

Volunteer Spotlight

Debbie Sheetz brings yoga to our medical clinic

If you stop by Bread for the City's Northwest Center lobby at noon on Thursdays, you will usually be treated to quite the sight: a dozen rainbow-colored yoga mats, a quiet lobby, and a mix of clients and staff stretching out for this week's yoga lesson. Debbie Sheetz generously volunteers her time and skills to teach this weekly class, which is open for anyone to join free of charge—even I was offered a mat, though I doubted my ability to do sun salutations in a skirt.

Before the class got under way, I had a chance to talk to some of the students about why they participated in Bread's yoga class. One woman told me that yoga is good for the body; she said the stretching helped to keep her calm. Another woman told me that the weekly yoga classes helped her cope with her depression and balance problems. She has been attending the classes since February, and in the four months since, she's moved from participating in a chair to having the flexibility to do the poses on the mat—a wonderful accomplishment!

After observing the class, and doing a bit of stretching myself, I got a chance to talk to Debbie about her experiences teaching yoga at Bread for the City:

How did you first get involved with Bread for the City?

I found Bread for the City through an organization, Yoga Activist, that helps connect yoga teachers with volunteer and community work, and I started teaching classes just over two years ago.

See Yoga on page 2

Transforming farmers' markets into places for community engagement

Through our free farmers' markets, our food program provides people with free bags full of fresh produce every month at each of our centers. As our Southeast Center staff gathered to discuss ways to make the event a place for community engagement, we tossed around ideas.

"What if we added music and made this more fun for our clients?" Steven suggested. He recently joined Bread for the City as the new community resource coordinator—and resident DJ.

Stacey, director of our Pre-Employment Program, agreed and fondly recalled when music was a regular part of the free farmers' markets, a Bread staple since 2010. "I'd love to bring that back," he said.

We also decided to add a food demonstration to the mix. "Folks getting produce can get some healthy-but-delicious ideas for preparing it," said Aja, our community organizer.

At 10:00am on a Friday in June, the warm sounds of Al Jarreau's "Morning" floated out of our gates, and we welcomed people from a line that had been building on 17th Street SE since 8:30am. A few people started bobbing their heads to the beat, and as they moved forward, the parking lot became a marketplace. Suddenly, the heat seemed more bearable and the line not as long. People weren't just receiving food—they were having fun.

Staff from all different programs got on board to engage our community members. Stefanie from our Sustainable Agriculture crew brought down tomato plants for clients to take home and told them more about the rooftop garden. Stacey and case manager Arianna worked alongside energetic volunteers from Clark Construction. Aja brought out pitchers of cucumber basil water to keep clients cool. Steven kept us moving to the tunes of Sam Cooke, Curtis Mayfield, Chaka Khan and more. Precious made taste buds dance with her two summer salads—one with watermelon, sea salt and basil, the other a delicious mix of collards, sweet corn, and zucchini dressed with lemon and vinegar.



Nearly 200 people joined us at our Southeast Center's free farmers' market for fresh food and community building!

"You got the music for the spirit and the food to fortify the soul!" exclaimed Ms. Darlene, a longtime farmers' market attendee. "It's positive and beautiful."

See Market on page 2

Yoga continued from page 1

What have you done as a volunteer?

I teach yoga classes every Thursday at noon at the Northwest Center, and I also teach the occasional day-long retreat for clients.

Why do you think your work is important?

Everyone can benefit from yoga, and making it accessible to everyone is important.

Yoga can stop feelings of stress and improve your quality of life, and that should be accessible without spending so much money. I can see the benefits of yoga in my life and in others, and I want to be able to share that with the wider community. There are so many ways to volunteer, to do something you enjoy, and seeing people's reactions to your work is what keeps you going.



Our medical clinic is packed just about every Thursday with folks ready to get their bend and stretch on!

staff participates with the clients and community members. The clients are wonderful, from the core group who do yoga every week to those who just drop by, everyone is so appreciative.

Despite all the noise around us, you can find time to focus on what is inside you, and let

everything else become the background. You can do yoga anywhere, you don't need a studio. I just think yoga is fulfilling, there isn't any radical change in your life, but it changes the quality of your life. And it helps to help others.

We thank Debbie for her contributions as a volunteer yoga instructor at Bread for the City.

—Rebecca Worrell

What do you like about volunteering with Bread for the City?

