

From the Executive Director

Express Yourself

As you might imagine, I've found myself in lots of unexpected situations during my 35-plus years at Room In The Inn. Rarely a day goes by when I don't think to myself, "Well, I didn't see that coming."

While these surprises occasionally weigh heavy on the heart, mostly they range from amusing to awe-inspiring. The ways in which our community surprises and delights me are countless: Sometimes in seemingly ordinary moments and, at other times, in the most extraordinary manner.

Last summer, I found myself standing at an art opening in Nashville's renowned Julia Martin Gallery, surrounded by a stunning mixed media exhibit and an eclectic mix of artists and admirers. Why was I there? Because the exhibit, titled *Do You Know How Good You Are?*, featured a collection of vibrant, compelling works by participants in the Room In The Inn arts program.

Though their mentor and teacher Delia certainly knew it was possible, I expect many of them — all neighbors struggling with homelessness — likely didn't see it coming. Not only to have the opportunity to create, but to have their work seen, respected and celebrated, and in a gallery of that caliber no less: It was both a dream and very real!

That event was the culmination of thousands of exceptional "everyday" experiences in the Room In The Inn art studio and across our campus, where we recognize creative expression as a fundamental part of being human — as both healing and life-enhancing.

Ultimately, healing requires the space to breathe and the invitation to create. It's our privilege to open wide the doors, offer a seat at the table (and maybe a paint brush, a notebook, a microphone or a guitar), and witness what happens.

As our volunteer music therapist Channing notes, it's often been a very long time since anyone — you, me, our Room In The Inn guests — have been invited to create in this way. "The last time they had the opportunity to freely express themselves was in childhood," she says, "but it's something we all have access to." And how life-changing this can be. Channing reminds us of the fact that music results in change: physiologically, cognitively, spiritually and emotionally. I can attest that this change through music and all forms of creative

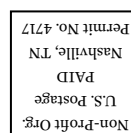


expression deeply empowers change in other areas of our community members' lives.

I recall the times I've found myself looking at a framed piece on a gallery wall or hanging in the Frist Art Museum. I think about opening *The Contributor* to see our participants' articles or poems published. I remember Channing telling me about her weekly music group composing a film score. And then I think of the near daily occasions when someone steps onto the karaoke stage in our café or very quietly discovers the beauty of blending watercolors or shaping something new and lasting from clay in our art studio. Always, I think, "Wow, would you look at that." And then I'm called to remember every person's humanity, every person's essential goodness and every person's unique gifts, and I realize I shouldn't be surprised at all.

With love,

Rachel Hester



“Art feeds the soul. Art is a necessity.
The creative spirit is what gives us life.”

- DELIA S., ART PROGRAM COORDINATOR



Room In The Inn believes that artistic expression is an essential element of a healing community. Our art program was founded by Tom Seigenthaler, whose guiding principle was simple but profound: “People gain self-esteem through the creative process.” Over the years, we have seen this to be true. Room In The Inn’s art program offers a space for reflection, emotional growth, creativity and community connection.

After years of experience at the University School of Nashville, Delia Seigenthaler, who happens to be Tom’s niece, has become our new art program coordinator at Room In The Inn — collaborating with community partners and volunteer artists to help the program grow and flourish. “I think it’s a great thing that the art program at Room In The Inn exists,” Delia shared. “It’s rare, and the way we do it is rare. We’re not focused on selling anything; it’s about the making. We are focused on the act of creative expression. There’s no final project. There’s no end goal except having time and space to be creative. A lot of really great art is made in this room.”

The art program is rooted in our core value of spirituality and the understanding that each of us carries the capacity to create. For many in our community, the creative process reflects the creative power of God, who is first revealed as Creator, and humanity is made in that image. When people create art, they tap into something within themselves that they may not have known was there. The experience can remind teachers and participants alike of their own dignity and purpose.

Our art program is based on the notion that the creative process itself can be both healing and life-enhancing. It gives those involved the chance to experience:

- ✳ **Joy** that comes through artistic expression
- ✳ **Confidence** that comes with trying, failing and trying again
- ✳ **Problem-solving** required to adapt to outcomes that vary from expectations
- ✳ **A healthy way to process** emotions and manage stress
- ✳ **Persistence** that comes with seeing something through to completion
- ✳ **Community** that comes with collaborating on a project or working alongside others

Whether we know it yet or not, each of us is an artist. In the Room In The Inn community, it is dignifying to be celebrated as a community with the power to create.



