



FEEDING HOPE

www.chicagohelpinitiative.org

Overview of Our Programs and Services

Every Wednesday evening, The Chicago Help Initiative (CHI) gathers at the dining hall at Catholic Charities, 721 N. LaSalle St., to serve a warm meal on white-clothed tables to 130 guests in a safe and dignified setting. An additional 70 individuals receive a bag meal to go. The nutritious and delicious food is provided by local restaurants and hotels from Chicago's Magnificent Mile and River North areas. We serve food, but we also serve as an efficient hub for accessing needed resources.

CHI's mission is to assist our guests in bettering their lives and becoming contributing members of the community again. CHI is very much a local organization, drawing our support from the residents and businesses that surround us. We have a very small staff, but every meal is served with upwards of 25 volunteers. We are an organization that succeeds by leveraging existing partnerships and resources.

Before dinner, guest speakers from various organizations around the city give brief presentations on helpful resources, housing and job training. During the meal, guests can visit resource tables staffed with social workers, partner agencies and volunteers who assist with shelter, addiction services, legal aid, medical care and job opportunities. We use the meal to draw in individuals who are hungry and in need, and at the meal provide them information and access to the best social service agencies we know. We don't duplicate services that others already provide well – we just connect to them efficiently.

Guests are also given an opportunity to participate with several ongoing programs before or after dinner, which include adult learning, yoga, tutoring, art classes and book club. These programs are intended to cultivate positive peer relationships and facilitate maintaining contact with our guests, through shared interests, as we work to connect them back into networks that can help improve their lives.

Our Programs

CHI Dinners

Our meals are either donated or purchased at discount from area restaurants and hotels. Our meal sponsors include The Hotel Intercontinental, Gene and Georgetti, Goddess and Grocer, Benny's Steakhouse and Eli's Cheesecake, among others.

Dinner Speakers

At most every meal we invite a speaker from a local service agency to talk on a topic relevant to our guests, such as job training, housing, and health services. Speakers remain for the duration of the meal to connect with those who want further assistance.

Bag Meals

Every meal attracts an overflow crowd. We provide an extra 70 takeaway bag meals for those who, because of space limitations, are unable to join the sit-down meal.

Employment Resources and Jobs Club

Our weekly jobs club program provides our guests with one-on-one counseling and training with our volunteer counselors, including interviewing techniques, resume writing, computer instruction and job applications. We also make referrals for our guests to local agencies that specialize in job preparation and training for a variety of skill levels and industries. Guests can also peruse our jobs bulletin board, where we post current job openings and other employment resources.

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Adult Learning

Our trained education volunteers provide one-on-one tutoring to our guests on a variety of subjects such as computer skills, reading, writing, math, and GED preparation. The hour-long sessions take place prior to our meal. Currently, more than 40 guests participate in our program. Do you have a knack for teaching and want to volunteer as a tutor? [Learn more.](#)

Arts and Culture Program

We host regular outings for a group of our guests to some of the finest cultural and entertainment venues Chicago has to offer. Museum visits, theater performances, films and an architectural boat tour are among the outings our guests have enjoyed. Each outing is followed by a meal at an upscale eatery and a group discussion that stimulates intellectual curiosity and critical thinking.

Yoga

Before each meal, a certified yoga instructor teaches a chair yoga class that focuses on flexibility and wellness.

Bike Fair

Every spring in partnership with Working Bikes, CHI sponsors a bike repair class and gives away refurbished bikes (along with locks and helmets) to our guests who want to use bikes as transportation and for exercise.

Resource Table

Volunteer social workers are present at every meal to provide information about shelters, food pantries, how to access permanent housing, and how to find medical care, legal aid and other services.

Resource Guide

Twice a year, CHI produces a free, pocket-sized booklet that steers our guests and others in need to the best social service agencies in Chicago. The guide is sponsored by The Chicago Loop Alliance, the Magnificent Mile Foundation, The Chicago Association of Realtors, The River North Residents Association, the Streeterville Organization of Active Residents and RAM Racing. It is distributed by CHI and numerous other organizations, including churches, community groups, emergency rooms and shelters.

Outreach Walks

Once a week, our staff walks different areas of the downtown area to interact with and recruit vulnerable Chicagoans to come to our meal and connect with needed services.

Medical Assistance

We provide a volunteer MD, nurse practitioner and volunteer medical students from Northwestern Medical School at every meal who provide on-the-spot healthcare, confidential HIV and Hepatitis C testing, blood pressure checks and referrals to appropriate healthcare providers.

Mental Health Services

On the second and fourth Wednesday, practitioners from Stone Institute of Psychiatry at Northwestern Medicine are present to speak with and refer guests.

Birthday Acknowledgments

At every meal, we acknowledge guests who are celebrating their birthdays during the month with a happy birthday song. Each celebrant is also given a birthday card along with a gift card.

Holiday Gifts

Each holiday season, we provide gift cards to our guests that they can use to purchase what they need.

Library Table

CHI distributes free books (current events, best sellers, serious literature) and magazines at every meal.

Holiday Cards and Placemats

Students from St. Francis Xavier Warde create greeting cards as well as cheerful placemats for each holiday for our guests.

For more information about becoming a meal sponsor or volunteer, or to make a donation to The Chicago Help Initiative, please visit our website at www.chicagohelpinitiative.org



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