WARrios At Work

2018 Annual Report
Hard work has been key to this mission since the start. We are built from scratch, on a vision to create a community of active and engaged Warriors.

Each year at Opportunity Knocks we set out to recognize a Warrior that represents the mission in an exceptional way. Whether it be leadership, perseverance, accomplishment or otherwise, we think it is a special way to recognize a person in the mission. This year we recognize Eliza Grahnke.

Eliza has been involved in Opportunity Knocks since the early days and is extremely active in nearly all OK programs and events. “Her love of programs is absolutely contagious,” said OK Program Leader & Catering Coordinator Joe Hart.

Outside of OK, Eliza is also a strong leader in the wider community. She holds down part-time jobs at Concordia University, Brookfield Zoo, and Grace Lutheran Church.

Another reason Eliza is a Warrior role model is because of her commitment to health and wellness through her gluten-free diet and as the most active participant in OK Walk to Run Club.

These above reasons warrant the Warrior of the Year Award on their own, but the timing of this recognition comes after an extremely challenging year for Eliza’s family. Several of Eliza’s loved ones passed away recently, including her dear older brother Kris, whose courageous battle with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) inspired countless people in our community and beyond.

Congratulations on the award, Eliza! You deserve it!
**WARRIORS AT WORK**

**GROWERS SCHOOL**

The newly re-named "Knockout Farm" has continued to grow into an awesome program and enterprise space for Opportunity Knocks. Our philosophy is to continue to engage the Warriors on the farm, by building their understanding of farming concepts. That belief led to the creation of the OK Grower's School, which is an eight-week workshop designed to educate and train Warrior farmers. Lessons cover soil composition, plant life cycles, composting, pollinators, and local food systems. By developing their understanding of farming, Warriors prepare to fully engage in farm operations on the Knockout Farm from the crop planning to the harvesting and all the work in between.

**MYSTERY READER**

Since the beginning of 2018, Life Shop Warriors have visited Longfellow Elementary School monthly as a part of the "Mystery Reader" program. Warriors read a variety of children's books and facilitate related activities to 1st grade classrooms at the school. Not only do we have a blast, we work on our professionalism and leadership skills each trip.

---

"Longfellow is extremely grateful for the opportunity to work with the members of OK. We feel that there is a huge need to connect our young merging learners with loving compassionate adults such as the ones in your program. The relationships that form in our class does not only grow inside our classes but extends to our town, our homes and our hearts. For in these types of learning experiences, everyone grows."

— Allison Lamb, 1st Grade Teacher at Longfellow Elementary School in Oak Park

---

"I read a story with Max at Longfellow School. I did great and it was great! It’s me in the cool photo!"

— Karisa R.

---

"The Warriors from Opportunity Knocks are one of my favorite groups to work with. They always come to the pantry with a great spirit and ready to help us with many tasks. This is integral to our mission to ‘work together as a community to relief hunger locally’. It is such a pleasure to have the Warriors on the team."

— Ricardo J. Garcia - Volunteer & Pantry Manager

**OPRF FOOD PANTRY**

Each Thursday afternoon, a pair of Life Shop Warriors goes to the OPRF Food Pantry to help sort and package dry foods, produce, and household items.

"The food goes to people who need food and don’t have it. We like going there. It’s fun and we work on job skills there."

— Max W.

---

"I read a story with Max at Longfellow School. I did great and it was great! It’s me in the cool photo!"

— Karisa R.
KITCHEN PARTNERS BRIDGE GAP

As our catering range has grown certain jobs have created challenges for us to execute in our home facility at the RFCC. To address these challenges, we have formed a series of partnerships to help find secondary space to cater, as well as create culinary programming.

Our friends at the Sugar Beet Schoolhouse have opened their doors to us to use their commercial kitchen space so that we can take on larger jobs that require more equipment. The 19th Century Club has been so impressed by our work that they have listed us as their only preferred outside catering company, affording us the access to jobs and the use of their commercial kitchen space to cater those events.

"River Forest Kitchen and Sugar Beet Schoolhouse are eager to support Opportunity Knocks in any way possible. Their work serves an incredible need in our community and our facility does, as well. When we collaborate we can accomplish amazing things!"

— Cheryl Munoz, Founder & ED of Sugarbeet Schoolhouse

CHEF MADDY SHINES

In May of 2017, we welcomed Maddy Gancer to our Catering Team. Maddy had always showed great interest in our culinary programs in After Opps & Life Shop programming. She was an obvious candidate for consideration on the WCC team.

