

Laurel Advocacy & Referral Services, Inc.

311 Laurel Avenue • Laurel, MD 20707 • 301.776.0442 • www.laureladvocacy.org

LARS Letter

Serving the Laurel Community Since 1987

Spring 2015 | Volume 28, Issue 1

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Spring Brings New Things

We've got big plans in store for the warmer weather that's settling in. Many seasoned Turkey Trotters have asked us to consider planning a springtime running event... you asked, we answered! The **1st Annual Spring into Summer 5K & Family Fun Walk** will replace LARS' usual spring fundraisers: the Silent Auction & Dinner and the Fannie Mae Community Walks. If you have participated in these programs in the past, we hope you will consider supporting this fun new endeavor to help LARS maintain lost sources of funding. What better way to celebrate the first day of summer and

Father's Day weekend? Plenty of post-race fun for participants and spectators, including local food trucks, music, and backyard games for the whole family! Register online at www.laureladvocacy.org. See flyer inside for details and paper registration.

We want YOU!

LARS needs volunteers (a great opportunity for groups!) to help with course marshaling, coordinating post-race activities, and more!

Contact Stephanie Guzmán at 301-776-0442 ext. 34 or sguzman@laureladvocacy.org to learn more!

A Very Busy Winter

It takes many generous hearts and hands to keep a community going strong. LARS is lucky to have a network of compassionate supporters who inspire us every day to be the trusted ambassadors of their goodwill. Let's take a look back at a very busy but impactful winter:

Despite the threatening snow on Thanksgiving Morning, 746 runners and walkers joined us for the 10th Annual 5K Turkey Trot, which raised a record net profit of \$37,397 for LARS' daily operation!

A 4+ month long effort of many dedicated volunteers and donors made the holiday season much brighter for 442 children who had their Christmas wish lists fulfilled through LARS' Holiday Program. 178 families were adopted by over 60 donors, including local businesses, congregations, and individuals. Families were provided with holiday meal fixings, grocery/gas gift cards, and other needed essentials. Over 40 senior citizens were provided with holiday meals.

The Laurel Winter Shelter was a lifesaving refuge for many of our homeless clients this past winter. Truly a team effort, 20 Laurel congregations joined forces to ensure the warmth and safety of over 100 homeless men and women during the 16 coldest weeks of winter. LARS served as the main point of entry for shelter participants and provided weekly outreach to shelter sites.



Taking Steps Toward Independence

LARS' Transitional and Permanent Housing clients are doing great things!

We are happy to report that one of our Permanent Housing participants has been approved for Section 8 housing through the Veteran's Affairs Supported Housing (VASH) Program. After living in the woods for 7 years, his subsequent 5 year stay in one of LARS' apartments was not taken for granted. As one of 9 chronically homeless, disabled individuals in LARS' Permanent Housing program, he was given a stable environment to maintain sobriety and build skills for independent living. We are excited to support this client during his transition and we are confident that he will be a thriving member of his new community!

One of our Transitional Housing participants recently secured a full-time job! She has shown a great commitment to self-improvement during her employment counseling sessions with case manager Janada Randall. She continues to impress us with her ability to balance the many responsibilities of a hardworking single mother. By securing full-time employment, this client has taken a crucial step towards gaining financial independence. LARS' Transitional Housing Program aims to give single mothers and their children a safe place to regain their footing after experiencing homelessness, along with the necessary tools to achieve self-sufficiency. The program currently supports 10 families.

Volunteer Corner

Gail Whitman: An A+ Administrative Volunteer!

My family has donated to various food drives and holiday programs throughout our many years of living in Laurel. When I retired in 2012 from Prince George's County Public Schools, as a special educator, I really wanted to find some meaningful volunteer work. As I searched for local opportunities, it seemed that many of the agencies looking for volunteers were located in Howard County. I really wanted to find something in Laurel, and contacted LARS. I was very glad when they contacted me, and had volunteer opportunities available. I've enjoyed stepping outside of my comfort zone, working on administrative duties. The LARS staff is always available when I have a question regarding incoming phone requests, or when I need assistance with a new task. I've enjoyed getting to know them, and seeing how professional they are and how sensitive they are to their client's situations and needs. My entire family adopted a family in need for the holidays, in lieu of buying one another gifts.



My husband and I worked all day to give gifts out, and look forward to helping again next year, and becoming involved with other LARS programs in the future. In my time away from LARS, I spend time catching up with friends and family, work as a contract educator with a private therapy group, and try to walk every day. We traveled this Fall to the North Rim of the Grand Canyon, and Bryce and Zion National Parks. There are many places, both near and far on my future travel list.

