



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 721 North LaSalle Street 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.

Before dinner, speakers give brief presentations on helpful resources, agencies and job training. During the meal, guests can visit resource tables staffed with social workers, partner agencies or volunteers who maintain listings of services, including shelter, addiction services, legal aid, medical care and job opportunities. We use the meal to draw in those 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 have included adult learning, yoga, GED tutoring, art classes and bicycle repair. 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.

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.

Our Programs

CHI Dinners

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

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 are interested in further assistance.

Bag Meals

Every meal we have an overflow crowd. To accommodate this we provide an extra 70 takeaway bag meals for those who are unable to join the sit-down meal.

Employment Resources and Jobs Club

In 2017, we launched our weekly jobs club program. Guests who sign up receive on-one-on 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 our partner 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, GED preparation, and books club. The hour-long sessions take place prior to our meal. Currently, more than 30 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

In partnership with Red Line Service, a nonprofit arts organization serving Chicago's homeless population, 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 enjoyed in 2017. Each outing is followed by a meal at an upscale eatery and a group discussion that stimulates intellectual curiosity and critical thinking, and a provides a sense of possibility in our guests of their own talents and potential to improve their situation.

Yoga

Before each meal, a certified yoga instructor teaches a chair yoga class – focusing 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.

Resource Table

CHI's table is staffed by two social workers, one from Night Ministry and one shared by CHI and Catholic Charities. In addition, there are experienced volunteers present to assist. The table provides information about shelters, food pantries, how to access permanent housing, and how to find medical care and legal aid and other services. The organization mRelief, one of our partners, provides immediate information on eligibility to resources and appropriate next steps. Our shared social worker is also available to do follow up the next day if there are resources that are not available at the time of the request.

Resource Guide

Twice a year, CHI produces a sturdy pocket-sized booklet that steers our guests and others in need to the best social service agencies we know of. 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

Through our partnership with The Night Ministry, a nurse practitioner is present at every meal. This might mean a referral, assistance in getting medication prescription or on the spot assistance. In addition, a Night Ministry staff member conducts confidential HIV and Hepatitis C testing.

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.

Blood Pressure Testing

Every week, medical students from Northwestern Medical School are present to conduct blood pressure readings.

Financial Literacy

Once a month, volunteers from Metropolitan Capital Bank are on hand to present information on reestablishing a bank account, credit repair and other needed financial services to any of our guests.

Birthday Acknowledgments

We dedicate a few moments at each meal to wish and sing happy birthday to our guests who are celebrating their birthdays. Each celebrant is given a birthday card along with a gift card. It is sometimes the only acknowledgment individuals have of this life milestone.

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Holiday Gifts

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

Bingo

In addition to speakers at each of the meals, we occasionally schedule bingo for a fun way for our guests to enjoy themselves. Bingo prizes, donated, range from Nike running shoes to passes to 360 Chicago at the John Hancock Observatory.

Library Table

CHI distributes free books 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.

