



UNITED METHODIST HUMAN SERVICES

BIANNUAL NEWSLETTER
WINTER 2021

A PRESENCE THAT BRINGS HOPE

*By: Cheryl Bedick Keafer, MSW
Executive Director*

As Christians we believe that God is always present. Omnipresent – in all places at the same time. It is not a human possibility, but it is a part of the nature of God. It is certainly a part that has brought us all comfort through such a difficult season in our history. No matter what, God was there. God is here. That truth is enough to sustain us. It is the very definition of His name, Immanuel, God with us. It was the last thing Jesus promised before He ascended, “I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt. 1:22-23). We know that He is more important than what He might do for us. When often He does not fix things to make them easier for us, it is His presence that brings hope.

Recently I stood with a woman as she waited outside our building for some help. She didn’t want to venture inside because of our stairs and her obvious disabilities. It was snowing and it was cold. She was cold. I was cold. I ran inside and got her some gloves, a hat, and a chair to sit on, which helped but couldn’t help enough. In fact, I couldn’t help enough. There is so much in life that we just cannot fix and frankly I’m not sure we are meant to fix! The reality is much more complicated. At times there is little we can do except be present. Like a reflection of our Creator, made in His image, there is something about being present with someone as they go through the struggles of life. It tells them you see them; it reminds them God sees them, and they are not alone.

Later that day I found myself crying for this dear woman and another woman who has been in the news recently. We have been present with her too – not able to

help much but seeing her pain. God reminded me of how desperately I rely on His presence and nudged me to see that often all we are to offer is our presence. Make no mistake, being present can be much harder than fixing. We are so wired in our culture to do something! But often, it is really our presence that brings hope.

Thank you for being faithful throughout 2020. So many gave new gifts and above and beyond gifts. The Lord sustained us well through your gifts and allowed us to minister His hope to many precious people. We pray that the reality of His presence will comfort you and bring you renewed hope for this New Year. May we each be His presence in the lives of those around us, bringing comfort and hope.

◆ Just a little F.Y.I. you might find helpful! ◆

As you consider any future giving to UMHS or any charity, you may be interested to know tax benefits from the federal stimulus bill, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act have been extended through 2021. The same “above the line” charitable deduction of up to \$300 still allows individuals who do not itemize to deduct charitable cash donations up to that amount on their 2020 tax returns. Those filing jointly (and not itemizing) will be able to deduct up to \$600. This is important, because after the passage of tax reform in 2017, only about 10 percent of Americans itemize their taxes.

Those who itemize are able to offset up to 100% of their adjusted gross income with charitable contributions.

SPRING ONGOING ENRICHMENT CLASSES

BOUNDARIES IN RELATIONSHIPS

Thursdays, March 18—May 20
10:00 am—11:30 am

Based on the book “Boundaries” by Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend. Begin to gain control of your life by learning when to say yes and how to say no

EXPLORING YOUR FAITH

Thursdays, April 8—May 13
6:00 pm—7:30 pm

This is a six-week study of the basic beliefs of the Christian faith covering such topics as the Character of Christ, the Meaning of the Cross, and the Spirit of Christ.

Classes are available to all Getting Ahead Graduates. You may choose one class.

Participants must wear a mask for all in-person classes.

Call or text Carolyn to register at 814-418-4336 or e-mail at carolyn@umhumanservices.org

PROGRAMS CONTINUE DURING PANDEMIC

By Carolyn Varchol, Program Director

Despite the ongoing challenges of the pandemic, Bridges to Success programming continued through the fall.

The Fall 2020 Getting Ahead cohort was able to meet in person for the majority of the classes. Due to safety concerns around the holidays, the last three sessions were completed remotely. Cynthia Borgella (Spring 2017 graduate) facilitated, and Kim Baker, (Spring 2016 graduate) co-facilitated. There were six graduates. We are grateful for Irene Luther and members of Bethany UMC who provided wonderful snack bags each week for the class!

(Continued below)



Front from left: Cynthia Borgella (facilitator), Judy Diamond, Nellie Sarlouis, Kim Semelsberger, Kim Baker (co-facilitator).
Back row from left: Bret Snyder, Jamie Kerr, Robbin High, Bob Semelsberger (not pictured—Philip Russo)

Coming soon! MONEY TIPS & TOPICS

BUDGETING TIPS COUPONING/MEAL PLANNING ON A BUDGET

These are one-session groups that are open to GA Graduates AND to the public.

