



A Season of Hope

After a long and lingering winter, the hesitant arrival of spring, and the culmination of Lent during Holy Week, we finally arrived at Easter Sunday and the Season of Hope it brings! This transition reminds us how necessary hope is to the people we serve – and how it’s often very difficult for them to find.

When our friends are struggling, when they can only see the darkness that surrounds them, when the prospect of taking steps toward something new and better seems daunting, C-U at Home is here to offer them hope. It’s a gift we’re given so that we can give it to others.

Hope can seem so abstract. But, with your help, we make it concrete. It may be as simple as a kind word offered during street outreach efforts or a reminder that we will be here when they need us. We also share hope by addressing very specific needs: creating a place for people to spend the afternoon, building shelter solutions with community partners, helping people get into substance-abuse programs, or supporting their transition into a job.

No matter their situation, we provide people with the opportunity to take the next step toward stability. It’s challenging work. Individuals make progress, stumble, regroup, and try again.

We embrace our friends no matter where they are on that journey and do our best to lighten their burden, provide opportunities to grow, and bring hope into their lives. Thank you for supporting us in this important work!

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C-U at Work/Prosperity Gardens Season 3: "Watch us Grow!"

Season 3 of our [C-U at Work](#) partnership with City of Champaign Township's [Prosperity Gardens](#) is up and going, and this year's crew of six dedicated "production assistants" has already logged nearly 500 hours of labor and laid the groundwork for a second production location!

The large new plot is located south of North Street between Walnut and Champaign. So far over 40 raised beds have been built there (with twice that number to come) to help supply a new "Community Supported Agriculture" project.

The long term plan, says Prosperity Gardens director **Nicole Musumeci**, is to offer "shares" in the program that will allow participants to receive a weekly order of fresh produce! This opportunity will come alongside the current "Mobile Market" program, which takes fresh produce out into the community, and the weekly produce stand at the Champaign Farmers Market.

Back at the original First Street location, activities have included the complete reconstruction of the fence and 18 existing raised beds and outfitting of nine other beds with new "low tunnel" coverings. More than 1000 seeds are already in the ground in the 25 raised beds at the First Street site.



Outreach coordinator **Steven Harper** (top center) oversees the work program on our end. He calls this year's work crew "a really outstanding group" who are excited about the opportunity. Production assistants work up to 20 hours per week, earning a wage and gaining skills that will help them progress in their journey toward independence.

Go to our [website](#) to learn more about the C-U at Work program and access local media coverage of the program's first two seasons.





Meet our Staff



Over the past year, there have been a lot of changes and additions to our staff as we increase our capacity to provide more “wrap around” services to our friends without an address. This issue seemed like a good opportunity to introduce the people who make up the “heart and soul” of all we do! In keeping with our “Season of Hope” theme, we also asked a few of them to share a “message of hope” related to their work. We’ll start with the longest serving staff member and work our way to the newest.



Steven Harper (Housing and Outreach Coordinator). With 4 years of service, Steven is our “seasoned veteran.” He oversees our Transitional Housing, leads our street outreach efforts, and helps with our C-U at Work program.

"My HOPE is that I may be able to help offer a gift of life that was freely given to me."

Russell Mann (Phoenix Assistant). Russ has been on staff since 2019, but his tenure as a volunteer goes back to near the beginning of the ministry. He oversaw the renovations at the original Phoenix Center and continues to serve here in its third iteration.



"I find HOPE in transformed lives and seeing people housed."



Susan McKee (Administrative Associate). Susan started shortly after Russ and is also in her third year of taking care of the day-to-day details around here. From HR to data entry to purchasing supplies and so much more, Susan is our all-round “utility woman.”

Chloe Hanson (Shelter Coordinator). Now in her second year, no one has worn as many hats as Chloe! From Operations Associate to Women’s Shelter Coordinator, Chloe now oversees all shelter operations. Her versatility and willingness to serve are a big asset.



Rick Williams (Ministry Development Associate). Rick and Chloe started on the same day and have each grown with the organization. Rick’s world is all “words, numbers, names”: communications and media relations, data compilation, and donor management.

Cedar King (Case Manager). In his first year, Cedar has brought a much-needed social service support element to our staff. He does most of our program intakes, meets with clients, and assists our friends with whatever they need along the path to progress.



