

LARS Letter

Spring 2013 • Volume 26, Issue 1 • Serving the Laurel Community Since 1987

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Remembering A Dear Friend & Colleague

Written by: Shelly Kessler

On Monday March 11, 2013, our dear friend and colleague Linda Stone passed away. Linda has had a long relationship with LARS: She worked at LARS as the Transitional Housing Case Manager and after retirement served on LARS' Board of Directors as the representative for St. Nicholas Catholic Church. Before lending her talents to LARS and many other charitable organizations, Linda worked as a drug and alcohol counselor and later established her own family therapy practice.

Linda was very generous with her time and often volunteered at LARS, especially during the Holiday Program, which is when I first met Linda. I was a rather young professional (read: I had no idea what I was doing) charged with running the program. Linda came to LARS to help me interview applicants. What I didn't tell her



until later is that because I was so new to this sort of work, I was often unsure about how to interact with clients. So, I would sit in the office next to hers and listen to how she did it—because she was very good at it. Needless to say I learned a lot and wrote her the nicest thank you card I could

manage for all that she did for me and the people who came to LARS that winter.

In the times since, I would often run into Linda and her husband while she dropped off food, stopped by to chat before board meetings, and volunteered even more of her time.

While preparing to write this I asked my colleagues at LARS to share their own memories of Linda, and this is what they had to say:

"Linda was one of the nicest people that anyone could want to meet. She had such a respect for people. It didn't matter if you were young, old, rich, poor or what have you; Linda would find a way to listen and to help because it was just her way. She was a very kind-hearted person who carried herself with a quiet strength that people could not help but to recognize. She loved her clients and they in turn loved her. She was a kind and encouraging presence at LARS and she will be truly missed."

Events & Announcements

- ⇒ It's a girl! CONGRATULATIONS to Leah Paley-Merriman, LARS' Acting Deputy Director, and her husband Mat on the birth of their first child, Keegan Aiello Merriman, born April 15, 2013. Keegan weighed in at 8lbs, 13oz, and 21 1/4 inches long!
- ⇒ You're invited to the **9th Annual Silent Auction & Bull/Oyster Roast to Benefit LARS!** Auction items include 4 tickets to Disney World, an Ocean City getaway, Redskins tickets, local restaurant deals, and more unique experiences! For tickets or to donate an auction item, contact Laura Wellford at 301-776-0442 ext. 27 or lwelford@laureladvocacy.org.
When: Saturday, June 1st, 6-10pm
Where: American Legion Post 60 (Laurel, MD)
- ⇒ Subscribe to our **NEW E-Newsletter** to stay up to date with all LARS happenings! We will still send out a print newsletter, but we want to build up our e-mail list so that we can send out more frequent updates! (Visit www.laureladvocacy.org to join!)
- ⇒ Re-like us on **Facebook!** Our old page disappeared, so if you "liked" us before, please like us again and help us rebuild our network by sharing our new page with friends! We are also on **Twitter** @laureladvocacy.

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

Charles Smalls
Case Manager/Volunteer Coordinator

Laura Wellford
Program Coordinator / LARS Letter Editor

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

Sequestration Impacts LARS

The country's economic climate seems to be taking a hint from the unpredictable weather patterns we've been experiencing over the past few months. In the wake of sequestration, significant cuts to many discretionary programs are being made. Homeless prevention and affordable housing programs throughout the country are at risk of losing crucial funding. Nearly all programs within the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) have already seen a 5% funding cut since March. This number may seem small, but it has the power to reverse a great amount of progress being made by organizations like LARS. HUD estimates that as a result of sequestration cuts, over **100,000** homeless and formerly homeless people will be "removed from their current housing or emergency shelter programs, putting them at substantial risk of returning to the streets."*

LARS' Permanent and Transitional Housing Programs, both of which receive funding from HUD, will certainly feel the hit. LARS provides permanent housing for 7 chronically homeless, disabled individuals. As part of the Permanent Housing Program, clients are connected with benefits and resources such as substance abuse treatment programs, mental health counseling, medical assistance, food stamps, Social Security benefits, and clothing vouchers. As we experience more uncertainty in our government funding sources, we ask for your continued support to help us keep these programs strong!

*Source: *Sequestration Impact on Homeless Assistance Grants Programs*, Ann Marie Oliva (March 2013).

