



“The people who walk in darkness  
have seen a great light.”

- Isaiah 9:2

December 2020

Dear Friends and Benefactors,

One day in March, the dark cloud of the COVID pandemic descended upon our world. Life as we knew it was drastically changed overnight. Visits to newborn grandchildren and our elderly relatives became taboo. A simple trip to the grocery store was filled with apprehension. Fear became our constant companion in the simplest tasks of daily life.

Thea Bowman House staff quickly learned that we are essential workers because we needed to remain open to parents who scrambled for child care. They needed to get to their jobs in nursing homes, hospitals, and grocery stores. It didn't take us long to learn to expect change at a moment's notice. Flexibility became the order of the day. Now this crisis has followed us into the holiday season as we await the hope of a vaccine next year.

Resilient children like Sara and her brother Sam don their masks each morning as they arrive with Chromebooks in hand. They are ready for another day of seeing their teachers on-line. They miss their friends and they long for the day when we will be able to hug each other again. The littlest toddlers and pre-schoolers, like Sophia and Rafael, seem to go with the flow as long as they get to play with their favorite toys and have full tummies. Family income takes a hit when mandatory quarantines close down workplaces due to a positive test. There were close to 350 children registered at Thea Bowman House in March 2020 and each of their lives has been touched by the pandemic.

Shadows block the sunlight for parents like Maria who works mandatory overtime in a nursing home and has limited time with her children. They are ever present in our courtyard as food pantry lines show a rise in numbers of the homeless, mentally ill, and newly unemployed. One food pantry guest, Al, shuffles into the pantry wearing shoes that are duct taped together. He struggles to walk home with his bag of groceries. Jasmine looks for food assistance since her work hours have been cut from 40 to 10 hours a week making it next to impossible to feed and clothe her four children. Todd fights the lingering side effects of COVID infection.

So many songs and scripture readings focus on our call to be light in the darkness. In our community we are blessed with so many examples of those who have lived that call. Earl Cunningham and Diana O'Looney both died during this past year. Their contributions to the education of less fortunate children will continue to illuminate the lives that they have touched for years to come. They were part of an army of volunteers who have helped improve reading scores, assisted refugee children learning English, and made a college education possible for many.

We are humbled to be part of the stories of our alumni who are doing incredible things. They have gone into medical professions, engineering, social work, education, and a host of other professions that are building up a world in need. We are hoping this year to launch an alumni page on our website so that you can meet them. We also realize the need to reach out in a spirit of *agape*, unconditional love, to our children who have not done as well and who still struggle to find the light within.

Local churches of all denominations, civic organizations, and individuals continue to provide food, clothing and monetary support all year round. So many of you, our benefactors, help dissipate the dark clouds of poverty, hunger and despair through your contributions. Each year we ask you to consider a donation to our annual holiday appeal. If you have already given, we thank you and we look forward to a 2021 filled with hope and some very bright light.

Gratefully,

Jane Domingue and the Staff and Children of Thea Bowman House

## Our 2020 Service Statistics

We usually use this section of our Christmas and holiday mailing to report the number of persons served in each of our programs. It has been an erratic year for most not-for-profit organizations. Many have had to close or go remote but child care is definitely a hands-on business. So is the food pantry and used clothing shop.

### Pre-K

We have adapted our Universal Pre-k program to the hybrid model. We have 150 children enrolled. 75 of them come on Mondays and Tuesdays. We clean and plan all day Wednesday. 75 more come on Thursdays and Fridays.

### Licensed Child Care

Both of our sites are open and receiving children. FLEXIBILITY is the key word. We try to make every accommodation so that parents can get to their jobs. Close to 90% of these are working in hospitals, nursing homes or essential food services. Since schools have gone to virtual learning, we have children who would normally be in school with us all day. We have adapted our program to provide child care for them while they are doing on-line assignments. Health Department regulations require smaller class sizes. This has required that we hire more staff members to comply with mandates.

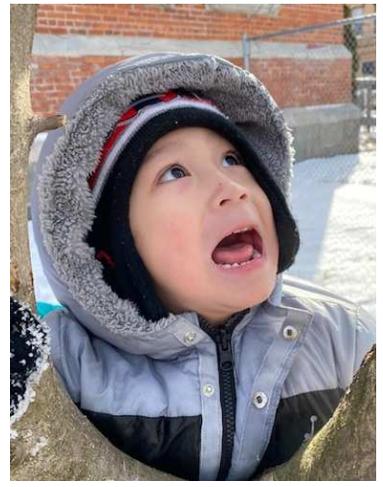
### Food Pantry and Clothing Shop

This program continues to provide food for people in need on Monday, Wednesday and Friday of each week. Food boxes are given to guests at the door to prevent COVID exposure and clothing needs are met by appointment only.



## Earl (the Pearl) Cunningham

Each weekday afternoon, Sara and Earl would arrive to tutor and mentor the children at Thea Bowman House. Sara would delight the kindergarteners and first graders with her piano playing, and how she loved to read with them! Earl (lovingly called her pearl) would tackle math and science with the formidable junior high kids. Earl died just a few weeks ago on November 21, 2020. Earl seemed to instinctively know which children really needed a mentor in their lives and he was there for them. He considered them as his own family. When Earl became Sara's primary caregiver after she developed Alzheimer's disease, he could no longer be physically present to the children. He wanted to make sure that alumni of Thea Bowman House programs could have the opportunity to go to college. He established the Cunningham Scholarship Fund at the Community Foundation of Herkimer and Oneida Counties. The two latest awards were made just days before Earl's death. We often speak of *agape*, or unconditional love, as our founding principle. Earl lived it every day of his life.



# Thank You for Your Support!



## Programs & Services

### Pre-School Day Care:

Licensed child care for children ages 18 months through five years, all day throughout the year. Transportation and meals are provided. Capacity: 75

### After School Program:

A structured program for school age children, including tutoring, gym, creative development and field trips. Transportation is provided. Capacity: 100

### Universal Pre-K:

NYS certified teachers provide a half-day program through the Utica City School District to help prepare children for kindergarten. Capacity: 150

### Kids With Promise:

A structured program for youth ages 12-18, completely free of charge, promotes social- and self-responsibility and offers academic support. Capacity: 40

### St. Clare's Cupboard & Cleophas' Closet:

Emergency food pantry and secondhand clothing shop, all provided free of charge to anyone in need. Provides food packages of three meals a day for three days.

### Peace Garden:

A garden in memory of children who have lost their lives to violence and a memorial reminding us that peace begins with each person and is shared with those around us.

### Movin' On Up:

Child care assistance for single parents seeking higher education in post-secondary school.



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