

A Year in the Life of a Newly Housed Mom, by Gloria Cribben, Housing Case Manager

I first met Victoria in February of 2021, a single mom of two daughters who was struggling with homelessness. Victoria had no family in Florida for support, and in spite of all her struggles, Victoria came to my office with the most delightful smile and optimistic attitude under circumstances that would be crushing to most people. After losing their apartment, Victoria and her daughters had been sleeping at a friend's house who now said they must leave - her only alternative was living in her car. Victoria's Wawa salary certainly couldn't sustain them in a motel for more than a few days so we met to work on a plan for ending their homelessness.

The ESG Rapid Rehousing program I administer pays not only the start-up costs for an apartment, but also helps cover emergencies for the family for one year with comprehensive case management. Victoria's case is the perfect example of how important this fallback support can become to the success of a housing placement. Victoria was able to secure a better job at Auto Zone, distinguishing herself with exemplary work, and entered their management program. She and her daughters were housed in April 2021, and we paid an additional month of rent so Victoria was able to save \$600 in her bank account for an emergency. Sadly, that emergency came in the form of COVID-19. She and both daughters were ill during August and much of September. When her savings ran out, the grant was able to help with her monthly rent, kept the utilities connected, and the family remained housed and stable during this crisis.

Everything went along smoothly until the night of November 3rd when a near fatal, head-on collision left Victoria with multiple broken bones, serious internal injuries and facing numerous surgeries - all through no fault of her own. Victoria was such a trooper though! She tackled physical therapy, moved from a wheel chair to a walker to a cane, determined to spend Christmas at home with her kids. Despite being fully insured, many weeks went by before a settlement check was issued for her injuries and car replacement. Unfortunately, in the aggressive housing market here in Ocala, when rent is 4 days late, most landlords begin eviction procedures. And once again, the grant was able to pay December and January rent so Victoria and her kids actually had an apartment waiting when she was discharged from the hospital. The Twilight Cruisers donation of toys to Interfaith made sure her kids had presents for Christmas and our Food Warehouse provided lots of groceries so her pantry and fridge were loaded when she returned from the hospital. Through it all, Victoria always had a smile on her face and such a grateful heart for her support. She often thanked me saying what a relief it was to focus on her healing and not worrying about keeping a roof over their heads.

Fast forward to February 2022, Victoria has been released by her doctor to resume her job on a limited duty basis, and Auto Zone is welcoming her back to her old job. She still isn't totally out of pain, but she is fighting to regain her former level of mobility. Without a doubt, this past year has presented more than her share of challenges, but Victoria continues to remain optimistic that 2022 will be her best year ever!

Hunger Fight is a Winner! by Delores Bulgin, Food 4 Kids Manager

The Food 4 Kids program is fortunate and grateful to have teamed up with Hunger Fight. The mission of Hunger Fight is to end hunger through the provision of nutritious meals to children, seniors, and families in need. They also supply age-appropriate books to preschoolers by engaging communities and mobilizing partners. These pre-packaged meals provided from Hunger Fight are provided for our elementary school kids, which include Beans-N-Rice, Cheesy Mac, and Brown Sugar Oatmeal. These are in addition to the other items provided by the Food 4 Kids program. We love partnering with organizations like Hunger Fight, so that together we can support each other's mission. Not only are they providing free meals each week for students, the cost savings to our food budget is huge. With the cost of food prices increasing, Hunger Fight saved the day at a perfect time. Delores pictured right with Hunger Fight Staffer.



From the Chief Executive Officer: Karla Grimsley-Greenway



Sometimes I ponder the idea of changing the name of our organization. Our name, Interfaith, was generated from the local ministerial network looking for a solution to help those coming to their doors in need of food, clothing and other essentials. Since the hope was that all faiths would join together, provide financial support and volunteers, the name Interfaith was appropriate. And although we are a Christian based organization, we welcome people of all faiths to join us as we serve together. There's nothing more beautiful than people of different races, religions, and socio economic status coming together to serve for the greater good. I also like the fact that the word "faith" is a part of our name. There is no way to describe how essential faith is to the work we do. And because prayer is the action that exercises faith, we incorporate prayer into every area of the organization from our board meetings to the prayer room at our food pantry. We never force our faith or prayer on anyone, but the vast majority of our clients welcome this food for the soul. In April alone, our volunteers in the prayer room spent time with 174 of our clients who wanted to be prayed for.

While visiting one of our partner churches recently, I was being interviewed by the pastor and mentioned that one of our former homeless women was now a regular part of their congregation and was there in the audience. Seeing her on that pew and thinking of the many times I saw her walking along the street, alone, vulnerable and hopeless, I was overwhelmed with the realization that God had answered the many prayers I've whispered for her. Now she is housed and has all of the support services in place to help her stay housed, safe and enjoy a quality of life that evaded her previously. I thanked God for answering my prayer as if I had something to do with it. But He gently corrected me with the realization that the prayer he had answered was not mine, but hers. So back to the first line of this article, I sometimes think that the name should be "enter faith". No matter what we do and how hard we try, there are just some situations that we can't fix; mountains we can't move. But then enters faith and a faithful God makes a way.