Our decision was a good one. Her positivity and team-first approach has been a great addition. In addition to her great attitude, she has also shined by improving her knife skills and organization. Even more than the technical skills, her greatest improvements have been in communication skills with customers.

Once soft spoken and shy now she projects confidence and comfort while talking to everyone about our menu and looking for direction on how best to do her job. Our catering continues to grow more and more. Maddy’s work has been a major reason for that.

"It is hard work and community based and provides something to do on those tricky, lonely Fridays and Saturdays. We are so grateful for this in her life."

— Joce Gancer (Maddy’s Mom)

GETTIN’ HER HANDS DIRTY ON THE FARM

It’s been a productive season on the OK Farm! Throughout all the hard work, one Warrior in particular has shown dedication to the success of our farm. Joce Dandby has been a Warrior and volunteer for 6 years and we are thankful for her hard work on the farm this season. She is an active volunteer during our bi-monthly work days and rallies her friends and family to attend, as well. The work is dirty, exhausting, and difficult, yet Joce always maintains a positive and upbeat attitude! The OK Farm would not be where it is today without the help of our dedicated volunteers.

"It is hard work and community based and provides something to do on those tricky, lonely Fridays and Saturdays. We are so grateful for this in her life."

— Cheryl Munoz, Founder & ED of Sugarbeet Schoolhouse

WASTE MINIMIZATION INITIATIVE

Potential crop waste was 315 pounds. With a focus on minimizing, we were able to divert crops to more sustainable uses in 2018.

CRAFTY PARTNERSHIPS

Our craft brewer partnerships have always supported our events, but more recently, these relationships have helped grow our enterprises. We are currently working closely with the taprooms at Kinslahger Brewing Co. and the oak Park Brewing Company. We are providing the classic variety of our Knockout Pickles for Kinslahger’s taproom menu, as well as a collaboratively developed batch of pickled eggs, featuring a beet infusion. At the Oak Park Brewing Co., we have become the exclusive provider of pickles for their menu. They are also using the pickle juice to power up their Bloody Marys and most recently we began preparing a variety of other pickled perishables for a charcuterie tray.

"River Forest Kitchen and Sugar Beet Schoolhouse are eager to support Opportunity Knocks in any way possible. Their work serves an incredible need in our community and our facility does, as well. When we collaborate we can accomplish amazing things!"

— Cheryl Munoz, Founder & ED of Sugarbeet Schoolhouse
Community partnerships are integral to advancing our mission and providing meaningful life experiences to our Warriors. Our team of partners lend support in every way possible — they open their businesses to our programs, volunteer at events, lend financial resources, promote our social enterprises and provide in-kind donations and man power to develop our infrastructure. As our organization has grown and evolved, so too has the number of community partners that support us. We are grateful to each of them for sharing in our vision of community and believing in the voice of the Warriors.

**Always Answering the Call:**

**Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices KoenigRubloff Realty Group**

John Lawrence, Managing Broker, has been involved in OK since inception, initially helping with real estate needs and later joining the Board of Directors in 2011. John said the cause resonated with him and his family, and he was inspired by the passion and commitment from the founders and young staff. As one of the leaders in real estate in the area, John believes that Warriors unique abilities are a vital part of our community fabric, “I love seeing the Warriors out in the community doing the gardening or the catering, or just having fun at an event - it’s important for everyone to see people of all ability levels making a contribution.” Today, in addition to his contributions through the Board, John and his team always find ways to answer our calls for help - from volunteering at and supporting every OK event to working with the Warriors in sponsoring annual OK car wash fundraiser. John recognizes that doing good is also good for business and acknowledges the importance of community in both aspects.

“My business is entirely about building community and sharing the great aspects of OP, RF and FP with those who are newcomers. I also love to connect great people with other great people and OK fits that.”

**John Lawrence, Managing Broker**

---

For more information, please visit the Reports & Documents page on our website at www.opportunityknocksnow.org
Through the Warrior Star Initiative, Warriors work alongside Dominican University psychology and nutrition students to perform various vocational tasks, attend social events, learn about nutrition and healthy living, and develop peer friendships on and off the local university campus. Through their efforts, Warriors have carved out their own unique, dynamic, and productive place within the DU community. At the same time, a steady stream of DU interns and volunteers have created a strong and fresh presence within the OK community.

