



St. Mary's
Franciscan Shelter
For Homeless Families

Issue 22 | Winter 2021

Newsletter



What are you asking Santa Claus for this year?

So often we dream and hope—and sometimes these dreams come true! Here at St. Mary's, we are pausing and reflecting on what we asked "Santa Claus" for over these years. Yes, St. Mary's, there really is a Santa Claus!!

In 2016, we dreamed of an old empty school building being converted into housing for our homeless families. Could we take each classroom and turn it into a small apartment?

With the gifts, blessings, support and love of so many others, the dream came true as noted in our recent groundbreaking of the new St. Mary's Transitional Housing. Beautiful 2-bedroom apartments, a lift, a laundry room, meeting rooms and office space. A miracle far beyond what we hoped for, far beyond what we imagined. Yes, there is a Santa Claus – or shall we say a loving God watching over us and providing for us in ways we could not imagine.

In 2018 we dreamed of a lovely garden to give our families a quiet space where they could find some peace and relaxation. With the help of the Connelly foundation and many amazing supporters, we were able to create an urban oasis that is beyond our wildest dreams. Yes, another time we dreamed and received a miracle in return.

In 2020 in the midst of a frightening pandemic, we asked Santa for strength, courage and good health so we could

remain open every day and fulfill our role as Essential workers. Every day, every staff person arrived on duty and the shelter never missed a beat. We housed as many families as the CDC allowed and we made as much progress as possible. Our friends from the Churches and the neighborhoods were there to bring meals, leaving them on the bench outside so no contact occurred. We had food, shelter and a generous staff of individuals who worked tirelessly to keep the families safe.

In 2021 we are asking Santa Claus for the gifts of gratitude to you, to our donors, friends and neighbors who are and have always been Santa in our lives. Blessings to each and every one of our many Santas - those great people with big hearts, loving spirits and a bag filled with surprises.



UPDATE: SAINT MARY'S TRANSITIONAL HOUSING PROGRAM



We are happy to announce that our first two families have taken up residence in their new apartments. At this time, we have a family of 3 in apartment 2-B and a family of 2 in apartment 1-B. Each is adjusting well and enjoying the newness of the apartments as well as the outdoor beauty. The grounds are colorful and landscaped to perfection while the inside offers a peaceful, lovely, residential space complete with everything needed to live comfortably and safely. The words we hear most at St. Mary's, "Thank you." Our first 2 families in the apartments repeat the words over and over. Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!

Volunteer Spotlight: Ben Cowen and Martha Napolitan

What is our favorite part of Mondays? Listening to the sound of belly laughter coming out of the Playroom when Ben and Martha come to visit! Ben and Martha are an incredibly dedicated and upbeat couple that have been volunteering at St. Mary's for several years. They started by working on gardening projects with us but quickly found an additional passion at St. Mary's- being our playgroup volunteers! With the experience that they bring from additional volunteer positions and raising three children of their own, Ben and Martha are constantly looking for a way to get our children involved. When the weather (and the

sun) allows it, the pair loves to get outside and ride bikes, play basketball, throw frisbees, and even participate in a friendly scooter race or two with our children! When they

can't get outside, they come prepared and help our children color and craft. Ben and Martha recount that some of their favorite memories include watching the children while they pretend play. Their dedication for volunteering with us two weeks every month helps ensure that our parents are receiving a much-needed hour of "me time." Our parents can decompress peacefully knowing that their children are enjoying themselves with some of our amazing volunteers! We are incredibly thankful for all the memories that Ben and Martha helped make for our children and for all of the time and dedication they give to St. Mary's. Thank you so much Ben and Martha!!



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WHAT'S NEXT...

Reopening our Weekly enrichment program

In January, we are scheduled to resume the educational program that is so critical to the good use of the time that our families are with this. We will have a presentation every Wednesday evening. The topics to be covered during this cycle are parenting (Cindy Mastrangelo will return for her 19th year), Nutrition with Dr. Jim, Spirituality with Deacon Mark Nowakowski and Finance (TBD) . The program this year will include both the shelter residents and the apartment dwellers. It will be the one time that the two programs will come together for a scheduled program. We are hoping that this time to share stories and information will be successful for all our families. We all look forward to meeting our presenters and enjoying the Wednesday night enrichment series. A million thanks to our presenters.



From Shelter to Transitional Apartments Congratulations Danielle and Shikar

Danielle arrived at the shelter with her 4-year-old boy in October. She and Shikar, who has special needs, needed to be housed as quickly as possible in a safe and structured place. After initial

intake with our Coordinator of Resident Services, Danielle and Shikar settled in, and Danielle quickly got to work on her goals in the program here at the shelter.

Shikar had to be set up to go to a special daycare and also needed transportation. Danielle immediately made those calls, so he could get the services available. She made sure that she followed up on all phone calls and was soon successful. Although Danielle had a job, she lost it when they became homeless and then Shikar was no longer able to go to school. Danielle found a new job that was willing to wait until she got her son back into school. She kept in touch with them throughout this trying time and will

begin her new job the first day Shikar is in his new school.

Next, she started looking at her housing options. Times are difficult in the housing market with both high prices and little selection. This did not deter her from calling and visiting several different places; she was determined to find housing for her and her son. She even went as far as Johnstown PA, where she has family, and put her name on a waiting list there.

In the meantime, the team at St. Mary's were increasingly aware and impressed with Danielle's perseverance, tenacity and willingness to work hard to reach the goals she sets for herself. She clearly was able to meet the requirements for living in our Transitional Apartments. We are so happy to welcome her as our second family residing in the newly established homes. She will move in as soon as she finishes her eight-week program in the shelter.

In short, Danielle has shown great success here at St. Mary's. She has been proactive throughout her stay. She still has many plans for the future including getting her driver's license. She is a true example of how you can succeed even when the odds are against you.



RETURNING FROM THE DEPTHS OF THE PANDEMIC



Slowly but surely, we are getting back to normal following the challenges of the pandemic. We were delighted to welcome Dr. Sissy John, Medical Director at our local Phoenixville

Clinic to talk with our families about the vaccine and to clarify some strongly held myths. She was very engaging and responded to the many questions that our families had. It was a wonderful evening for all. Thank you, Dr. John.

SPOTLIGHT ON SIERRA HUFF, MSW, LSW: Welcome and Congratulations!

How lucky for us to meet Sierra Huff, MSW and welcome her to our staff. Her role as Program Coordinator was truly a work in progress. Her gentle, efficient, creative manner allowed her to serve our staff and residents as the bridge between our traditional emergency shelter and our new Transitional Housing Program. Sierra was right there ready to take on this challenge.



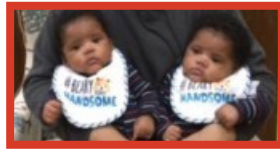
In the midst of all of this, Sierra prepared for and took her licensure exam to become an official Licensed Social Worker. Stay tuned as we change her MSW to her new MSW, LSW . Congratulations Sierra!!

The Faces of the Children say it all!!

We all know that Christmas is all about children and the child within all of us! Lights, wreaths, bells, trees- indoors, and so many delights and wonders.

Saint Mary's this year will be home to 6 families - a first for us - now that we have 2 families residing in the apartments and 4 in the Shelter. Newness is all around us as the apartments are being decorated, and the shelter is ready to receive the live tree. All families on campus will join in Christmas celebrations, and activities. Once again, our home will be ready with lights, lights, and more lights. The darkness of winter will slowly disappear!

With our hearts filled with gratitude, we offer some of the faces of the season.



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