



Decatur

Cooperative
Ministry

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News

Client Success Story: Valda Brown

By Nancy Saltmarsh, Board Member and DCM
News Editor

Like many people who try to make a fresh start in a new city, Valda Brown hoped her “Plan A” would work, because she had no Plan B. She moved from New York City to Atlanta in the summer of 2005 with her four sons and a work-from-home job lined up. When that work started dwindling and her car broke down, she found herself in the downward spiral familiar to many DCM clients.

“We had gotten evicted from an apartment,” Valda recalls. “I was working from home as well as substitute teaching. The work-at-home position had started slowing down, so money, of course, decreased and the money as a substitute teacher was not sufficient enough to maintain our household expenses. I started getting behind with bills and rent and eventually got evicted. My car had broken down. We lived in an area with no transportation and I couldn’t find a job within that area.”

With the help of the Atlanta Union Mission, Valda and her children lived in a series of one-room hotels from week to week. After the help ran out, she applied to DCM’s Family Transitional Housing Program in February 2006, and

in April moved into the Winn House, owned by North Decatur Presbyterian Church.

Family House allows homeless families who qualify to live in a house rent-free (typically owned by a church and managed by DCM) for up to two years while they put together jobs and savings for the transition to permanent housing.

The Winn House offered Valda and her sons, ages 8 to 14, more than a roof over their heads. It gave them the support system they had been lacking, in the form of North Decatur Presbyterian Church

and DCM, which Valda calls “family.” Winn House “gave me and my family a sense of peace, safety, and comfort. We loved the neighborhood and the surrounding schools. The people were friendly. We were comfortable there.”

Now Valda lives in a four-bedroom rental house in Covington that she hopes to own one day and is employed

by the Georgia Department of Revenue, where she recently was promoted to tax examiner. But that didn’t happen by magic.

“When I first spoke to Valda on the phone, she was mentally worn out, tired, and ready to give up on her family,” says Christy Oraelosi, Family



Valda Brown, at her job at the Georgia Department of Revenue

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Mission

Decatur Cooperative Ministry alleviates and prevents homelessness while affirming the dignity of each family.

Vision

To lead our diverse congregations and community in ending homelessness by:

- providing individualized, comprehensive services to homeless families;
- raising awareness and providing education about homelessness and its systemic causes;
- advocating for social justice and long-term solutions to homelessness.

Transitional Housing Program Manager. "I knew that she really wanted the best for the boys but was having a hard time. I did interview her the same day and encouraged her to keep her head high with faith. The family successfully completed the program on April 11, 2008. There was a time in the program that she lost her job and was unable to secure another one for four months. It was a roller coaster and she never quit trying or got discouraged. Fran Mohr and Becki Veal on the Family House interview team made a big impact in encouraging Valda and praying for her. Valda Brown and her four boys are very respectful and grateful for the opportunity given to them."

Winn House Renovated

The house that started DCM's Family Transitional Housing program is getting a major renovation. The Winn House, which is owned by North Decatur Presbyterian Church (NDPC), has been used to house homeless families since 1983, and has undergone several "facelifts" in its 25 years of operation. Now, with the help of HomeAid Atlanta, it will be restored "probably to an even better condition than it was originally," says Jean Wright, of the church's Properties Committee.

"North Decatur Presbyterian has always had close ties with DCM and a strong interest in transitional housing," adds Anne Topple, Community Ministry Committee at NDPC. "We are delighted that DCM has partnered with HomeAid Atlanta to make lasting improvements so that this house can continue to be used to lift families out of homelessness."

HomeAid Atlanta is a nonprofit that partners with the Greater Atlanta Home Builders Association to renovate houses with donated or discounted materials and labor. Needed renovations and repairs include rebuilding the bathroom and kitchen, replacing damaged windows and siding, treating mold in the crawl space, replacing

or refinishing flooring, and replacing the heating and air conditioning system. Eventually the house will also have more energy-efficient appliances.

The budget for the project, which got under way November 7, is \$41,567, 40% of which is donated by HomeAid's trade partners and the other 60% of which (\$24,000) is being raised by DCM.

As with all eight of the housing units in its "Family House" program, DCM pays for utilities, minor upkeep, and case management while homeless families live rent-free for up to two years. During this time, they must attend financial management classes and save a portion of their income in escrow for the eventual transition to permanent housing.

On November 8, more than 20 volunteers from Overhead Door Company of Atlanta participated in a HomeAid Care Day at the home, performing demolition of the bathroom and kitchen, cleaning the gutters and roof, digging a drainage trench, and building porch railings. Renovations to the home are scheduled to be completed by mid-December, which should allow DCM to place a family in the home by Christmas. The dedication ceremony is scheduled for December 18 at 2:30 p.m.

"The rehabilitation of The Winn House will allow it to continue providing a dignified place where homeless families in the Decatur area can rebuild their lives," says Haley Livingston, communications manager with HomeAid Atlanta.

From the Executive Director: Need Greater Than Ever

By Beth Vann, Executive Director

On Thanksgiving morning, I attended DCM's annual community worship service, which was planned and hosted by First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Decatur. One of the passages read during the service included the story of the feeding of 4,000 people with just a few loaves and fishes. As I heard it, I will admit that I began to wish for some of that loaves and fishes magic here at Decatur Cooperative Ministry.

During my tenure at DCM, the need for shelter, transitional housing, financial assistance and food has never been anything less than overwhelming. Soon after I started, a good friend sincerely asked of the shelter, "Is it ever full?" He was surprised when I told him it was full almost every night. That was during a booming economy. We are all keenly aware that the number of people who are truly in need is now much greater, and although we aren't able to accommodate walk-ins, there are routinely

desperate people standing outside the Project Take Charge door in the morning or coming to the administrative office in tears looking for a place to stay.



