



PROFILES OF HOPE: Meet Kelly, an IOH Advocate:

I grew up in Birmingham where I attended Optometry school and met my husband. We moved to Atlanta 30 years ago and went church shopping for me (my husband is Jewish), and although St. Martin in-the-Fields Episcopal Church was the closest church, we saved it for last. My first visit felt like coming home. When I told the pastor we were visiting, he leaned over and whispered, “Well, come back another time. The Bishop was here today, so we had to ‘put on the dog’.” I told my Mom I had found a new church called St. Martin’s, and she informed me that it had been our church when we lived in Atlanta when I was in 2nd grade. Turns out, I really had come home.

When my kids were young, my goal was to find kid-friendly outreach programs, which led to serving as Outreach Chair at St. Martin’s. IOH was one of many programs the church supported. After bringing dinners and helping with birthdays, Deborah asked if I would serve on the Board. I said no, as I was already Outreach Chair, among other things, but she didn’t give up. In deciding, I asked for advice from a wonderful priest at St. Martin’s, Mary Kahrs Erickson, and she replied, “Deborah Walker-Little is one of the most amazing people I have ever met, and IOH is an amazing program.” So I joined the Board. Later, when asked to chair the Board, again I hesitated. Deborah asked, “Who will do it, if not you?” Good question. I called it my ‘non-paying part-time job’. There was so much to do, and the more I learned, the more I became impressed. IOH was to become a core topic of conversation - wherever I went. Once I found myself talking about IOH on a ski lift in Colorado! And my dear friend, Kenny Jones, is a huge IOH supporter - he lives in North Dakota. Word gets around.

I have never given my heart and soul to an outreach program like I have to IOH. It is a place of dignity. The residents are not infantilized. Residents contribute to the program each month, so they are not just taking but are partnering in the process. They acquire the tools needed to remain independent and can stay long enough to



find the hope and confidence to be successful when they leave. A private apartment with a lock on the door equals safety and stability. In that atmosphere, families can look forward to the future instead of just day-to-day existence.

My family and I view homelessness differently now. It is not limited to the mentally ill and addicted as depicted in the news, because there are more homeless children than adults in Georgia. It affects hard working people who have no safety net to catch them when hardship hits. In that sense, homelessness could happen to anyone.

I believe it's important to consolidate your personal energy, time and money to a particular cause in order to make a difference – small focus, big impact. For the holidays this year, instead of giving his colleagues small gifts, my husband, Tom Spetalnick, made a sizable donation to IOH in their name. Because of our vocal involvement, they knew where that gift was going. By being 'all in', not only can we make a difference, we develop personal relationships with the people involved in the program.

Of all the outreach programs I've worked with, none come close to offering the chance for an independent future life like IOH. It is a special place. If only there were more than 10 apartments...