

## NEWS

# ALCW New Start program offers just that

*New kitchen kits make a real difference for families trying to establish a new home*

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A set of pots and pans. A microwave oven. Plates, glasses and flatware.

These items are essential in any kitchen. And for some 150 families moving into a new home last year, these items and more were provided by Assistance League Chicagoland West's New Start program.

"People have a right to live in a decent home with decent tools," said Sandra Ver Beek of Clarendon Hills, who has co-chaired the program for the past four years with Mary Kay Shukis. "It gives them the chance to

live with some dignity. The kitchen is the heart of the home, whether you live in a large home or a modest home."

ALCW works with a variety of partner agencies to help families and single parents transition from situations like homelessness or domestic violence into a new living space. The program serves families from Berwyn to Downers Grove, said Chris Hotchkin of Downers Grove, ALCW's vice president of philanthropy.

"I think it fits with our mission really, really well because our mission is to support families in the community," Hotchkin said. "It

also really fits in with the hands-on nature of our philanthropy. These women come in and pack the kitchens themselves. They go to Walmart and buy microwaves and haul them in here."

That very fact is what attracted Shukis, a Western Springs resident, to the program.

"I was interested in New Start because I used to be a buyer and executive at Marshall Field's and there is a lot of purchasing involved," Shukis said. "I really enjoy working with the merchants and finding the best values that I can."

Obtaining kitchen items

involves both investigating the best prices and developing relationships with vendors like World Kitchen, which donates Corelle and CorningWare.

"They basically have quadrupled their donations in the time at least that I've been working with them," Shukis said. "They believe in our mission and they're happy to help us."

Beth Waldo, who took over as chair of New Start this year, said she's seen these products last for decades in people's homes.

"That is going to go with them for so many years," she said. "The quality of it is just unbeatable."

In addition to the savvy shopping of Shukis and Patty DeWitt, who makes frequent trips to Walmart, the program works well because of partnerships with agencies like Bridge Communities, Waldo said.

"There's no way that those agencies would tackle this project. It wouldn't make sense," Waldo said. "It would be prohibitively expensive for the partnership agencies to dedicate a staff person or even a portion of staff to this project."

"There's nobody else out there doing this," she added. "We are a unique partner to these agencies."

Conversations with these agencies and the evaluation forms included with each kitchen kit have led ALCW to add new items, such as irons and bathroom tissue. A vacuum cleaner would be

### ■ MAKING A DIFFERENCE

*Making a Difference is a partnership between The Hinsdalean and Assistance League Chicagoland West, whose mission is to deliver education and outreach programs that address needs and help transform lives in local communities.*

a welcome addition, Shukis said, but the league doesn't have the budget to expand the offerings right now.

Depending on which agency is involved, Assistance League volunteers might or might not have the chance to meet the client who is receiving the kitchen. But volunteers sometimes learn more when recipients return their evaluation.

"Occasionally you just get this unbelievable thank you that brings tears to your eyes," Shukis said. "There are people with health issues that before they received these kitchens never really could cook. They feel like this is really impacting their lives and their families' lives."

The relationships ALCW members make with agency representatives also is rewarding, Waldo said.

"We give each other hugs when the caseworks arrive at the office," she said.

Knowing the agencies are working hard and that they and the clients are grateful is a wonderful reward, Shukis said.

"That is the payoff for us," she said.



**Mark Kay Shukis (left)**, last year's chair of Assistance League Chicagoland West's New Start program, and **Beth Waldo**, this year's chair, show off the Corelle dinnerware donated by World Kitchens. The kitchen kits contain a variety of staples for families transitioning to new housing, including small appliances like a slow cooker and microwave. (Jim Slonoff photo)