



## OPEN ARMS OF MINNESOTA

### *The Story of Open Arms*

Open Arms of Minnesota's service began in 1986 when our founder, Bill Rowe, prepared dinner in the kitchen of his apartment and delivered it to a few men with AIDS who had become too ill to shop for groceries and cook for themselves. The isolation and stigmatization created by fear of this new disease, as well as the dramatic and unintentional weight loss it caused, made nutrition intervention critical in the lives of people with HIV/AIDS.

At Open Arms, we thought that if people with HIV/AIDS could just maintain their weight, we could extend both the quality and the length of their lives. Soon, a growing pool of dedicated volunteers began preparing and delivering free meals to our first clients. From the very start, we made a commitment to provide meals to anyone in a household affected by disease, including dependent children, caregivers, partners, and spouses.

Today, Open Arms continues to embrace the same core values and singular vision that have guided our work from the beginning. As our program has expanded, we have moved our operations from storefronts to church basements to our current building on Franklin Avenue in Minneapolis. But no matter where we operate, the kitchen remains the heart of who we are.

A registered dietitian and food services director design menus that ensure our meals meet appropriate nutrition and food safety guidelines.

Our staff and volunteers cook meals with a personal touch, drawing from their favorite recipes to prepare a wide variety of delicious and nutritious meals that look, smell, and taste good to our clients. And year after year, as rates of HIV infection and the number of people living with HIV/AIDS have escalated, Open Arms has kept up with the changing pandemic, both in the Twin Cities and in townships in South Africa, where one in five adults is HIV-positive.

In 2000, we began partnering with South African non-profit organizations to provide food and nutrition to Africans who weren't living with HIV/AIDS, but were dying from it. Open Arms' continuing work in South Africa has become a model for other agencies to follow. The Association of Nutrition Services Agencies (ANSA), a Washington, D.C.-based nutrition organization, has launched programs in Namibia and South Africa based on Open Arms' international work. And we didn't stop there.

Throughout the years, as more people learned about our program, Open Arms received requests from people with other diseases who needed our help. Women newly diagnosed with breast cancer asked us to deliver meals to themselves and their children while they underwent treatment. Men and women with MS who were cutting or burning themselves attempting to make their own meals, inquired if we could assist them. Caregivers of people in late stages of Lou Gehrig's disease, exhausted

# OPENING OUR ARMS TO SERVE MORE PEOPLE WITH MORE DISEASES WAS THE RIGHT THING TO DO. IT'S ONE WAY THAT OPEN ARMS CAN HONOR OUR COMMITMENT TO HIV/AIDS AND ENSURE THAT SOMETHING GOOD COMES FROM THIS TERRIBLE DISEASE.

from the stress of caring for their loved ones, told us how helpful it would be to receive meals that their sick family members could actually swallow. Having seen the positive impact that our program had on the lives of people living with HIV/AIDS, how could we not try to help others?

In 2004, Open Arms became one of the first nutrition organizations in the United States to expand our service to individuals with all of these diseases, while also increasing our outreach to people with HIV/AIDS. Opening our arms wider to serve more people is the right thing to do. It's a way for us to build on the promises we made to individuals with HIV/AIDS, and to ensure that something good comes from a terrible disease. It also provided remarkable opportunities for continued growth and creativity.

To better meet client needs, our kitchen developed a mild menu that avoids strong spices and acidic foods for those who struggle to eat because of nausea. Soft and pureed meals were introduced for others who have difficulty swallowing. A greater variety of sandwiches and wraps were offered to clients whose dexterity problems make using knives and forks challenging. A special menu was designed for children that balanced the need for food that kids will eat with the increasing awareness of child obesity. Nausea Care Packs were assembled with items like ginger ale, and saltine crackers that can help calm an upset stomach. And we launched a frozen meal delivery system that offers clients more choices of what to eat each day and better meets food safety requirements.

All of these programmatic enhancements, along with Open Arms' steady commitment to our mission, have been recognized with the Victory Against Hunger Award, presented by the Congressional Hunger Center, and with the Brian Coyle Leadership Award, the highest honor given by the Minnesota chapter of the Human Rights Campaign. Frank Abdale, a nationally recognized figure in the field of nutrition and health and ANSA's executive director, summarizes Open Arms' reputation:

*"In a field known for its innovation and commitment to excellence, Open Arms consistently rises above their peers to provide both leadership and vision on a national and internat*

*ional scale. They have done far more than many other organizations, [who have] more resources, to develop best practices that are now accepted as the gold standard for the field.*

*Open Arms is a strong and steady light shining out from America's heartland to illuminate the lives of countless people throughout the world who are challenged by illness, isolation, poverty, and hunger. We point to them again and again as an example of what can happen when a community comes together and, undaunted by fear, commits to saying 'yes'."*

This is why Open Arms' capital campaign is so important. We are building a kitchen with a heart so we can take our unique model of care, honed over two decades of service, and share it with as many people as possible. It is a singular vision that can positively impact so many more lives.