Twenty-thirteen has gotten off to a good start at Catholic Social Services. We continue to assist God’s chosen people and we’ve had some accomplishments. That’s an unbeatable combination.

St. Patrick Parish hosted the Consulate-General of Mexico in February. The purpose of the visit was to increase accessibility to consular services, specifically the issuance of passports and consular identification cards, eliminating the need for citizens to travel to Atlanta for the services. It was a successful visit and carefully orchestrated by immigration specialist Stella Knight.

The Disabled Homeless Project was awarded the Round-Up Grant in February by the Baldwin EMC Foundation. The monies will help Connie Plemmons and Robin Suggs fill the eight spots in that program with people who meet the criteria. A great achievement indeed.

The Valentine Banquet was a grand affair. It was wonderful to see how each of the volunteers was honored and valued in his or her own parish, school or ministry. For those of you who assisted in any portion of its success, I applaud you and I thank you sincerely.

Nineteen Georgetown University students visited us in March. They were in Baldwin County on the Alternative Spring Break Program with Habitat for Humanity. They spoke with Donyale Rawson and Annette Hicks about what case managers do for a living. It was a good visit, by all accounts.

Donyale and Annette hosted a tremendously successful meeting of other case managers later in March. More than 30 of their peers were in attendance to hear members of the social services field speak on their specific areas of expertise.

Our volunteers at CSS now have their own newsletter. “CSS Volunteer Voice” is an online missive filled with news that pertains specifically to the volunteers here at Catholic Social Services in Robertsdale. Volunteer coordinator Peggy Peterson is spearheading this important project. If you are a volunteer and are not receiving the newsletter, contact Peggy at ppetersoncss@gulftel.com.

Therapist Jeannie Fleek has been asked to be the counselor for a new nonprofit called “Under His Wings.” It’s a group home for troubled girls which will soon be up and running in Robertsdale. Jeannie’s good reputation got her that position.

Phyllis Beam and I put together the budget for the next fiscal year. It was a challenge for a non-mathematical person like me, but Phyllis took it all in stride. I thank God for her talents.

Our Thrift Store continues to supply good quality hand-me-downs to the consumer at very reasonable prices. We’re fortunate to have Carol Chandler, Rose-Ann Tuck, Linda Farrell and Sherry Ball minding our store.

Lynn Bingert maintains her place as the star on the tree. Brightly and cheerfully she greets the weary traveler who finds his way to our door. With professional aplomb, she guides him through the process until his needs are met. How fortunate we are to have Lynn.

We are now bringing our ministry of serving God’s people to the citizens in Escambia County. Check out the article on the next page to see how that is unfolding. Watch for the next edition of Connections for more on this new ministry and for more on another new project we are undertaking.

We welcome all who grace our doorway.

Colleen
VOLUNTEER HIGHLIGHT— KAREN MCDERMOTT

Correct grammar and foreign languages are second nature to volunteer Karen McDermott, the mother of two and Rhode Island native. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree in English literature from Spring Hill College in 2011, and she holds a two-year degree in criminal justice administration from Faulkner University and another four-year degree in human resources.

Yet, with all her credentials, she couldn’t land a job in her field until life’s circumstances led her to do volunteer work.

“I had a lot to offer,” said Karen. “I could use my hands. I could use my brain. I could use my heart. I wanted to help.”

She began as an aide with the Literacy Council, helping people learn to read and that morphed into a paid job teaching English as a Second Language at Faulkner University as well as at the Literacy Council. She teaches General Education Diploma classes to students whose ages range from 16 to 77.

She says she really enjoys the ‘aha’ moments of her GED students. She watches for it while she’s teaching them.

“They’re sitting there,” she says, “and then you see that they’ve got it, and it’s like the light goes on in their heads!”

When she met Stella Knight, our Immigration Specialist, she became one of our more active volunteers at Catholic Social Services, dividing her time between Stella’s Deferred Action clients and clients in Peggy Peterson’s various volunteer programs.

“Karen McDermott is my Girl Friday,” said Stella. “She is devoted to her volunteerism with Catholic Social Services Immigration Program but more so to those who lack education.”