DATES TO BE ANNOUNCED

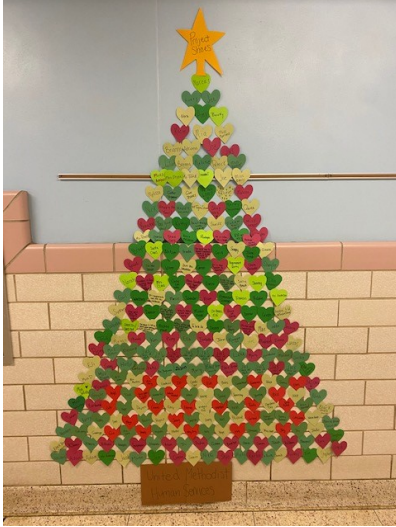
Other fall classes included Bridges Financial Management sponsored by Somerset Trust (with seven completing), and “Taking Out Your Emotional Trash,” (with five completing). Both groups met at the Behavioral Health of Cambria County “Conference on the Park” room to make use of the Zoom conferencing capability. In addition, one graduate completed an individual study on Emotionally Destructive Relationships via Zoom.

While we are grateful to be able to utilize technology for our programming, it continues to prove challenging for all, and impossible for some. Because of this, our Bridges Financial Management and Getting Ahead classes have been postponed until it is safe to meet in person.

OTHER MINISTRY UPDATES

Project Shoes

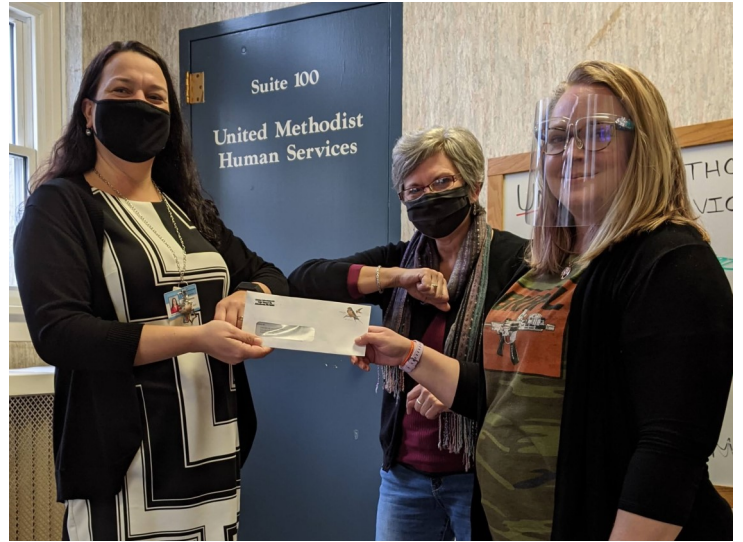
This past fall, Project Shoes provided shoes to less than 200 students. The number of students served was lower than in past years due to school districts operating virtually or with a hybrid schedule. Previously we were averaging 500 students served each year.



*Greater Johnstown School District
mini "Love Tree"*

Many thanks to our partners at the Greater Johnstown School District for their annual fundraiser in support of Project Shoes. This year they did a mini "Love Tree!"

Special thanks to the class of 1965 that really pitched in! Your support will continue to help put new shoes or boots on the feet of school-aged children in our five-county region.



From left: Melana Simms (Guidance Counselor, Greater Johnstown Elementary School), Cheryl Bedick Keafer (UMHS Executive Director), and Stephanie Krumenacker (Office Manager)

Franklin Street Food Pantry

Thanks to the flexibility of Barb Hunt, Pantry Director, and our volunteers, the food pantry continued to operate in the safest way possible throughout 2020. In November, the pantry moved back outside to prepare for post-holiday concerns about the COVID-19 virus spread. It moved back inside on February 2.

In addition to our weekly pantry that served an average of 400 food-insecure people each month, we helped 56 families with an Emergency Food Supply in 2020 compared to 26 families in 2019.