Cheryl Lehman (Phoenix Coordinator). Cheryl is also in the midst of a successful first year overseeing our Phoenix Daytime Center. She’s expanded programming and services, assists with intakes, oversees our volunteer corps, and is a favorite hand at the card table!

"I love providing a place for people to get together and encourage one another in HOPE."

Meet our Staff (continued)



Melissa Courtwright (Executive Director). Melissa joined us last November and has already made a big impact as a leader, colleague, and collaborator. Her vision for organizational growth, service enhancement, and staff development promises a bright future for C-U at Home.

Victoria Costello (Case Manager). Victoria came on board last December to oversee our low-barrier emergency winter shelter operations. She will join us as a case manager following the closure of those temporary shelters, greatly expanding our capacity for supportive services.



Cory Shoemaker (Facilities Assistant). Formerly one of our Men's Shelter night staff, Cory is taking on a new role helping with facilities needs and filling in at the Phoenix as needed. He also is part of this season's C-U at Work crew. *(see night shelter staff on next page . . .)*

Meeting the Demand for Emergency Winter Shelters

At the end of last December, in collaboration with five local funding partners and two churches, we opened two low barrier emergency winter shelters in downtown Champaign to meet the needs of those who would otherwise be on the streets during the harsh winter months.

Little did we know just how great that need was! Over 16 weeks of operation, the shelters were utilized by over 150 different people. Nearly 2,500 total beds (individuals x night of stay) were provided during that time. These temporary shelters closed after the night of Friday, April 15.

"We are so grateful to C-U at Home, New Covenant, and First United Methodist Church as providers, and the cities, county, and Cunningham Township as funders, for stepping to up ensure everyone has a warm place to sleep over winter," said Cunningham Township's **Danielle Chynoweth**, chair of the emergency shelter steering committee.

Joining C-U at Home to fund the emergency winter shelters were the City of Champaign, the City of Urbana, Cunningham Township, the Champaign County Board, and the Champaign County Regional Planning Commission.



First Presbyterian Church and New Covenant Fellowship, two downtown churches with a history of supporting homeless sheltering, provided the space for the shelters.

"C-U at Home has been proud to be part of a community effort that has allowed us to serve the most vulnerable homeless this winter," said C-U at Home executive director **Melissa Courtwright**. She also praised our "wonderful staff [who] have been the heart and soul of this endeavor."

Melissa also noted that homelessness doesn't stop being a real concern just because the coldest months of the year are over. C-U at Home's existing year-round men's and women's shelters will continue to operate, but they have limited capacity (48 men, 14 women).

"The need to serve this vulnerable community continues throughout the year. Extremely cold weather is a challenge, but it is only one of the many challenges our clients face."

A Message from Melissa

Hope is a word we use often here at C-U at Home, but it is not a word we take lightly. Hope is more than just wishing for a different or better circumstance. Hope has a special meaning and deep roots in our organization.

Wikipedia tells us that as a verb, hope means, “expect with confidence.” As Christians we didn’t need Wikipedia to find the meaning of hope. Hebrews 11:1 tells us that our “faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”

There is a confidence in our hope that is strong, transcending our place in time. When we talk about hope, we refer to a confident future. We talk about waiting to see the life changes taking place in ourselves and in the clients we serve. We wait in faith and hopeful confidence.

If you haven’t already partnered with us in our mission of HOPE, please consider joining us in prayer for those we serve, helping us as a volunteer, or investing financially in our work. All these expressions of support inspire our confidence as we hopefully wait on the unseen to become certainty!

All the Best,
Melissa Courtwright
Executive Director



Austin's Place staff (l-r) Chloe Hanson, Torie Thoman, Kari Grady, Alley Billman, Allison Williford-Burgund.

I try to “bring hope” by providing a “come as you are” atmosphere in the shelter that allows our guests to grow and heal in ways to better their situation and life without judgement.

Kari Grady

Photos of our Men's Shelter staff are hard to come by, but these guys still deserve a "shout out" for their commitment and compassion to serve! **Don Gerard**, **Seve Day**, **D'Angelo Earley**, and **Demarius Wooten** burn the midnight oil to provide a safe and secure night's rest for all.

The newest member of our shelter staff fills in wherever she's needed. **Katlin Crane** has been with us just over a month, and she's been a great addition to a solid team on the night shift!



Our Spring Intern, Susan Schultz from Gibson City, will complete her M.Div degree at Asbury Seminary this semester. She's been a big help and a huge blessing here at our Phoenix Center each week, and we wish her God's best!