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Northside Common Ministries
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NCM: Celebrating Over 30 Years of Service!



For more than 30 years, Northside Common Ministries has been the recipient of help from many caring people. Without the help of our volunteers and supporters, we could not continue to provide the services we offer to our brothers and sisters in need. The past few months brought out many supporters of the work at NCM including our Food Pantry Brunch Challenge held at the New Hazlett Theater in January.

1982-2019:
30 plus years of providing for the needs of our brothers and sisters who are hungry and homeless

NCM News

April 2019 Volume 9, Number 1

A Message from the Director:

This past winter, our staff was faced with several guests who had medical needs that we were not prepared to address at Pleasant Valley Shelter. Our staff, in their usual fashion, pulled through with flying colors as they helped these men as much as possible with care, compassion and dignity.

At one point, we were serving two men on 24 hour oxygen, two men in recovery from recent surgeries, a man in a motorized wheelchair, a man in a push wheelchair who was unable to bathe himself and suffered from early stages of dementia, and a man with narcolepsy that caused him to fall asleep continuously throughout the day and be in unsafe situations outside our building. For a rehab facility, these scenarios would be all part of a normal day; for a homeless shelter providing care for between 25 to 30 men each night with only one staff person on duty, these were Herculean tasks. None of our shelter staff is trained to provide medical support or personal care services; none are provided extra support to manage through their shift. And yet they all pulled through.

What frustrated each of us wasn't the added responsibilities but rather the recognition that each of these men needed a level of care that we were not really set up to provide. Yet, here at a homeless shelter is where these men landed. We watched each day as these frustrated men struggled, as they fought for dignity, and as they muddled through. Our shelter staff and case managers worked with staff from a

variety of county agencies and from our on-site medical clinic for the homeless to help secure more appropriate placements for the most complex of the cases.

As I type this article, some of these men are still with us – I am pleased to say it is the men with the most self-care abilities and who are most able to be safe in the community. The men will eventually exit to a supported program that can address their needs more fully. But the staff and I still find ourselves asking: how did these men with such significant needs end up here? We all know our systems for caring for each other are far from perfect; some of society's most vulnerable people are left to find their own way.

Admission to our shelter is a choice made by the individual; frequently it's the better choice from among several very poor options. In each of these cases, when faced with the choice of a level of independence as opposed to a more structured setting, these men chose the level of independence they have at a shelter even when that was not the wisest choice based on their health.

Each year, it seems that I see more people with more significant challenges at my office door. I understand the position that all adults who are not a danger to themselves or to others should be free to make their own decisions about the services they need and utilize. Options and resources can be laid out before them, but they individually must take the next step and make the final

decisions. While theoretically I embrace the concept of allowing individual choice, I must admit I struggle each time I see Edgar as he balances a large garbage bag on his shoulder filled with his life's treasures knowing that he has on many occasions been provided a list of options and resources. Yet he selects to haul that bag around the city begging for things and sleeping in the woods. Edgar should have the right to choose, but I wonder if he is really able to make that choice. Who would select sleeping on the cold ground year after year and begging in the streets over a warm bed in an apartment? Edgar and many others have their reasons for the choices they make — reasons that I cannot comprehend, but that I must honor.

It's not just in the world of homeless shelters that I find myself struggling to honor difficult decisions. I find it with family and friends, I find it with coworkers and even passers-by. Honoring the choices of others can at times be stressful, frustrating and even a bit disheartening; ultimately who am I to decide what's best for another person? Like any parent, I've often stopped myself in mid thought as I pondered how much easier it would be if my child would just do what I say. But in most cases, I stop before I let the words out of my mouth. I pull back, recognizing that we each need to make our own path and that factors beyond my understanding or my control impact the decisions of others. I may not understand or love the decision, but I must honor the person's right to make that decision. ★

Did You Know....

NCM offers students needing to complete community service a wide variety of opportunities to help us out and at the same complete their hours. Some students provide hands on assistance at the food pantry or shelter; others coordinate collection drives at school, church or in community groups. Between designing fliers and electronic posts to get donations, or coordinating and delivering collections, the students learn new skills while they help provide for the needs of the people using our services.

People needing to complete court-requested community service hours are also on site each day providing much needed physical help. Additionally, on many days each week individuals with intellectual disabilities and their care aides help at NCM with our pantry and lunch program.

