

OUR INDEPENDENCE

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Delaware's Voice For The Voiceless



Connections Pitches In With City Clean Up

By John P. Clyne

On Saturday morning, May 4, 2013, residents of Wilmington and members of community agencies, businesses and civic groups rallied together to complete various projects throughout City neighborhoods. Wilmington's Community Project Day marked a day of volunteer service during which individuals and organizations demonstrated their community spirit by participating in activities to improve neighborhoods and make life better in some way. Ideas for particular activities were solicited beforehand. Projects this year included new or improved community landscaping and gardens, street clean-up, litter removal, and other beautification measures. More than 500 residents participated in the effort, carrying out over 70 projects.

This marked the third consecutive year for Wilmington Community Project Day. City Council Member Charles "Bud" Freel first launched the concept in 2011. The event is sponsored by the City of Wilmington with special support from the Public Works and Planning Departments, Office of Constituent Services and City Council, along with invaluable contributions of materials and funding from local businesses like Home Depot and ShopRite.

One group joining in for the undertaking consisted of staff and clients from Connections CSP. The Connections team helped clean 38 blocks in *Continued on page 2*

Judge Jan R. Jurden Presiding Mental Health Court

By John P. Clyne

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition that mental illness plays a significant and undeniable role in criminal justice involvement. There are thousands and thousands of people in this country who are caught in a vicious cycle of repeated incarcerations. They suffer from mental illness, yet never receive the specialized treatment they need to prevent future imprisonment. By some accounts, over 50% of inmates in state prison suffer from some form of serious mental illness.



Under the direction of Judge Jan R. Jurden, the Superior Court of Delaware has established a Mental Health Probation Court as an available disposition for certain eligible mentally ill defendants in criminal matters within the Court's jurisdiction. The goal of this innovative mechanism for resolution of cases is to reduce recidivism rates and save criminal justice resources by holding defendants suffering from mental illnesses accountable for their actions but ensuring that they have access to necessary services to support their efforts to successfully complete probation and become healthy, productive and law-abiding citizens.

In the not too distant past, most criminal judges, recognizing mental illness as both a root cause and a mitigating factor in the underlying offense, would impose a term of imprisonment suspended for probation, rather than immediate incarceration, where allowable. Ironically, however, *Continued on page 5*



The Hicks Anderson Community Center at 5th and Madison will host a Community Health Fair on June 20 from 4PM to 7PM. There will be Health Screenings for Diabetes, Cholesterol, Blood Pressure, Depression and more. Health professionals from Christiana Care will be on hand. There will be free food and drink as well as games for the kids. Get your Summer off to a Healthy start at the West Center City Community Health Fair.



Edward C. Pankowski Jr. readying to deliver a meal

Meals On Wheels Delaware

By John P. Clyne

They're called the "Golden Years," but for some senior citizens, these years are tarnished by illness, loneliness, diminished capacity, and a loss of independence. Family and friends want to help but may not know how. Sometimes, there just isn't anyone around to help. How can I or a loved one receive meals? Faced with these challenges, people have turned to the Meals On Wheels programs throughout Delaware for more than 30 years. Meals On Wheels helps seniors to remain independent, maintain good health, manage their own affairs, find needed assistance or care, and live life with dignity. *Continued on page 8*

HOW IT WORKS

This newspaper is produced almost entirely by those who are homeless and without jobs. They also are the ones distributing it. Each vendor pays 25 cents for a copy they then ask \$1 for. They keep the difference.

HOW TO HELP

Get the newspaper. Give your distributor a tip. Advertise in our pages. Buy papers in bulk for your organization. Donate at www.addictionscoalitionde.org.

OUR INDEPENDENCE

By The Addictions Coalition of Delaware, Inc

Published in cooperation with Connections CSP

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Connections Pitches In With City Clean Up Continued from page 1

Quaker Hill, Trinity Vicinity and West Center City. Joe Connor, a Connections volunteer and crew organizer, stated before the event that “[t]he people at Connections live, work and play in our City. We are very interested in and invested in making Wilmington a better place to do all three. We are happy and enthusiastic to help.”

Mayor Dennis P. Williams also turned out for the occasion. The Mayor has said before that he believes that “Wilmington’s strongest asset is its neighborhoods.”

Soon after the projects were finished, the City hosted a community appreciation cook-out in Freedom Plaza at the Louis L. Redding City/County Building. ShopRite and the Kenny Family Foundation provided food and refreshments as volunteers had an opportunity to relax and meet neighbors from around the City. The Delaware Humane Association was also there to talk to City residents about their animal shelter services. So was Recyclebank which provided information about Wilmington’s curbside recycling program. Every group that participated in Wilmington Community Project Day also received a printed certificate of appreciation from the City.



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America's Drug Abuse

By Steven Studer, BS CADC

Drug abuse in the United States continues to escalate every year. The number of people that use and abuse illicit drugs has grown immensely over recent years and reaches into the millions. There is a difference between the 3 most abused illicit drugs nationwide, compared to the 3 most abused illicit drugs in the state of Delaware. Drug abuse also varies by age, race and gender.

The drug categories included in this article are Narcotics, Stimulants, Hallucinogens, Cannabis and Prescription Drugs. Depressants and Sedatives-Hypnotics are also discussed and are included under the Prescription Drug category. Many drugs in these categories are legal for use in the medical community. They fall into the illicit realm when they are sold and used by people with the intent of abusing the substance or illegally profiting from its sale. Webster's New World Dictionaries (1988) defines illicit as not allowed by law, unlawful, improper, prohibited and unauthorized. This definition allows for any drug, from any of the above drug categories, to be considered illicit. The American Psychiatric Association (2000) states that many prescribed and over the counter medications can also cause substance-related disorders. This allows for all drugs to be a potential problem when used inappropriately. These statistics do not include the use of alcohol.