Bundles of Joy/Care Program

The year 2020 was busy for all our direct relief services. We helped 53 families with baby care items such as diapers and wipes; a baby formula voucher to Ideal Market; hygiene kits for men or women; or winter essentials like a coat, hat, gloves, and scarves.

Special thanks to the Clothing Closet ladies here at Franklin Street United Methodist Church who coordinate with us to meet the need for winter essentials.

Emergency Financial Assistance

Although this part of our program has been scaled back in recent years in order to focus our efforts on the Bridges to Success program, 2020 was a time for everyone to pitch in to help! Working with many other agencies and churches in the area, we assisted people almost every day to stay in their homes and keep the lights on, just by helping them navigate the system.

More than a dozen needs were met directly by us for either a utility or housing help.

Find us on 

A private Facebook group — **UMHS Getting Ahead Graduates Group** — is available for Getting Ahead Graduates! The purpose of this page is to provide graduates with information about ongoing enrichment classes and networking activities, plus words of encouragement as you're moving ahead!

To find us, search Facebook for UMHS Getting Ahead Graduates Group and choose Request to Join.

HOW COVID-19 HAS IMPACTED GA GRADUATES

By: Carolyn Varchol, Program Director

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all of us in some way either in our personal lives and/or in our jobs. Folks in or near poverty are not excluded, and, in fact, may have experienced different types of challenges. It has been extremely disheartening to witness this on a weekly or sometimes daily basis. Some have not received their stimulus payment for one reason or another, and others have yet to receive unemployment despite filing months ago. The result is the inability to pay their rent or utilities. Many others—particularly those who struggle with mental illness or addiction—continue to be negatively impacted by social isolation and the inability to meet with their therapist or case manager face-to-face. In addition, many parents find it difficult or impossible to maintain employment with their school-aged children learning virtually from home or following a hybrid model. We are fortunate to live in an age of technology that has allowed folks to work from home and communicate with loved ones. For those in poverty, however, the lack of Internet access or a computer makes it difficult to access services that are available or the help that they need.

Recently, I decided to survey several Getting Ahead graduates to ask them about their experiences throughout 2020. Many of our graduates have learned to be very creative in meeting day-to-day obstacles and have become quite resilient in doing so. Despite their struggles, I was delighted to hear that each (without any prompting from me), added something they found that was POSITIVE during this trying time. I hope you are enlightened and encouraged as you read their stories. (The class from which each graduated appears after their name.)

Amara Fayette (Fall 2019) has learned to be flexible and to adapt during 2020. Some of Amara's nursing school classes were virtual from November 2020 to the present. Services at Beulah United Methodist church that her husband, Wanick, pastors have been virtual due to the primarily older population. This has been difficult for many members, as the social aspect of church is important to them. Darshell, Amara's niece who resides with her and Wanick had some adjusting as well. Her school, Johnstown high, moved entirely to virtual learning in October. Lacking the structure of time at the school was initially difficult. But through this experience, Darshell has gained skills in time management and working independently.

Dea Rowe (Fall 2019) appreciated the COVID-19 stimulus money she received. This was added to the money she has been saving for a vacation to see her mother in the north-eastern part of the state. Dea admits she misses attending church and going to her appointments, all of which are now done virtually. Living in an apartment building, she does feel anxious about having to touch doors and elevator buttons. Despite this, she faithfully walks her dog every day. On the bright side, Dea has learned some new technical skills during the pandemic. She uses the Zoom meeting app, and she was able to finish the UMHS Fall 2020 Bridges Financial Class virtually using a hotspot that she rented from Johnstown Public Library.

Julie Peterman (Spring 2016) has found herself home much more than usual. For her job, she has had to meet virtually with her clients instead of in person and has not been able to provide transportation as usual. She reports that many of her clients have been suffering with anxiety, boredom, depression, and fear throughout the pandemic. Many successfully attend therapy via Zoom as an alternative to in-person appointments. Personally, Julie has made an adjustment in the way she shops for groceries. She shops online and uses Walmart Pick-up to avoid going into the store. Despite the challenges of the pandemic, Julie is proud to say that she has maintained her sobriety!

Tyra Jones (Spring 2018) has found homeschooling her three children challenging, especially with the three trying to share only two devices. All three have attended virtual schooling since Johnstown Area schools closed at the end of October. Tyra has been helping her youngest (in first grade) with using the keyboard and learning math. On the positive side, Tyra says the experience has helped her to sharpen her skills and to read more.