Karen is currently working intensely with one of the clients in Connie Plemmons’ Disabled Homeless Project. She is teaching him to read so he can double his chances for success in this world.

Apart from knowing English so well, Karen is also fluent in Spanish and Portuguese.

She is married to Kevin Mann who works as a nurse at Mobile Infirmary. Her daughter Emyle is 13 and attends Central Baldwin Middle School. Her son Montie is 8 and attends Silverhill Elementary School. The family belongs to St. Patrick Catholic Church where Karen made her Confirmation at Easter this year.

FROM OUR CASE MANAGERS

In response to requests from St. Maurice Parish in Brewton and St. Robert Belarmin Parish in Atmore, the case managers began establishing a regular outreach session twice a month in Atmore for those in need of emergency assistance. In addition, we are partnering with pantries in those areas and delivering bread and other basic food items that are needed in Atmore and Brewton. One of our goals for this outreach is to partner with other agencies in Escambia County, such as Sav-a-Life in Atmore, to provide additional funds as needed for emergency situations. In offering this outreach activity, we are expanding our role in fulfilling our ministry responsibility to outlying areas.

The first quarter of the year has seen a rise in medical needs for both first time clients as well as those trying to re-establish long term care. Those that are uninsured can no longer go to the hospital to be treated for illnesses that are considered non-life-threatening. Most of our clients have no health insurance. Many of our clients wait until they don’t know what else to do. Then they visit a hospital emergency room for treatment. A hospital will not treat a non-life-threatening condition without some form of payment, so many of our clients are turned away. Often, by the time a client reaches us at CSS, their illness has progressed beyond our means of helping them.

We often network with Franklin Clinic, which has locations in Mobile, Loxley and Foley, where a client can establish a family primary physician for a limited co-payment, which our agency can provide. The fees for the first visit and their charges are based on their income. We also carry first time vouchers for clients in need of the various services offered by the Baldwin County Mental Health Department.

BRIDGES OF BALDWIN

Catholic Social Services of Baldwin County is pleased to introduce its donors and supporters to the BRIDGES of Baldwin.

Based on the constructs of Ruby K. Payne, Ph.D., Philip DeVol and Terie Dreussi Smith’s “Bridges Out of Poverty,” this program will engage individuals and families living in poverty and facilitate a comprehensive process for the transition out of poverty.

BRIDGES of Baldwin will incorporate DeVol’s “Getting Ahead in a Just-Gettin’-By World: Building Your Resources for a Better Life,” a 17-week curriculum designed to investigate what poverty is and its impact on individuals, families and communities. Participants will learn the hidden rules of economic class, the importance of language and the necessary resources for transitioning out of poverty.

They will investigate what their lives are now, identify available and needed resources and develop a plan for moving out of poverty. The program will collaborate with community agencies, churches and businesses. A matched mentoring component will facilitate putting participant plans into action. Robin Suggs will coordinate this effort and oversee the Getting Ahead curriculum.

We are excited to offer a program dedicated to serving those in need while smoothing the changeover out of poverty to ultimately decrease dependence on public assistance and impact poverty rates in Baldwin County.
During this first quarter of 2013, 61 volunteers donated 1,370.25 hours to our ministry in Baldwin County.

- In the Thrift Shop, 21 volunteers provided 1,064.5 hours.
- In the Food Pantry, four volunteers gave 62.5 hours.
- In the Bread Pantry, nine volunteers gave 71.75 hours.
- Two Emergency Food Assistance volunteers contributed 41.75 hours.
- Three Immigration Program volunteers furnished 28 hours.
- Helping with mail-outs were 17 volunteers who worked 52.5 hours.
- Five volunteers offered their services in-house logging 49.25 hours.

The staff offers its admiration and love for the continued efforts of our faithful volunteers. We thank them and we thank God for their time and talents.

The Disabled Homeless Project is now an umbrella for the two federal grants we are hosting. We will begin our 12th year of the Baldwin Permanent Housing grant in May. We also host the Baldwin Community Housing grant which started in October 2012. Combined, these grants allow us to lease 16 units for disabled homeless individuals or families that meet the HUD eligibility requirements.

We were awarded $20,000 through the Round-up Foundation to assist with the 25 percent match we are obligated to provide for BCH.