Drug abuse affects all socioeconomic classes, ages, races and genders. It holds no prejudices against anyone. Whether you come from the upper class, middle class or lower economic class, all classes have the chance of becoming addicted to illicit substances.

America's Facts and Figures

With knowledge of illicit drug use and its effect on people, it is important to determine which of these drugs are the most abused. This information is necessary for determining the treatment methods that are needed for the drug abusing population.



The first subject is the 3 most abused drugs nationwide and the age groups that use them. The author began with the age group of 18 to 25 and then 26 and older. The 12 to 17 year old age group is not calculated to maintain adult participation only; however some figures were mentioned in the gender section.

The second area of discussion is the racial differences in drug users. Whether the diverse races of drug users live in the same region, or in completely different areas, the primary drugs of abuse are dissimilar.

The third and final area of disclosure reviews the gender differences in drug users. Men as well as women both have addictive tendencies; however their choice of drugs of use varies. The following were my findings.

Most Abused Drugs and Age Groups

The following information was retrieved from the 2005 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH). The Office of Applied Studies (2006) reports that marijuana is the most commonly used illicit drug (14.6 million past month users). In 2005, it was used by 74.2 percent of current illicit drug users. Rates of current use of illicit drugs were higher for young adults aged 18 to 25 (20.1 percent). In 2006, for this young adult group, it was reported that 16.6 percent had used marijuana, 6.3 percent had abused prescription drugs, 2.6 percent had used cocaine, and 1.5 percent had used hallucinogens.

The Office of Applied Studies (2006) also stated that among adults aged 26 or older, 5.8 percent reported current illicit drug use in 2005. In this age group, 4.1 percent used marijuana, and 1.9 percent used prescription-type drugs. Moreover, fewer than 1 percent used cocaine (0.8 percent), hallucinogens (0.2 percent), and inhalants (0.1 percent).

It appeared strange that heroin statistics had not been included in the above reports. Through investigation, it was discovered that the national figures for heroin use and abuse were much lower than anticipated.

According to the 2005 NSDUH, heroin use in the 18 to 25 year age group was 0.2 per cent and the 26 and older age group reflected 0.0 percent.

This report shows the following statistics. With the 18 to 25 and the 26 and older groups of illicit drug users, marijuana is the first most commonly abused drug in the nation with a

20.7 percent rate of use. The second most commonly abused drug is the non-medical use of prescription type drugs with an 8.2 per cent usage rate. The final figure and the third most commonly abused drug among illicit drug users was cocaine with a 3.4 per cent usage rate. The percentages may seem low in some cases but when converted to numbers, can give a different perspective. U.S. Census Bureau (2007) stated that the population of the U.S. on April 1, 2000 was 281,421,906 and the estimate of the population of the United States for January 1, 2007 was 300,888,812. Using the 2005 survey figures and the 2007 estimate from the U.S. Census Bureau, we can estimate that over 62 million people were current marijuana users, almost 25 million people were current non-medical prescription drug users and over 10 million people were current cocaine users.

The information below concerning racial and gender differences was also compiled from the 2005 NSDUH. Although it was not age specific, it did calculate the percentages from the 12 years and older population. This allowed for us to observe the gender and racial differences of the drug abusing populace.

Racial Differences

Differences in the percentages of illicit drug use and the racial backgrounds of the users also showed variances. According to the NSDUH, the calculations were as follows. Not Hispanic or Latino, 8.2 per cent, White, 8.1 per cent, Black or African American, 9.7 per cent, American Indian or Alaska Native, 12.8 per cent, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, 8.7 per cent, Two or More Races, 12.2 per cent and Hispanic or Latino at 7.6 per cent.

Gender Differences

The final area to consider is the percentage differences between men and women. These statistics were also compiled from the 2005 NSDUH report stated earlier. The percentage for the illicit drug abusing population was 10.2 percent for males and 6.1 percent for females.

This data is beneficial in determining what treatment methods are needed to help specific populations categorized by age, race, and gender. Being able to offer the right treatment to the right person at the right time can greatly increase the person's chance of successful recovery outcomes. All references are available upon request from the author.

For a list of treatment options in Delaware please call the Delaware Helpline at 2-1-1 or go to www.delaware211.org/Services?d=5cc868a

www.addictionscoalitionde.org

Judge Jan R. Jurden Presiding Mental Health Court Continued from page 1

instead of cutting the mentally ill defendant a break, the judge was merely postponing an inevitable reappearance, usually before a different judge, on a violation of probation and facing almost certain jail time. Practically speaking, traditional sentencing did not take into account that the average defendant suffering from a mental condition simply lacks the capacity and faces too many obstacles to succeed at conventional probation. As a result, mental illness arguably became criminalized, and already overcrowded prisons became ill-equipped, de facto mental institutions.

In April 2008, stirred by a colleague's frustration one day with revolving-door violations by probationers with mental illnesses, Judge Jurden spearheaded the implementation of a specialized "Mental Health Court" for dispensing with felony-level charges in Superior Court. The goal was to systematically identify and help motivated defendants get treatment for their mental illnesses and avoid repeat encounters with the criminal justice system. While she did shepherd the original idea, Judge Jurden makes clear that the project has always been a team effort by many players from many agencies. The collaborative partnership coordinates the efforts of the Superior Court, the Attorney General's Office, the Office of the Public Defender, the Office of Probation and Parole, and TASC (Treatment Access Center). The participation of each agency is critical to the overall functioning and success of the program.