Gail Whitman has been serving as LARS' Administrative Volunteer since August 2014. She has become an integral part of the office staff, providing much needed office support. Thanks to Gail, we are now able to keep up with the many

phone calls to our office on the days we are not open for business. Attentive, dependable, and trustworthy are all words that staff have used to describe Gail. We are so appreciative of her willingness to help staff and, most importantly, LARS' capacity to connect with those most in need.

Lending just a few hours a month of your time can be a huge help to our small staff! To learn more about volunteer opportunities at LARS, contact Stephanie Guzmán at sguzman@laureladvocacy.org or at (301) 776-0442 ext. 34.

Mid-Year Highlights

During the third quarter of the fiscal year (January-March 2015):

- LARS received **\$38,208** worth of food, toiletries, and school supplies, and **212** volunteers logged over **1,516** hours of service worth an estimated **\$38,587**.
- **25** households were provided with rental assistance totaling **\$8,127** and **6** households were assisted with utilities, totaling **\$1,841**.
- The Prince George's County Department of Social Services Outreach Worker, who is stationed at LARS once a week, helped **104** clients apply for public benefits.
- Over **2,012** bags of food were distributed, and clothing/furniture vouchers were provided to **29** households. **11** individuals were assisted with obtaining eye exams and glasses.

Over the past several months, LARS staff and board members have been doing lots of research to aid in the process of creating our organization's strategic plan for the next 5 years. Check out some of the surprising facts we've learned so far, and stay tuned for more updates to come!

DID YOU KNOW?

Laurel, MD



What can LARS do in a year? With your help, the impact is BIG!



LARS Staff

Lynette Greenwood
Office Manager

Lauren Cohen, MSW
Permanent Housing Case Manager

Janada Randall, BSW
Transitional Housing Case Manager

Emily Kleeman, LGSW
Lead Case Manager

Stephanie Guzman, BSW
*Bilingual Case Manager/
Volunteer Coordinator*

Kennesha Rodgers
Bilingual Case Manager

Laura Wellford
*Program Coordinator/
LARS Letter Editor*

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

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www.laureladvocacy.org

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A New Start

LARS has been working closely with an elderly couple who had lost their apartment of four years when the bank foreclosed on the home. The couple was forced to put their personal effects in storage and live out of their vehicle for close to two weeks. Once they made contact with LARS, we were able to fund their stay in a motel while we worked to identify an affordable long-term housing solution. Upon finding a new home within their budget, LARS assisted the couple with Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds in the amount of \$500 towards their first month's rent. LARS caseworkers continued to advocate for this couple to ensure that their new start would not be short-lived. After receiving a proper eye exam and prescription eyeglasses funded by the Laurel Lions Club, the husband could now pursue a job opportunity as a driver. With a steady source of income secured, LARS completed referrals for furniture and clothing, mental health counseling, and provided them with food for their new home. They are now living independently and are once again able to maintain their expenses. This couple's story demonstrates just how crucial CDBG funding, along with a strong network of community resources, is to our organization and the people we serve. LARS staff will share testimony at the Prince George's County Budget Hearing on May 4th to push for continued support of this program.

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Stay up to date with LARS news and
events at www.laureladvocacy.org

LARS Food Pantry

Help stock the LARS food pantry this summer! Food donations tend to be less frequent during the summer months while requests for food assistance grow. We encourage community members and organizations to consider donating food or sponsoring food drives for us as we prepare for the busy summer.

Food donations can be dropped off at LARS during business hours:
Monday, Wednesday, & Friday from 9:00-2:00pm and Monday evenings from 5:00-7:30pm.

Items that are especially helpful include:

Cereal, instant oatmeal, tuna, peanut butter & jelly, rice, spaghetti & sauce, canned meats, mac & cheese, fruit/applesauce cups, 100% fruit juices, pop-top cans, on-the-go meals/snacks

Please remember to check expiration dates!

For more information on donating food or sponsoring a food drive, please contact:
Stephanie Guzmán at (301) 776-0442 ext. 34 or sguzman@laureladvocacy.org



LARS recently earned the GuideStar Exchange Gold participation badge, demonstrating a strong commitment to nonprofit transparency and accountability. LARS uses the GuideStar platform to keep up-to-date information about our work available to our supporters and to an immense online audience of nonprofits, grantmakers, individual donors, and the media.

We want to hear from you! Your experience matters to us, and your passion for our organization helps keep this cause alive. Anyone with firsthand experience with LARS—donors, volunteers, board members, clients—can write a review for us on GuideStar. Your review will appear in our profile on both GuideStar and GreatNonprofits. This is a free, easy way to raise awareness for our organization and to support our ability to secure crucial grant funding. To write a review, please visit: <http://www.guidestar.org/organizations/52-1537336/laurel-advocacy-referral-services.aspx>.