

LARS Letter

Fall 2012 • Volume 25, Issue 2 • Serving the community since 1987

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Sarah's Story

In mid-August, a new client, Sarah*, came to LARS requesting financial assistance. She and her two year old daughter, Amanda*, became homeless after being evicted from their apartment the week before. They had resided in the apartment with Sarah's boyfriend, who worked to support their family while Sarah attended a full-time accelerated RN program for the last year. Sarah's boyfriend was a stable provider and a loving father to their daughter until he was brutally attacked by a stranger during the summer. He was rushed to the hospital where he has since remained in a coma, and his outlook is not

promising. Without any money to pay the rent, Sarah and her daughter were evicted from the apartment. With no housing options available to them, the hospital staff allowed Sarah and her daughter to stay in her boyfriend's room at night while she searched for employment and housing during the day. She came to LARS during this very difficult time and explained that she had a job interview that very afternoon for a full-time position at a doctor's office. A LARS case manager told Sarah that if she was hired, we might be able to use funds from a homeless grant (CDBG) to assist with part of her balance for first month's rent.

Sarah returned to LARS two days later to inform the LARS staff that she was hired by the doctor's office. She quickly found an apartment for herself and her daughter to move into, but she had no way of paying the first month's rent and security deposit by herself since she had just started her new position, and she had not yet received a paycheck. LARS was able to help Sarah with a substantial portion of her first month's rent and the security deposit. Sarah and Amanda moved into their new apartment in early September.

***The names have been changed in this testimony to protect the identity of the client.**

Holiday Program 2012

The holidays are fast approaching! LARS will begin interviewing clients for the Holiday Program beginning October 1st. This is always the busiest time of year for LARS, and we rely greatly on your donations to be able to provide food and gifts to over 125 families during the holidays.

There are several ways that you can help as an individual, family, business, school, or congregation:

- * "Adopt a family" by providing holiday gifts and food for a local family in need
- * Purchase gifts and/or gift cards to be distributed to those who are not adopted
- * Donate Thanksgiving/Holiday food packages for families participating in the Holiday Program
- * Volunteer for a 2-4 hour shift to help sort gifts and food
- * Donate stamps for holiday mailings
- * Make a direct donation to LARS

If you are able to help in any way this holiday season, please contact our Holiday Program Coordinator, Laura Wellford, at (301)776-0442, ext. 27 or lwelford@laureladvocacy.org.

Donor and client applications are also available on our website. Donor applications may be mailed in at any time. Clients wishing to receive food/gifts through the program are encouraged to schedule an interview by calling (301)776-0442 beginning October 1st.

Changes in LARS' Funding

LARS is not immune to the budgetary challenges of government on all levels. Recently, we were notified that Prince George's County is looking to eliminate their transitional housing programs (THP) as soon as July 2013. LARS has worked with ten homeless families at any given time in the THP, and the program has offered a hand-up to hundreds of mostly single, minority, female-headed households since the early 1990's. If this vital resource is demolished, LARS will lose \$185K in funds to operate the program, a devastating loss for the community. Additionally, LARS' Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds that assist with eviction prevention were cut by \$12K in 2011, and another \$10K in 2012. Those funds would have saved roughly 44 individuals/families from eviction had they not been reduced. To make matters more challenging, in September the County informed LARS (at the last minute) that they are pulling a long-time grant, the Homeless Prevention Program (HPP), which provided \$12K in eviction prevention funds (assisting approximately 24 individuals/families per grant year), and reducing LARS' Emergency and Transitional Housing and Services (ETHS) grant that serves as a County "match" for LARS' transitional housing from \$10,567 to \$10,000. District One Councilwoman Mary Lehman has been a fierce advocate for LARS during these challenging times (and throughout the years), and she is working to help LARS resolve these challenging issues. To off-set some of the immediate impact on the community Councilwoman Lehman awarded LARS a Special Appropriations grant totaling \$40,000 in late September.

Staff

Lauren Cohen, LSWA
Permanent Housing Case Manager

Ernestine Gibson
Part-Time Case Manager

Lynette Greenwood
Office Manager

Shelly Kessler
Case Manager

Emily Kleeman, LGSW
Transitional Housing Case Manager

Leah Paley, LGSW
Director of Emergency Services

Marian Ratcliff
Accountant

Laura Wellford
*Program Coordinator /
LARS Letter Editor*

**We are glad to welcome two
BSW interns, who are joining
us this semester from UMBC:**

Soheyla Bolouri
Jessica Kilpatrick

*If you would like to have your name
added or removed from our mailing list,
please contact:
lgreenwood@laureladvocacy.org*

LARS Employment Center & Computer Lab Open!



The LARS Employment Office is officially up and running! LARS encourages job seekers in the Greater Laurel area to stop by the Employment Center to utilize our computers and resources to locate, apply for, and obtain employment!

The LARS Employment Center & Computer Lab hours are **Fridays from 9am – 2pm**. Appointments are strongly encouraged since computer space is limited.