To learn more about volunteering or completing community service, email jay.poliziani@ncmin.org ★

"When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping." — Fred Rogers



So Many Helpers

There are many people who care, who fill our lives with blessings every day, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This includes our holiday helpers who can be found at NCM changing lives. The eight paid people on staff cannot manage to keep this place open to care for our brothers and sisters in need without the help of the over 1,000 volunteers who provide tens of thousands of service hours each year. ★

Food Pantry Produce Distribution Topped 17,000 Pounds Each Month Last Year

Onions, potatoes, turnips, greens and fresh fruit were among the multitude of choices offered to shoppers at our food pantry in 2018. Each day our pantry door is open so shoppers can access fresh produce. Our goal is to relieve the stress families face when they struggle to put nutritious food on the table that can prevent diseases like obesity, high blood pressure and diabetes.

According to a recent report published by Harvard, the CDC reports some sobering statistics about Americans:

- Chronic diseases are the leading causes of death and disability.
- 70 percent of annual deaths are due to chronic diseases.
- Preventable conditions not only compromise quality of life, they add to rising health care costs — 75 percent of health care dollars are devoted to treat these diseases.
- Among adults ages 20 to 74, diabetes remains the leading cause of kidney failure, blindness and non-traumatic lower-extremity amputations.

The good news is that people have the power to help prevent chronic disease by making positive diet and lifestyle changes that can help reduce risk. Eating healthy foods such as fresh fruits and vegetables, getting enough exercise, and refraining from tobacco and excessive alcohol use confer numerous health benefits — including possibly preventing the onset of chronic diseases. ★

<https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/disease-prevention/>



"When I say it's you I like, I'm talking about that part of you that knows that life is far more than anything you can ever see or hear or touch. That deep part of you that allows you to stand for those things without which humankind cannot survive. Love that conquers hate, peace that rises triumphant over war, and justice that proves more powerful than greed." — Fred Rogers

Success Stories...

Charles

Charles came to Pleasant Valley Shelter in the summer of 2019 in pretty poor health, shuffling around on a walker, getting weekly shots of maintenance drugs to keep him off heroine, and with early signs of dementia. During his extended stay at the shelter, he had multiple hospitalizations landing him in a wheelchair with virtually no use of his legs. Our staff was able to work with the county to arrange for an aide to help Charles shower, but his physical and mental abilities continued to rapidly decline.

While the staff at NCM willingly went above and beyond to make Charles comfortable, we all knew that the limited services we offer were not appropriate or even providing him with the basic human dignity we each deserve, especially in such difficult times. Near the spring of 2019, with the help of NCM staff, arrangements were made to get Charles into more suitable housing at a local extended stay rehabilitation facility. Success is not always calculated based on an apartment or a job, but rather what offers someone the best quality of life.

The Harris Men

Mr. and Mr. Harris moved into an apartment. Father and son, the Harris' arrived at the shelter in the winter with all their belongings packed in their car after being unable to pay their rent for several months. Senior Mr. Harris arrived on 24-hour-a-day oxygen that he pulled around with him; his son was his constant caregiver unable to work because there was no one else to care for his father. While they resided at the shelter, they worked to secure housing using the Allegheny Link Rapid re-housing program and through outreach to senior apartments around the city that would allow for a live-in caregiver. This winter, the Harris' packed up their car and moved to their new apartment. ★

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

Celebrating Humanity

Hundreds of supporters of Northside Common Ministries will come together on September 19 at Alloy 26 in the former Allegheny Center Mall to celebrate the good works of volunteers in our community. One adult, a youth under 21, and a congregation will be honored for their volunteer work with the city's hungry or homeless. Attendees will see how the former shopping mall has been renovated into the home of many hi tech businesses and a wonderful events space. Tickets for this year's event will go on sale this summer at ncmin.org ★

Spaghetti Dinners

Join us at Northmont Presbyterian Church, 8169 Perry Highway, on Saturday, April 27, from 4:30 to 7 p.m. for a delicious spaghetti dinner. Take outs and gluten free pasta will be available. A free will offering will be collected for the meal.

Hot off the presses and from the boiling water... a second spaghetti dinner has been added for 2019. Our friends at Bethlehem Lutheran Church, 1719 Mt. Royal Blvd., Glenshaw, have generously offered to host a second dinner to benefit the work of our mission. Watch for details for a Saturday night in October for this event. ★

Walk for a Healthy Community

The annual Highmark Walk for a Healthy Community is set for Saturday, May 11, at 9 a.m. at Stage AE on the North Shore. Join us as a walker or consider sponsoring a walker. It's the easiest way to help support the work of Northside Common Ministries.

Visit our web page ncmin.org for more information on the Highmark Walk. ★

"If you could only sense how important you are to the lives of those you meet; how important you can be to the people you may never even dream of. There is something of yourself that you leave at every meeting with another person." — Fred Rogers

