Staff Members

Sherry Ball
Thrift Shop Clerk

Phyllis Beam
Office Manager

Lynn Bingert
Receptionist

Carol Chandler
Thrift Shop Clerk

Lauren Doering
Thrift Shop Clerk

Linda Farrell
Thrift Shop Clerk

Jeannie Fleek, LPC
Therapist

Annette Hicks
Case Manager

Stella Knight
Immigration Specialist

Colleen McNorton
Director

Peggy Peterson
Volunteer Coordinator

Connie Plemmons
Disabled Homeless Project Manager

Donyale Rawson
Case Manager

Catholic Social Services of Baldwin County

All the Catholic churches, schools and social services agencies in Baldwin County celebrated our volunteers in February with a beautiful banquet at the Foley Civic Center. What a great evening it was. A sincere thank you goes out to all who made it a success. I’m looking forward to our 21st such event on February 15, 2015.

April is Volunteer Month, so I thought I’d consider some thoughts about this remarkable walk of life called volunteerism. Most of you reading this out there are volunteers somewhere and many of you who are not currently active have surely been so in your life. I’d venture to say that most people have walked the walk at some point and have found their niche.

The healthy aspects of volunteerism are as numerous as grains of sand and as glorious as the stars, and they span the gambit from physical to spiritual good health. Doctors recommend the avocation to anyone wanting to fill their spare time.

Can you remember the first time you volunteered for an agency or group where you didn’t get paid to do something worthwhile? Did you go back and take on another project for that same group? Did you make some new friends or acquaintances? Did it give you a good feeling to be able to share your God-given talents with others?

Our cadre of wonderful volunteers continues to grow here at Catholic Social Services, and for good reasons, I suspect. We always get the biggest-hearted people to apply for the position. When they do come to work with us, they find a great group of other like-minded people with whom to work and share and network. And they come back. It’s a win-win situation, as the saying goes.

Here at CSS, we couple that with the opportunity to give back to the community and to the people of God. We actually allow them to practice the second greatest commandment to love your neighbor as yourself. It doesn’t get any better than that. And our volunteers seem to appreciate the chance to give back. It’s nothing I’m doing as the director except that I try to keep the doors open and the creditors from calling. Otherwise, it’s all done from the hearts and souls of the people who work here.

The volunteer numbers are listed inside the newsletter, but I want to list the totals here to draw your attention to them. **Sixty volunteers put in 1,523 hours this quarter.** That’s an awesome feat and one for which the staff and I are very grateful.

All our volunteers are invited to the Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon on April 23 at the Magnolia Blossom Café at 11:30 a.m., to celebrate the good work they do for us and for the clients we serve. RSVP if you plan to attend. If you haven’t received an invitation and are a volunteer with us, it’s possible we don’t have a good address for you. Please call the office (251-947-2384) and let us know.

May God bless all volunteers all over the county. Your work is a blessing to so many.

Here is a prayer for volunteers:

“**Heavenly Father, the privilege is ours to share in the loving, healing, reconciling mission of your Son, in this age, and wherever we are. May your Holy Spirit make us wise. May He guide us, renew us and strengthen us so that we will be strong in faith, discerning in proclamation, courageous in witness and persistent in good deeds. Amen.”**

A correction needs to be made to last quarter’s newsletter. I misstated the number of grandchildren Phyllis Beam has when I wrote about her. Phyllis’ daughter, Jennifer, and Jennifer’s husband Billy, are the proud parents of three sons, not just one. The boys are Elijah, Noah and Fisher. I regret the error.

We welcome all who grace our doorway.

Colleen

Catholic Social Services of Greater Mobile Mission Statement

Catholic Social Services, in the Archdiocese of Mobile, is an organized expression of the Church’s concern for social justice and well-being. As such, all activity is to mirror the loving care and concern of Christ for those in need. We evidence this first as professional providers of both direct and indirect services. At the same time, we are called upon to act as effective advocates, leaders, prophets and consciousness-risers.
FROM THE CASE MANAGERS

In the first quarter of 2014, the bizarre ice storm brought many clients to our doors seeking utility assistance. We were shocked to see that the amounts of their electric bill had doubled, and some had even tripled, due to the extreme weather. Although our funds were stretched to the limits, CSS was at the ready to help save these families from having their power disconnected.

The dangerous conditions brought a realization for many of our clients about how inadequate the insulation in their homes was, especially those living in mobile homes.

The needs continue to increase as well in Escambia County, a ministry for which we have now begun our second year.

We always value the area’s other social services agencies, such as Community Action, Atmore Area Christian Center, Ecumenical Ministries and Repair Baldwin, to name a few, that step up and network with us. These partnerships led to another successful case managers’ meeting in March where over 30 case managers were in attendance. Those in attendance told us they benefited from information available at the meeting and from networking in person.

We appreciate our new Red Cross representative, Joe Hilliard, who offered us Project Share funds to help the elderly and disabled with utility assistance during the harsh winter months. We’re looking forward to being awarded Emergency Food and Shelter funds soon, which will give us a jump start into spring and the upcoming hot weather of the summer months.