In order to qualify for Mental Health Court, an accused must have been diagnosed with a severe, chronic Axis I psychiatric disorder, such as Schizophrenia, Bipolar Disease or Major Depression. According to Judge Jurden, about 75% of the defendants in the purview of her court also have co-occurring substance dependence, since they frequently turn to alcohol or drugs to self-medicate symptoms of mental illness. As a result, substance abuse treatment with TASC oversight is almost always ordered as a condition. The program is not open to sex offenders or violent felons. Candidates must also be willing to knowingly and voluntarily enter a plea to the charge against them. If the defendant is deemed eligible and accepted, a case management plan is developed for them to follow. The defendant is also referred to a wide range of service providers who help make connections with housing, counseling, treatment and other resources.

Mental Health Court probationers report regularly as appropriate to both specially-assigned probation officers and TASC workers who oversee the individual's

mental health status, treatment progress and compliance with prescriptions for psychotropic medications. The dynamic is as much educational as it is supervisory and most defendants benefit greatly and visibly thrive from the intensive attention. Probationers also routinely appear before Judge Jurden during her specially-dedicated Mental Health Court calendars which are held on Wednesday afternoons. At those times, the judge is briefed on individuals' progress and she uses the opportunity to encourage and motivate them. Now and again, she may need to caution someone about poor performance or relapses.

Some critics have suggested that Mental Health Court reflects softness on crime. But, Judge Jurden points out that the program's requirements and monitoring conditions, though a little different, are not less stringent than typical probation. Moreover, she adds that "we are merely teaching them what they have to do to succeed. They want to do well, but they don't start out with the skills or the tools or the mental health to do it." Long-term outcomes support the program's ability to reduce recidivism. A 2012 study showed that among graduates the re-incarceration rate was 22.5% and the re-conviction rate was just 10%, strikingly lower results than the norm.

Judge Jurden believes that there are 3 key elements of Mental Health Court which contribute to its overall success. First, the program is completely voluntary and the accused must fully agree to participate. This guarantees that the defendant is personally invested. Second, there is a lot of information sharing and transparency between all parties. It is essential that the probationer knows that he or she has a say and a role in their supervision. And third, defendants are constantly reminded of the critical need for compliance with their medication protocols and treatment. The idea is that mental illness is a disease just like diabetes, and one must do everything possible to stay on top of it.

On the bench, Judge Jurden projects the ideal bearing, consistency and temperament for

her role. She intuitively manages to maintain a balance between positive reinforcement and stern admonition. She is quick to recognize and commend continued compliance. In those instances, her dialogue is sprinkled with phrases like "Good for you!" or "You're doing great, keep it up." At other times, when a probationer has deviated from expected behavior, she gives short shrift to excuses and issues a grim rebuke, "You do you realize, don't you, that there will be serious negative consequences if this happens again." In every case, though, she always makes sure to ask "Is there anything else we can be doing for you?" or "Are you happy with the way things are going?" Judge Jurden is one of the program's best assets because participants look up to and respect her and will toe the line to gain her approval and avoid disfavor.

Accumulated data shows that since its inception in 2008, the New Castle County Mental Health Court has accepted and monitored over 150 participants. Of course, given the population, some fail to make it. Only about 53% ultimately completed their probation. However, for those who do "graduate," the accomplishment is momentous. For many, it spells the first time in their life they have achieved something meaningful. The occasion is normally marked by a ceremony in the courtroom at which time the person is presented with a certificate. It is not unusual for Judge Jurden to come down off the bench to offer congratulations. Judge Jurden shared that "it is the most gratifying work she does on the bench."

The effectiveness of Mental Health Court has not gone unnoticed. In 2010, Jack Markell presented the New Castle County Mental Health Court Team with the Governor's Excellence Award. The tribute recognizes teamwork which produces superior service and tangible results.

Mental Health Court probation is currently capped at 40 people, but Judge Jurden believes that if sufficient resources were available, the demand would easily triple that number.

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JUNE 2013 Our Independence 5

Sisters In Success Event At Baylor

By Brian Bartley, Chief Deputy Public Defender



Following the keynote speech were a variety of workshops given by judges and other experts focusing on a number of topics ranging from dealing with reentry barriers, managing

stress, improving self-expression through dance and self-relaxation through yoga, understanding the health issues facing justice-involved women, maintaining healthy relationships, dressing for success, maximizing employment opportunities, coping with grief and loss; helping mothers navigate their children through Delaware's education system, understanding Delaware's laws on child custody and visitation, and avoiding the increasing perils of social media. Finding appropriate housing upon release was one of the problems women inmates cited as a barrier they faced upon release and a reason they continue to be involved in the criminal justice system.

One powerful set of speakers were two former Baylor inmates. They had gone onto very successful lives but returned to Baylor for the first time on May 13 to share their stories of how despite failure they were able to overcome their problems and went on to recovery from addiction and to succeed in the outside world. Their central message was to deal with the disabling trauma and abuse that led to their criminal involvement.

The final speaker was the nationally recognized S. Renee Smith who focused on the dynamics and interconnectedness of violence, trauma, physical and emotional abuse, substance abuse, anger and domestic violence that cause victims to later become inmates.

