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Sr. Theresa Sullivan talks to Ocie, who she says always adds a spark to her day, at Daybreak Day Resource Center in Macon, Georgia. (Provided photo)



by Eleanor Nash

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Sr. Theresa Sullivan is the director of Daybreak Day Resource Center, a day shelter for people experiencing homelessness in Macon, Georgia. Sullivan, a Daughter of Charity and experienced health care administrator, came to Daybreak, which is a part of DePaul USA, in 2017. As director, she coordinates Daybreak's daily services, including hot breakfasts, showers and a medical clinic; arranges funding; and oversees the 25 volunteers who come each day.

Sullivan talked with Global Sisters Report in July about the value of volunteers, making a difference when the work is never done, and creating communities where each person has a home.

***GSR*: Why were you drawn to Daybreak?**

Sullivan: I grew up on the North Side of Chicago, and every Sunday during high school, I would go with the Daughters of Charity to the inner city and visit the poor at the nursing homes. It was a time when they decided people didn't have any mental illnesses, so they closed all these mental hospitals and the people were all out on the street. The nursing homes we went to had a lot of people with mental health issues who were homeless before. It was in going there that I really discerned my call.

It's kind of ironic that it was really people who had been homeless all their lives that ended up at this nursing home that really helped me discern my life. To be back here serving this population is a special gift.

What is your day-to-day like as director of Daybreak?

As director, the most important thing I do at Daybreak is loving the people. I invite them in so they feel and are part of our community. I would say the most important thing in my day is when I walk in the door to greet our people, to welcome them and to give them the sense that they belong.

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One of the things I'm really proud of is that Daybreak partners with religious organizations, businesses and individuals that come and support us in our mission. We have around 125 volunteers and 42 different houses of worship that support us.

This includes everybody from the synagogue to the mosque, the Baptists to the Catholics. Part of my day is networking with these people who are partnering with us to reach out to our brothers and sisters who are homeless.

Having those connections not only helps support Daybreak, but it helps draw everybody together as a community.

How have these organizations contributed to Daybreak?

On every Wednesday of the month, a different congregation or church commits to providing the volunteers for breakfast. Macon Housing Authority made a commitment to pay all their employees for four hours a month to do volunteer services. We have some of them come and help serve breakfast in the morning.

We've had different groups come and do classes for us. The Mercer University ethics class came, and each group of three students did different projects based on their gifts. We had a group of students put on a movie and popcorn for our people. Another group did dancing. One person had worked in a salon, so she did makeovers.



Sr. Theresa Sullivan, left, thanks Reverend Spencer for the meal his congregation provides at Daybreak Day Resource Center in Macon, Georgia, each month. (Provided photo)

I believe people in the United States want to do something about homelessness, but they don't know how. Daybreak is the community avenue where people can come together and share their gifts and work on solving the problem of homelessness.

The Daybreak participants are an integral part of keeping the center running smoothly. What is an example of a participant who has given back?

Kim is one of our participants, and one day, I asked her, "Kim, can you help with the dishes?" You would think that it's easy to do the dishes, but you need to know all the steps, wear gloves, put things away. Kim is really good at it, and she has become the captain of our kitchen. I'll say, "Kim, thank you for doing that," and she'll say, "Well, it's my job, Sister." She enjoys doing the dishes because she has purpose in life: being able to help serve and make Daybreak nice for our participants.

We need that. We need to look at the papal teaching on the dignity of work, on the church documents. Our participants have that sense of wanting, needing to give.

What about your job challenges you?

One of the biggest challenges is when we've worked all day and there's still so much more to be done. I close the center knowing people are going to sleep on our front porch. There are people who look at me and say, "Sister, you saved my life," and I still want more.



A hot breakfast, a warm room and a place to connect with others is a welcome sight for people at Daybreak Day Resource Center in Macon, Georgia. (Provided photo)

The hardest thing is knowing that on our streets every night, there are people who are homeless, and knowing that if our people had good mental health, they had access to medicine, access to health care, that some of their problems could be alleviated. That's the hardest part of my job.

When was a specific time you felt you made a difference?

This week has been so hot, and the people are so dehydrated. We are closed on the weekends, so we started putting out big coolers of water, and I drive in to refill the water. The people said, "Oh, my God, we would have died of thirst if you hadn't come."

It's simple things. I think I make a difference by looking people in their eyes and telling them that they are loved and cared for by God and they are a gift to our community. We start recognizing the dignity of each person.

Daybreak seems like a community effort.

Right, and it is. As a church, we need to come together as the people of God, and I think Daybreak is a good example of church. You walk into Daybreak, and you'll see people who are black and white and Hispanic. You'll see people who are Jewish and Catholic and Baptist, and you'll see people who are rich and people who are poor. We are all there as brothers and sisters sharing our gifts. Even our volunteers come from our congregations, businesses, individuals in the community. They also come from our participants, and our participants give back. The whole place is cleaned by our participants.

Together, we can make a difference. Together, we can be that light of Christ, and together, we can make sure there's room for everybody at the table. Everyone.

[Eleanor Nash is a student at Wellesley College in Wellesley, Massachusetts, studying English.]

This story appears in the **Homelessness** and **Sustainable Development Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth** feature series.