We currently have 12 participants and are accepting applications for four openings in the BCH grant. This grant is restricted to folks who are disabled and have been homeless for at least a year or who have four documented episodes of homelessness in the past three years. HUD refers to them as “chronically homeless.”

Of the persons we are serving in the Disabled Homeless Project:

- We were able to help a client have her SSA disability denial overturned without having to wait two years for a hearing. She received her first check in March.
- Two of our clients have qualified for Section 8 Housing and are on the waiting list for housing that is wheelchair accessible.
- One client is learning to read with the help of the South Baldwin Literacy Council. He is sporting a new set of dentures, courtesy of the program, so he will be smiling proudly when he completes his program.

At the end of April our Baldwin Permanent Housing grant term phases out and we will begin working on our 2013 award. We will also begin working on our application for 2014.

During the first quarter the Immigration program serviced 37 paying clients for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals applications, renewal of resident cards, citizenship and translation of documents.

During the visit by the Consulate-General of Mexico in February, the mobile team served 511 residents that live in Baldwin, Mobile, Escambia, Clark, Montgomery and Jefferson counties of Alabama, and in northwest Florida. While the team was here, they helped citizens obtain foreign passports, which are accepted as identification by local law enforcement, banking institutions and government agencies. With a foreign passport, those living and working among us can identify themselves to local law enforcement during a routine traffic stop; at banks to open a checking or savings account or to cash pay check; and at public utility companies to get services started.

CSS was happy to learn that on March 15, 2013, the Alabama Department of Public Safety announced that it will issue driver’s licenses and state identification cards to DACA recipients. These individuals will no longer have to travel to neighboring states to apply for a driver’s license.

Our office conducted a letter-writing campaign to Governor Robert Bentley after the first of the year, encouraging him to change his mind about allowing DACA students to earn their driver’s licenses. After hearing this news in March, we can only hope that our efforts had a small influence on his change of heart.
The Lions Club in Baldwin County has closed for the time being, but our office of Catholic Social Services will continue to collect your old eyeglasses. Bring them by our office at any time. Someone will get them to the Lions Club in Mobile County. Thank you.

OZANAM CHARITABLE PHARMACY

January: 12 clients, 36 scripts, $1,088.68.
February: 10 clients, 40 scripts, $1,309.07.
March: 8 clients, 41 scripts, $1,297.40.

January: One wheelchair, $109; one walker with seat, $80; one potty chair, $80; two walkers, $100; two 4-prong canes, $58.
February: One wheelchair, $109.
March: One 4-prong cane, $29.
Quarter total: $565.

THRIFT SHOP

The Thrift Shop earned $33,598.24 during the first quarter of 2013. We helped 38 clients shop for free at a value of $1,387.80. Other funds used were: Share: $3,496.77 for 26 clients; Riviera: $2,254.42 for 17 clients; and Neighbor To Neighbor: $4,476.5 for 31 clients.

The Ridden Word Ministry

Zachary Foerster had never been a cyclist when he first got the “call” to start a ministry he refers to as the Ridden Word, but he’s repairing bicycles now for a living and loving every minute of it. The simple gesture of rebuilding a bike and then giving it away to someone who needs it has become a way of life for him, his wife Amy and their 4-year-old son Noah.

His advertising flyer states: “The Ridden Word was started in order to meet the specific need of transportation for individuals that are facing the effects of these tough times. Many people are homeless, many are jobless and many can’t afford gifts for their children.” Volunteers with this ministry rebuild old bikes and repaint them in a bright orange color. They paint Scripture sayings on the bars and fenders and give them away to people who need them for transportation. Each bike is unique.

You know of someone who needs Ridden Word’s help or if you’d like to make a donation to this ministry, visit www.riddenword.org. They are looking for new storage places for the bikes. If you can help out, contact Zac on the website.

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In February, members of the Farmers Federation, Women’s Committee and the Young Farmers brought food items they had collected for our food pantry. The group donates non-perishable food every quarter to Catholic Social Services. Without these kindnesses, our pantry would be depleted in short order. We owe a great deal of gratitude to these groups and to the many hundreds of others who faithfully supply our pantry every week, month and quarter. May God bless each one of you.