

Laurel Advocacy & Referral Services, Inc.

311 Laurel Avenue • Laurel, MD 20707 • (301) 776-0442 • www.laureladvocacy.org

LARS Letter

Spring 2012 • Volume 25, Issue 1 • Serving the Laurel community since 1987

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Celebrating 25 Years of Service

In 2012 LARS celebrates our 25th year of service in the Laurel community! With the unwavering support of so many people LARS has had great success helping our neighbors in need. Over the years LARS estimates we have: supported hundreds of homeless families with Transitional Housing and case management services that have a proven success to pull families out of poverty and homelessness; given a dozen chronically homeless individuals a second chance in our "housing first" Permanent Housing program; prevented thousands of evictions and utility cut-offs; provided first month's rent and security deposits for hundreds of individuals and families; secured

referrals for more than 1,000 individuals to enter treatment for an addiction or mental health issues; and, distributed more than \$1,500,000 in food to low-income individuals and families.

In February, LARS launched our campaign to pay off our remaining debt from our original mortgage that was used to purchase our building in 1999. Since February 2012 we have raised \$8,500 for this effort, reducing our remaining mortgage debt to \$110K which we hope to pay off before June 2013, the month the loan would have to be refinanced, if not paid.

Please consider making a gift to LARS to help us achieve our goal.



The LARS building is the home of our Community Crisis Clinic that serves approximately 2,000 individuals and families each year.

Silent Auction & Bull Roast

LARS' 8th Annual Silent Auction & Bull Roast is almost here! Last year we raised nearly \$9,000 for the continuation and enhancement of our programs. We are hoping to make this year's event even bigger in celebration of our 25th anniversary.

We have received several exciting auction items, including some fun get-aways, passes at local ski resorts, and TWO ROUNDTRIP Southwest Airlines tickets to any destination where they fly!

The food is always a hit with crab soup, steamed shrimp and oysters catered by Casey's Crab Co., and live music provided by The Mike and Bobby Show.

If you would like to donate an auction item, sponsor the event, or put an advertisement in our program, please call Laura at 301.776.0442 ext. 27 or email llwellford@laureladvocacy.org.

This event sells out every year. Please join the fun and help LARS celebrate 25 years of service to the Laurel community.

Event Details:

Saturday, June 2, 2012
6-10pm

American Legion Post 60
2 Main Street
Laurel, MD 20707

Cash Bar
Catering by Casey's Crab Co.
Live Music

\$45/ticket in advance
\$50/ticket at the door

Hope to see you there!

LARS Happenings

- ▶ With the help of congregants from Emmanuel United Methodist Church (EUMC) LARS has partnered with the Capital Area Food Bank (CAFB) to stock fresh fruits and vegetables in our food pantry. EUMC supporters travel to the CAFB to pick-up and deliver the items to LARS a few times each month. The partnership provides more nutritious options for individuals and families in need of food.
- ▶ Generous giving from community partners resulted in our best holiday appeal in our 25 year history, raising \$59,000 for LARS programs and our operation this past holiday season. Thanks to so many of you who generously support our work.
- ▶ In December 2011 the DeVito Family Trust provided LARS with a \$15,000 grant to support our operations and services. This is our first award from the DeVito Family Trust. We thank them for their partnership and support.
- ▶ A special thank you to Councilwoman Mary Lehman for awarding a \$12,000 grant to LARS in March 2012. The award will be used towards client services that include food for the LARS pantry and eviction prevention services.

Staff

Lauren Cohen, LSWA
Permanent Housing Case Manager

Ernestine Gibson
Case Manager

Lynette Greenwood
Office Manager

Shelly Kessler
Case Manager

Emily Kleeman, LGSW
Transitional Housing Case Manager

Leah Paley, LGSW
Director of Emergency Services

Laura Wellford
Office Intern / LARS Letter Editor

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

Fannie Mae Help the Homeless Program

A special thank you to our long-time partners, the Fannie Mae Foundation. With their help, and the hard work and dedication of the Laurel community, **LARS raised \$116,887.08** while raising awareness for homelessness during the 2011 community walks!



