

Agency Partners for the Good Works Timothy House

From April 2023 to December 2023, Garrett Mather-Smith shared some thoughts in the monthly volunteer updates with the weekend volunteers about some of our agency partners. Following is an archive of those reflections. They have been minimally changed from the versions that were in the monthly emails.

The Gathering Place

The Gathering Place (GP) has been around Athens for quite some time and as I understand it, the partnership we have had with them has looked different in different seasons, according to the different directors the GP has had. The GP is a place for people to go during the day who struggle with issues related to their mental health or co-occurring mental health and substance abuse. They have various activities that they lead for their members and visitors, including art and music programs, a computer lab, a quiet space for people to go when they need to limit their stimulation, or take a rest, and I'm sure many other things I have forgotten about or don't know about.

In the last few years, as I have taken on the role of being one of the “guardians of the relationship” (this is a phrase we use among the staff which basically means I'm the primary person with whom that agency or person interacts with Good Works) with the GP, I have seen their hearts to serve vulnerable people and their desire to come alongside people who are in all manner of distress.

As I'm sure you can imagine, there is overlap between the people they serve and the people we serve. Some of our residents spend their time during the day at the GP. Ginger, the current Executive Director, often calls us to refer people who need shelter or to talk through with us a situation they have seen with our residents. In kind, we also call and talk with Ginger to talk through some of the situations we have with our residents, which could impact the community they are building in their house.

Our relationship with the GP is a beautiful reflection of our mission. We all work together to love and serve the people who come to us in their vulnerability. And through that, we see a glimpse of the Kingdom of God.

Integrated Services

This is how we interact with Integrated Services—their full name is Integrated Services for Behavioral Health (ISBH).

Integrated Services is an agency that covers our entire service area, plus a good deal beyond it. They have caseworkers/managers who work with individuals to get them signed up for needed assistance. They can help people with signing up for TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) and SNAP benefits (Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program, which used to be called “food stamps”), HUD, assistance through HAPCAP (Hocking/Athens/Perry County Community Action Program), and many other things. They

also have counseling and psychiatry services here in Athens and can occasionally help their clients with rides to appointments.

So as you can imagine, we work a good deal with ISBH. We work most often directly with the caseworkers who are working with our residents, but occasionally with the people who oversee those caseworkers, to talk about all of our residents with them.

One thing that we often look for our residents to receive through working with ISBH is a voucher for their Homeless Crisis and Response Program (HCRP) or Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH). These are programs with funds available to help individuals with paying for their housing—in part or in full, depending on their income level—when they qualify for HUD housing, but the waiting list for HUD is too long to help them right now. They can cover the cost of housing for up to a year while the individual is on the waiting list.

One of the eligibility requirements for the HCRP voucher is that the individual is verifiably “homeless.” That is, by HUD’s definition of homelessness, which is pretty difficult to prove in most circumstances (there are difficulties in proving that someone is actually living in a tent, for instance), but when someone is living in a shelter, it is much easier. We have a form we can fill out called a “Verification of Homelessness,” which we supply to ISBH (and which the staff can supply to anyone to whom a resident needs to verify their address) upon our referral to them, and/or upon their request. It is a statement we sign which states that the person has lived at the GW Timothy House since a specified date and is still a resident (when we supply these after someone moves out, we have a similar, but separate form for someone who is no longer a resident but was from *this* date to *that*).

Hopewell Health Centers

This is how we work with Hopewell, whose full name is Hopewell Health Centers which we usually abbreviate to HHC.

Hopewell is based primarily in Athens, but there are offices in almost every county we serve, plus Ross and Franklin Counties. They are a mental health center, where people can go to receive mental health or drug and alcohol counseling, groups, and psychiatry services, but they do so much more than that, as well. They have case managers for their clients as well, and so they can do a lot of the same work with our residents that Integrated Services (ISBH) can do.

I often think of ISBH and HHC as being on a spectrum. ISBH often provide more help with the housing side of things, but has the mental health services as well, while HHC is a bit more focused on mental health services, but also has case management for housing.

HHC also has a relationship with Athens Behavioral Health (ABH) and runs Respite. ABH is an inpatient mental hospital for people who are in crisis to be treated in an inpatient way to reach a point of no longer being in crisis, so that they can either move to a “step-down facility” or back into general society. Respite is one of these “step-down facilities,” but is also a place where people can be while doctors help to get their medications rebalanced.

We occasionally get calls from someone who is coming from ABH or Respite. Whenever someone is calling from another facility, it is important that we talk to a doctor, nurse, social worker, or someone there who knows what has been happening while the patient has been in their facility. Firstly, this is because someone who is leaving this kind of facility against medical advice—and we do get those calls sometimes, so we need to check—is often unlikely to fit well into our structures. But additionally, the person at the facility can advocate for the person seeking shelter and give us confirmation of their situation, telling us why they were admitted initially, how their stay has been going (for example, have they obeyed the rules?), and what sort of after-care they are going to set the person up with (a counselor, medications, etc.).

Calls where we get to talk with someone about how the person seeking shelter has done in another facility can be really illuminating and give us an idea of what sort of things we will need to focus on to help a resident to do well in our structure. Sometimes, the caseworker someone gets while in ABH or Respite can be a partner with whom we work throughout the resident's stay, which is ideal!

