Maria Lombardi: Blog 1 Carolyn Parham

Today was our fourth day volunteering at D.C. Central Kitchen. We were originally supposed to meet with Robert Egger, the founder of D.C.C.K. but because he was at an out of town engagement, we were fortunate enough to have the privilege of meeting with Carolyn Parham. Ms. Parham is the Volunteer Program Coordinator at D.C.C.K. and enjoys a close relationship with Gettysburg College. In fact, she has worked with every prior “Homelessness in America” seminar and even attended the opening of Campus Kitchens at Gettysburg College.

Ms. Parham sat down with us and told her incredible story of mistakes, redemption, and what led her to D.C.C.K. What was so amazing about her anecdotes was her openness and willingness to share. She started off talking about how she had two daughters, was a divorcee, and grew up in the foster care system. Along with her former husband, Ms. Parham described how she had been addicted to crack. What led her to D.C. Central Kitchens was the hospitalization of her daughter. The doctor treating her daughter informed the Parham’s that unless the family lived in a no-drug environment, he would not release her to them. In her search for a way to better her life, Ms. Parham found D.C.C.K. The Culinary Training Program allowed her to join and that was truly the first day of a new life. She stayed clean, graduated from the program, and eventually moved into a new, nicer apartment. Unfortunately, her husband of the time regressed and started using again. Ms. Parham eventually divorced him because of his addiction.

After graduating from the Culinary Arts course at D.C. Central Kitchens, Ms. Parham went on to pursue a career working in school cafeterias. This did not last very long until D.C.C.K. called her and offered the position she is currently in now as the Volunteer Program Coordinator. Ms. Parham’s life is truly an example of why D.C. Central Kitchens is an amazing program. She was able to bring her life full circle and become a contributing member of society. And that is the attitude of D.C.C.K.; it might be easier to hand a person a fish and tell him to eat it, but it is more effective to teach someone to fish so that they will be able to provide for themselves in the future. Ms. Parham is also a personal representation of Robert Egger’s vision for eradicating homelessness and poverty. Instead of just making D.C.C.K. into a soup kitchen that just feeds the homeless, he corporatized the business of charity, with his catering business Fresh Start and his Culinary Institute. The catering business not only provides jobs for the graduates of the Institute, but also a profit that can be used at D.C.C.K. Also, the Institute enables graduates to pull themselves out of poverty, not by giving handouts, but by giving the chefs the power to better their lives. It was truly an honor to speak with Ms. Parham and get the opportunity to gain perspective into the breadth of which D.C. Central Kitchen makes an impact on those in need.