The event was uplifting and enlightening for all involved as the women inmates and female professionals found they had much in common

The Sisters in Success event was developed under the leadership of Superior Court Judge Jan Jurden and jointly sponsored by the Delaware Department of Correction, the Baylor Women's Correctional Institution, the Delaware Criminal Justice Council, the Women and Law Section of the Delaware State Bar Association and the Delaware Chapter of the National Association of Women Judges. Lunch for all participants was provided by the generous donation of the local ShopRite organization. The professional volunteers learned first-hand of the existence and expertise of women inmates participating in Baylor's Culinary Arts program who prepared and presented a pre-conference breakfast.

Baylor Warden Wendi Caple capsulized the importance of the conference: "While we

recognize that trauma is a factor that leads to the incarceration of women, we also know that by empowering them with the tools and knowledge gained during this conference, these justice-involved women stand a better chance for successful re-integration into society as returning citizens. It is both an honor and a privilege to witness and be a part of this endeavor by the Criminal Justice community. We are hopeful that Sister's in Success becomes an annual event."

Warden Caple has been leading Delaware's dialogue on the connection between criminal justice involvement, trauma and homelessness since November, 2011 when she announced that "today we recognize that the restoration of incarcerated women requires a different approach . . . one of trauma informed care for female offenders in Delaware."

Mayor Welcomes Swedish Crown

By John P. Clyne

Mayor Dennis P. Williams, on behalf of the City of Wilmington, welcomed King Carl XVI Gustaf and Queen Silvia of Sweden and their daughter Princess Madeleine, and other foreign dignitaries, on Saturday, May 11th and presented them with a key to the City. The event was held at Dravo Plaza on the Riverfront. The royal visit was in tribute to the 375th anniversary of the first European settlement in the Delaware Valley. In 1638, the first permanent settlers of Delaware landed the original Kalmar Nyckel along the Christina River. This settlement spawned the Swedish colony known as New Sweden. Fort Christina, located in our own City of Wilmington, was the very first settlement. The City celebrated and paid tribute to



these historic events with a "Welcome to Wilmington" celebration. The Wilmington Children's Choir sang the countries' national anthems, and Johan Persson, mayor of Kalmar, our Swedish sister city, addressed the crowd before the honored guests boarded the Kalmar Nyckel to embark for Fort Christina Park. Governor Jack and First Lady Carla Markell, Senator Tom Carper and his wife, Martha, and Congressman John Carney joined in on the festivities.

The "Welcome to Wilmington" celebration spelled an entire afternoon of festivity and fun for the many families that attended. There was food, activities and exhibits to honor the rich Swedish heritage. Appropriately, the band "New Sweden" was on hand for musical entertainment, sharing their unique flavor of Americana, folk and indie rock with the excited audience.



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The A & G Steak Shop will let our students further develop skills that will help them find jobs by preparing and serving meals from this social enterprise, and to provide catering for corporate parties, meetings, and conferences. Profits from the A & G Steak Shop will go to improve and expand the Culinary Arts Training Program itself, provide scholarships, and with the goal that the program will one day be 100% supported by the social enterprise initiative of the A & G Steak Shop.

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MILESTONES

By Stanley R. Wills

Hello to our loyal readers. The last article I submitted to the "Our Independence" newspaper, I talked about what this paper has done to help me gain my independence. Well, since then, a lot has changed, not only in my work as an "Our Independence" vendor, but also in my personal situation.

When I am on the corner of my choice, which is 10th and Market Streets, everyone that passes me by either speaks kind words to me or calls me by name.

This has given me a sense of belonging to something and feeling like part of a family. All of my regular, loyal customers always have much concern for me, especially when my mother, Delores M. Wills, died on October 2, 2012. All the love I felt while distributing this paper was so moving that some days I was in tears after an encouraging word from someone. I am deeply grateful to my many customers and friends for enhancing my life.

The next major change in my life is that I am now renting a room on the north side of Wilmington. What I generate from this paper has allowed me to save money and to acquire my own place. This milestone in my life has opened up other opportunities, such as possible full-time employment, now that I have a permanent address. Prospective employers have a place to contact me. GOD has truly blessed me and this paper has opened up the world for me.

Being involved in this endeavor is the best decision I have ever made. Thank you "Our Independence."



Meals On Wheels Delaware
Continued from page 1

Meals On Wheels Delaware is a nonprofit organization working with five meal-providing agencies manned by thousands of volunteers from corporations, civic, religious and community groups. Together, the program provides and distributes meals every day to over 4,000 homebound seniors. In fact, last year nearly 635,000 meals were delivered throughout the state. Meals On Wheels Delaware contributes to the partnership by providing additional financial and volunteer resources to agency providers to ensure that seniors throughout Delaware are given the support they need. Meals On Wheels Delaware provides more than a meal. It also provides the gift of health, independence, and companionship to homebound seniors in Delaware.

Meals On Wheels is truly a volunteer-driven agency. Volunteers are the hearts and hands of the program. Thousands of caring individuals, whether they're retired, self-employed, homemakers or managing major companies, deliver nutritious lunches each day to needy seniors. Giving of their time to serve others is what makes them special. Their caring, dedicated, and generous contribution turns a mission into a reality. Not only do volunteers bring nourishing meals to their homebound older neighbors, they offer participants a brief, cheerful visit and the security of knowing that someone will be checking on them regularly. For some seniors, the Meals on Wheels volunteer may be the only person they see each day.

