

## Embracing Dr. King's Vision Through Service



It's the end of a long day. Paint cans and trays are piled, a resident scrubs white drops off the hallway carpet, and Joe Kleinhenz of the Men's Residential Center leads the task of removing tape strips and shifting furniture back into place. Many of the MRC's residents will soon return from an MLK Day trip to Seaside to find their 11 rooms freshly painted. And 45 Portland-area volunteers are heading home to wash off the paint and tell friends and family about what they accomplished together with the residents

who stayed behind. Only they know what it took to get the job done and how their perspective changed because of it.

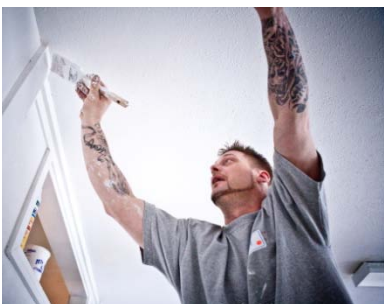
"It was great to help a client paint their own room," shares Caleb Bolen, a community volunteer. "He got a little competition going with the other clients to get his room to 'bling'. And I found out that Ed, one of the residents, lived in Detroit during Dr. King's time."

Dr. King spoke to the importance of service in creating equality in a community, and that sense of awareness and shared experience is what this service project was designed to embrace. From its small beginnings with an \$800 grant from Oregon Volunteers, which current VOA Americorps VISTA member Nancy Loso was eligible to receive, this project grew to include 60 MRC clients, staff, volunteers, and community members. Small teams named for five colors painted together and shared a meal and reflection on the life and values of Dr. King.



The hope was to challenge stereotypes the groups may hold of each other and to give them a common ground to inspire support. Miller Paint, Russell St. BBQ, and Hands On Portland all pitched in donations and staff to help the day run smoothly, and KGW, KATU, and the Oregonian all stopped by to take photos, interviews, and video footage.

"I was listening to Dr. King's speech on NPR on the way here," shared Terry Clelen, a community volunteer, during the closing project debrief. "It was so nice to know I was coming here to do something



with his message." Another volunteer reflected that in Virginia, where she is from, they celebrate MLK Day along with Andrew Jackson day. She is proud to live in a city that focuses on honoring Dr. King and performing service.

"I appreciated seeing the courage in the residents," reflected Andy Nelson, CEO of Hands On Portland and leader of a work team. "There are brave people living in this house."

Jeremy started the day angry; there was no more space for residents on the bus for the field trip. But Scott Engel, a long-time MRC volunteer, who was there to paint for the day with his 12-year-old daughter Taryn, asked Jeremy if he would join them. Soon, Jeremy got into the job, becoming friendly and animated with the volunteers, and even getting his picture on the cover of the Oregonian's Metro section. He joked about the idea of getting on the news again, this time for "something good."

"This is my first time volunteering," Taryn shared excitedly about her chance to paint bedroom doors, set-up for lunch, and register volunteers. "When you have a great time volunteering, it makes you want to come back again and again." And that's just what she and her dad, Scott, plan to do, starting next weekend at the Oregon Zoo.



"It's nice to think about service with a company," reflected Dan Ford of CUI Industries, who volunteered for the day with a group of coworkers. The energy and playfulness the group shared was clear when



Liang Chen donned a hat folded from a newspaper to keep paint out of his hair. Staff from Harland Financial Solutions also participated.

"I forget there's nice people in the world," Anthony, an MRC client, shares of his difficult childhood and previous lack of support during his addiction. "Seeing people taking time out of their day to come and help us reminds me there are nice people."

But the mission of building community was most clearly accomplished by the afternoon shift of the red team, led by MRC staff member Tyrone Hunt. "I worked to start the first chapter of Dr. King's African-American fraternity in my state during college," Tyrone remembers. "It's nice to share that with the young folks in the group. And to see so much consistent humor and conversation."



"The residents Mike & Brandon kept us in stitches," said red team volunteer, Terri Buckmeir. "It was great to work with them across the gap of age and experience, and I'm talking to the MRC staff about inviting them out to the Civil War re-enactment we do over the Labor Day weekend." This future opportunity supports the residents' commitment to on-going community service throughout their recovery. And Rebecca, a red team member and student, was inspired to sign up on her way out to fill in at the front desk as a long-term MRC volunteer.



But before leaving, the red team had time for a warm group hug, full of laughter and light-hearted jabs. "You stay out of trouble and I'll see you over Labor Day," called Terri to Mike. "You know it!" he shot back. On this MLK Day, at this program for men in recovery, people came together to embrace Dr. King's vision. And literally embraced each other.

*Article by Nancy Loso, VOA Volunteer Coordinator*

*Photos by Rob Delahanty, MRC volunteer Resident Counselor*