

Hope Inside



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Remembering Gathering Place Administrator, Michael Ryan



Michael preparing an evening meal in the Gathering Place kitchen

A man whose caring and compassionate spirit will live on at The Gathering Place, and in all our hearts

If you have ever volunteered at, or have been otherwise involved with The Gathering Place over the past 11 years, you knew Michael Ryan. You knew that you were to arrive to serve not a second before or after 4:45. You knew the exact amount of barbeque beans to scoop onto a tray – that “seconds” of said beans would be offered promptly at 5:30. You knew that every day it was Michael’s personal goal to get the kitchen temperature hotter than the previous day; you’d smile to yourself as he checked the thermometer. You knew a man who didn’t

speak many words, but one who wore his heart on his sleeve. You knew a man who believed deeply in the work of The Gathering Place, who lived his life to serve others – not for personal gain, not for pride, but because it was just a part of his being. And likely, you are a changed person for having known him.

Michael Ryan passed away on June 22nd, 2016 after an 18-year battle with cancer – a loss that has been felt by so many. Even from a young age, Michael was passionate about serving others. At the age of 24, he became the youngest Nursing Home Administrator in the state of Nebraska.

But most of you remember Michael for his service to The Gathering Place... for the care he showed to each and every individual who depended upon the soup kitchen each night for a hot evening meal. You could tell that Gathering Place guests sensed this care – a feeling many likely had never experienced in their lives otherwise. Some would even express to Michael what he and his service meant to them. A young woman who found herself at The Gathering Place for the first time a couple years ago, for example, wrote him a note of thanks on a napkin. *Today was the first*

home-cooked meal I've had in a long time, the note read, I mentioned that to the only familiar face I knew and the thought made me cry. Why am I 25 years old, homeless, and cold looking for a place to call home? But then as I looked around me, and I looked at you, and I didn't feel so alone anymore. I guess that's why it's called The Gathering Place.

Indeed, Michael made The Gathering Place feel like something more than a soup kitchen – he made it feel like a home. Guests felt it, and all those who assisted with meal service felt it, too. In 2014, long-time Gathering Place volunteer, Maggie Stuckey,

nominated The Gathering Place for a national competition sponsored by Scrubbing Bubbles® that would allow for the soup kitchen to get a deep clean – to make it feel even more like a home for guests. You probably remember voting for The Gathering Place to win this competition repeatedly as well as the excitement that followed when you learned that all your votes paid off. “I nominated The Gathering Place for this competition for several reasons, but mainly because I was so inspired by Michael,” said Stuckey. “He created such a welcoming environment for

Michael made The Gathering Place feel like something more than a soup kitchen – he made it feel like a home.

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Autumn is quickly approaching

In the coming chilly months, your continued support will be crucial in keeping families safe, warm, and comforted

Greetings, Friend –
As I write this note to you today, I am in disbelief that it is already September. Children recently went back to school, football season has started, and the days are gradually getting shorter – the air cooler. While autumn is a season loved by many, it can be a difficult time of year for those living in poverty. It is during this time of year that it is especially important to keep our homes heated and our stomachs full, but for many in our community, meeting these basic needs can often be a struggle.

Made possible with the support of donors like you, Community Action is able to prevent crisis for those who walk through our doors fearful for their safety and health. In the month of November – just two short months away – you will receive information about the opportunity to contribute to two campaigns that will help families in our community stay safe, warm, and comforted during the coming chilly months: one for The Gathering Place, which will help to keep pace with demand for hot evening meals; and our annual *Gift of Warmth Campaign*, which will help to keep families facing crisis safe and warm in their homes. Your continued support of these efforts truly makes a difference for families who are struggling.

On another note, I am proud to say that as of September

13th, we have raised 79% of our Soaring to Success Campaign goal! Funds from this campaign are helping us to open our two new early childhood education centers in Lincoln and allow our Head Start programs to continue to expand.

I am thankful to live and work in this community; friends like you – who demonstrate continued care for those who are struggling – make the difference.

