

The Face of Homelessness - Teddy's Story, by Gloria Cribben

I received a call from a young lady a couple days before Thanksgiving to ask if there would be any Thanksgiving dinners being served in Ocala. I explained the Brother's Keeper noon meal on the Interfaith campus and the evening meal at Salvation Army would be resources for her. She explained that she lived with her 70 year old uncle and several others, several miles down South Pine Avenue in a wooded camp area....a distance too far for a 70 year old to walk and beyond the bus route. After a discussion with my husband, the simple solution to their problem was to pack up some of our own Thanksgiving dinner and deliver it to them (who wants to be eating turkey for 5 days straight, anyhow) - but that isn't the point of this story.

The food gave me an opportunity to meet Teddy (the 70 year old) and hear his story. I always look for opportunities to reach the homeless with services, and it turned out a turkey dinner was the least of his needs. It seems Teddy had been incarcerated for trespassing and upon release in 2021, his Florida ID was not returned to him. During his incarceration, his Social Security retirement benefit had been stopped, so now Teddy had no income, no ID, no transportation, no housing, and because he chose to move as far as possible from law enforcement, he had no access to resources from help agencies such as Interfaith. Incredibly, 2 years went by before our chance encounter over the Thanksgiving dinner. Here is the pathway I am walking with Teddy to move him from homelessness.

The Social Security Office cannot help without a valid photo ID, so our first stop was to get a homeless ID voucher at Interfaith and then we went to the DMV for his new Florida ID. With the Florida ID, we drove to Social Security to start the process of reinstating his monthly benefit check. He completed his application interview, has his benefits reinstated, and will receive the first check in February. At Interfaith, we maintain a PO Box for our clients to receive mail, so with that service we were able to apply for SNAP benefits for Teddy. He has been granted his SNAP award, received his new EBT card, and is now able to purchase nutritious food. During a couple weeks, Teddy's situation has improved dramatically simply by walking alongside Teddy and helping him navigate. So many of the homeless, especially the elderly, simply "fall through the cracks". They lack transportation, so how can they even access services like the DMV or Social Security office? It is so easy to fall into depression and despair. Teddy still isn't housed, but he has a renewed sense of hope that 2024 will be a much better year. Psalm 98:1 says it best, "Sing to the Lord a new song because he has done wonderful things."



Teddy's Road to Help



There's still time to grab tickets to Legacies of Love, honoring Wes Wheeler, Monica Bryant and the late Wayne McDonald. We would love for you to join us and make the day even more special!

Tickets (and tables) can be purchased at www.IESMARION.ORG/LEGACIES-OF-LOVE

Serving Marion County Since 1983

From the Chief Executive Officer: Karla Grimsley-Greenway



There are so many wonderful charities in our community doing good work. And while each of us are called to our specific mission, we are truly connected at the heart. Recently I was blessed to be part of a web and labor of love that reminded me why we are all here. It was a typical Friday and I was opening the door to go into my office. We close during lunch so staff can get lunch, so as I was turning to lock the door behind me there was a young man standing there. He looked young and didn't appear to be homeless so I assumed he might be related to one of our staff. I invited him in and he said he was there to see Ms. Gloria. Gloria is our Engagement Center Manager and works with people experiencing homelessness. She was out on an errand, so I asked him what he needed and he shared that he needed an ID. I was curious about this young man because he didn't look like he was of adult age, he was clean,