In order to accomplish its fundraising goals, Meals on Wheels Delaware sponsors a number of premier fundraising occasions throughout the year. Coming up next on Saturday, September 7, 2013 is the 5th Annual "Denim & Diamonds" event being held at the Delaware Agricultural Museum in Dover. One part backyard barbeque, one part lavish social affair, Denim & Diamonds is one end-of-summer party you won't want to miss. It will be a great opportunity to share an evening with over 500 guests enjoying exceptional food, wine and spirits, live music, and an exciting live auction – all while supporting Meals On Wheels Delaware. Further details are available online at www.mealsonwheelsde.org.

To understand how Meals on Wheels Delaware works, it is helpful to think of a starfish. The limbs are the five separate member agencies dispersed throughout the state. These localized operations have some of their own funding and are responsible for providing the meals and delivering them to seniors. The "body" of the structure is the Meals on Wheels headquarters at the Community Service Building which raises private funds and supplies extra volunteer resources when needed in order to cover any shortfalls. While other states have waiting lists of applicants, and sometimes have to cut off assistance when money runs out, this doesn't happen in Delaware due to the charitable contributions raised by the main office.

In order to sign up for meal delivery, homebound or disabled seniors aged 60 and over should contact the agency below closest to them. The same holds true for any individuals (or employees of businesses) interested in volunteering their time to this worthy cause.

Fare/St. Anthony Center
(Wilmington and New Castle County)
1703 West 10th Street
Wilmington, DE 19805
Business: 302-421-3734

Newark Senior Center
(Newark Area)
200 White Chapel Road
Newark, DE 19713
MOW Program: 302-737-5747
www.newarkseniorcenter.com

Modern Maturity Center
(Kent County)
1121 Forrest Ave.
Dover, DE 19901
Business: 302-734-1200
www.modern-maturity.org

CHEER (Sussex County)
546 South Bedford St.
Georgetown, DE 19974
Business: 302-856-5187
Fax: 302-856-5451
www.cheerde.com

Meals On Wheels Lewes-Rehoboth
(Sussex County – Beaches Area)
32409 Lewes Georgetown Hwy.
Lewes, DE 19958
Business: 302-645-7449
www.beachmeals.com

2013 Point-in-Time

By Susan Starrett, Homeless Planning Council of Delaware

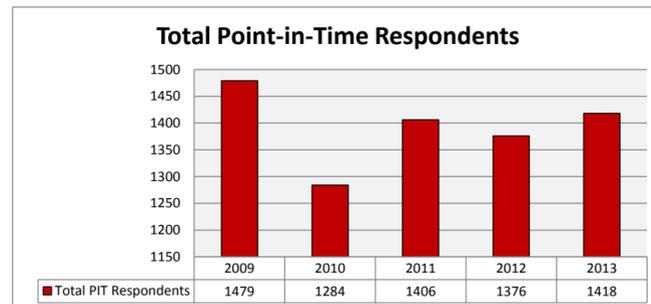
The 2013 Point-in-Time Survey activities culminated with the submission of final survey results to HUD on April 30, 2013. 2013 survey interviews were conducted on the night of January 29 and included required counts of both sheltered and unsheltered persons throughout Delaware. Volunteers collected information on a total of 1418 persons for this year's PIT Survey. The Homeless Planning Council's report to HUD included a count of 936 sheltered homeless persons staying in emergency shelters, transitional housing, or in safe haven facilities on January 29 and another 10 persons counted as unsheltered on that night. An additional 469 persons were located in permanent housing and 3 in rapid re-housing on January 29. This year's HUD report also included breakouts by age for households reported.

Over 30 volunteers did the real work of gathering point-in-time information by conducting extensive interviews with homeless persons all over the state. The 2013 survey included more than 20 questions that might have been asked of each homeless person, depending on their circumstances. Locating unsheltered persons proved to be a challenge once again. This challenge was described in an informative January 31 News Journal front-page article.

The full 2013 Point-in-Time report will be released shortly. Special thanks go out to all of the providers and volunteer staff who completed the over 1400 surveys in one night and provided a wealth of data for HPC to analyze- for the ultimate benefit of Delaware's homeless population.

The 2013 Point-in-Time Survey: A Profile of Persons Who Are Homeless

(Source: The Homeless Planning Council)



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For more information call
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www.connectionsmsp.org

Denim & Diamonds

Saturday, September 7, 2013
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Connections staff providing assistance are Michael Reyes, Employment Specialist (left), Danielle Brothers, Director of Youth and Employment Services (center), and Phil Arendall, Director of Consumer Empowerment and Employment Services (right).

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Matt Denn Targets Foster Care Gap

By John P. Clyne

On Tuesday afternoon, May 21, 2013, Lieutenant Governor Matt Denn, the Kind to Kids Foundation, and the Delaware Division of Family Services sponsored an information session on the foster care system in Delaware at the Community Service Building in Wilmington. The event was organized to heighten awareness of the need for more foster parents and to provide guidance to individuals interested in helping.

Caroline Jones, President of Kind to Kids Foundation, opened the conference with a terrific outline of the need for more foster care families. Right now in Delaware, there are more than 800 children who, through no fault of their own, have been separated from or abandoned by their families because of abuse or neglect and placed in foster care. Foster care is meant to be a temporary placement that provides security and a nurturing environment that supports healing and provides normal childhood experiences and preparation for a successful life, while efforts are made to strengthen the functioning of the child's birth family.

However, at the present time, there are only about 400 foster families available for placing these children. As a result, instead of having multiple options for placing one child into the best suited home, many

families have taken in two or three foster children. This is an untenable imbalance. Caroline noted that "kids who have been abused, neglected and abused often face an uncertain and difficult future." There is a clear need to significantly increase the number of families that provide foster care and become foster parents for Delaware's children.

