

# ONWARD Update

*Fall 2014*

## We Made a Historic Move!

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Executive Director

Onward Neighborhood House has left the only home we've known since 1868. At the end of September, we closed our location in West Town and moved permanently to Chicago's Belmont Cragin neighborhood, where we've had a center since 2008.

Onward House was founded to serve the working class immigrants in West Town and now, with rising housing costs, those working class immigrants have moved west. As we are adapting to the changes in the community, we must follow in their footsteps to ensure that our services reach those who need us most.

During our strategic planning process, the board identified that the demand was in Belmont Cragin and the number of families served in West Town had reduced to a level that was manageable to transition. Our goal

was to reduce the impact on fewer people and determined that this was the right time. This gave us the opportunity to utilize our financial and non-financial resources in a more effective way to serve those most in need.

When programs at West Town closed in August, Special Projects Manager Darica Charles took charge and mobilized staff and volunteers. Imagine sorting, packing, shipping, donating and distributing decades of history spanning three floors and seven classrooms over six weeks. Darica gave countless books, supplies and furniture to our partnership sites to enrich the program offerings at those locations. She was instrumental in ensuring a smooth transition to Belmont Cragin as well as unpacking and organizing the new space.

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*Our new building just steps from our current Belmont Cragin center*



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We have purchased a second building adding 9,735 square feet of administrative and programming space just steps from our current Belmont Cragin center.

**Good news!**

**Nothing has changed for you.**

You can still reach us by phone at 312.666.6726 or fax at 312.666.6735.

Our new administrative offices are located at 5413 W. Diversey Ave.  
Chicago, IL 60639.

*Ms. Jane Cobel, Onward House receptionist, packs boxes at West Town*



## News from the Executive Director

***“Progress is impossible without change.”***

***– George Bernard Shaw***

Dear Friends,

This year at Onward Neighborhood House has been a time of high emotions and great change. We've experienced everything from sadness to excitement due to some very big transitions.

In September, we made a difficult, but significant move. Based on the decision of our board of directors and in accordance with our strategic plan, we closed and sold our West Town location and started to expand our operations in Belmont Cragin. Prior to the move, I had a chance to call our supporters to discuss the big changes, and they all were very understanding and supportive of the decision.

While it was sad to announce the news to the families at West Town, they understood our plans for the future and our staff made sure to transition them to similar programs in the community. Staff also transitioned; some employees found other employment, some went back to school and others moved with us to Belmont Cragin.

The move gave us an opportunity to reflect and see the impression we have made in Chicago. During the transition, I was able to meet with Emil Sabatino and Ken Hondrich, two previous Onward House Executive Directors who worked here from the 1960s to the 1980s. They came to see the West Town center one last time and I had a chance to listen to many stories from both of them. They reminisced about the work that they'd done and it reminded me of the impact Onward House has had on the lives of thousands of people over the decades.

While our red brick building on Leavitt Street in West Town may not have been on Chicago's register of historic places, it was a landmark to the many children, families and staff that walked through its doors over the years. It served as a beacon of hope for immigrants needing a helping hand, community members needing food and children needing education. With our expanded services in Belmont Cragin, we hope to be just as bright of a beacon in this community for decades to come.

Change is never easy, but it was made a lot smoother through the tireless effort and dedication of our staff. I am so grateful for all of the staff at West Town who stayed with us until the very end helping families and each other to make the transition.

I wanted to extend a special thanks to two new funders: the Tampico Foundation and the Paul M. Angell Foundation. I also welcome a new grant from The Field Foundation of Illinois, Inc.

I hope to see many of you this holiday season, as well as at our 2015 **Night of Bright Futures Gala on February 21, 2015 at the Trump International Hotel & Tower Chicago!**

Sincerely,

Mario F. Garcia

# Belmont Cragin Food Pantry Now Open!



*Pastor Jeremy McLeod of St. Peter's Church, loads food into the refrigerator*



*One of several volunteers helping a family with the food selection*

In collaboration with St. Peter's Church and the Greater Chicago Food Depository, Onward Neighborhood House opened a client-choice food pantry in the Belmont Cragin neighborhood on August 14th. Due to space restrictions, St. Peter's Church, across the street from our center, houses the food pantry while Onward House operates the pantry.

