



# St. Mary's Franciscan Shelter

*For Homeless Families*

## The Countdown til Christmas!

Here at Saint Mary's we are waiting and counting days for the arrival of the big man with the big bag. Our children can't wait for Santa and Christmas to arrive. They know that this season belongs to all of us and their desires are simple... On their lists we see pajamas, monopoly board game, a basketball, action figures, toy trucks, a full size blanket. Nothing grand but all gifts, surprises and welcomed caring. With the help of our Secret Santa program these wishes will come true.



Our parents are waiting for bigger hopes and dreams... a job, a used car, a small apartment to provide safety and protection for their children. These aren't going to come from Santa but from hard work, cooperative efforts of many organizations and lots of patience, prayer and caring folks in our neighborhoods.

By the time you read this we at St. Mary's will have provided housing for over 10 families since September. Most of the children are under 10 years of age. This is a critical time for them and their parents. If they are going to break the cycle of poverty that so many of them were born into, it has to happen while the children are young. Maybe with our help we can send these young children a message: *Life is not always going to be so hard. Keep faith and grow strong, the world will be safer as the days go on.*

We join with you and your loved ones listening to the Silver Bells... Ring a ling, hear them sing.. Soon it will be Christmas Day.

## GOODBYE TO THE OLD.....HELLO TO THE NEW!

With so much happening at St. Mary's these days, we sometimes forget to show you the difference we are making as our changing environment continues. We recall the sadness we all felt as St. Mary's beloved school was demolished. At that time we promised to create a garden in its place - a peaceful and gentler space for our families to reflect.

Please rejoice with us as we celebrate our new family Garden! We are most grateful to our donors and friends who made this possible. We offer a special thanks to the Connelly Foundation for their support and the funding that they provided to make this dream a reality. Please visit when the season changes and enjoy this lovely space.



## Life at St. Mary's in the words of a guest...

When I first came to St. Mary's, I didn't know what to expect. Well actually, I expected that the staff would look down on me and treat me like another statistic and not an actual human being.

Fortunately, my expectations were so far from what it really is like here at St. Mary's.

From day one, the staff was extremely welcoming. There is structure here for the parents, as well as the children. The staff is adamant about making sure that we set goals for ourselves and our kids. Not only do they find out what our needs are, they help us to go and get them acquired.

I came here not knowing what the future would hold for my son and me. I was provided with a coach, Ms. Kate, who helped me find meetings in the area that I could attend and a place in the area where people would help me look for a job by providing help with a resume. I was able to make doctors' appointments close to the shelter, which helped a lot.

The people at St. Mary's shelter provided me with a case manager, who helped me find resources when I finally winded up getting an interview. I was able to go to a place where people helped me get clothing appropriate for work. The shelter people helped me with my confidence, being that I didn't have much when I first arrived.

Soon enough, I couldn't wait to come back to tell everyone here about the good news I was getting. I had gotten hired at the job I wanted. The people at the shelter even found the resources for me to get back and forth to work because I have no vehicle. The structure is something that I also love here. We have dinner at the same time every day. I get to know other residents and their stories, while building relationships at the same time.

During all of this, I received a call from a housing program. There's no need to find a place for meetings with them outside because the shelter will have no problem letting them come to us. So at this point, I have a steady job, a housing program helping me to find a place and my son attending school daily. After looking at a few place to live, I found one that I should be moving into within a week from now.

Without coming to St. Mary's I don't know where I'd be. Sister Bernadette is always excited when I come with good news. The people who work here constantly encourage me every single day. They've become family. I would not have had so many positive things happen in my life if it had not been for St. Mary's. I will miss each and every person here when I leave and I am forever grateful for the opportunity to come here. *Thank you!!*

*J.F. Nov. 2019*

**SOLD OUT!!** The Barbecue and Brew Fundraiser was a great success. Thank you from our families who are now facing homelessness. Thank you to all who supported this amazing event. To those who planned, served, provided food and live music.... Bravo!! Job Well Done!!



## HOME FOR CHRISTMAS....

Meet April, who with her son, came to St. Mary's Shelter hoping to get their lives back on track. April had struggled with addiction for over a decade. When she arrived at St. Mary's, she had just finished six months in a Rehabilitation Center for families. April's competence was first recognized at the rehabilitation center where she was appointed a group leader.

April made the decision to come to Saint Mary's directly from the rehabilitation Center as she knew to get back on her feet she needed great strength and security. Every decision that April made, was based on her goal... creating a better life for her son.

April started the day she arrived at St. Mary's! She got a job, got her son into a local school district and began researching housing. Staying at the shelter and setting these goals with the case manager were an important start to her success.

Within a few weeks, she landed a job with a local insurance company, where she is enjoying her position and her co-workers. She is a go-getter and is an inspiration to others that you can do whatever you set your mind to. April always came to her case management meetings with a smile on her face, notes in hand, and ready to get things done.

Success is not coming easily to April. With no money or car she has to walk or take a bus to try to reach her goals. Each day remains very challenging. She begins the day by waiting for the school bus with her son in Phoenixville and then races to catch her bus to her job in King of Prussia. After working six hours, she gets the bus back to St. Mary's in order to meet her son at the end of his school day. Job searches, housing visits, and appointments all have to fit into the daily schedule that she follows. She is tireless in her pursuit and is reaping the rewards of her struggles. We here at St. Mary's wish April and her son success and happiness on their journey.



## CELEBRATING OUR VOLUNTEERS

Every word falls short when it comes to thanking our extraordinary volunteers. Each one of them plays a very crucial role in supporting us to run the program successfully for our residents on their journey to find stable housing.



Volunteers are the team of silent caregivers for the families we serve. They inspire us every day with their care, thoughtfulness, willingness to serve and support. Hence, it was our absolute pleasure to organize an annual get together to celebrate them. It was an opportunity to meet them personally and get to know their amazing stories serving the shelter as well as the community at large. We were honored to spend meaningful time with our volunteers on November 14 and definitely missed those who couldn't join us.

We thank all our volunteers who help us with office work, organizing events, maintaining the building, flawlessly coordinating meals on behalf of their parish year after year, spend their evenings helping staff to serve dinner and cleaning up and share their time

with children to give the parents living in the shelter some much needed free time. Thank you all for the care you shower to all of us! May volunteers increase in the community so that together we will keep on making a difference in the lives of those in need.



## COMING SOON.....TRANSITIONAL HOUSING AT SAINT MARY'S

Since 1987 we have provided temporary housing for families from Chester County at Saint Mary's Shelter. Over this time we have housed close to 700 families. In the back of our minds was always a desire to serve more families, more effectively. In order to do this, we had work to do!!

Saving money for this dream was first on our list. Then the present buildings had to be assessed for their ability to withstand the demolition and rebuilding that would be required. One building, called the "Old School", passed this test! The second building and gym did not. This building had to be demolished, the property restored, renewed and replanted. We are very proud of the family garden that now stands in its place!



As we moved toward rebuilding the "Old School" we realized that the back of the house had to be restored due to rotted joists and pilings. An eight month rebuild began in 2018 and was completed in January 2019. Finally we are ready for the new apartments!!

Stay tuned as we build 4 apartments for transitional housing within the present shelter building. We have faithfully saved, prudently investigated, restored structural concerns and have created a property that our residents in both the emergency shelter and soon to be transitional housing will be proud to call home! Stay tuned!!



**St. Mary's**  
Franciscan Shelter  
For Homeless Families

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Online Donation can be made through our website: [www.stmarysfs.org](http://www.stmarysfs.org)

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May God's love light your way to a Christmas filled with hope and a new year bright with joy.