Carlson Center

The Carlson Center is a relatively new facility which I believe got started toward the end of 2019. They are a detox and rehabilitation center in Athens, but their parent agency, Outreach & Crisis Counseling Services, is based in Columbus.

In terms of direct connections regarding residents, we do not have a lot of interaction with the Carlson Center, as all of their services are inpatient. However, we have received referrals from their staff of people who are completing their program with nowhere else to go. We also, when we get someone who is applying to the Timothy House who is still actively struggling with addiction, have referred those people to Carlson Center to begin their recovery journey before we can work with them.

However, our most impactful connection with the Carlson Center goes much deeper. As many of you know, the Good Works staff has a weekly meeting on Tuesdays from 10-11am where we gather together and have a time of song, scripture, and sharing what God is doing or has done in our lives. You are all welcome to come to this if you are able (and residents are too; they come on occasion), but please let us know if you are interested, as there are some Tuesdays we cannot do it because of our monthly Staff Development Days. Last spring, in a conversation Keith and I had with an administrator at the Carlson Center to build a good bridge between us, she asked if we have any church services that their clients could attend. We told her we do not but told her about this and she asked about their clients attending our Tuesday worship gatherings. That following Tuesday, clients from the Carlson Center, along with one of their staff, began coming to our gatherings!

For a period in the spring of 2023, 3-5 clients from the Carlson Center were driven to the Timothy House each week for the gathering, and they participated in singing with us, in reading scripture, and in sharing their testimonies with us! It was a beautiful experience

and we are so grateful to have had this opportunity to share what we were already doing with the folks from the Carlson Center!

Job and Family Services/OhioMeansJobs

I'm sure many of you are aware of JFS—that they provide Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits to families and individuals with low-to-no income. TANF is a small cash benefit for families who are not able to work or need some help and I am sure you are familiar with SNAP, even if you know it by its older name of food stamps. Some people still colloquially refer to SNAP benefits as food stamps.

OhioMeansJobs (OMJ) is an agency under the broader umbrella of JFS. You may have seen the OMJ building in the old VA office on Union Street, near the bike path and the red formerly Habitat for Humanity house. They used to be located in The Plains until 3-4 years ago. Back then, it was called The Workstation. OMJ has a lot of supports for people who are looking for jobs. They have a computer lab available where people can look for jobs, apply, work on their résumé, or anything else for getting things together to get to work. They also have staff who will help to put together a résumé for those who don't know how to do it, training events, career fairs, and much more, all with the goal of helping people get back onto their feet and get into a career which suits them. They do a lot!

One other thing that they do which doesn't fit in quite the same as the others is that they have staff there who are focused on helping those who come out of incarceration with re-entry, either by helping them to find housing or a job, to get connected to resources and community, and it sounds like pretty much whatever else they need to get settled back into life. We have worked closely with the staff who oversees that area on multiple occasions as there have been people who are re-entering who have no place to go. As with all of our agency partners, we deeply value their advocacy for their clients!

Mostly, the people who qualify for assistance through TANF or SNAP are already receiving that when they arrive to the Timothy House, so there is not often much we have to do to refer anyone there. We do often refer those who are job seeking to OMJ so that they can get help in that search, but we don't often have to refer people to the re-entry program. Mostly, the jails and prisons do that directly when someone is leaving. Nonetheless, we are very grateful for all that JFS and OMJ is doing in our community!

My Sister's Place

My Sister's Place (MSP) is a domestic violence shelter here in Athens. They started in 1977. Keith did his internship for his Mental Health Degree at MSP in the fall of 1980 and had a very good experience with the staff at that time. It was this internship which moved Keith to think about and eventually gain a vision for starting a shelter in the basement of his home.

MSP takes in people who are actively fleeing an abuser and gives them shelter; and also helps with counseling and helping them to transition into living in freedom. They have a secure location—their address is not public, and residents are not allowed to reveal its location, and they must arrange to be picked up and dropped off some distance away from the facility to prevent others from finding it out. Historically, they have only allowed women (and children) to stay there, but they have been taking men for a few years now, as long as they are actively fleeing an abuser.

People occasionally call us who have recently fled their abuser and we always prefer that they attempt to get into MSP first and take advantage of their resources. On the occasions where MSP has been full, we have welcomed people into the Timothy House who are fleeing their abusers. We have a protocol here we call **Domestic Violence Alert (DVA)** which clarifies procedures the staff employ when welcoming people who are in this situation.

Whenever we accept someone for a DVA, however, it is always with specific expectations. Because we do not have a secure location—despite our best efforts, the Timothy House address is still easily found on Google—we are not able to provide the kind of safety that most people fleeing domestic violence need. So, we are usually partnering with MSP about finding an alternative option as soon as one comes available. Sometimes that looks like MSP taking them in when they have an open bed—however, they often have a “waitlist.” Sometimes MSP can get the person connected to another agency and get them into a different DV shelter somewhere else.

Additionally, even when MSP has no room, they are often able to help people with counseling and other resources, so when we have someone on DVA, they are still able to be connected with them for that kind of service.