With gratitude,



Vi See
Executive Director

P.S. Hope to see you at the tailgate event we are holding in honor of Michael Ryan on October 5th. See the invite in this letter for details!

The most joyful noise

Your gift gave Luis a voice

At three years old, Luis had never spoken a single word. It was something that kept his mom, Sara, up at night – she felt lost, uncertain, and scared. After all, this was not the case with her two older children. She knew something was wrong. Why couldn't her son say "yes" and "no" and "mom" and "what are you doing?" like her other children had well before they were three? Why would he cry when he wanted something instead of just asking her? These were the questions that plagued Sara's mind on a daily basis. She loved her son more than anything in the world. She wanted to be able to help him; she just didn't know how.

Thanks to the support of donors like you, Luis and Sara were able to enroll in our Early Head Start Home-based program, where they began to receive professional support and guidance to work through the delays Luis was experiencing. It was determined that Luis had Autism. While this diagnosis was hard for Sara at first, she was relieved to know what was wrong. With support from their Early Head Start Family Educator, Sara began conducting activities with Luis that were individualized to his developmental needs. They'd sing. They'd read. They'd write. They worked non-stop, and every day Sara hoped for just one thing: for her son to speak his first word.

And then.

During a home visit a few weeks ago, Sara took out a big sheet of paper. In big letters she began to write: A, B, C... Luis watched as she wrote each letter. And what happened next stunned the whole family. "Beeeee," Luis's little voice spoke, "Ceeeee."

From the kitchen, Luis's father and aunt – their eyes as big as saucers – bolted to the dining room table where Luis sat, saying his first words. His mother dropped the crayon she was writing with and gasped as tears pooled in her eyes. Her baby had spoken his first words. He recognized the letters she was writing. He was going to be okay.

Luis continues to make progress as his mother, family, and Early Head Start staff support his development. Without you, this simply would not be possible. Thank you for investing in children like Luis and his family.



Volunteer/Donor Spotlight: Susan Simon and First Plymouth Congregational Church

Susan Simon, member of First Plymouth Congregational Church, has been regularly volunteering at and coordinating volunteer groups to serve at The Gathering Place since the early 2000s. We recently sat down with her to learn more about her experience volunteering over the years, and why giving back in this way is important to her.

Q: Why is giving back to The Gathering Place important to you?

A: It was the right thing for me to do and I could give back to others. The Gathering Place is important to me because it is something I am very passionate about and I know how important it is to support people who are less fortunate or in need of a meal.

Q: What is one of your most memorable moments while serving at The Gathering Place?

A: My most memorable moment was serving on Christmas Eve three years ago

with my family and another volunteer and his family. We not only served a meal, we also handed out mittens and hats, personal care items, and 100 bags of treats that I put together for each person (filled with oranges, peanuts, candy canes, and chocolate). That was also the last Christmas Eve that I spent with my mother; she passed away the following spring.

Q: What about The Gathering Place is special to you?

A: All of the people. The volunteers from First Plymouth that help each month. And all the folks who come for a meal. I have learned so much about people and the goodness within all of us.

Q: You have been volunteering at The Gathering Place for many years. How have you seen it change? Are there differences you notice between the people who came 10 years ago versus now?

A: I can't really remember what it was like in the beginning, but do know that Michael Ryan had a lot to do with making The Gathering Place the well-operated place is today. The

biggest difference I have noticed over the year is an increase in younger people who come in for meals, young men and women in their 20s. This is something I am concerned about as it seems like so many young people are struggling.

Q: What would you say to someone to ask them to help out at The Gathering Place like you do?

A: At First Plymouth, I have several new volunteers and I simply asked them to help out because the rewards are great. It's always better serving and taking care of others rather than focusing on yourself. I have a wonderful group of volunteers from First Plymouth who give their time, donate, and do so many other tasks. I am so lucky to know and serve all of them.

We are so thankful for Susan and all of you for donating your time and resources to further the mission of The Gathering Place. If you are interested in learning more about how you can volunteer, please contact Volunteer Resources Coordinator, Georgann Roth, at (402) 875-9320 or groth@communityactionatwork.org.