Beth Vann

My mind stayed with the loaves and fishes story throughout the Thanksgiving service, but my perspective began to shift. Gratitude crept in, and I began to think of the everyday magic we witness when we look for it. What happens at DCM on a daily basis may not be as dramatic as a Biblical story, but the depth, breadth, and quantity of services offered month after month, year after year, with a budget of only \$500,000 feels pretty miraculous. Our strategic planning process (see article on page 5) drove this idea home to me. As we researched and benchmarked our organization and programs against others, we discovered that, although there are excellent organizations doing similar work, few of our size offered the range of services we offer. Many that did offer a broad range had a budget at least two to three times greater than ours. The

tremendous in-kind and volunteer support DCM receives each month makes our array of services possible. This support, combined with generous financial donations and the goodwill of the community, adds up to much more than the sum of its parts – a sort of loaves and fishes effect.

I readily admit that DCM can learn important lessons from those organizations with bigger budgets. We must improve our fundraising efforts and garner more financial resources if we are to meet the changing needs of the community. In order to achieve the aggressive but realistic goals outlined in our strategic plan, DCM will be starting a food cooperative for low-income

residents, adding shelter staff, and increasing the number of transitional houses in the months and years ahead. This will require more in-kind donations, more volunteers, more staff, and more money.

As I think about the past year at DCM and the many years that preceded it (39 in all!), I am hopeful and optimistic that, although our finances are tight now, DCM and its families will continue to be blessed by the loaves and fishes effect. I am grateful for what each person or group brings to the table – whether time, talent, or treasure – and how it sustains our ministry and provides the hand up needed by the families we serve.

Staff Profile: Loretta Aqeel

What is your position at DCM?

I am the office administrator. I handle accounting and finances, as well as grant administration. I am also responsible for human resources (benefits, payroll, timesheets, and labor postings) and office operations such as purchasing and coordination of maintenance services and vendors.

What did you do before you joined DCM?

I've been in the nonprofit community for quite some time. I was employed at Pathways Community Network, Our Common Welfare (a substance abuse treatment/prevention agency), and Father Flanagan's Boys and



Loretta Aqeel

Girls Town, since relocating to Atlanta. Before that, I lived in New York and was employed at Family and Children's Association, Queens Child Guidance

Center and Mandell, Mandell & Okin, Esqs.

What do you like most about working at DCM?

The amount of community involvement with DCM. I am amazed at the amount of board and volunteer commitment.

Tell us something that your coworkers don't know about you.

I don't like to fly. I'd rather drive, take a train, walk, anything but fly. I'll do it if I have to (I have flown before) but I don't like it one bit.

What are your favorite books and movies?

I don't have a favorite book, but I love mysteries. Again, I don't have any one favorite movie but I love movies that make me laugh.

Who or what inspires you?

The goodness and compassion in people is what inspires me and helps me to counter the negativity that I see in the media and elsewhere.

DCM Approves New Strategic Plan

By Valerie J. Alexander, 2009 Board Chair

In May 2008, the Decatur Cooperative Ministry board of directors met to kick off an intense and productive process of strategic planning to determine the future direction of DCM over the next five years. A small number of board members and volunteers formed the Strategic Planning Committee, which was led by an independent consultant, Alice Savic.

Strategic planning involves three processes: 1) the situational analysis, 2) setting goals and objectives, and 3) strategic alignment (or implementing the plan).

The situational assessment or analysis provides strong groundwork and preparation for the more intensive task of establishing goals and objectives. In this early phase of the process, the DCM Strategic Planning Committee was divided into five teams. Each team was responsible for assessing the current climate of DCM within five areas: beneficiaries (clients), customers (donors), competition, internal drivers, and external drivers. Team members did this by conducting research, individual interviews, and secondary analyses of

previous organizational assessments. This helped us to keenly articulate and assess where we are as an organization, to examine our mission and vision, and subsequently, to rewrite our mission and vision statements. While the intent of DCM's mission and vision has not changed, the Strategic Planning Committee sought to develop statements that were shorter and more precise.

Setting DCM's goals and objectives was probably the most arduous of the strategic planning process. Seven goals were established, along with corresponding objectives, strategies, and measures. Our goals describe what we want to achieve over the next five years. Objectives quantitatively define our target of progress within a given timeframe. Strategies define how we will meet our objectives, and measures provide

7 Goals of the 2008 Strategic Plan

1. To prevent homelessness for households in DeKalb.
2. To lessen the impact and duration for those who find themselves homeless in our community.
3. To increase awareness of and support for all DCM programs and operations in our community.
4. To increase awareness of and knowledge about homelessness and its systemic causes and to advocate for policy changes in our community.
5. To ensure comprehensive written policies and procedures are in place to ensure effective, efficient delivery of services as well as financial accountability and sustainability.
6. To ensure that all facilities are adequate and safe to carry out client services and staffing functions.
7. To determine and maintain the appropriate level of human resources.

a quantitative method of evaluating whether the objectives are being met.

Strategic alignment is the final step in the process. A strategic plan cannot be successfully executed unless all board and staff members are given ownership of the plan. Therefore, a commitment to implement the plan was achieved by attaching accountability to each strategy. This process of establishing accountability ensures that the organization's daily operations are fully aligned with the long-range plan that has been

committed to paper.

The result of this strategic planning process is that DCM has a comprehensive and realistic plan for growth and continued success over the next five years, with short- and long-term goals. Overall, the strategic plan provides a long-range tool for directing and evaluating the work and vision of the Decatur Cooperative Ministry. DCM's staff and board of directors are excited about the plan, which received full board approval in November 2008.

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Many thanks to the following donors, who made contributions between August 11 and November 30, 2008.

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this holiday season.*

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