The staff at Bread are supportive, and everything is organized and well-run. I feel like everyone's efforts are being maximized, and everyone is enjoyable to work with. Also, I feel like Bread for the City is a holistic organization, where the

If you'd like to join her class, please stop by the Northwest Center on Thursdays at noon. **All are welcome and the class is free!**

Market continued from page 1

No longer were people just picking up produce and leaving. In the energetic conversations and grins among neighbors, volunteers, and staff, we were building community!

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"This just feels so much more welcoming," beamed Ms. Gail. "I would've never thought to use these vegetables this way," she said as



Precious prepared recipes at our farmers' market with ingredients straight from our pantry!

she watched Precious perform the food demo. That Friday, the smiles, laughter, and love of nearly 200 people filled a small sunlit corner of Southeast DC. On that day, the farmers' market served as a vibrant expression of Bread's mission to provide service with dignity and respect for our clients. We're excited to keep the sense of community alive at our free farmers' markets every month at both our Northwest and Southeast Centers!

—Aja Taylor and Steven Swann

'tis the season for workplace giving!



CFC #61733



United Way #8219



DC One Fund #8219

Stay Connected to Bread for the City!

We live tweet all of our major events, and we love tweeting with our supporters!

@BreadfortheCity

We're always sharing photos and stories from the front lines on our Facebook page!

Facebook.com/BreadfortheCity

We're also blogging every week about issues affecting our community.

Subscribe to our blog on our website at www.BreadfortheCity.org or by emailing communications@breadfortheCity.org

Streamlining access to affordable housing

Here at Bread for the City, when we see a gap, we work to fill it. One of the big challenges facing DC residents is securing affordable housing. There are 34,500 subsidized housing units in our city and more than 74,000 people on waiting lists that could exceed decades. Unfortunately, we aren't able to create more housing. But we can work to provide greater access into the housing that exists.

While all subsidized apartment buildings receive payment from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), there is no centralized process by which prospective tenants can apply for these units. Each apartment building is privately owned and independent of the others. Each has its own unique application process. Each has its own window for which applications may be submitted.

In our Housing Access Program (HAP), we help clients navigate the maze of subsidized apartment buildings and their application processes. While each application is different, they all ask for roughly the same information.

That's why we created the Housing Worksheet, which mimics a housing application by allowing participants to gather all of their information in one place as a guide for completing applications. Our clients found this to be helpful. However, once a Worksheet is complete, there is still the task of transferring information to each individual building application. This process takes roughly an hour per application—with people routinely filling out upwards of 15, depending on their eligibility.

There has to be an easier way.

We had a vision to further streamline the process by creating an electronic, consolidated application program that will allow users to type in their information just one time, leaving the program to pre-populate several housing applications at once. A product like this will allow us to help more people in less time—shortening the application process from hours to minutes. We named it Mega App.

Enter Code for DC. We wrote up our goals for Mega App and got our proposal in front of Code for DC's nose. They were interested in working on this project with us and have done an incredible amount of work on it so far. While it is not yet complete, a demo of the project knocked our socks off. We are so appreciative of the effort put forth by this group of volunteers working on their own time to create this app



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for us and our participants. Their dedication is evident in the care and thoughtfulness they put into this project, the questions they ask, and the changes they are eager to make so that the program can work best for our clients.

Once it's active, we can use it for almost every client who comes through our doors in need of help with housing applications. Our hope is that this Mega App will one day be useful outside of Bread for the City's walls and made available to the community at large. 🍞

—By Stacey Johnson

Make an in-kind gift by donating food, clothing, or an item from our Amazon Wish List [See our Wish List at Amzn.to/BFCWish](#)

Here are some of our most-needed items:

- ✓ Diapers
- ✓ Children's books, especially in Spanish
- ✓ Cleaning supplies/laundry detergent
- ✓ Gift cards for grocery stores and pharmacies
- ✓ Plus-sized clothing for men and women
- ✓ SmarTrip cards
- ✓ Toilet paper and other household items
- ✓ Thumb drives



The best way to support our work is through a monetary contribution to Bread for the City.

Join our Bread & Butter Club with a monthly gift to help us sustain our programs year-round at **Donate. BreadfortheCity.org/GiveMonthly**

Just want to make a one-time gift? Give today at **Donate. BreadfortheCity.org**



Looking for other ways to get involved? Volunteer with us by contacting volunteer@breadfortheCity.org

We banned the box!

VICTORY IN THE FIGHT AGAINST WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION

Twice. That is how many times DC Council Chamber Room 500 erupted into cheers and applause. Some Councilmembers looked pleased by our excited outburst, while others looked... well, less than pleased. It didn't matter to us what they thought—we had made history.