In 2000, our campus art program was founded by the late Thomas P. Seigenthaler. Tom taught the value of art to all who met him. But more importantly, he learned from everyone he met.



Admiring art from Tim L. (second from left) and other Room In The Inn artists are, from left, Bob Seigenthaler, Tom’s brother and Delia’s father; Delia, Room In The Inn art program coordinator; and Katie Seigenthaler, co-editor of The Kingdom of the Poor, at Julia Martin Gallery.

Marcus

by Bill B., *The Contributor* vendor | Originally published in *The Contributor*, Volume 20, Number 13
Excerpt printed with permission by the author & our partners at *The Contributor*

I became homeless about a year and a half ago. Like a lot of people, I found my way to the day center at the Room In The Inn here in Nashville. For someone experiencing homelessness, I would describe the organization as a lifeboat in the middle of shark-infested waters. They offer essential services, educational classes, crisis support, and are willing to help anyone who wants help.

Eventually I found my way upstairs to the art room. Delia S. runs the art program at the Inn. She and a group of volunteers teach classes just about every weekday. All of them are kind, supportive and absolutely perfect in their own way.

I grew up like a lot of kids watching Bob Ross on PBS painting happy little trees and wanted to try painting but never had the opportunity. So, when I got to the art room, I grabbed a brush and went to town. One of the first things I painted was a guy I named “Marcus.” He was an imposing-looking fellow that looked like he was in the middle of a bad day. I used red, white and black acrylic paint on a wood panel. I was proud.

Since then, I’ve painted several other things, some good and some that went into the trash can at the end of the day.

Recently one of the mental health counselors that provides services at the Inn stopped by the art room. She was looking at everyone’s work and asked me which pieces were mine. I showed her Marcus and some other things I had done. She complimented me on all of them and then quickly circled back to Marcus. She asked, “What made you want to paint this piece?” I told her I didn’t know; I guess it was just a feeling I had at the time. She looked at me rather concerned and said, “You’re not experiencing any of those feelings now, are you?” I laughed and assured her I was not wanting to harm myself or others. The question struck me as funny, but later I started thinking about what was going on in my life when I painted Marcus. Being newly homeless, it was a stressful time in my life to say the least. I thought about the person I was before and after painting him.

Until that day she asked me that question, I had never thought about what art was doing for me or the therapeutic effects it had on me. I noticed there is a tremendous euphoric feeling that comes from the whole creation process, and I now know it can also be somewhat cleansing. I think the day I painted Marcus, he left my head, traveled down my arm and exited out of my paintbrush onto the canvas, and with him he brought a lot of the frustration, anger and hate that created him in the first place.

Right now, at the Frist Museum they are having an exhibit featuring artworks from some of their community partners. These are different organizations that provide social services, community centers and advocacy groups. I think a lot of the art you will see there was created out of a therapeutic need and serves as their own personal record of healing. I invite everyone to go see the exhibit. It is truly amazing.



Community Partner Highlight: *The Contributor*

The Contributor is a different kind of non-profit social enterprise — driven by the mission of empowering our homeless neighbors to achieve income, dignity, housing and community. The bi-weekly publication is purchased and then sold by vendors who have experienced homelessness as part of a sophisticated ecosystem that empowers them on a path to establishing micro-businesses, earning income, finding housing and self-advocating, all of which restore their self-confidence, dignity and community. You can support their efforts by purchasing the paper from your local street vendor or visiting thecontributor.org.



A Place for Hope

Room In The Inn believes that everyone deserves the opportunity for lifelong learning and self-empowerment. Our Hope University adult education program is a hub of daily education and personal development opportunities with classes along five tracks: housing, income, health, education and creative arts.

Our neighbors experiencing homelessness engage in these classes to keep their minds and bodies active in a healthy way. Learning something new is dignifying and helps them to gain a sense of courage and the support they need to take the next step forward. Classes also provide the opportunity to engage in their interests and hobbies, a luxury we often take for granted.

Our goal for every person experiencing homelessness is to have access to permanent housing. The ultimate purpose of the education program is to equip participants with the skills and knowledge needed to obtain and maintain their housing. Our education programming is designed to help participants develop hard and soft skills to be successful in the journey to a home.