*Last year LARS received a \$50,000 bonus from the Fannie Mae Foundation for reaching our goal of registering 3,000 walkers. The goal for this year has been increased to **4,000 walkers**, so please consider getting involved!*

Registration for the 2012 Help the Homeless Program is now open! Community walks can be held anytime between now and November 4, 2012. Groups of all sizes are encouraged to register a walk by visiting **www.hthwalks.org**. You can choose to make your group's walk a public or private event. Sponsors are needed to pay the registration fees for low-income walkers at local elementary schools. Registration fees are \$20 for youth walkers (age 25 & under), \$30 for adult walkers, and \$35 for virtual walkers. We encourage groups of all sizes to participate: schools, church groups, sports teams, boy/girl scout troops, book clubs, etc. Feel free to get creative with your "walks"... any type of physical activity counts! (Think dog walking, square dancing, treadmill running, yoga). The only requirements are at least 15 minutes of physical activity and a 30 minute educational piece about homelessness (visit hthwalks.org for ideas!). Please contact Laura Wellford at **lwellford@laureladvocacy.org** for more information.

Farewell, Friend

On March 8, 2012, our long-time friend, Brian, died in his sleep of natural causes related to a pre-existing health condition while he was in HIS home (leased by LARS) in Laurel. Brian was one of the first clients in the LARS Permanent Housing Program when it began in 2009, and he had been successful in the program for more than two years at the time of his death. Before coming to LARS for services, Brian was chronically homeless and was living in a nearby homeless camp in the woods for a substantial period of time. His story was typical of many homeless individuals.

Brian was adopted as an infant and his struggles began when he was very young. He had a history of difficult relationships with most of his family, and he was alienated from many of them at the time of his death. Brian also had significant

struggles with addictions and his mental health. With the help of LARS, Brian was linked to health and mental health services to help him with his basic needs. He was very receptive to case management, always welcoming Lauren Cohen, his LARS case manager, into HIS home and stopping in the office to see the LARS staff at least once a week. He was quiet, but always kind.

On March 27th, the LARS staff, along with Brian's friends and family, participated in a memorial service led by Pastor Chris Owens from The First United Methodist Church of Laurel. During the service Brian was remembered by many of his friends, including many who shared beautiful stories about the gifts of life and joys Brian had shared with them. Lauren also offered kind words about her friend.

As the LARS staff worked through our own emotions surrounding the sudden, shocking loss of Brian, we all felt a sense of "relief" and "comfort" in knowing that when Brian was called he left this life with dignity while feeling compassion and support - the essentials for a healthy life - that the LARS staff and many community friends provided to him. Without the LARS Permanent Housing Program Brian's fate would have most likely included him dying on the street or in a homeless camp, alone and suffering from his medical conditions, as he was when we first met him.

We all will miss seeing Brian in his variety of baseball caps and his staple pair of jeans. He taught us many lessons in the way he lived his last years. To know him was a gift and honor for all of us.

THANK YOU

to

Taryn Gauthier and Kim Guidara, our first-year MSW interns from the University of Maryland School of Social Work, for a job well done! Taryn and Kim began their field placements at LARS in the Fall and have been wonderful additions to our team. During their time at LARS they helped many of our clients and organized a very successful and educational credit forum for the community. We will miss them as they move on to new placements to gain experience in other areas of social work, but we want to thank them for their hard work here at LARS and we wish them the best of luck in their future careers. They certainly have very bright futures ahead!

Congratulations!

to

Leah Paley-Merriman, our
Director of Emergency Services,
on her recent marriage!

AND to

Lori Proietti (our Deputy Director)
and her husband, who are
expecting the arrival of their
second son any day now!

We are so happy for you both!

SAVE THE DATE

for the

9th Annual 5K Turkey Trot &
1 Mile Fun Walk to Benefit LARS!

Thanksgiving Morning
Thursday, November 22, 2012

The First United Methodist Church
424 Main Street
Laurel, MD 20707

USATF certified course!

Visit www.laureladvocacy.org for
course map and online registration.
(Coming Soon!)

SPONSORS NEEDED!

LAUREL ADVOCACY & REFERRAL SERVICES, INC.
311 LAUREL AVENUE
LAUREL, MD 20707

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

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Website: www.laureladvocacy.org



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 a crisis by providing both emergency and long-term services designed to promote self-sufficiency.

LARS Food Pantry

We are grateful to all those who helped keep our pantry stocked during the holidays and winter months. **Food donations tend to be less frequent during the summer, but the need is constant.** We encourage community members and organizations to consider donating food or sponsoring food drives for us as we prepare for the busy summer.

Donations can be dropped off at LARS during business hours (Mon, Wed, Fri 9am-2pm & Mon 5-7pm).

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, Spaghetti-O's, macaroni and cheese, and other staples.**

Please check expiration dates before donating food!