

# Vitalink



## 20th Anniversary

Twenty years ago, Vital Bridges was born in the throes of an epidemic that was killing our friends, colleagues and neighbors, and a city and country that were slow to respond. Co-founder Lori Cannon remembers: "I guess you could say it was the best of times, it was the worst of times. The worst being that our friends were suffering and dying. The best of times being the cohesiveness of the community to rally, show solidarity to those who were suffering by coming up with ideas to serve."

Bands of determined volunteers organized to cook and deliver meals, lend support and care for people with AIDS. On December 24, 1988, thirty-five people throughout Chicago received hot, holiday meals and the gift of friendship and support. This simple act grew into Vital Bridges.

As the epidemic grew and changed, so did Vital Bridges. Once medical treatments became more effective, our food program expanded to include grocery centers across the city and then suburbs. The goal – to provide high quality, nutritious food that would support the medical regimens of people living with HIV/AIDS, while giving them the opportunity to choose their food and to prepare it when and how they preferred.

The first center was opened in Lakeview on the north side of the city, followed shortly by centers on the west side in Humboldt Park and on the south side in Englewood. Hundreds of clients now visited the centers on a weekly basis to pick up food. Assuring that we offered appropriate nutrition was important, and in 1995, Vital Bridges hired its first dietitian to oversee the quality of our food programs. Since then, the organization has sustained a team of dietitians to help clients learn how to manage their diets and their medical regimens in order to improve their health.

In 2002, the integration of the services clients need most –

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