



Jesus Hacked: Storytelling Faith

a weekly podcast from the Episcopal Diocese of Missouri
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Episode 011: Who is Grace Hill?

We are joined today by Delores Hardwick. She's the Community Relations and Volunteer Program Manager for Grace Hill Settlement House, and organization that has a deep history with Episcopalians in Missouri. This episode's host is Deborah Nelson Linck.

Debbie Linck: Welcome to Jesus Hacked, our weekly podcast on Storytelling Faith. On today's episode, we're speaking with Delores Hardwick from Grace Hill.

My name is Debbie Nelson Linck, a long-time parishioner at Christ Church Cathedral, St. Louis. Welcome, Delores.

Delores Hardwick: Thank you. Thank you for having me.

Debbie Linck: Grace Hill has a long established history that goes back to a philosophy known as the Settlement Movement that began in the late 1800s. Delores, share with us a little history of what began as Grace Hill Settlement House.

Delores Hardwick: Grace Hill Settlement House was actually founded by the Episcopal Diocese. It started out as Grace Episcopal Church and it was

organized in the late 1840s. It was located at 11th Street and Hadley which is currently where our administrative offices are.

Grace Hill House was founded in 1903 and it was a merger of Holy Cross Clinic and Dispensary and Grace Episcopal Church. The neighborhood saw that there was a need for social services and they were providing volunteers and support for the mission.

Debbie Linck: How have the original mission goals translated into the needs of our present day community?

Delores Hardwick: Grace Hill, as you mentioned, is a part of the settlement house history which was founded by Jane Addams and she was a Nobel Prize winner who came out of Chicago. Settlement houses create a very strong core within communities and they are focused on providing social and economic development as well as educational development.

We currently have a number of programs that focus on those three areas. We strongly encourage social change, economic prosperity, educational change and making sure that our families and our children are receiving the education that they need in order to be successful. We also focus on community development, so making sure that we're working together as a community and being able to provide any type of resources that our families need in order to thrive.

Debbie Linck: In listening to the last comments and overall kind of mission of Grace Hill, specifically what services does your organization offer?

Delores Hardwick: Grace Hill has Head Start programs. We have three locations. One is located at our Water Tower location which is off of 70 and Grand in North St. Louis City. We have two other locations which are a little bit further south. One is at Carondelet which is kind of down Highway 55, and also our Patch location. So between the three centers, we serve 313 Head Start students, ages zero to five. We also, as an agency, have about 88 full-time employees currently. We are able to touch about a thousand children. We have about 3600 direct clients that we work with in between Head Start ... We have our school partnerships which are with Clay Elementary and Bryan Hill Elementary Schools which are also located in North St. Louis City. We have our Women's Business Center. We also have our Neighborhood Leadership Center, and then also our Patch Senior Services and Neighborhood Center.

So we have a number of opportunities available within the organization that really kind of touch on a lot of the lives of the people in the community that we serve. We typically have about 2600 volunteers annually, and we have board members as well who help to govern a lot of the work that we're doing.

Debbie Linck: So who can take advantage of the programs? For example, how would I get my kids into the Head Start program, or the after school program, or any of the other things you spoke to?

Delores Hardwick: Head Start actually serves low-income families so in order to be a part of our Head Start program, we check for income. So we ask that families meet the poverty guidelines in order to be qualified for Head Start. And they would be able to enroll their child. They would come in and fill out an application and then the application will get approved and then they'd be able to have their child start.

As far as Clay and Bryan Hill Elementary, if the children live in the area, they are St. Louis Public Schools so their children would go through the St. Louis Public School District in order to be a part of those schools, but then the after school programs, they're able to be a part of that through Grace Hill and so if there is a need for them to receive after school care, then we would connect the families with one of our student or family mentors that are located inside of those schools and they would be able to work with the families to get them enrolled in the after school program.

Debbie Linck: As a former educator, do you see good parent participation when the children attend the pre-school program as well as the after school program? Do the parents tend to follow up more because they're in this specific program?

Delores Hardwick: Yes. We definitely encourage parent involvement and participation. We have a lot of our parents who are actively involved in the program, but they also volunteer. They come out and they volunteer in the classrooms with their children and with other children. We have parent meetings that are held on a monthly basis and so it's an opportunity for parents to come out and learn information that's really important to their child's development and growth. It also gives them an opportunity to learn about what activities are coming up that are being held at the center, or that might be being held within the neighborhood that they can become a part of.