Small World Yoga



Bingo with Robert Kent



Shakespeare Aloud with Nashville Shakespeare Festival



Art Class



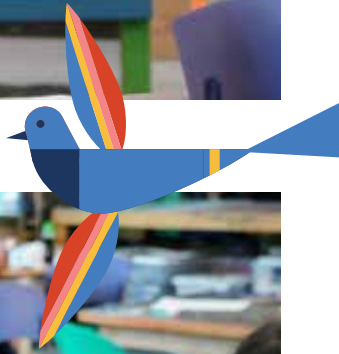
Improv with Derek Pham



Computer & Budgeting Basics with Greg Gann



Writing as a Path to Healing with Board Member Karlen Evins



What's INN Store?

We want our participants to know that their time, energy and engagement in our education classes are valuable. To do this, participants earn points for each class they attend. They can redeem these points at the stores in our education center, where they can purchase personal care items, vouchers for special services and clothing. Room In The Inn's points are a simple way to practice budgeting, saving and spending, especially if participants have not had the opportunity to use those skills for some time, while providing dignity, respect, hospitality and the gift of choice.

Help us keep our What's INN Store stocked! Scan the QR code to see our Amazon Wishlist of items:



Amazon Wishlist

"The thing I love about the clothing store is that you go in and actually shop. I don't know about you, but I like to look at different colors and pick out different styles. You don't have to ask for a shirt or say anything, you just go and use points."

- Dianna S., Room In The Inn Participant

Volunteer in the Education Program!

Our education program would not be possible without the numerous volunteers and community partners who offer classes each and every day. Our classes are as varied as the people who lead them! If you are interested in volunteering to lead an activity, big or small, reach out to our team at volunteer@roomintheinn.org.





Power Days: Meeting the Unique Needs of Our Neighbors

The path to housing is not “one-size-fits-all,” and Room In The Inn is committed to respecting the unique circumstances and challenges of each person in our community. Power Days help us to meet this need. Room In The Inn’s Power Days are workshop-style events created to empower participants with information and resources related to their specialized needs. Because of the success of Recovery Power Days, which have been a staple of our services for more than a decade, we saw an opportunity to expand this initiative to include specialized navigation for unhoused older adults, veterans, women and more. Annie, our Guest House manager, shared, “I’m excited to grow our relationships with participants, connect them to resources and be more intentional with the communities that make up our larger Room In The Inn family.”

Each Power Day includes elements focused on housing, important documents, income, healthcare, recovery, mental health, creative expression and more, based on the unique needs of that population. More

than 30 participants attended our Veterans Power Day this summer. In just one day, 10 veterans linked up with housing resources, 10 signed up for food stamps and six met with our onsite occupational therapist.

Power Days are important because even as we serve our neighbors on the margins, they help us ensure that no one is left behind. They create a welcoming space for those who may otherwise be reluctant to seek the help that they need. Annie reflects on how Recovery Power Days bring people deeper: “The dream is that everyone gets sober, but the hope of Power Days is that a seed is planted. It starts the thoughts of what life in recovery could be like. Maybe it’s not today, but people start to realize that it’s possible.” Sheila, one of our recovery specialists, reflects on recovery as a journey: “It’s not an in and out; we get to nurture them through their recovery.” We are excited to keep engaging participants and continue utilizing our newly imagined Power Day initiative as a dedicated space for our neighbors to move forward.



Through our expanded Power Day initiative, we were able to offer connections to wraparound services for over 30 veterans in our community.

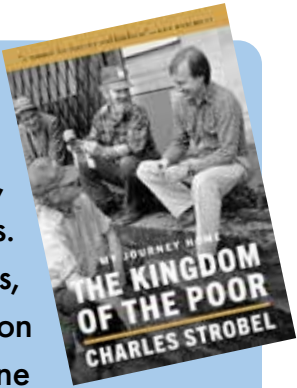


Back to School Season: Anyone Can Serve!

Education is one of the most important ways to shift the existing narratives about homelessness here in Nashville and beyond. We have created many opportunities to take part in this work by learning and engaging with our community at Room In The Inn:

The Kingdom of the Poor

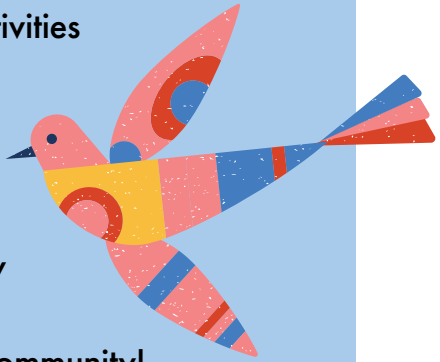
The lessons that our founder, Charlie Strobel, shares through his simple stories are timeless. We have created a study guide for students, small groups, book clubs or personal reflection to help deepen your conversations and shine Charlie’s light as a prism into your lives. We also have staff available from Room In The Inn to come speak to your group about *The Kingdom of the Poor*.