We will also have a job coach on hand to help you.

Trot With Us on Thanksgiving Morning!



The 8th Annual Thanksgiving Morning 5K Turkey Trot & 1 Mile Fun Walk to Benefit LARS will be held on Thursday, November 22, 2012 at 8:00am, rain or shine! This can't-miss Laurel tradition takes place at the First United Methodist Church right at the corner of Fifth and Main Streets in Laurel. This is a fun event for both families and serious runners... all are welcome! Our course meanders through historic Laurel and along the riverfront – a great way to spend Thanksgiving morning with family, friends, neighbors, and fellow trotters while supporting a great cause! For those of you who have "trotted" with us in years past, you know what it means that we "go up the hill this year!" See the included race brochure for more details and participant registration. Online registration is also available on our homepage at www.laureladvocacy.org!

Sponsors are still needed! This is a great opportunity to get your company, congregation, or organization's name out there to an expected 800 participants! Be sure to check out the included list of sponsorship opportunities. Last Thanksgiving, 541 runners and 99 walkers came out to support LARS. Help us make this year's race the best one yet!

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: Knights of Columbus

LARS would like to recognize the Knights of Columbus Patuxent Council 2203 for their dedicated service to the SHARE (Self-Help and Resource Exchange) Food Program. More than 200 volunteers have committed time to ordering, picking up, and delivering packages of food to the LARS pantry for over 15 years. The LARS pantry is supplemented by SHARE food packages that are purchased with LARS grant money or donated by the Knights of Columbus. LARS clients can also purchase their own value packages for \$20, which generally include \$50 worth of food. The only commitment required by SHARE is that the recipient completes 2 hours of community service (on their honor) for each month that they purchase a SHARE package. Participation in this program is a way for our clients to secure good, nutritious food and is especially helpful to individuals and families on limited budgets. **THANK YOU** to all of our SHARE Food volunteers, especially: Gary Hall, Bill Knox, Adam Novak, Rick Novak, Rick Askins, Pete Monti, Bill McMahon, Mark O'Dea, Dave Knitowski, Lou Rozzi, Raoul Paez, Adrian Paez, Andrew Paez, Larry Krieger, Tom Bresson, Don Marlow, Rick Rekus, and John McLeod. For more information about the SHARE Food Program, visit www.sharefoodprogram.org.

Local Organizations Walk for Homelessness Awareness

Thank you to everyone who has showed their support so far! There is still time to get your group involved in the Fannie Mae Help the Homeless Program! Registration fees are \$20 for youth walkers (ages 25 & under), \$30 for adult walkers, and \$35 for virtual walkers. LARS receives **100%** of the registration fees and will receive a \$20,000 bonus from the Fannie Mae Foundation if we are able to reach our goal of registering **2,000 walkers!** Sponsors are also needed to pay the registration fees for walkers at local elementary schools. This is a great opportunity to not only raise public awareness about homelessness, but to teach young people about the importance of caring for their community.

For more information, please contact Laura Wellford at (301)776-0442, ext. 27 or lwellford@laureladvocacy.org.

LARS Community Walk (at LARS): Sunday, Nov. 4th @ 10:00am
Register to walk with us at www.hthwalks.org!



Laurel Community of Christ Walk, organized by LARS Board member Sue Ratzlaff.

LAUREL ADVOCACY & REFERRAL SERVICES, INC.

311 LAUREL AVENUE
LAUREL, MD 20707

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



Laurel Advocacy & Referral Services, Inc.

311 Laurel Avenue
Laurel, MD 20707

Phone: (301) 776 - 0442

Fax: (301) 604 - 7076

E-mail: lgreenwood@laureladvocacy.org

NEW Website: www.laureladvocacy.org



Find us on our brand new Facebook page!

(Search for "Laurel Advocacy & Referral Services, Inc.")
(Also join the "8th Annual Thanksgiving Morning 5K Turkey Trot"
Facebook Group for race updates!)



Follow us on Twitter @laureladvocacy

OUR MISSION:

LARS is a non-proselytizing ecumenical ministry serving the Greater Laurel area by assisting homeless and low-income individuals and families who are experiencing crisis, providing both emergency and long-term services designed to promote self-sufficiency.

LARS Food Pantry

The LARS food pantry could barely keep up with our community's need for food this past summer, and the need is sure to grow as we enter the busy holiday season. PLEASE keep us in mind as you do your grocery shopping! Donations can be dropped off at LARS during business hours:

Mon., Wed., Fri. 9am-2pm & Mon. 5-7:30pm

Suggested items that are a great help to our pantry include:

**canned soup, canned fruit and vegetables,
pastas and sauces, peanut butter and jelly,
cereal, oatmeal, "just-add-water" pancake mix,
tuna, Tuna Helper, macaroni and cheese, and
other staples.**

Plastic grocery bags are also needed to deliver food to clients.

Please check the expiration dates before donating food. Thank you!