wore glasses and quite honestly he had an air of innocence about him that is rare. While waiting for Gloria to return, I sat with him to learn more about his situation. It is far too complicated to relay in this article, so suffice to say that it was his 18th birthday and he had been asked to leave the house where he was staying with his mother and siblings which happened to be out in the Ocala National Forest. The previous day (when he was still 17) he had walked into town and had the blisters on his heels to prove it. Now, 24 hours later, he is a legal adult with no identification, no money, no cell phone and only the clothes on his back. We learned that he is technically still a dependent because he's in the middle of his senior year in high school and is enrolled in virtual classes, but as an adult with no identification, he didn't qualify for any of our local shelter options. So, the issue at hand was how to help him be safe and have his basic needs. This is where the "web" began to be spun. Because there was domestic violence in his family history he qualified for help through the Marion County Children's Alliance DV program. Monica Bryant, one of my personal heroes, came to the rescue with a safe place to shelter him and a cell phone so he could stay in communication with us. I was able to take him from department to department at Interfaith and watch as my incredible staff poured love all over him by providing food, clothing, hygiene items, a bus pass and lots of prayers. Project Hope learned of this situation and offered to find him a computer so he could continue his schoolwork and also connected him with a family that has a young man around his same age for camaraderie. David Houck, who works with at-risk youth in the Forest area learned about him and also offered support. Open Arms Village, which works with adult males transitioning from homelessness to self-sufficiency, offered to interview him to see if they might be a long-term option for him as he navigates the months ahead of him. I don't think this young man has ever felt so important. He was appreciative and kept saying he couldn't believe how nice everyone was being to him. But this is just one example of the way this community pulls together to help those in need on a regular basis. I felt so blessed to be a part of this story and even more so to be a part of this community. Keep us all in your prayers. Though the reward is great, the work can be exhausting. One thing is certain. It's always worth it. God bless you all for making sure there is a place like Interfaith to receive people in desperate situations through your in kind and monetary support. You are also a part of this story.

And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Matthew 25:40

New Year Goals for Food 4 Kids - How Can You Make a Difference?

The new year brings new hopes, dreams, goals, and perspective. As we look forward to the new year we have prayed hard about the goals and dreams for the Food 4 Kids ministry. Our dream would be that no child in Marion County would need help with food but until God answers this prayer, we have dedicated ourselves to being the hands and feet of Jesus for the local children in need for 2024.

A goal we have set is to never limit the number of children we serve. We feel led by Christ to be of service in His Name to every student who requests food services – but that means making sure we can cover the cost of any additional children we add to the program. We are standing in faith that God will provide all the desires of our hearts. One way we are hoping to achieve this goal is through food drives and community partnerships. A little bit from a lot of people can do BIG THINGS!

We have chosen to do a trial run of pasta noodles and (canned/plastic) (red or white) pasta sauce inside the backpacks due to its cost effectiveness and ability to feed an entire family, but we didn't stop there. We believe that God will send local people to donate these food items saving a ton of money and allowing us to feed even more children in need. If you would like to be a part of making our goal a reality by hosting a food drive or donating (every dollar helps!) please reach out to Teesha Garcia, Manager at (352)620-8239. We hope to have several food drop off locations throughout the county so if you have a business and would allow me to place a box at your location, please give me a call!



Special Gifts

In MEMORY of:

Wilma & Dan Andrews

By: Cindy Andrews

Jimmy Alexander

Albert Peek

By Kirby & Sandra Manning

Vera Agosta

By: Rachel & Cindi Watts

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Beth Cannon

Craig Cannon

Alice Cannon

Harris Cannon

Ann Richardson

By: Chris Richardson

Faith Doiron

By: Debra Roumas

Honor Someone Special

Give a gift to someone special - an honorary or memorial donation in their name to Interfaith! The person honored (or their family) will receive a letter of acknowledgement. Please contact Kayla at 629-8868 x202 or Kayla.Hess@IESmarion.org. Mail donations to PO Box 992, Ocala, FL 34478.

Special Thanks to...

Special thanks for these large donations (in pounds): Custom Window: 83; Stone Creek Happy Feet Dance Club: 938; Grace Episcopal Church: 706; Ocala West United Methodist Church: 416; Ocala Palms Ladies Golf Assoc.: 97; Meeple Movers: 200; Trinity Baptist: 139; Dept Juvenile Justice: 61; Dollar Tree Distribution Center: 334; First Baptist, Ocala: 227; First Assembly of God: 469; Marion County Public Schools, SLPS: 121; Florida Credit Union: 801; Scott Cannon State Farm: 228; Silver Springs Shores Moose Club: 485; Top of the World: 6,957; Belleview Middle School National Honor Society: 331; Osceola Middle School: 802; Doc's Restorations: 288; Oak Run Clubs: 393; 8th Street Church of God: 216 (pictured right); The Way Christian Church: 445.

