

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 2015 | Volume 28, Issue 2

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Leah Paley, LGSW

Board of Directors:

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St. Philip's Episcopal Church

Mike Woodruff
St. Nicholas Roman Catholic Church

An Exciting New Endeavor

Over the past year, LARS has been working on finalizing its strategic plan for the next 5 years (FY2016-FY2020).

As a part of this process, staff and board members have conducted a thorough assessment of LARS' current activities, resources, community needs, and opportunities for program growth.

For over 28 years, LARS has worked to enable homeless and low-income people in Laurel who are in crisis to achieve (1) stability and (2) long-term self-sufficiency. Through these many years of experience, trial and error, and collaboration with other local service providers, we have built what we feel is an organization that excels in short-term case management and crisis intervention. The majority of our work is focused on stabilizing our clients, ensuring that basic needs are met. Of the 1,871 households we worked with last fiscal year, 34% were visiting LARS for the first time. The other 66% of clients had used our services before, in some cases relying on our help with rent more than once, or help with food each month.

Through our housing programs, we have delved deeper into the latter part of LARS' mission, working in partnership with clients to build skills for self-sufficiency and independent living. However, we have not had the staff capacity or a framework in place to

extend these longer-term services to our larger client base.

In January 2016, LARS will pilot a Self-Sufficiency Program focused on guiding stabilized and motivated clients to achieve their long-term goals through skill development, gainful employment, and weekly support from a LARS case manager. Modeled after an evidence-based theory of change developed by Massachusetts' Crittenton Women's Union, along with components of LARS' supportive housing programs, the Self-Sufficiency Program aims to not only get people back on their feet, but help them *stay* on their feet.

LARS case managers will focus on developing five key areas of client well-being, including family stability, physical and mental health, education and training, financial management, and employment. We have put a lot of thought and research into this initiative, and we are hopeful that it will help to empower our clients and set them up for sustainable futures as they learn to be their own advocates.

For more information on how you can support LARS' Self-Sufficiency Program, contact Stephanie Guzman at 301-776-0442 ext. 28 or sguzman@laureladvocacy.org.

Restoring Power & Peace of Mind

Carrie Stanley* has relied on LARS for help with food over the past several years. Recently, Mrs. Stanley came in extremely worried seeking help with her utility bill. Her lights had been turned off and she didn't have the \$600 needed to immediately reconnect her lights. Due to severe memory problems, Mrs. Stanley required a bit more support from Kennesha, her case manager at LARS, to guide her through the process of reconnecting her lights. Mrs. Stanley seemed like she would be a great candidate for the Maryland Energy Assistance Program (MEAP), which assists low-income Marylanders with their energy bills. Kennesha helped gather all of the required documents and assisted her with completing the application. Mrs. Stanley contacted us the following week to share the good news: her lights were back on! Assistance from MEAP had paid off her entire outstanding balance, and even left a \$300 credit to help her get back on track with future payments. Oftentimes a well-informed referral and a bit of extra time and attention is just as meaningful to our clients as receiving financial assistance from LARS directly. Case managers are constantly researching new resources for our clients, many of whom do not have the access or ability to locate help on their own.

(*Name has been changed to protect client's privacy)

Give Back this Holiday Season!

Last holiday season, generous donations from Laurel families, community groups, businesses, and congregations fulfilled the Christmas wish lists of 442 children and provided Thanksgiving and Christmas/Holiday dinners to another 373 families and 72 seniors. Starting October 5th, LARS will begin meeting with families applying for this year's Holiday Program. There are many ways to get involved at LARS during this busy time of year!

- **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** (grocery, gas, etc.) for families in need
- **Donate Thanksgiving/Holiday food baskets** for families and seniors (see back page for a list of needed items)
- **VOLUNTEER!** Many extra hands are needed at LARS from October through December. LARS is looking for a few volunteers to provide weekly support to the Holiday Program Coordinator throughout the holiday season. Duties include matching families/donors, accepting donations, and organizing gifts in the office. Any amount of time you can lend to LARS is greatly appreciated!

If you are interested in donating or volunteering during this year's Holiday Program, please submit your information to LARS through the Google form on our homepage at www.laureladvocacy.org!

For more information, contact Laura Wellford at 301-776-0442 ext. 27 or lwellford@laureladvocacy.org.

Volunteer Corner

LARS would like to recognize the members of Emmanuel United Methodist Church (EUMC) in Scaggsville, MD for their many years of service to LARS. From coordinating large-scale food drives to adopting dozens of families each holiday season, our friends at EUMC are always eager to lend a hand.

Several years ago, volunteers from EUMC were instrumental in connecting LARS' food pantry with free and reduced cost food from the Capital Area Food Bank (CAFB). To this day, a group of 11 volunteers from EUMC are committed to picking up fresh fruit and vegetables from CAFB 2-3 times each month and delivering the produce to LARS. Since January of this year, Emmanuel volunteers have delivered 10,080lbs of fresh produce to LARS so that our clients always have access to the proper nutrition they deserve.

Ed DeLong, a dynamic EUMC volunteer and a long-standing leader of the CAFB pick-up team, shares his experience supporting LARS: "It is a matter of people who are privileged to have their basic health, housing, education, financial, etc. needs met to give a path forward for those whose lives have not been as fortunate." Helping to coordinate LARS' yearly Thanksgiving Food Drive, Ed has built lasting partnerships with local schools and works to ensure the volunteer support needed to make the food drives possible. Last year, EUMC volunteers picked up over 20,000lbs of food for LARS from schools during a two-week period around Thanksgiving. That's a lot of heavy lifting!