On July 14, 2014, the DC City Council passed the strongest legislation against hiring discrimination in the country. The Fair Criminal Records Screening Act, also known as the Ban the Box bill, is a piece of legislation aiming to change the way that business is done in the District. It passed with a final vote of 13-0. Yes, it passed unanimously.

The Fair Criminal Records Screening Act of 2014 is a great first step toward comprehensive policy that prevents discrimination against the men and women in this city who have criminal histories.

At Bread for the City's Southeast Center, we see firsthand the result of employer policies that automatically disqualify returning citizens. According to a report by the Urban Institute, for every 1,000 residents East of the River, there are roughly 33 parolees—the largest percentage in the city. On average, 8,000 fathers, mothers, daughters, sons, sisters, brothers, husbands, and friends return from DC Jail or prison each year.

Studies show that stable employment reduces the rate of recidivism. And while initiatives such as Project Empowerment and Bread for the City's own Pre-Employment Program (PEP) are so important in helping returning citizens write resumes and prepare for interviews, the challenge for many of the participants has been that they never get an opportunity to use their skills—not because they are unprepared or unqualified, but

because many employers won't even grant an interview to someone with a criminal record.

The passage of the Fair Criminal Records Screening Act was such a tireless fight that could not have been won without effective coalition work, engagement of returning citizens at each step of the process, and effectively engaging our communities to act. Because of our collective work, persons with criminal or arrest records will not have to check a box on an application that identifies them as someone with a record. Employers will have to wait until after a conditional offer has been made to look into someone's criminal history, which will allow them to make a final hiring decision based more so on merits than on preconceived notions about returning citizens.

It was a long campaign for the Ban the Box Coalition, but because of YOUR support—calls and emails to Councilmembers, standing with us at the Wilson Building—WE DID IT!

So what happens next? Well, now the real work begins—making sure that employers know and understand how to follow Ban the Box, making sure that the data is being tracked so we can measure effectiveness, and getting more returning citizens and advocates engaged in the work it will take to ensure this bill's effectiveness!

We won! 🙌

—Aja Taylor

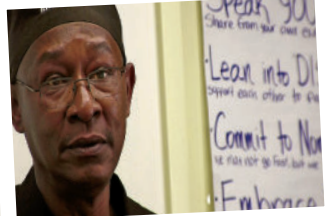


Thank you to everyone who stood with us at the Wilson Building and supported our efforts to ban the box!

We'd like to thank the following for their support:

- Councilman Tommy Wells
- Councilman Kenyan McDuffie
- Council Chairman Phil Mendelson
- Chamber CEO Harry Wingo
- Marina Streznewski and the DC Jobs Council.

But most importantly, we are thankful to Chearie, James, Durante, Alisha, Antoine, Michael, Mr. Greene, Lashonia, Sherman, Tanisha, and countless other returning citizens who shared their stories with me and with the public. You are the reason behind our success.



Larry starts anew: Finding work as a returning citizen

and skills he needed to jump back into the game.

He graduated from PEP and started an internship in our clothing room. Next, Mr. Pitman continued his education in DC Central Kitchen's culinary arts training program, where he graduated at the top of his class.

We're proud to announce that, today, he has a full-time job as a cook at Fresh Start Catering! Through Fresh Start, Mr. Pitman is giving back to his community by feeding public school kids. He's happy to be back at work, and he's able to feel good about what he does for a living.

"I look forward to waking up at four in the morning, getting ready, and catching

that bus at five to go to work. I look forward to that," says Mr. Pitman. "It makes me feel like I'm doing something worthwhile."

He recently returned to PEP to share his experience and motivate others in our program facing unemployment.

"I thank God for giving me a second chance," he says, "And I want to thank Bread for the City for helping me when I needed help, for giving me a backbone so I could walk with my head held high."

We're proud of you, Mr. Pitman, and we thank you for being an inspiration to people in our community striving to rejoin the workforce! 🙌

—Stacey Smith

Who would have thought that, after spending half his life in a federal penitentiary, Larry Pitman could rise to start anew?

Mr. Pitman was incarcerated for 30 years. Upon his release, he entered our Pre-Employment Program (PEP) to learn life and job skills that could help him re-enter a workforce that had changed dramatically over the last three decades. In our six-week program, Mr. Pitman learned to write a resume and participated in mock interviews. More importantly, he gained the confidence