Laurel Winter Shelter Wrap Up

The Laurel Winter Shelter (LWS) Program was a great success this year! The shelter season ran from late November through mid-March and LARS conducted nearly 100 intakes for the shelter, including both men and women. Twenty-two congregations participated in the program by sharing their space for one week (or two weeks in some cases) with the shelter participants. Hot meals were served to participants each night and morning, and volunteers ensured that the participants were provided with a sack lunch each day to take with them during the shelter's off hours. None of these efforts would have been possible without the volunteers at each congregation who were fundamental in the execution of the shelter program.

Case managers from LARS conducted weekly outreach to the shelter, where they met with shelter participants and informed them of the services that LARS offers. LARS was able to assist some guests with obtaining permanent housing through rental assistance, as well as eyeglasses, employment assistance, food, financial assistance for health needs including tooth extractions and prescriptions, as well as substance abuse and mental health treatment referrals. LARS continues to support homeless individuals throughout the year and we look forward to supporting the LWS in years to come.



Emmanuel United Methodist Church in Scaggsville hosted nearly 40 men and women during the Laurel Winter Shelter Program in early February. Volunteers provided guests with hot meals and a safe place to rest.

Transitional Housing Highlights



LARS would like to congratulate the Transitional Housing Program teenagers who are graduating from high school this semester! We wish you the best of luck in your futures and hope you have an easy transition from high school to your prospective colleges or careers! We would like to recognize all of our Transitional Housing families for the hard work and dedication they have put into the program. One of our clients entered the program in October 2012 and was able to locate permanent affordable housing and steady employment within 6 months of her participation. We look forward to hearing many more success stories like this one in the years to come!

The LARS Transitional Housing Program serves 10 families by providing housing and support services to assist them in becoming financially independent in their communities. Program participants attend weekly life skills workshops at LARS held by Transitional Housing Case Manager Emily Kleeman and a variety of guest speakers. Workshops cover topics such as budgeting, job searching, and parenting.

***Pictured left:** Kimberly Lee Johnson, MA, a Parent Educator from Encouragement Parenting Services visits with the Transitional Housing Program participants for a Group Parenting Workshop. Kim held 6 classes at LARS this Spring, covering parenting topics such as discipline, family communication, and problem solving in families.*

Volunteer Corner

Year after year LARS has been fortunate enough to accomplish its mission of serving homeless and low-income individuals and families in need living in the Greater Laurel area. With the assistance of our dedicated volunteers, LARS has been able to distribute more than 11,000 bags of food to people over the past year alone. Recently we were able to sit down with just one of the many individuals who give of their time, talents, and effort to help us make a difference in the lives of so many:

SPOTLIGHT... MR. PAUL SIMON

At 72 years young, Mr. Simon would be considered anything but retired to the staff at LARS. In addition to helping to keep our pantry stocked on a weekly basis by making multiple deliveries of food from local retailers and organizations, he also generously lends us his time as our volunteer maintenance technician. Mr. Simon's energy and efforts seem endless as he also serves as an active member of the Knights of Columbus, a long-time volunteer at the Elizabeth House/FISH of Laurel, and currently serves as an usher at St. Mary of the Mills Church. He also spends a great deal of time visiting homebound friends. It would be an understatement to say that Mr. Simon is a very involved member of the community.

When asked of his motivation to serve so openhandedly Mr. Simon stated "I just love the feeling of doing good in the community". Having learned his work ethic and sense of community involvement from his parents, he hopes to ultimately instill these ideals in his grandchildren.

On the rare occasion that Mr. Simon is not busy gathering over \$100,000 worth of food or recognizing other people for their generous efforts, believe it or not he actually has some free time. He can be seen working in his vegetable garden or grabbing a bite to eat at Old Country Buffet. While Mr. Simon does enjoy his free time, he does not plan to stop his volunteer efforts anytime soon.

LARS thanks you, Mr. Simon!

There are many ways to get involved at LARS! For more information about volunteer opportunities, contact Charles Smalls, LARS' Volunteer Coordinator, at 301.776.0442 ext. 28 or e-mail csmalls@laureladvocacy.org.

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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

Donations can be dropped off at LARS during business hours:

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

(Or call ahead to arrange another time)

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.**

Please check the expiration dates!

We are also in need of **plastic grocery bags** to distribute food!

If you would like to coordinate a food drive to benefit LARS, please contact Charles Smalls at 301-776-0442 ext. 28 or email csmalls@laureladvocacy.org.

THANK you!