

Laurel Advocacy & Referral Services, Inc.

311 Laurel Avenue • Laurel, MD 20707 • 301.776.0442 • www.laureladvocacy.org

LARS Letter

Serving the Laurel Community Since 1987

Fall 2014 | Volume 27, Issue 2

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The Turkey Trot Turns TEN!

It's hard to believe this Thanksgiving will mark the 10th Annual 5K Turkey Trot to Benefit LARS! The Trot has become a part of over 700 family traditions, but it didn't happen overnight. LARS owes many thanks to the person who started it all. Ten years ago, Laurel resident and avid runner Kelly Miller was looking for a Thanksgiving 5K to run with a friend—something local with a cause behind it. Not having much luck in her search, the new stay-at-home mom (with no background in race management) decided to create Laurel's first Turkey Trot from the ground up. After doing lots of research and gathering advice from local runners and race directors, Kelly approached LARS' Executive Director with her plan for a fundraiser. With lots of hard work and community support, the plan came together, bringing out a small but impressive crowd on that first

Thanksgiving morning. It was a no-frills affair, but turned out to be more profitable than expected, raising much-needed funds for LARS' community crisis center.

Kelly served as the Turkey Trot's race director for the first few years and, with the help of her husband Trevor and a dedicated group of volunteers at First United Methodist Church, she laid a strong foundation for the event. As the Turkey Trot transformed from a small community gathering to a larger-scale race with a loyal following, LARS staff members took ownership of the project, keeping the race's founders heavily involved in the planning. The Turkey Trot continues to be a major source of funding for LARS' work throughout the year and a fun way to connect with our community. A huge thank you to all who had a hand in creating and keeping this event a success!



See the enclosed flyer for more information about this year's Turkey Trot. We are busy making some exciting improvements to this year's event, including long-sleeved race shirts and real-time digital race results.

Runners and walkers of all ages and abilities are welcome to join us! Registration prices increase starting Oct. 1, so act quickly!

Remember to bring non-perishable food to packet pick-up and on race morning for the LARS pantry!

If you have any questions about participating, sponsoring, or volunteering at the Turkey Trot, please contact Laura Wellford at 301-776-0442 ext. 27 or lwellford@laureladvocacy.org.

Client Story

John* first came to LARS in 2012 seeking help in developing a plan to move out of the woods and into a safe, affordable place to call home. He was a diligent client who visited LARS on a weekly basis to meet with his case worker to create a plan for stability. Over the course of two years, John became gainfully employed, was approved for state benefits, and continued his search for housing. Slowly but surely, all of the pieces started to come together for him. John was recently able to move into an apartment with financial assistance from LARS. Many congratulations to a hardworking, determined individual!

*Names have been changed to protect client confidentiality.

Volunteer Corner

What do a retired accountant, an interior re-designer, and a concerned citizen have in common? You'll find each one of them devoting their free hours to volunteering at the LARS food pantry. In a summary of efforts our volunteers clean, sort and stock the food pantry on a weekly basis. However, the services that they provide fulfill so much more than requirements on a checklist. Laurel residents in need of food come to LARS for support. Volunteers such as Maureen Bauer, who says her purpose is "to serve those who are less fortunate," are vital to our ability to do just that.

The people who volunteer at LARS are varied, as are their experiences and backgrounds. The diversity that volunteers bring to LARS generates a great environment to serve in. As Monica Revelle said, "The laughter and joy we find working together only makes this endeavor more enjoyable." Part of what makes this experience so great is simply having volunteers who are invested in

"The laughter and joy we find working together only makes this endeavor more enjoyable."

supporting LARS' work. The time these volunteers give to the food pantry help LARS achieve the larger effort of helping people in our community who are experiencing a crisis.

When asked about the most challenging aspect of volunteering in the food pantry, volunteers note the apparent need for food assistance in the community. Melissa Romero explained that many times she has been present when LARS received a large donation thinking to herself, "This is going to last a while." When she would return a week later, hardly any of the food from the donation would be left.

Demand for food assistance has been increasing each year with demand peaking in the summer months. Unfortunately, the summer months are also the leanest we see in the food pantry and this summer was no exception. Yet even when our pantry stock dwindled, we continued to receive generous donations from the community. These donations helped LARS continue to provide food to our clients when they needed it the most.



Thank you to each and every one of our volunteers, donors, sponsors, supporters, and friends for all of the ways you give to LARS!

If you would like to support our efforts by sponsoring a food drive for LARS or for more information on how you can help, contact Stephanie Guzman, LARS Emergency Services Case Manager / Volunteer Coordinator at (301)776-0442 ext. 34 or sguzman@laureladvocacy.org.

A snapshot of seasons in the LARS food pantry.

