



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

Newsletter

The Many Faces of Homelessness....



Recently we met a young student from University of Missouri. He is a Film Production major working on a semester project. He knocked on our door asking if he could film a short video on our new transitional housing program. We agreed and he returned the next day to begin.

Louis arrived bearing the baggage of a professional film producer - cameras, lens, battery packs and tripod. He also came in the new uniform of the pandemic - mask, clothing coverings, Clorox wipes and hand sanitizer.

Missouri to Phoenixville? How did those thousand miles come about? In conversation with him we learned that Louis's Mom and his two youngest sisters lived with us at St. Mary's a couple years ago. To our surprise, Louis was a member of our St. Mary's extended family! He reported that his family is doing well and his sisters have grown to be friendly, loving and very active preschoolers. His Mom is happily living in a local apartment and continues to work hard each day. Her new stability is gift to him as well as his siblings. He is free to work hard, study, dream of a future that will be stable and productive. He is very well on his way.



Louis seemed right at home behind the camera and in our home. His creative, sensitive, artistic mind absorbed the problem of homelessness and saw the wonder and grace that a new home with four additional apartments would be to our area. He engaged the residents with respect and interest in their progress. He let them know of his experience and his path to success in college. His images showed a deep understanding borne from the life experiences of his twenty-one years. His understanding of the oft used quote "we are all only a paycheck away from being homeless" was reality for him. His awe at the beautiful families now living here, the century plus building that we share with our homeless families, and the beautiful flowering garden with gazebo for enjoying the outdoors lent strength and encouragement to all of us.

Homelessness requires knocking on doors day after day. Louis knocked on our door with a different idea and a different question. Sometimes the extensions of our homeless families come back to us and bring everything we need - respect, encouragement and tons of energy!



Thank you, Louis, for showing us that homelessness is sometimes just a big step ahead.

BEING SAFE DURING PANDEMIC

Natalie stayed at the shelter with her daughter during the crucial months of her pregnancy. She came to the shelter right at the beginning of lockdown for COVID-19. Together we found out the ways to stay safe, made arrangements for her daughter to attend virtual zoom classes, and continued to give her case management support to keep her motivated during these stressful uncertain months. We are so happy that she found housing and moved on to the next chapter of her life. Wish her and her daughter and new born a very healthy, safer and stable future!





The Voice of Life Is Soft; We Must Listen Hard

We have been blessed at St. Mary's to welcome a mom and young son over the past few months while we all work to get through the pandemic safely. At such a difficult time, St Mary's is a haven for those in need

While Sharon and Eli are here, they have been working towards many goals. Eli is receiving on-line tutoring so he can better use sign language. Sharon is also learning to sign, so she and Eli can communicate with one another readily. St. Mary's has provided an iPad to aid them with their studies of sign language. But that is not all. Sharon's greatest goal while sheltering here at St. Mary's is to find a home to raise Eli. She is currently working not only with the case manager here at St. Mary's but with many other Chester County services to help get her and Eli on their feet. Our hope is that they can get settled in a new home within the next month or so. This would allow Sharon to enroll Eli into the upcoming school year at either Elwyn Development Center or the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf (PSD), in order for him to become immersed in the deaf culture and become more proficient at signing. It should be a wonderful experience for Eli and his mom. We wish Sharon and Eli great success in finding their forever home and going forward in life.

Team Work IS Dream Work

As soon as March 2020 began and our lives started to change the shelter staff came together under the guidance of St Bernadette Daugherty to work on the projects that were planned big Volunteer events. The staff started working on the projects such as make over for the hallway, getting the shades ready for spring and summer so that families and children can safely enjoy the outdoors, mulching the garden and many such activities. Each activity brought back the wonderful memories we spent with volunteers at the shelter in pre-COVID era.

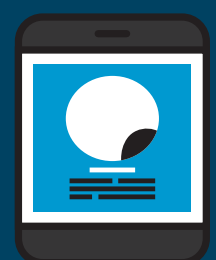


of shelter. Mom, Sharon, is raising Eli basically on her own and he is a wonderful little boy. Eli is one and a half and is hearing impaired, but that doesn't seem to slow him down any. He always has a smile, and he is full of energy. Now that the weather is warming up, we often see him and his mom playing outside in our beautiful garden area. They enjoy the sunshine and safety of the fenced in garden.



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KEEPING THE PROMISE AMIDST PANDEMIC

After many months of hard work, detailed discussions, thorough designs, team work and many hardships including COVID-19 pandemic, St Mary's shelter signed the contract with the builder to begin the construction work for the Transitional Housing on June 11. It is an exciting time for all of us! Four separate apartments are scheduled to be done by January 2021.

Volunteers and Volunteering in the era of COVID-19

Since the very beginning volunteers have been the heart and soul of the shelter. The nurturing spirit of our volunteers touched each and every family that lived in the shelter. They feel joy when we

losing friends and neighbors, we gained more. When people were still getting familiar with the term 'social distancing' our volunteers proved they were always there with us with their creative ways.



grow and our families thrive for better future, they share our struggle, they inspire us to strive for betterment; in a word they are our 'Family'.

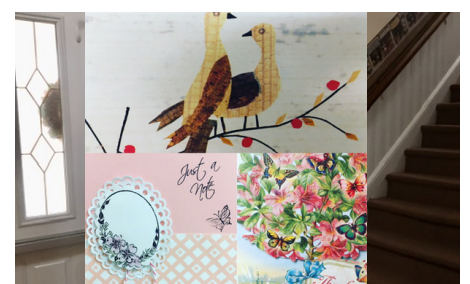
So, when COVID-19 came home and started disrupting the lives of our neighbors we had to take a tough call to suspend all on-site volunteering activities for an indefinite period of time. It also meant our crucial workforce could no longer join us to provide the services to our families at the shelter. We were worried but we had to take the call to keep both our volunteers and families safe. When the world was worried about

St Mary's 'VolunteerFamily' made sure we had enough masks and cleaning products. We had calls coming in everyday to ask if we needed anything for families as they were going to the store. They helped us to keep up with our need for online communications and many more. Our volunteers even sent us handwritten notes, handmade greeting cards, and baked us cookies to keep our spirit high during those difficult days. Volunteers made sure our families could enjoy Easter and Mother's Day. Our bond became stronger during these difficult months. We are truly blessed to have you all in our family to walk the tough walk together.



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Shelter's Need List

Disinfectant Wipes

Paper Towel

Hot Chocolate Mix

Individual Snack Bags

Individual Juice Boxes

Iced-Tea Mix

Decaf Tea

Coffee



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