

In Action – Respect

“Everybody deserves to feel worthy and is worthy of the help that’s out there,” says Eugene Schertzberg. Or as Aretha Franklin challenged: “R-E-S-P-E-C-T. Find out what it means to me”

Eugene was one of more than 80 clients of The Salvation Army Ottawa Booth Centre who attended the second annual Project Self-Esteem event this past November, part of its life-skills program. The program focuses on building self-confidence and job readiness by offering free haircuts, beard trims, a professional photo shoot, and education and employment information from local agencies.

“It does make me feel better if I don’t have hair growing down to my shoulders,” continues Eugene. “Self-esteem is about how I look at myself and how I present myself to others. If I don’t have any self-esteem, I don’t want to be involved in anything.”

The 49-year-old father of three had two successful careers, one in the commercial-hardware business and the other in computers. But he found himself facing mental-health issues, including depression and anxiety. That, combined with alcoholism, kept him from being able to maintain stable employment, and it wasn’t long before he had to leave his home. With nowhere to go, he reached out for assistance at the Booth Centre, where he found a home and support.

“I was on uneven footing; I wasn’t sure what to do,” he says. “I had some previous experience with rehabilitation and addiction programs but I found there was always a component at the end that was not being dealt with—that being mental health.”

Eugene was encouraged to get involved in the life-skills program, which was developed by co-ordinator Kimberly Zapata in August 2013. Kim, along with activity assistant Drew Corley, helps men make positive changes in their lives.

The life-skills program requires each participant to complete 16 lessons, which include building a positive image, conversation skills, forgiveness, stress and anger management, decision-making and goal-setting.

“I’m working with the life-skills program and it’s giving me time to put things in order, such as looking for a place to live and setting weekly goals,” says Eugene. “They’ve been very helpful. “As for Kim and Drew, while their youth can be deceiving, it turns out they both have a lot of understanding of the people that come to the program. They’ve even engaged us with outings on Saturdays. Recently, we went to the agricultural museum and to the harvest festival downtown. It’s great and refreshing.”



For Eugene, his immediate goals include continuing to deal with mental-health issues, finding housing and completing the life-skills program before attempting to re-enter the workforce. “Difficult as it may be for me to be in a situation like this, I know I am not alone—The Salvation Army is here to help me,” he says.

The Salvation Army Ottawa Booth Centre provides assistance to every person that walks through the door with respect and integrity. Members of staff meet and accept each client where they are at and help them discover and achieve their goals.

As it is for so many people in times of crisis, sharing his story wasn’t easy, but Eugene felt compelled to tell it.

“I recognize that in society there are those who persecute and then there are those who assist people in need,” he says. “As a recipient of the caring that I couldn’t find in my everyday life, I need to share how important it is to me to be able to express the need for salvation in my spirit and mind. There is so much to say.”

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