Susan Simon (right) with Gathering Place Coordinator, John Brown

Susan (left) and First Plymouth volunteer group on August 23rd



When their home was destroyed in a fire, the Wilson family was left with nothing

Your gift helped them find a new beginning

The picture of your wedding day that hangs upon the living room wall. The finger painting on your fridge that your son brought home from his first day at pre-school. The bed you go to sleep in every night – the pillow that conforms perfectly to your head... where all your troubles of the day melt

away; where you feel safe and comforted. These are some of the possessions in your home that you might describe as among the most important and treasured.

It's hard to imagine all of it being gone in an instant, but a few months ago this is exactly what happened to the Wilson family. When their apartment building caught fire – by no fault of their own – they were told everything was destroyed

and they could not return to their home. As you can imagine, this news was devastating. And although the family had always been able to make ends-meet, they did not have the savings to put a deposit on a new place. With nowhere else to turn, the family had no other choice but to live in their van – nothing but their hope for a better tomorrow to keep them comforted.

Thanks to the financial



support of donors like you, we were able to provide the Wilsons with the emergency financial assistance they needed to secure stable housing once again. Though what they lost will never be replaced, the Wilsons are thankful for the opportunity to begin again – to create a new place to call “home”.

Remembering Michael Ryan

(continued)

the people who came in for meals, and you could just tell that it was so appreciated. He forever impacted my life, and I know so many others feel the same.”

The pain of Michael’s loss has been and will continue to be felt by the entire community. He will never be replaced, but as we continue meal service at The Gathering Place, his spirit will always remain. On October 5th, joined by the Ryan family,



From left: Scrubbing Bubbles Associate, Michael Ryan, and Maggie Stuckey; May 2014

we will be hosting a tailgate event at The Gathering Place in Michael’s honor. We hope to see you there as we pay tribute to a truly remarkable life.




Celebrating 10 years

Did you know that Community Action has been providing language translation and interpretation services through LanguageLinc, L.L.C. over the past 10 years?

What started out as a grant program through Community Action, LanguageLinc is its own independent L.L.C. that provides interpretation and translation services in over 30 languages. Not only does LanguageLinc help to remove language barriers in medical, legal, law enforcement, and other contexts, it provides job opportunities to those who are new to the United States and speak two or more languages. And all profits generated from LanguageLinc are invested back into Community Action’s poverty-fighting programs and services. It’s a win-win-win!

Congratulations to LanguageLinc on 10 years of connecting services with communities. For more information, visit: <http://www.languageinc.com/languageinc/>



YOU'RE INVITED!

Michael loved his family. He loved The Gathering Place. And he LOVED Nebraska football! Please join the Ryan family and Community Action for a tailgate event to honor Michael.

When: Wednesday, October 5th, 2016; Dinner from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00, program at 5:45 p.m.

Where: The Gathering Place – 1448 E Street, Lincoln, NE 68508 (street parking available; overflow parking at McPhee Elementary School (820 Goodhue Blvd. Lincoln, NE 68508)

This is a great opportunity to share your condolences and remembrance of Michael with the Ryan family. Please RSVP to info@communityactionatwork.org or (402) 875-9338 by September 26th.

YES, I want to help empower people living in poverty to reach economic stability.

Please accept my gift of \$ _____

Your donation will go toward supporting:

- Feeding those who are hungry at The Gathering Place
- Preparing children for success in school
- Keeping families safe and warm in their homes
- Helping families learn financial skills/save for a home, post-secondary education, or small business start-up

I would like to designate my gift to the following program _____ (e.g. The Gathering Place, Head Start)

My name _____

Company _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone _____

Email _____

May we publish your name? Yes No

If so, how would you like your name(s) to appear? _____

Payment Options:

Check payable to *Community Action*

Credit Card: Visa MasterCard Discover

Account # _____

Exp. Date (mo/yr) _____ Security Code _____

Signature _____ Date _____

For more information contact:

Heather Loughman, *Development Manager* | (402) 875-9339
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