Left: Shelves stocked to the brim in December

Right: Bare shelves in July

Holiday Program

The holiday season is a very busy time of year at LARS! Starting October 1st, LARS will begin meeting with families applying for the Holiday Program which, thanks to community donors, provides food and gifts to approximately 130 families each year. There are plenty of ways to get involved:

- “Adopt a family” by providing food and gifts for a family ranging in size from 2-8. You will receive a wish list from the family to help guide your purchases.
- Donate loose gifts to be distributed to families who are not adopted.
- Donate gift cards to be distributed to clients during the holidays (grocery, gas, etc.)
- Donate Thanksgiving and/or holiday meals for families and seniors (see back page for a list of needed items).
- Volunteer for a 2-4 hour shift to help sort food and gifts.

Contact Laura Wellford at 301-776-0442 ext. 27 or lwelford@laureladvocacy.org for more information about this year’s Holiday Program.

Get Moving for Homelessness Awareness!

Looking to get your school, congregation, or group on their feet and thinking about the needs of their community? So are we! This fall, LARS’ goal is to educate people of all ages about homelessness and its effects on individuals and families right here in Laurel.

For the past several years, LARS has taken part in the national Fannie Mae Help the Homeless Program, which came with a substantial grant from the foundation (as much as \$115,000 each year). Although Fannie Mae has retired their program, LARS will continue its efforts to increase awareness of the issues that face our community. LARS staff will provide support and education to groups

as they plan their own creative homelessness awareness events on a day of their choosing. Participants contribute \$20 to take part in any variety of physical activity—a softball game, Frisbee, yoga... you name it! The idea is to create visibility for the cause and to raise needed funds for LARS, all while having plenty of fun with friends! All proceeds from these events directly benefit LARS’ service to over 2,700 low-income and homeless Laurel residents each year.

If you would like to get your group involved in LARS’ Homelessness Awareness Program or participate as an individual, contact Emily Kleeman at 301-776-0442 ext. 28 or ekleeman@laureladvocacy.org.

LARS Staff

Lynette Greenwood
Office Manager

Lauren Cohen, MSW
Permanent Housing Case Manager

Janada Randall, BSW
Transitional Housing Case Manager

Emily Kleeman, LGSW
Lead Case Manager

Stephanie Guzman, BSW
*Case Manager/
Volunteer Coordinator*

Kennesha Rodgers
Case Manager

Laura Wellford
*Program Coordinator/
LARS Letter Editor*

If you would like to have your name & address updated or removed from our mailing list, please contact: lgreenwood@laureladvocacy.org

Subscribe to LARS’ e-newsletter at: www.laureladvocacy.org

Like LARS on Facebook: Search for “Laurel Advocacy & Referral Services, Inc.”

Twitter: @laureladvocacy

Staff Updates & Announcements

⇒ LARS’ Executive Director, Lori Proietti, and her husband Chris welcomed a baby girl on August 22nd. Weighing in at 7lbs 5oz, Neenah Marie joins two very excited big brothers, Nicholas and Lucas.

⇒ This June, LARS welcomed three wonderful new staff members! Janada Randall joins us as LARS’ Transitional Housing Case Manager, taking the place of Emily Kleeman who was promoted to Lead Case Manager in LARS’ crisis center. Stephanie Guzman and Kennesha Rodgers are our newest Case Managers. Both Stephanie and Kennesha are fluent in Spanish, a skill that has been lacking in our crisis center for quite some time!

⇒ After 17 years of dedicated service to the Laurel community, LARS Case Manager Ernestine Gibson retired in June. Our staff has learned so much from Ernestine’s kind and patient example, and many clients have been touched by her compassion. Enjoy your retirement, Ernestine! You deserve it!

⇒ Congratulations to Lauren Cohen, LARS’ Permanent Housing Case Manager, on her graduation from the University of Maryland Baltimore School of Social Work’s MSW program!

**LAUREL ADVOCACY &
REFERRAL SERVICES, INC.**

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events at www.laureladvocacy.org

LARS Food Pantry

Food donations can be dropped off at LARS during business hours:
Monday, Wednesday, & Friday from 9:00-2:00pm and Monday evenings from 5:00-7:30pm.

Items that are especially helpful include:

Canned soup, canned fruit and vegetables, pastas and sauces, rice, peanut butter and jelly, cereal, oatmeal, “just-add-water” pancake mix, tuna, Tuna Helper, macaroni and cheese, and other staples.

Please check expiration dates!

We are also in need of plastic bags (new or used) to distribute food.

*For more information about donating to the LARS pantry, starting a food drive, or volunteering, please contact
Stephanie Guzman at 301-776-0442 ext. 34 or sguzman@laureladvocacy.org.*

During November and December, LARS puts together holiday meal kits for over 130 families and seniors. Holiday food is distributed once in mid-November and again in mid-December. This means that we will need lots of extra holiday meats and sides, such as: frozen turkeys and hams, canned or fresh sweet potatoes, cranberry sauce, instant or fresh potatoes, gravy, stuffing, cornbread mix, pie filling/desserts, etc.

Thanksgiving food is needed by **Friday, November 21st.**

The last day to donate food and gifts for the December distribution is **Friday, December 12th.**

*For more information about LARS' Holiday Program, please contact
Laura Wellford at 301-776-0442, ext. 27 or lwellford@laureladvocacy.org.*