



## Blue Dress Breakfast 2017

*By Ned Delmore, Executive Director*

There you have a brief glimpse into Leah's life. Let me share with you a bit more. After 2 years of living in her car, parking it at night, never knowing what she would encounter in the dark she would rise in the morning, clean herself up and proceed to make phone calls for housing. She never wavered phoning daily for 2 years. We bring you good news today. Recently Leah found her home in Shoreline for herself and Rylan with some assistance from SVdP.

This is a young mother with a serious heart. I had the great privilege of spending time with Leah, learning that she came to SVdP through one of our volunteers and into case management.

As I listened, she revealed her truth and I could sense this fierce desire to live fully, longing to have her place with her son, where they could have a safe, predictable life together and maybe even watch cartoons on Saturday. It was clear her love for Rylan enabled her to survive.

She went on to share that she had found a community, a family at our SVdP Aurora store that held her up through her ordeal and how she existed while living in her car. As night came upon them she asked her friend if he would stay beside her and her son in his truck as they slept. He became her sentinel, her protector and over time SVdP became a bridge to her new life.

When you visit our neighbor like Leah on her turf—see her, say her name, a portal of trust begins to open and we are invited in.

This is the essential work of SVdP; "PROXIMITY", person to person, a rare immersion of personal presence that is our home visit. Our 800 volunteers form a collective community impact responding to over 50 parish neighborhoods throughout King County.

We go out in pairs, like my wife Janet and I, to see, listen and respond to the needs of our neighbors. Our home visit gives us the truest picture of one's life experience; it is where we engage some 37k, men, woman and children yearly.

We inherited this GIFT from the values and convictions of our founders. They taught us a radical love that honors and protects human dignity as a birthright for all of our neighbors. That you have to stick with love, it is the only answer.

You have all seen the streets of Seattle and beyond. It feels at times like the levees have been breached. And I'm not just talking about Pioneer Square. In South Seattle and King County alone, we received over 25k calls last year with the majority requesting rental assistance. I'm telling you, the view from ground level is arresting.

Poverty has no boundaries and SVdP keeps showing up on the front line in neighborhoods wherever we are called and we respond to thousands. We advocate with other partner agencies for the single mothers and our senior citizens who cannot stretch their limited dollars and are needing to pay the overdue electrical bill while worrying about the threat of eviction.

Think of the cascading effects of insufficient income, an unexpected health diagnosis, a job loss, an injury, a mental disorder that incapacitates. I bet all of you have seen or faced something similar in your lives. These are the folks we encounter daily in our home visits across this county.

Our Volunteer Vincentians are you and I. We are a diverse group with a common mission. We are teachers, parents, retirees and working moms and dads—even a few millennials—who visit 7 days a week fostering connections with our neighbors.

SVdP volunteers are often able to get assist our neighbors get ahead of the eviction and pay that extra rent of \$300 or \$400 dollars for the thousands of people teetering on the edge and preventing them from ending up in a shelter and homeless.

For a moment, think of the cost to taxpayers at \$50 thousand or more a year when someone is living on the streets. What is more cost effective? And more importantly, what is more humane?

St. Vincent de Paul believes that the best antidote to reducing homelessness is preventing people from becoming homeless.

On one level or another SVdP directly helped over 4000 families stay in their homes last year. Our aim is to prevent an additional 1000 woman, men and children from entering that slippery slope toward eviction with dollars raised today from your generosity. No one in this room wants to see another human being living on the streets.

SVdP needs you to stand with us as SENTINELS to ensure that our neighbors like Leah always have a home.

Thank you for coming together with SVdP today.