

Jeremiah's Inn & the Ignatian Volunteer Corps

By Walter Spenser, Executive Director
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In the bustle of activity that is the background music of a small social services agency, it is sometimes difficult to hear the melody that is the fundamental theme of our work. We are fortunate to have had **Ignatian Volunteer John DeBairos** working with us at Jeremiah's Inn as a part-time conductor of our band.

John involved himself with a variety of tasks from assisting with some of our creative arts projects to helping to serve neighbors who use our emergency food pantry. However, perhaps John's greatest gift to us was the time he spent just casually interacting with the residents of our residential recovery program for men. The men in our program are working hard to turn their lives around after having spent years ensnared by the scourge of addiction to drugs and alcohol. They are good men with a bad disease. John is a keen observer of life. He understands the pain and suffering that often accompanies the men in our program, but John can see through the façades that we all construct to hide our pain and insecurity. He is an empathetic listener and a gentle shepherd who encourages and supports positive growth with kindness and a wry sense of humor.

I enjoyed John's company. We laughed and joked together and helped lighten the tone of this deadly serious work. John accompanied me on a speaking engagement and sat in on some meetings and interviews and offered his observations of the process with uncanny sensitivity to the nuances of the situation. He gets it. It is this time of casual conversation and reflection with John that I found most valuable. It seems I never can find enough time to pause and reflect on this work, and when I do, it often it occurs after some event of extreme of joy or sadness. With John, I have learned how to better appreciate the grace of everyday work. His reverence for the simple blessings we often take for granted is truly a gift. His presence was a present that was shared with the entire Jeremiah's Inn community.