Reach out to us at kingdomofthepoor@roomintheinn.org or learn more on our website!

Education Series

We have developed lessons and activities created for families, educators and students to provide a framework for conversations about homelessness, poverty and responding with love. We have organized the materials by age group, making it a great way to include even the littlest ones in our community!



Check them out at roomintheinn.org/educationseries.

Volunteer

Homelessness is not an abstract concept, but a lived reality, and the best way to get to know our community is to volunteer! From families and children of all ages, to school groups and faculty — all are welcome to volunteer with us!



Email volunteer@roomintheinn.org to get involved.

Donate Education Supplies

As you are doing your back-to-school shopping, consider grabbing a couple extra school supplies! We use everything your student uses and would greatly appreciate any donations to help sustain our education program.

Donations can be dropped off **Monday-Friday** from **8 am-4:30 pm**.

Community Partner Highlight: The MNPS HERO Program

The Homeless Education Resource Office (HERO) of Metro Nashville Public Schools supports students who are experiencing homelessness. They strive to help unhoused youth to be successful in school and have a positive school experience.

To learn more about supporting the HERO program through their pantry and more, visit their website at mnps.org/departments/hero.

The HERO Program makes sure that students have access to books that represent their life experiences. Their library includes these titles, among others: A Shelter in Our Car by Monica Gunning and A Place to Stay: A Shelter Story by Erin Gunti.





Music as a Mechanism of Change: A Chat with Channing, Belmont Music Therapist

“I KNEW FROM THE MOMENT I STEPPED IN THE BUILDING THAT I DIDN’T WANT TO LEAVE.”

Channing first came to Room In The Inn looking for additional partners as the Belmont University music therapy program’s clinical coordinator. She said, “Truly it was fate. I knew from the moment I stepped in the building that I didn’t want to leave. I was like, ‘Oh, can I do a group like right now?’ I love the space, I love the people here; the energy is just something so unique.”

“MUSIC THERAPY AS A CAREER IS BASED ON THE IMPLICIT KNOWLEDGE WE ALL HAVE THAT MUSIC RESULTS IN CHANGE.”

Whether that be physiologically, cognitively, spiritually or emotionally, Channing says that “music as a mechanism of change — that’s the field of music therapy. The big difference is that you have a music therapist who understands how to make that change happen within music. So when I come into groups, I have a plan of what we’re going to do and what people might need. Then, gathering an understanding of need from them — from them telling me what they need — I can say, ‘Okay, I know how to address that in music.’ And then the plan happens, and change happens. It’s really cool.”

“THERE’S JUST SO MUCH BEAUTY HERE.”

“One of the special things is getting to see people empowered by music and seeing them kind of come into their own. Getting to see people walk into the room, see a bunch of instruments and kind of reject it at first or be really hesitant, but then to become comfortable in being silly, exploring, being creative and then sometimes getting into really deep conversation, deep lyric analysis or deep songwriting — it’s just really beautiful... I always say that music therapy as a career is almost selfish in its selflessness, like there’s a lot that you give to others, but I receive so much more in return. The coolest part of what I get to take away is just like the beauty of stories and the beauty of lives... I value each of these people so deeply that I think the whole world should know how incredible all these individuals are.”

“THIS WOULD HAVE MADE A HUGE DIFFERENCE IN MY LIFE.”

“A small point of personal disclosure is I experienced homelessness myself. So, for me, walking into this space that sees people first, this would have made a huge difference in my life had I had resources similar to this when I was younger. When you don’t have a housing situation that feels stable, having other pinpoints in your life that you can count on, and people you can count on — that feels like home to me. Being able to provide some sense of that — knowing that on Thursday mornings at 8:00 a.m. a music group is going to happen, that I can show up in that space and be myself and feel comfortable in my skin — I think that is what home is. And that’s what happens here all the time.”

Visit roomintheinn.org/40-years-of-stories to listen to the full interview.



*Dr. Channing Shippen,
Assistant Professor of Music
Therapy, Belmont University*