Jesus replied, "Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." Matthew 17:20-21.

Thanks to Generous Donors - Ladies High Tea Raises \$40,000

We are so grateful to the 23 hostesses that stepped up to decorate and set a table for this year's Ladies' High Tea. It was a beautiful day and the equestrian property generously offered as a venue by our board member, Alejandra Arango, made the event extra special. There were heart-warming testimonies from former shelter residents who are now self-sufficient and thriving. At the end of the event, the Golden Teapot was awarded to Michelle Dinkins for raising the most funds for our Sheltering Ministry. The People's Choice award was presented to Amy Jo Lord for the beautiful table she hosted. With the help of our Sponsors, Susan Lightbody with Morgan Stanley, Ocala Electric Utility, Professional Realty of Ocala and Homes to Ranches Realty, coupled with the incredible efforts of the hostesses, over \$40,000 was raised! We are beyond thankful for these ladies and all who contributed. If you want to serve on the planning team for our next High Tea, call or text Karla at 352-209-7045.



Michelle Dinkins table top-left, Amy Lord with her table above, Michelle posing with Golden Tea Pot on right and Sponsor Tammy Hoff with OEU with her table, left.

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Special Thanks to...

Special thanks for these large donations (in pounds):

Ocala West United Methodist: 248, Upper Midwest Club: 190; Twilight Cruisers: 337; Greater Ocala Woman's Club: 106, First Baptist, Ocala: 345; First Assembly of God: 366; Meadowbrook Church: 262; Bradley Blessing State Farm: 229; Grace Episcopal: 34; Brothers Keeper: 1,231; Ft King Presbyterian: 240; and Silver Springs Shores Moose Lodge: 99 pounds of food.

The truckload of food from Cebert Wealth/Ameriprise Financial was right one time! We are so grateful! Thank you for helping our community.

How Can you be a Blessing Today? by Tina Reid

If you're ever around the management team, you'll hear us often say, "If it wasn't for our volunteers, we would not be able to open for services." That's how priceless our volunteers are to us. And it's only as a last resort that we sometimes have to close for being short staffed. We've grown so big through the last several years, that it takes a small army to keep each of our ministries going. Another quote you'll hear is that, "Thanks to our volunteers, we are able to keep our staff numbers low so that we can put .93 cents of every donated dollar into the community for services. That's how we keep our cost down and our doors open.

Our staff wear a lot of hats to keep everything going around Interfaith, and when we're short volunteers in a particular ministry, the staff has to stop whatever they are working on, and do that volunteer's job (leaving other projects unfinished). We've all seen businesses lately with staff shortages, and the impact it makes on their business. It's even tougher when we rely on a volunteer work force with shortages. Again, you see the value of our volunteers.

That's why my job is so important. I get the honor of recruiting new volunteers to Interfaith. I love meeting new folks that want to give of their time and talents, and walk them through a tour of all our ministries. I love seeing the spark in their eye when they spot something that just 'zings' with "That's it!" as they find that perfect spot waiting for them. God makes my job easy a lot of times, as he sends his own little whispers or taps on the shoulder - I just become his hands and feet to make the connection, so they can dive right in.

Today, I'm looking at lots of openings in our ministries. If you have just 3 hours out of a week, I would so love to talk to you about volunteering. Days and times are flexible. Let me introduce you to an amazing place - God works miracles around here every day - it's pretty cool to be a part of it. You can fill out an online application found through the link on our website (www.iesmarion.org) under the "Volunteer" section or contact me directly at tina.reid@iesmarion.org or (352) 644-9196. Thanks in advance for your kindness, the blessings in return will be yours to receive.

Summertime at the Thrift Store, by Shannon Pickering

Summertime is here and your favorite, friendly thrift store is ready for your summer donations including patio furniture and gently used grills! Our Driver Richard and assistant Bill, will be more than happy to come pick up your items for donation. Give us a call at 352-351-3541 to schedule a pick up today!

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.



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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.

Have you Heard of Praying Princesses?

Praying Princesses is a prayer group held every Saturday evening in the Interfaith Shelter for women who wish to fellowship in a safe space with other women of like faith. The group features a warm, cozy, setting inviting women to pray, study a particular topic of discussion related to scripture and our Lord Jesus Christ. We discuss how women can use those lessons to help with various problems they may be facing and openly discuss those thoughts or problems in a safe space with fellow Christian women. The prayer group is comprised of staff, volunteers, residents, and other local women. We hope to one day have a larger space to meet, where we can extend the invitation for more women to join us. If you'd like to donate to the



shelter so that more materials can be purchased for our prayer group, please indicated 'shelter' on your check or online donation. Thank you for supporting these beautiful women on their spiritual journeys.

Giving Back to our Community

We're so proud of this Interfaith crew (pictured below) for taking part in the Mayors Spring Clean Up! Some of our staff and volunteers cleaned up Brick City Adventure Park and Fisher Park. We love giving back to our community!

