

VOLUNTEER CONNECTION

Jan Schwarze: the “sign me up” volunteer, supporting UMD for over a decade

Jan Schwarze remembers January 2003 clearly. That was when she retired as an elementary school music teacher and could finally raise her hand at church when they asked for volunteers to serve at UMD. “Sign me up!” she said. Since then, Jan has given selflessly of her time to help her homeless and very poor neighbors.

Jan started by bagging food in the Food Pantry. She then worked in the Clothing Closet, which she liked better because she had more client contact. Wanting to do more, Jan was “promoted” to intake and has since done that job more than 200 times every Tuesday and Thursday morning.

During her shift, Jan plus one other volunteer help 26 families plus 5 UMD shelter residents, speaking with each to assess their needs. In her experience, “most people are wonderful and your heart goes out to them.” She always finishes her interview by asking, “Is there anything in particular you need today?” And if UMD has it, Jan does whatever she can to get it for them.

When asked what UMD gives her, Jan replied, “When I go home, I mostly feel like I have helped people, and most are so grateful.” But sometimes she has the difficult experience of meeting people UMD isn't in a position to help, such as a mom whose space heaters unexpectedly ran up a \$1000 electric bill she couldn't pay.

Jan serves with her faith community—Parkwood United Methodist Church, a Protestant Christian congregation. Parkwood serves breakfast several times a year in UMD's Community Café; they conduct a food drive called “Christmas in July.” Jan says it's because in the summer, she sees the Food Pantry shelves are almost empty when the kids are out of school and families have an even greater need with no free or reduced breakfast and lunch. Jan eagerly continues, “And the women do an annual underwear drive, AND a hat/gloves/scarves drive.” Jan's personal mission is to get donations of paper products—toilet paper, paper towels, tissues.

Though UMD is non-sectarian and serves neighbors in a non-religious way, Jan is one of many volunteers from a broad range of faith traditions who consider their service at UMD a part of their spiritual lives. Jan reflects: “I have been so very blessed in my life, and Urban Ministries is my way of giving back. I take seriously the biblical command to care for the needy and feed God's lambs. Each time I serve at UM I also serve the Lord.”



Jan and her husband, Herb, have 3 sons, 3 wonderful daughters-in-law, 7 grandsons and 2 granddaughters.