Since opening, the client-choice food pantry has served 250 individuals in need – and it is growing every week. On opening day, with minimal outreach, the pantry served 36 individuals with as many as 65 in the following weeks; considerably larger than those served at our former West Town food pantry. We anticipate demand to continue to be significant and hope to increase the availability of the food pantry to twice a week in the future.

In Belmont Cragin, 15,800 individuals or 20.3 percent of the neighborhood are food insecure, which means they do not have healthy food to feed themselves and their families. According to the

Greater Chicago Food Depository, there is not another food pantry located within a 1.5 mile radius and they were happy to see one centrally located in the community.

The food pantry is client-choice, which means participants are able to select items from different food stations and shop as if they are at a supermarket using shopping carts donated by Roundy's Supermarkets, Inc. Each food station is different and may include canned fruits and vegetables, dairy, frozen meat or bread. In the past few weeks, we have also received donations of fresh vegetables from the Northwest Food Partners Network of which Onward House is a member.

"It is good for the community," Food Pantry Coordinator Leticia Gonzalez said. "I see people from last month coming back to us. People come in and say, "Thank you so much, I need this." One participant who received food on opening day of the pantry has referred her neighbor and now volunteers periodically.



*A child waits while her mother is registering for food*

**Check us out online to stay updated on the latest news:**

**Facebook:**

[www.facebook.com/onward-house](http://www.facebook.com/onward-house)

**Twitter:**

[www.twitter.com/onwardhouse](http://www.twitter.com/onwardhouse)

**Website:**

[www.onwardhouse.org](http://www.onwardhouse.org)



5413 W. Diversey Avenue  
Chicago, IL 60639

## New Adult Education Coordinator has Big Plans

Please welcome Santia M. Lopez as Onward Neighborhood House's new Adult Education Coordinator.

Santia said she is striving to make Onward House a central location for adult education services in Belmont Cragin – and she's setting some big goals for the Adult Education Program.

"Adult education is important because not knowing the language can impact people in such simple ways such as being unable to speak with a clerk at a grocery store and you see how it impacts their lives. It can also lead to larger issues, like unemployment or underemployment. The importance of learning English and continuing education can benefit the individual as well as their families in many ways," Santia said.

In addition to expanding English as a Second Language (ESL) and plans to bring GED classes, Santia wants to provide an all-access center for adults. The goals for the expanded and enhanced Adult Education Program would not only include traditional ESL and GED classes, but would be coupled with supportive services; job readiness, financial literacy workshops and bridge programs to higher education are a few supportive services we plan to offer to help participants achieve their personal and professional goals.

Santia is teaching people how to write a resume and cover letter, and helping them with interview skills. "If a person has never held a job, I want to help them; For example, if a homemaker goes for an interview and an employer asks for her job history, she can say, 'I managed a budget for a family of four for 15 years.' That is a marketable skill."

In mid-October, a man visited the Community Computer Resource Center and asked assistance in

finding a job. Santia asked if he had a resume, but he was unaware of this basic necessity often needed for employment.

Santia was able to sit with him one-on-one that afternoon and guide him while he created his very first resume and cover letter. She then directed him to an online job search engine, taught him how to use it and together found multiple opportunities he was qualified for. After selecting a job of interest, Santia assisted him in applying for it and helped him fax his cover letter and resume for consideration from Onward House that same day. Within a week, the gentleman's wife called thanking Santia for her guidance and told her that with her assistance her husband was offered that job.

In one afternoon, this is the impact that Onward House has made on one man's life and what we strive for with each individual who walks through our doors. If you're interested in supporting the Adult Education Program, please make a note when completing the enclosed donation form.



*Santia assisting a participant with job readiness services*

## Don't Miss the 2015 Gala at Trump International Hotel & Tower Chicago!

Want to enjoy a night out with friends with amazing views of downtown Chicago and the Chicago River?

Please join us for the  
**9th Annual Night of  
Bright Futures Gala!**

This year's gala will be held at the  
**Trump International  
Hotel & Tower Chicago**

on

**Saturday, February 21, 2015!**

For more information, please  
contact **Melissa Tracy** at  
**312.666.6726.**