We definitely see a lot of parent involvement and we strongly encourage parents to be heavily involved in their child's advancement and growth.

Debbie Linck: Wonderful. Wonderful. Delores, your title reads that you are in charge of community relations and act as the volunteer program manager. Tell us about your role with Grace Hill.

Delores Hardwick: Sure. I actually was brought on to help facilitate a lot of the relationships within the community as well as bring on corporate partners that would be able to come out and have a really good, rich volunteer experience. We want to make sure that anyone that comes out

to any of our centers or that come out to help out with any of our programs, that they have a really good experience and it makes them want to continue to give whether that is their time, them coming out and continuing to volunteer with us on an ongoing basis, or if that is an opportunity for them to donate financially to Grace Hill and its mission.

That is primarily what I work on. Just really getting out and spreading the word about the work that we do and what services and programs we have to offer, and making sure that that aligns with the goals of other agencies or companies that have a desire to get involved.

Debbie Linck: I'm going to ask you two things. First of all, what is the most rewarding thing about your job, and do you have a vision for helping the organization to continue to thrive?

Delores Hardwick: Absolutely. I think the most rewarding thing about my job is knowing that I'm a very small piece of a larger picture, and knowing that I have an opportunity to really come in and be able to bring any skills or talent or experience that I have and help to further the mission of Grace Hill along even more. I think just being able to interact with the different organizations and community members that I interact with on a regular basis and getting to meet new people is a wonderful opportunity and experience.

I think as far as moving forward and helping to build a more futuristic goal, I think that I really see Grace Hill having the opportunity to be more well known in the community. I think people for a very long time have just never really been aware of all of the opportunities and services that we provide and so I think being able to just really help people to understand that there are opportunities and services out there and that there is hope for them in whatever situation they may have going on, but just really making sure that I'm helping to get that word out there and help people to understand what we do more.

Debbie Linck: Talk about some of the needs of the community, why they would come to you and kind of share a little bit about your organization as a last stop for people. They don't know it's there and then they find this beacon and you offer them ...

Delores Hardwick: Sure. Absolutely. So one of the things that we currently have at our Water Tower location is what we call kind of our hub, which refers to wrap-around services. So what we found is that the needs of the community are pretty much around community and social impact, giving them an opportunity to have resources available to them and knowing that they have options. Education is also a huge need for the community and so that's where our Head Start program comes in, our school partnership programs come in, and then also within some of the other

programs that we have, they're getting those educational components as well.

Then the other piece is the economic and so we learn that a lot of the members in the community they don't have that economic stability and so we really wanted to provide them with the education and the resources around that. So at our Water Tower hub which is again located in North St. Louis City, we have a St. Louis community credit union which is located inside of the hub. It's open free to the public but it is heavily utilized by a lot of our families and surrounding community members, and so that is an opportunity for them to come out and be able to bank and have a financial institution that they can go to and that they trust. Trust is something that a lot of people struggle with and so having the credit union located within the Water Tower hub is an opportunity for people to start rebuilding that trust in financial institutions.

Then we also have a partnership within the hub with Connections to Success. They used to be known as Dress for Success but then they expanded on that and so they decided to not only offer opportunities for people to have interview and professional attire but they also wanted to give them the tools and resources to be able to interview properly for a job and also have what they needed to sustain a job once they got it. So we have a partnership with them. They are also located inside of our building.

So, again, we try to provide a lot of those wraparound services. So if a mom comes into the Head Start program, she brings her child, she's there, she knows that her child has the educational component but she can also get access to other areas within the hub that will help her to be sustainable as well for her family.

Debbie Linck: You have a lot of people take advantage of that?

Delores Hardwick: We do. We really promote a lot of our resources and we makes sure that our families are aware of what's in the building as well as any other partnering agencies that we work with so that they are aware of what's available to them. So, yes, we do.

Debbie Linck: Personally, what attracted you to Grace Hill?

Delores Hardwick: Grace Hill has a longstanding history of being in the community and I think its mission to really help families to thrive and to help empower them to be self-sustainable is what really attracted me to become a staff member. I've worked in non-profit now for about 13 years and I've always been driven by giving people tools. I think that it's one thing to hand things over to them but to give them the tools and the resources they need in order to be the best that they can possibly be, I

think that's most important, and so I feel that Grace Hill offers that opportunity.