Lt. Gov. Matt Denn understands that every child in foster care deserves a loving, nurturing home, where they feel cared for, safe and supported. Unfortunately, Delaware has twice as many children needing placement as we have foster parents on board to take them in. Matt praised the fantastic job being accomplished by the 400 families striving to fill the void, and called them a "blessing to the state," but he lamented that "the numbers just don't work." His goal is ensure there are enough foster families so that the ideal fit can be found for each child, based on that child's social, emotional, and physical needs, as well as geographical and educational factors. Since last May, Lt. Governor Denn has been calling on faith-based communities in order to boost the number of families that are willing and qualified to provide loving foster care for Delaware's children while they are in the custody of the state. He said that this is not a new issue, but he has resolved to make a renewed, focused effort on trying to at least mitigate the problem. His plan is called the Faith, Family and Foster Care Initiative and he is aiming to make a huge impact.

John Bates, Foster Care Program Manager at the Delaware Division of Family Services, also shared some remarks. He began by applauding Matt Denn for all the impressive work the Lieutenant Governor does on behalf of children and families. Mr. Bates then spoke about what it takes to be a foster parent. It is by no means an easy thing. First and foremost, you must love children. Then, you must be committed to taking on an awesome responsibility because every child in foster care has been traumatized. Mr. Bates also took the occasion to explain some steps his office was taking to reduce the numbers of children in foster care by identifying those at risk earlier on and by keeping them connected with family members as much as possible. He also announced the implementation of a hotline for foster families designed to provide 24 hour information and support.

The audience also heard from Ms. Lisa Johnson, a veteran foster parent who over the years has cared for 53 children in her home. Ms. Johnson teared up as she read a Mother's Day message from a young lady, one of her former foster children, thanking her for all the love, support and learning which she had received from Ms. Johnson, who she calls "Aunt Lisa." Later, Ms. Johnson described the joy and excitement she felt at a recent graduation ceremony where another one of her kids walked across the stage to accept her high school diploma. In sum, Lisa characterized her 17 years serving as a foster parent as a "delightful, life-fulfilling experience."



To tie up the event, Nicole Byers, Assistant to Lt. Gov. Matt Denn, and a former foster youth herself, shared some insightful thoughts on her own experiences growing up.

Perhaps you have a future as a foster family or a respite care family. The Lt. Governor has posted pertinent information and a locally-produced five minute video about foster care on his website at <http://ltgov.delaware.gov>.



Action Plans, Obamacare in Delaware and Opportunities for Peers, Advocacy that Works, and Art: Alternative Resources for Recovery.

The conference also afforded the occasion to pay tribute to Jim Martin of the peer-run A.C.E. Center in Seaford. Jim has

made a big difference in the behavioral health community on behalf of individuals recovering from mental illness and substance abuse disorders. To a rousing round of applause, Allen Conover, Executive Director of the RVSC, presented Jim with the 2013 Rick Van Story Award for advocacy.

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Facing Your Financial Problems

By Carol P. Waldhauser

After yet another night of tossing and turning, John is aware of the first faint light of dawn streaking through the curtains. It is nearly morning now, and yet another night has passed without deep sleep. John crawls out of bed and stumbles to the shower. As usual, he is agonizing over his financial problems. He wonders whether his mind, body, and soul will have the stamina to get him through yet another day.

John is a 49 year old business owner, over his head in debt: credit card bills, mortgage and car payments, utilities, student loans, etc. Out of character, John has begun parking his car a few blocks away from home because he fears repossession. In order to evade bill collectors, he has installed Caller I.D. on all of his phones. John, a self-described frugal person, cannot believe where he is financially. Unfortunately, a number of harsh life events have buried him deeper and deeper into a financial hole. As he put it, "my bills are sticking to me like Velcro; the pawn shop is becoming my shop of choice!" The pressure, anxiety, and tension are straining every aspect of John's already stressful life.

The Problem Money worries can create enormous stress, particularly when they threaten one's home, business, and even family. Financial difficulties can arise from events beyond one's control, such as reduced income, low cash flow, job loss, health problems, and overspending. Seventy-one percent of 20,000 people surveyed for Psychology Today pinpointed anxiety as the emotion they associated most often with money. Others listed depression and anger. Those most stressed by money - and not necessarily unemployed - complained of increased fatigue, insomnia, headaches, and other stress-related symptoms. Researchers are beginning to calculate precisely how much damage stress causes. The Family Credit Counseling Service of Rockford, Illinois, commissioned a 2004 survey of consumers with credit card debts. Nearly 25 percent of the 1,590 participants had debts exceeding \$10,000. More than 75 percent experienced some type of physical symptom they attributed to the financial strain. Headaches, inability to concentrate, and nausea were the most common symptoms. Some participants had even contemplated suicide.

The Solution Whatever the underlying cause, economic upheaval impacts many within our community. If you are one of those affected,

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rest assured that digging out of debt is not an insurmountable challenge. The solution begins with an attitude adjustment and a declaration of personal revolution. This can be undertaken in small steps, but it requires a plan, along with persistence, focus, commitment, and vision. By dealing with financial problems head-on, your standing with creditors will improve while you relieve the stress of worrying.

