Solomon and Janell Gage both participated in the Community Police Dialogues, which were organized by InterFaith Works' Center for Dialogue & Action. Before being involved in the program, it is unlikely they would have ever spoken. If they did speak, it might have been under vastly different circumstances. Months later, after the dialogue sessions ended they are happy to see one another again, proudly showing off pictures of their dogs.

Officer Solomon and Gage set out on the path of dialogue circles for different reasons. Officer Solomon found himself inundated by the news of national turmoil between communities and police officers reaching a fever pitch, fueled by racial and political issues. He sought to serve as a conduit, bringing together Syracuse's community and police officers. It was also important for him to show the humanity behind his uniform. Gage, too, desired for her voice to be heard, reflecting, “In the past, I haven't had the greatest interactions with police officers here in Syracuse. I thought any safe space where you can sit in the same room and have real discussions is the perfect space for people to speak to police officers when they are not under stress. These conversations could actually save a life.”

Their shared desire for change did not exclude them from harboring preconceived notions and apprehensions about the conversations. Officer Solomon explained his reluctance to engage, saying “In the past, I heard that different dialogues were critical and deconstructive, and it was a lot of finger-pointing. InterFaith Works and the people who were trained by them had such great energy and allowed a very honest and open conversation to happen. There were things that we agreed with the community members on and things we disagreed on, but everyone was respectful.”



Gage, several community members, and police officers engage in a dialogue circle.



Upcoming May Community Wide Dialogue Schedule:

Taking Action Against Racism

May 20
May 27
June 6
June 10



Register here and learn how to take action against racism.



Save The Date

United We End Racism
Saturday, June 8, 2024,
10:00 AM-2:00PM at the Inner
Harbor

InterFaith Leadership Award Dinner

Tuesday, September 24, 2024,
SRC Arena, Onondaga
Community College

JOIN OUR GROWING STAFF!

InterFaith Works is currently seeking talented individuals to join our team and support our mission to Affirm Dignity. Our employees benefit from weekly wellness activities, a welcoming and diverse work culture, and generous PTO. Scan the QR code to discover our latest career opportunities.