Debbie Linck: Where do you see Grace Hill making a real difference in the community?

Delores Hardwick: I think Grace Hill currently has, again, the history and people really have a respect for Grace Hill and what it's done within the community currently, but I think Grace Hill has so much more to do and has a lot of growth around again the educational piece. I think that we can never get enough education and I think the more that we educate our children and our families, the more that we are grooming and providing opportunities for them to just be the best that they can. So I think as long as Grace Hill continues to educate and provide opportunities for families, I think it has a long way to go and will continue to have a place in the community.

Debbie Linck: I'm curious. Education is a big component and you've spoken about the early childhood program. Is there any education program for adults?

Delores Hardwick: Yes. We have our Neighborhood Leadership Academy which is an opportunity for adults to be able to really take charge of their community and get the tools that they need in order to help their community thrive. We have our Women's Business Center which is focused on women entrepreneurship and helping them to have their own business and giving them the tools that they need in order to be successful in that. So I think that's a really good opportunity for parents to be able to kind of build on their dream and their vision and get the educational tools they need there.

Again, our partnership that we have with Connections to Success really focuses on a lot of resume building, helping parents set goals, making sure that they are fulfilling those goals and helping to get them employed, and promote continuous education. So, yes, there are a number of opportunities for parents as well.

Debbie Linck: Great. Let's shift gears a bit. Please share some events Grace Hill has coming up.

Delores Hardwick: Sure. We are currently working with the Episcopal Diocese to try and conduct kind of a relationship building opportunity between Grace Hill and the diocese. We know that there's a lot of history there. The diocese has a very strong foundation with Grace Hill and so we want to be able to build upon that and kind of re-engage members of the diocese with members of Grace Hill. So we are working to have an opportunity coming up. We're looking at the month of May and it would be an

opportunity to kind of just have people in the community and members of the diocese to kind of talk about some of the challenges that they might find within the community, but also an opportunity to talk about how we can partner and be able to move a lot of the goals and mission of Grace Hill further along. So that's one event that we have coming up, and there's more to come for that.

We also have an event coming up, our summer concert series which is called Whitaker. It's a six-week concert series. It will begin on June 8th and go until July 20th, and that will be every Thursday evening starting at 6:00 p.m. until 8:30. It will feature many bands and performers that are really locally known, and then we will have children's activities, intermission activities. It's just a really neat opportunity for community members to come together and have a really good time.

We also encourage parents to come out and community members to come out and bring their children. It is free to the community so you're welcome to come out and join us. There's more information to come. You can visit our website at www.gracehillsettlement.org.

Debbie Linck: The Whitaker series is at ...

Delores Hardwick: It's at St. Louis Place Park. That is actually on St. Louis Avenue and Rauschenbach. So it will be there every Thursday evening beginning June 8 through July 20th.

Debbie Linck: Very nice. How can folks in the St. Louis community volunteer at Grace Hill?

Delores Hardwick: People can volunteer by going on our website. Again, it's www.gracehillsettlement.org. There is an opportunity to see some of our current opportunities that we have available as well as fill out an application online. Applications will be sent to me then I will have an opportunity to meet with the volunteers to really understand what their areas of interest are and make sure that we are giving them opportunities to volunteer where they're most passionate about. So I would be the best person to contact. Again, you can contact me through the website, or I can be reached at 314-584-6701.

Debbie Linck: Your program seems like it's just a wealth of resources and helping community to connect and just has so much to offer people, and they need to know more about it. So I hope that through our talking, people will be excited about learning more about Grace Hill.

Any closing thoughts you'd like to share, Delores?

Delores Hardwick: No. Just thank you for the opportunity to be able to talk about Grace Hill today and to talk about some of our volunteer opportunities and some of our programs. Would love to have any members to be able to reach out and learn a little bit more about us, but be willing to come out and volunteer and kind of see things in action.

Debbie Linck: Our guest has been Delores Hardwick, Community Relations and Volunteer Program Manager of Grace Hill Settlement House.

Delores, thank you for your work and the contributions of Grace Hill to our St. Louis community.

Please join us next week for the next episode of Jesus Hacked.

I'm Debbie Nelson Linck. Thanks so much for listening.