Tips for Working Through Debts and Stress

- Get help. Seek out help through available resources and services if you are having trouble coping on your own. Professional assistance may be necessary. This does not imply weakness. It simply means that the particular situation is just too overwhelming to handle personally and you need coaching to get through it.
- Prioritize. Decide what are essentials and what are extra. This will allow budgeting for the important things such as health costs, housing, utilities, and food, while delaying or eliminating non-essential items.
- Communicate. Rather than dodging your collector's calls, negotiate a lower interest rate.
- Don't be afraid to downsize. It will happen eventually, so it may as well be you. Turn your chattels into cash.
- Consider a part-time job. This allows for additional cash flow and a chance to get out and meet people.
- Use cash not credit. Research has found that people who pay with cash instead of plastic spend 12 - 18 percent less whenever they shop.
- Take responsibility. You are responsible for your own thoughts, actions, feelings, and decisions—as well as their consequences. Unless you take responsibility, you will not strive to change what can be changed. Rather, you will remain in a cycle of blaming other people or life events for the way you think and feel. You are not a victim.
- Learn acceptance and manage worry. Accept that you cannot control every situation and learn to be flexible in your thinking. We all have needs, and when these become too demanding we can burn out. When it comes to managing worry, the well-known "Serenity Prayer" gets it right: Find the serenity to accept the things you cannot change, the courage to change the things you can, and the wisdom to know the difference.
- Don't wallow. Rather than feeling sorry for yourself, focus on the positives.
- Turn it over. Prayer and/or meditation can soothe the mind and calm the soul.
- Eat well and exercise regularly. Eat a well-balanced diet and limit sugar. Avoid unhealthy substances, like tobacco, alcohol, drugs, etc. Moderate exercise every day will boost energy and improve your mood. Adequate rest is also imperative to maintaining health and stamina.
- Relax. Make time to listen to soothing music. Play with pets. Read. Watch a comedy. Laugh!

Over The Edge Fundraiser For Special Olympics

By John P. Clyne

Ninety-six courageous volunteers took their community support to new heights on May 9th by rappelling mountaineer-style down the 17 story office building at 300 Delaware Avenue in downtown Wilmington to raise money for Special Olympics Delaware. The 3rd annual "Over the Edge," co-sponsored by TD Bank and Brandywine Realty Trust, and supported by Law Enforcement for Special Olympics Delaware, is a unique charitable event which allows civic-minded participants the thrill-of-a-lifetime opportunity to swing down from a tall building on a rope with the goal of generating money and awareness for a worthy cause. The Special Olympics of Delaware provides athletic services to more than 3,500 special needs children and adults who participate in 20 different sports.

"Over the Edge" has become a May tradition and serves as a high profile way for Special Olympics to raise money. Each participant had to put down a \$50 deposit to reserve a spot and then collect a total of \$1,000 for the chance to rappel down the side of the 17 story high 300 Delaware Avenue Building. The adrenaline-pumping adventure is a concept from Over the Edge USA, a national special events company formed to help non-profit organizations raise pledges in an exciting, but completely safe atmosphere. The Over the Edge team consists of a staff of experts with a zero mishap record who provide the technical expertise, training and equipment needed for the event. For a number of the daredevils participating, it wasn't their first time. Impressively, 30% of the people who take the leap come back and do it again. Two of this year's distinguished "edgers" were Wilmington Police Chief Christine Dunning and State Senator Greg LaVelle.

The 2013 event brought in more than \$130,000, boosting the three-year total to more than \$355,000 raised for Special Olympics Delaware. All the money stays in Delaware. TD Bank graciously contributed free coffee service in the morning and free hot dogs and soda and ice cream in the afternoon.



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Homeless Services Can Do Better

By Mark Horvath, Founder of InvisiblePeople.tv (Reprinted with Permission)

No homeless person ever said “Please place me in one room with a hundred other people. Please give me a cot or a mat for the floor to sleep on. Please only have one bathroom with two toilets and two shower stalls for all of us. Then please kick us out everyday, even in freezing cold weather - and that will cure my drug addiction and mental illness.” But that is exactly how homeless services treats people. For the most part, we are warehousing people and simply maintaining homelessness - not ending homelessness!

I really have never understood the shelter model of kicking homeless people out during the day. Homeless services will tell you it’s to motivate people to better their life and look for work, but the real truth is - it’s about money. When people are awake it costs money for more staff to take care of them, electric bill and utilities, and things like food and toilet paper. The people who are going to actually go and better their lives will do so even without being forced outside. The others, and what is a vast majority, just find another place - a park, their car, a library, or fast food to hang out in and kill time. The model of kicking people out during the day does little to improve their chances of getting out of homelessness. In fact, I would say is actually hurts their chances.

A far better solution is to have life skills classes during the day to actually help people and motivate them. See, it’s not that these people are bad, it’s they have been conditioned by years of hurt and being told no, and they either have so low self-esteem they don’t care, or they really have never been given the skills and are scared to move forward. Seriously, if a shelter wants to see their housing placement numbers go up assign a “navigator” to each homeless person

to help them during the day. Y[es], I get money is an issue, but a volunteer system of navigators can be used to make this happen with very little increase in cost. Kicking people out during the day, including mothers with young children, does not help and actually causes more harm than good!

Now imagine you’re a homeless person and you’ve found a park to live in that you feel safe enough at night to sleep. You hear through the grape vine, or through outreach workers, that a homeless agency may be able to help. You panhandle the money to catch a bus to travel to this agency. You then sit in the office for anywhere from four to six hours to see a case worker so the agency can collect your data. Think sitting in a dentist office for four hours, it’s far from a good experience. After you see the case worker, if you’re lucky, you get placed on a waiting list. If you’re really lucky they’ll give you bus tickets to get back to the park. Otherwise, you have to panhandle to get back to where you feel safe. You do all this just to have to get up and do it again- and again- and again! Any normal person would not put up with this, but this is exactly how we treat homeless people!