A huge thanks to ALL of our awesome volunteers, for all you do for LARS!

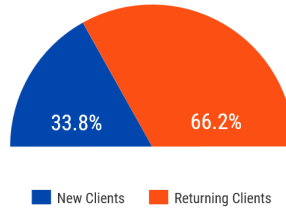
There are many opportunities to get involved at LARS this holiday season and throughout the year. Call Angelica Christian at 301-776-0442 ext. 32 or email achristian@laureladvocacy.org to find out how you can share your time and talents with LARS!



Ed DeLong directs a team of volunteers as they unload a large food delivery outside of LARS.

Year in Review*: July 1, 2014 - June 30, 2015

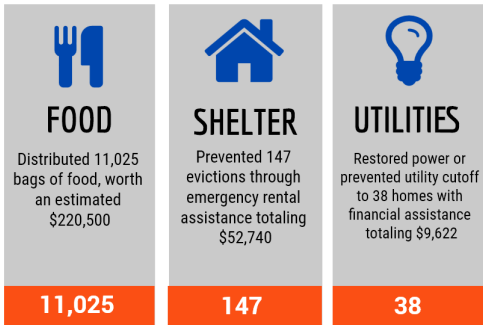
1,871 households served
=4,616 individuals
 168 self-reported as homeless



homeless families were safely sheltered in LARS' Transitional Housing Program this year; 5 of these families graduated from the program and secured permanent housing



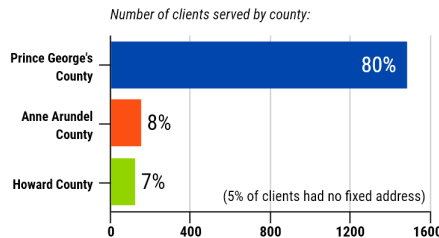
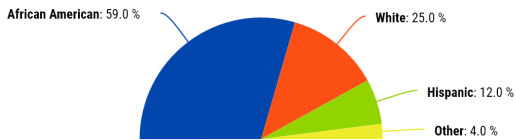
chronically homeless, disabled individuals resided in LARS' Permanent Housing Program; 1 participant moved into a long-term medical care facility during the program year



LARS received 6,848 bags of donated food, worth an estimated \$136,965! Volunteers delivered an additional 14,456lbs of fresh produce from the Capital Area Food Bank.

- 442 children had their Christmas wish lists fulfilled
- 237 clients met with an outreach worker from the Dept. of Social Services to apply for/renew benefits
- 161 children received school supplies
- 124 families received vouchers for clothing and furniture
- 66 job-seekers received employment counseling
- 57 adults and children obtained eye exams and glasses
- 40 homeless individuals obtained a birth certificate or ID

DEMOGRAPHICS:



*To view LARS' complete Annual Report for FY2015, visit www.laureladvocacy.org.

LARS Staff

Leah Paley, LGSW
Executive Director

Stephanie Guzman
Director of Emergency Services & Community Relations

Lauren Cohen, LGSW
Director of Supportive Housing

Laura Wellford
Development & Marketing Manager

Lynette Greenwood
Office Manager

Janada Randall, LBSW
Transitional Housing Case Manager

Angelica Christian
Case Manager/Volunteer Coordinator

Kennesha Rodgers
Bilingual Case Manager

Brendan Mahady
UMBC Social Work Intern

To have your name & address updated or removed from our mailing list, please email lwelford@laureladvocacy.org

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Clara's Story

At 77 years old, surviving on microwavable meals and sharing a few feet of living space in the backseat of a car with two dogs was never in Clara's* plan for retirement. After losing her home, she turned to the county for help. Feeling lost and alone in a new world of public assistance waiting lists, paperwork, and constant stress, Clara's dogs were her only remaining comforts. When she was told it would be next to impossible to find immediate placement in a subsidized housing unit that was both handicap accessible *and* allowed pets, her heart sank. Knowing the odds were against her, Clara's caseworker at the Department of Social Services (DSS) felt it was worth a shot to reach out to LARS on her client's behalf. LARS' Director of Supportive Housing, Lauren Cohen, reviewed the case and set up a meeting with Clara to assess her eligibility for placement in a local church shelter. Lauren quickly noticed that Clara was much more

at ease in the presence of her companion dogs, and that separating her from them would be more damaging and more traumatizing to her than being homeless for the rest of her life. Luckily, the church agreed to take Clara in, along with both dogs, until a more permanent solution could be found. With a little negotiating from LARS' case management team and Prince George's County DSS, Clara *and her dogs* will be able to move from the church shelter into an apartment of their own in mid-October. Clara will become the tenth current resident in LARS' Permanent Housing Program, where she will contribute 30% of her income towards the rental of a local apartment leased by LARS—a place she can stay for however long she needs. Lauren will continue to work with Clara during weekly case management visits, making sure she has the support she needs to live a happy, healthy life!

(*Name has been changed to protect client's privacy)

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

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Stay up to date with LARS news and
events at www.laureladvocacy.org

Help us feed those in need this holiday season!

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.

During November and December, LARS puts together holiday food baskets for over 300 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

Other helpful pantry staples include:

Cereal, instant oatmeal, tuna, peanut butter & jelly, rice, spaghetti & sauce, canned meats, mac & cheese, fruit/applesauce cups, pop-top cans, on-the-go meals/snacks

Please remember to check expiration dates!

For more information on donating food or sponsoring a food drive, please contact Angelica Christian at 301-776-0442 ext. 32 or achristian@laureladvocacy.org

Thanksgiving food baskets are needed by **Friday, November 20th**

Christmas food baskets are needed by **Friday, December 18th**