**WARRIORS HAVE WORKED OR VOLUNTEERED ON THE DU CAMPUS THRU WARRIOR STARS**

20

**DOMINICAN STUDENTS HAVE VOLUNTEERED OR INTERNEED AT OK THRU WARRIOR STARS**

24

**WARRIOR STAR | JACKIE FINN**

Warrior Jackie Finn started volunteering all over the Dominican University campus with the Trinity Volunteer Corps back in 2012. She has worked everywhere from the cafeteria to the greenhouse to the athletic department and more! With her extensive experience and knowledge of DU, she has been a great and enthusiastic peer-leader as the OK-DU partnership has evolved. Jackie has worked at the cafeteria, library, HeadStart nutrition, archive office, and native landscaping. She has also engaged as a leader in showing the newer Warriors to the DU Campus the many jobs that exist thru WSI at DU.

“I LOVE my job! I feel good and I like going there and working hard. I like working with the DU students. They are nice and helpful and friendly! Sometimes we go to parties and events and fairs on campus! I liked going to BINGO day.”

— Jackie Finn (WARRIOR STAR)

**BEE KEEPING**

Warriors have gotten the chance to learn about and practice beekeeping at Dominican University with students and staff during their weekly campus hive checks, as well as through hands-on tours, activities, and DU events. We get to practice vocational skills, socialize with students, learn interesting new information, and overcome our fears of bees!

“This kind of work gets everyone—Warriors, Opportunity Knocks staff, and Dominican students and staff—outdoors, collaborating on projects that everyone can learn from and that benefit everyone, as well as the environment. Next summer we hope to have a vegetable garden, where the Dominican students and staff can learn from the Warriors, whose experience working on the OK Farm will allow them to teach us new and necessary skills!”

— Ellen McManus, DU Professor Beekeeping/Native Landscaping

**DU INTERNSHIPS HELP PROGRAMS & TURN INTO JOBS**

Dominican University is located in River Forest, just 1.8 miles from the OK HQ. With proximity and the evolution of the Warrior Stars Initiative a clear opportunity to engage the DU community in the Warrior Mission emerged. That connection has grown exponentially in the past few years, as we have had the privilege of establishing volunteer and intern positions for nearly 30 DU students.

“OK has been such a meaningful and fun experience for myself, both as an academic and as a professional. The staff at OK from the start were helpful and welcoming. My experience at OK allows me to apply what I am learning in my psychology program as well as gain an appreciation for the community cultivated at OK. OK opens so many doors for the Warriors and it is an honor to be a part of building upon their vision to provide opportunities and resources for this community.”

— Oscar Montanez, psychology intern and now OK Program Leader

---

**NUMBER OF INTERNSHIPS BY SCHOOL IN 2017-18**

- Dominican University: 14
- Concordia University: 2
- UIC: 1
- Roosevelt University: 1

5 TOTAL SECONDARY EDUCATION PARTNERS
24 TOTAL INTERNSHIP POSITIONS CREATED IN 2017-18

10 DOMINICAN UNIVERSITY STUDENT VOLUNTEERS CONNECTED TO WARRIOR STARS

14 DOMINICAN UNIVERSITY INTERNSHIP POSITIONS

6 TOTAL FROM THE ABOVE HAVE BEEN HIRED ON TO THE OK STAFF
DONATE

#GIVING NOVEMBER

YOUR GIFT MATTERS DURING NOVEMBER!

Your gift matters to each of our Warriors as they chart their own paths to living self-fulfilled lives in the community. Visit us online to help us meet multiple matches that will double your donation.

VOLUNTEER

Are you passionate and driven to make a difference in the lives of our Warriors? The gift of your time, expertise and attention are priceless to us. Volunteer opportunities are available in all our programs to support staff and engage with Warriors. It will change their life, it will change your life!

Not ready for a regular commitment? No problem! We need volunteers for short-term projects in programs, at the OK Farm or one of our 4 fun and exciting fundraising events during the year. A list of our 2018 event dates can be found at our website.

WE LOVE SOCIAL MEDIA!

Follow us to keep up with the latest Warrior happenings in programs, special events and much more. We also maintain a blog on our website where we feature the voices of our Warriors, staff and volunteers.

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS
8020 Madison Street
River Forest, IL 60605