Please don’t get me wrong, I think there is a place for shelters in fighting homelessness, but most offer horrible experiences for people. I believe, as we continue to look at models like Housing First [quickly providing housing and then providing additional needed services], shelters will play a valuable role when people hit homelessness temporarily or in transition while waiting for housing to open up. But if we are going to have any impact ending homelessness, we need to start treating our homeless friends like real customers and provide the best experience possible. If your outreach team is having trouble getting people to come in for an intake, you may want to look at your intake process to see what “road blocks” to services are there.

Watch one of Mark’s videos at: http://youtu.be/oMg9fc_bOpA

Homeless man exhausted on Market Street Mall



Be Positive

By Esther Hofknecht Curtis, CBIS

All of us have experienced crisis situations during the course of our lives. For me, the most memorable was in July 2005 at a remote campsite in northern Maine.

I was on an annual trip with my then-husband and his family, and I was six weeks pregnant with my daughter Katelyn. One morning several days into the trip, I woke up and realized that I was bleeding heavily. Horror washed over me, followed by sheets of sweat and a thick wave of lightheadedness. I nearly vomited at the realization that I could lose my baby. A few minutes later, my best friend and sister-in-law comforted me as my husband drove at breakneck speed to Millinocket Regional Hospital, which was 25 miles away across mountainous terrain by way of logging roads.

At the hospital, the doctors asked me if I knew my blood type, and I told them I did not know. They decided to “type me” while they were running the rest of the tests. In addition to finding out that my unborn child was okay, I was also told that my blood type was B Positive. “B-Positive,” I remember thinking, “Wow, I needed to hear that.”

Ever since, I have associated major crisis and fear with that day. As vividly as I remember my fear, I also remember the feeling of amazement that came over me when I heard those two little words, “Be positive.”

I was recently laid off from the organization that I’ve helped to build with my B-Positive blood, sweat, tears, and backbone. Oddly enough, I had just published my first piece with Our Independence, entitled “How to Stay Sharp While You’re Unemployed.” Life throws all of us curve balls; mine tend to have the air of irony.

Although the layoff did not come as a total shock to me, I immediately felt very alone and afraid. After all, I am a 30-something mother of two, recently divorced, and a full-time student. I have bills coming out of my ears. The economy is at a plateau, and every company is receiving fifty resumes for every job posting. I realized very quickly that I could not wait for someone to come rescue me. I had to rescue myself. Instead of letting the fear eat me up, I decided to harness it the best and use it to work for me. Fear is a great motivator.

I hit the ground running. I revised my resume, contacted everyone I knew in the field, and talked to them about my experience, my needs, and my capabilities. I visited my mentors, asking for guidance and leads on new positions. Friends gave me advice on career change and found job leads



for me. Eventually, one of the conversations turned into an interview, and a job was created for me. I start June 3rd, and I think I’m going to love it.

I have heard people say that in matters of crisis, our truest character traits emerge. While I believe this is true, I would go one step further. Crisis situations force us to improvise and innovate to improve our situation. For me, the initially “bad experience” of getting laid off was awful; but I have learned to “Be positive” when things go wrong, so I was able to look at the situation in a different way. For example:

- Until I was laid off, I never took the time to assess the skills, abilities, and strengths I’ve cultivated in my position to see how they might fit into a different career.

- Being laid off freed me of the responsibility that I readily took on, but was keeping me in a job that did not meet my financial needs.

- Being without a job allowed me to think about moving into a new career field without any hesitation.

- I discovered people who were willing to help me advance my career just because I asked for help. Essentially, this helped me realize I am not as alone as I thought. I have allies.

Change is difficult, especially change that we have not initiated. Surviving crisis situations makes us stronger and sharper because we can look back and say, “Look at that. I met that challenge, and I crushed it.”

And that, my friends, is what life is all about.

Esther Hofknecht Curtis, CBIS is an avid reader, writer, and blogger. Ms. Curtis can be reached via email at ejhcurtis@gmail.com. Her blogs can be found at www.mytenbucks.blogspot.com and www.theardentreader.blogspot.com.

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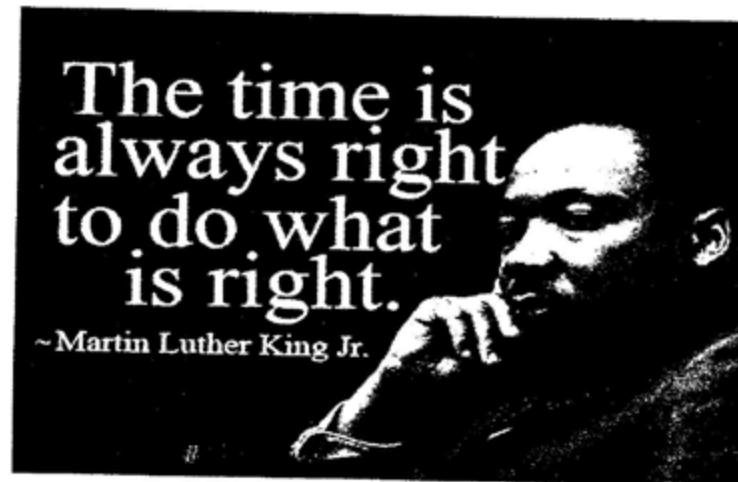


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