Also these donations: Eta Tau Omega Chapter: 858 diapers, 1400 wipes; Lake Weir Band Boosters: 32 chicken dinners; Fit Forever at Summer Glen: 86 pieces of clothing, 5,235 hygiene items; Joy Lutheran Church: 15 quilts

Special shout out to Meadowbrook Church. Interfaith is humbled and blessed by a generous gift of \$25,000. Thank you for being a light in our community and for helping us help those in need.

Local Residents Save the Day, Every Day, by Cherie Galloway, CFL Manager

The Center for Life would like to give special thanks to the On Top of The World residents. Each month we receive a call from the group's coordinator asking what special needs we have and a few weeks later they have generously fulfilled our needs. We have been able to serve so many with the supplies that they donate. We've received low dose aspirin, ace bandages, vitamins, ibuprofen, and Neosporin just to name a few.

Ours is a revolving door of need and we appreciate EVERY one of you who stop by with your spare OTC items and those who use your benefits to order items with the Center for Life in mind. So far this winter we have been able to distribute a great many bottles of vitamins and cold medicine.

Your purchases at our Interfaith Thrift Store have provided life-saving medications for cardiac, respiratory, and infectious patients.

We send out a heartfelt thank you to all our donors! You are our greatest gift.



Clients Served Jan - Dec 2023

Food services

Provided by 5 pantries:

Households: 14,806

Individuals: 43,186

Clothing(per piece) 16,895

Identification Cards

ID Cards 60

Homeless ID Cards 1,294

Glasses (readers) 992

Gas Vouchers

(Medical appts) 194

Workboots 26

Showers 4,731

Shelter

Successful transitions: 79

Total calls for shelter: 2,115

Bus Tokens: 398

Indv Counseling Hours: 1,002

Volunteer Hours 24,548

Food 4 Kids

(2022 - 2023 school year)

Children served 2,023

Meals provided 277,596

Total Cost \$110,044

How to Donate

Want to help support Interfaith in the work that we do? Please send a check payable to "Interfaith Emergency Services" at PO Box 992, Ocala, FL 34478, or give securely online at www.IESmarion.org.

Thank you!

Want to Volunteer?

Volunteer Positions are open in several areas. For more info call Tina at (352) 629-8868 x210.



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Check out our website at
www.IESmarion.org



MISSION STATEMENT

Interfaith Emergency Services is a community of faith called by God to offer emergency assistance without judgment to all persons in Marion County.

A Testament to Life Change, By: Andrea Jordan, Social Services Manager

The path that led me to Interfaith is something that I am reminded of frequently. I have encountered countless clients who have come to us in a state of destitution, homelessness, joblessness, or hunger. It wasn't long ago that I was in their shoes, seeking assistance at Interfaith due to my struggle with PTSD, difficulty finding a job, and a place to live. Fortunately, the agencies in our county played a significant role in helping me get back on my feet. Once I achieved stability, I made a promise to give back to my community. I began volunteering at Interfaith's shelter and eventually secured a part-time job in the social services office, which led to a full-time grant position. After the grant ended, I became a case manager for the shelter.

Today, as a Social Service Manager, I am reminded of my difficult past every day. Nevertheless, I am grateful for the opportunity to have turned my life around and make a positive impact on the lives of others, just as someone once did for me. My journey is a testament to the human spirit's resilience and the power of God, compassion, and community.

Thrift Store News by Shannon Pickering, Manager

Do you know what we love? Purses. Gently used, brand name purses like Coach, Guess, Relic, and Michael Kors!

Valentine's Day is approaching and if you're looking for a gently used purse or wallet for the special person in your life, stop by and see us! Monday through Friday, 9 am to 4 pm. Also, our truck goes out into the community 4 days a week for donation pick-ups so the store always has a brand new face, each and every time you come in! We would LOVE to see you!

Come by 718 North Pine and fall in love with Interfaith.