Annette Hicks and Donyale Rawson

FROM THE COUNSELOR

In the last newsletter article, I discussed one of the best ways to begin a New Year is to “Put the Positive in Your Life.” This article is a gentle reminder to touch base with yourself and think about how you have been doing in the first three months of the year. In the previous article, I suggested writing down the things in life for which you are grateful. Let me expound on this a bit.

When asked to do this, most people will list the big things, such as family members, jobs and health. All these are good things to include; however, I want you to list the small things for which you are grateful as well. For example: watching a football game on Sunday, cooking, reading a good book, working on the car, helping others, listening to music, learning new things, church services, a good cup of coffee or going to the beach. There are many things in our daily lives of which we don’t take notice that bring us joy, or pleasure, and many of them are routine and trivial. Write them down and review them often. This is a great way to focus on the positives that are already in your life.

Jeannie Fleek

BRIDGES OF BALDWIN

We regret to inform you that due to health concerns, Bridges of Baldwin’s coordinator Robin Suggs has resigned from Catholic Social Services. The program will continue as planned. Classes will be facilitated by the director, Colleen McNorton, with assistance from Advisory Board member Ron Kaufman and volunteer Kathy Dupre.

During this seventh week, the participants are working on Module 5, learning nine language concepts that can improve interactions with diverse groups of people by building respectful relationships, resolving conflicts and exchanging information. As in all the Modules, there is a lot of information to read and absorb, but so far, we have retained the original nine participants. Among the topics yet to discuss are resources; self-assessment of resources; community assessment; building resources; and personal and community plans.

The Bridges program feeds lunch to the participants each week. If any agency, group or family is interested in providing the noon meal for this group, please call Colleen at 251-947-2382.

Robin was instrumental in getting Bridges of Baldwin off the ground and she did so in a spectacular way, with all the pomp and circumstance this program deserves. For that, we will always be grateful. CSS wishes Robin good health and God’s many blessings in her future.
IMMIGRATION

The Immigration Program has been busy this quarter, launching the opening of a Language Lab equipped with five levels of Rosetta Stone and a Citizenship Curriculum. Last quarter, the program served 23 clients with naturalization applications, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals applications, renewal of green cards, Adjustment of Status, Family Petitions, translations and 56 miscellaneous services, for a total income of $3,130.

The volunteers who helped with the Immigration Program were very busy during the first quarter. The language lab is open five days a week, and with the help of two dedicated volunteers, the students are flourishing. There are volunteers who sort paperwork, enter information in the database and file. In addition, there are volunteers who mentor DACA recipients with the college application process.

Stella Knight and Peggy Peterson

Stella Knight and Peggy Peterson

DISABLED HOMELESS PROJECT

“Throughout my career I have had the opportunity to work with for profit, not-for-profit, non-profit, faith-based non-profit, as well as state and local agencies. In all but the faith-based non-profit, I have been prohibited from sharing my faith and my beliefs with clients and co-workers. My tenure at Catholic Social Services has been a blessing. Working every day among fellow Christians, I have been able to share my faith and unite in prayer for the people who come here for help. I have seen faith in action from the wonderful volunteers that give freely of their time and talents. I have seen prayers answered and peace bestowed. I have been truly blessed and I will miss all of you dearly.”

Connie Plemmons
GET TO KNOW THE CSS FAMILY

Connie Plemmons wears many different hats during the course of a day in her position as the project manager for the Disabled Homeless Project for Catholic Social Services. But she has good background experience in most cases for what’s in store for her on a daily basis.

In Denver, Colorado, Connie worked as a vocational rehab counselor for people with disabilities. She has been a substitute teacher, a house manager at a group home, a psychologist at Searcy Hospital in Mount Vernon and a program manager for Goodwill Industries, to name a few. Additionally, Connie was instrumental in getting the Baldwin County Public Transit Coalition up and running so that people in Baldwin County would have a way to get jobs and to get to their jobs. That organization still operates today.

During her years with Goodwill, Connie met the late Michele Prockup, the former director of CSS. When Hurricane Danny hit in 1997. Connie was dispatched to CSS to volunteer her time. She worked in the food pantry, stocking the shelves, bagging food, whatever was needed of her. That networking relationship paid off when Connie needed a job in 2001. Michele hired Connie first as a receptionist, and then moved her into her current position in May 2002 when the federal grant took effect for DHP.

Over the years, Connie has helped dozens of homeless people get into decent living conditions and into something that affords them some dignity. She has assisted them with everything they need to keep them off the streets, including helping them with their disability paperwork. But, the tide has shifted for Connie and her work with CSS.

Due to changes in federal regulations, Catholic Social Services has chosen to no longer host the two grants that are essentially funding the homeless projects. These services are defaulting back to Housing First as of May 1, 2014. The federal regulations were announced March 10, 2014, across the country. Connie’s clients will not be affected in this transition. Connie will move her office to 18345-B Pennsylvania Street in Robertsdale. Her work will remain, for the most part, the same.

CSS has accrued many benefits over the years from Connie’s service and dedication to her work, and we will miss her many talents. We wish her God’s many blessings as she continues to minister to the disabled homeless and marginalized people of Baldwin County.