

Donate Online



Resources for living. Hope for life.

Your Helping Hands:

Because of you UCOM can host a food truck on Saturdays which can supplement our neighbors food supply or give them an opportunity to obtain food while they are not working.



Fall 2013

United Church Outreach Ministry

1311 Chicago Dr. SW Wyoming, MI 49509 616.241.4006

www.UCOMgr.org

Fresh produce year round *Matt Dreisbach Donates Hoop House*

**By Bruce Roller –
Executive Director**

What happens when you and your twin brother decide on the same project to earn the Eagle Scout Award? If you are 17-year-old Matt Dreisbach, your plan B begins with a call to UCOM. Matt, a member of Plymouth United Church of Christ in Grand Rapids, jumped in with both feet when UCOM's Program Director Shawn Keener suggested that he might consider building a hoop house on UCOM's property so that our volunteers could "farm" and provide fresh produce for the food pantry well beyond the usual growing season in Michigan.

Within days Matt sent us initial plans for the hoop house. After a few tweaks to make the gardens completely accessible, a trip to the Wyoming City Hall to clear public safety and zoning hurdles, and some fund-raising, Matt has begun work on this symbol of UCOM's commitment to local, nutritious, safe, sustainable food for **everyone**. Work began in early November and the finished product will make Wyoming, Grandville and southwest Grand Rapids a better place to live and work.

I have a feeling that the hoop house project at UCOM will easily help Matt achieve his Eagle Scout Award. When we all work together, everybody wins.



Farm Life-City Living: *With a hoop house set up in the parking lot of UCOM, no longer do our volunteers have to go to the country to experience farming.*

Can you smell what mama's cooking?

Our community's children are counting on you to assist in providing food for their holiday meal. You can either provide a Christmas holiday basket for the entire family (average cost \$50 for a family of four) or the following supplemental items for Thanksgiving or Christmas :

- Fresh veggies or fruit dropped off between:
Nov. 19 to the 21 or Dec. 17 to the 19
- Packets or jars of gravy
- Stuffing and instant potatoes
- Jello and pudding
- Salad dressings and fixings
- Cake or pie mixes
- Juice or other beverages
- Butter and whip cream

Call or [email](mailto:shawn@ucomgr.org) Shawn for more info! 616-241-4006



It's Getting Hot in Here: *UCOM will be utilizing raised beds because they provide the same soil warming benefits as in the field.*



Lilliana hits home with UCOM neighbors

Lilliana Grows It Green Lilliana lo crece verde



At a recent UCOM event a faithful volunteer said to Erik Keener, our Assistant Executive Director, “Did you know the book Lilliana is about me?”

In *Lilliana Grows it Green*, Lilliana, a special young girl with some disabilities and a lot of assets, learns a little more about the world around her while finding joy, solace, and inclusion in gardening.

The second book of UCOM's Open Door series written and illustrated by the team of Amy Carpenter Leugs and Heather Newman, Lilliana features more of the beautiful illustrations and tender story telling that made *French Toast for Maleek* so powerful. Spanish language translations by Ale Siekmeier again accompany Amy's wonderful tale and help ensure Lilliana's story can reach a broad and diverse audience.

You can order your copy of *Lilliana Grows it Green* and all of UCOM's other books at the [UCOM online store](#).

Because of you, UCOM was there

By Bruce Roller –
Executive Director

It was the perfect storm for the Jerry Garza family. Jerry was brain-injured and his care-giver Karen and he moved in with Karen's adult daughter Serena and her 4-year old son. There were few financial resources and now the entire family was facing eviction. What to do? A call to UCOM connected the family with our newest staff member Ministerial Senior Support Coordinator, Ila Flo Barfuss, former Chaplain at Pilgrim Manor. It was her first day of work with us.

Ila Flo's home visit was just in time. The family asked for prayer and for help to prevent eviction; they were also in need of food, and the storm was just beginning. A few days after Ila Flo's first visit and the beginning of the relationship, she was helping the little family through a great tragedy as Serena died from an overdose of prescription medication. Immediately Ila Flo was in action, helping with funeral arrangements while continuing her connection with a Veterans organization that she hoped would be able to prevent the eviction. Laden with grief and overwhelmed by their circumstances, the Garza family came to UCOM for food and for clothing for a funeral. A long and challenging road lies ahead for their family but they now they know that they are not alone.

Because of your support UCOM is available to spot changing needs in the community, and to accommodate them. Because of you Ila Flo and UCOM were there for the Garza family when they needed her most. Watch for more of what you can do to help our seniors with spiritual, emotional and economic support.



Touching All of the Bases: In 2012 UCOM's food pantry served 1,000 people over the age 55. UCOM is now offering additional supports to older persons.

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The funding has ended but the work continues

By Erin Mann –
Community Development Manager



Wishing, hoping and praying: *At night Shanti prays that one day she will meet Oprah Winfrey so she can share her story.*

In September the Michigan Disabilities Rights Coalition monies for the Including Our Neighbors (ION) Initiative ended. This grant allowed UCOM to work closely with partner agencies to assist them in fostering inclusion of people with disabilities. Furthermore, the ION grant assisted UCOM in successfully utilizing insights and expertise of clients, volunteers, and neighbors with disabilities to welcome them into a meaningful community service opportunity with our agency. This experience included giving six volunteers with disabilities the opportunity to receive a \$500 stipend for 50 hours of work.

We welcomed Shanti into the UCOM family via the ION Initiative. Shanti grew up in poverty and was put in many vulnerable situations as a child. Nonetheless, her cognitive disability and childhood experiences do not define her. What defines her is her articulate poetry, beautiful art work and amazing work ethic.

As a volunteer with UCOM Shanti gained a variety of skills and assets. Shanti has taken the leap to live independently and UCOM is proud to have been a part of her journey. In addition to her stipend, UCOM was able to provide her with a bed and other furniture items to set her out on her own.

All of these opportunities were made possible because of donors like you. Though the ION funding is complete we know that UCOM's friends and neighbors are going to step forward to assist us in continuing this mission. If you are interested in learning how you can help with the inclusion of persons with disabilities at UCOM call (616) 241-4006 and ask to speak with Erin.



The children need you

Every student deserves a chance to be successful academically, Everyone is entitled to opportunities to be a positive member of their community. **Homework House™ students are in need of tutors who will work with them to improve their English and reading skills.**

Homework House™ provides after school tutoring/mentoring for children Kindergarten through 5th grade.

[Interested in being a Tutor?](#)

Homework House has multiple exciting locations where tutoring services are offered to children. If tutoring interests you, you could serve for one hour or more per week to help make a difference in the life of a child. Please contact us for more information.

Contact

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Loneliness

“The most terrible poverty is loneliness, and the feeling of being unloved.” — Mother Teresa



Through your dedication, support and altruism you help provide opportunities for friendship to so many of our neighbors.

Please pass this newsletter on to a friend so they can offer someone companionship too.

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