Sarah Hensel (Fall 2017) and her husband, Chuck, had to close their own company due to COVID safety concerns. Chuck began a new job but experienced a seasonal layoff over the winter. He did not qualify for unemployment since he was not working for this company long enough. However, the couple had saved all of his overtime earnings throughout the summer. That, along with couponing and staying home much of the time has enabled them to make ends meet. For enjoyment, the family spends time outdoors, taking walks. They also enjoy an occasional trip to the St. Francis Caring and Sharing Thrift store in Hollsopple. Sarah is busy homeschooling Alex, their oldest boy and caring for the latest addition to their family - a six-month-old who is the brother of their other boys (2½ and 6 years old) whom they previously adopted!

OTHER MINISTRY NEWS

FALL 2020 VIRTUAL BANQUET

There's a first time for everything! And 2020 was our first ever Virtual Banquet. Because venues were still not up to full capacity (and still aren't) we had to get creative like everyone else. It was sad not being able to come together to share with you about the work that UMHS is doing in our community, but the video gave us the opportunity to perhaps reach more people and it kept our costs down!

With many faithful donors, we raised about \$5,000.

You can view the banquet video on the umhumanservices.org website at: <https://umhumanservices.org/annual-events-fundraisers>



Cynthia Borgella, GA Graduate speaking at the Virtual Banquet.

OTHER FUNDRAISING EFFORTS

Thanks to those who chose us as the charity to support with Amazon Smile, Facebook Fundraisers, and the Boscov's Friends Helping Friends event. Every little bit helps as we serve those who struggle with resource insecurity and are working toward self-sufficiency!

Thanks to all the churches who still participated in our annual "Mini Love Tree" fundraiser over the Christmas season. They raised over \$2,600. Pretty impressive when you consider that many churches went back to virtual services because of the increased spread of the virus over the holidays.

SUPPORT UMHS AT AMAZONSMILE.COM!

Did you know you can financially support UMHS when shopping on Amazon?

Simply go to <https://Smile.Amazon.com> and choose "United Methodist Human Services" in the drop-down box. Each time you make a purchase, Amazon makes a donation to UMHS at no extra charge to you!

THANK YOU TO OUR GENEROUS SUPPORTERS

Many thanks for our newest grants:

Poverty Team of the Western Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist Church (WPAUMC) - in support of our Emergency Financial Assistance

WPAUMC Mission Support for 2021, providing for our General Budget

Fund for the Future of the Community Foundation for the Alleghenies – Fall 2020 grant for our Bridges to Success program

Thanks for all the extra donations to the Food Pantry through this difficult season, totaling more than \$10,000! Some provided special financial help to give families food gift cards for the holidays to Giant Eagle and Ideal Market.

Giant Eagle

GCU Lodge 625

Kable Thomas Financial Group

Slovenian Savings & Loan

Saturday's Kitchen

Beulah UMC

St. John Gaulbert – Holiday food drive

Community Open Door Church

It is because of the generosity of these organizations and many individuals that UMHS is able to continue serving the needs of those who live in instability!

2020 UMHS Board of Directors

Rev. Sung Shik Chung
Rev. Terry Knipple
Pastor Mike McKool
Rev. Adam Dotts
Natalie Marionneaux
Rev. Gary Grau
Rev. Rodney Hatfield
Jennifer Hautz

District Superintendent
Interim Chair
Vice Chair
Treasurer
Secretary
Member at Large
Member at Large
Member at Large

TO UNSUBSCRIBE

We would love to continue to keep you informed of UMHS news, but if you would like to be removed from our newsletter mailing list you may call the office at 814-539-2633 or send an e-mail to carolyn@umhumanservices.org. Thank you!

CONTACT US

United Methodist Human Services
510 Locust Street
Johnstown, PA 15901

PHONE (814) 539-2633
FAX (814) 539-8034

EMAIL
office@umhumanservices.org

WEBSITE
umhumanservices.org

FACEBOOK
facebook.com/umhumanservices

UNITED METHODIST HUMAN SERVICES

SERVING AS A CATALYST FOR INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF OUR COMMUNITY

NONPROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO. 392
JOHNSTOWN, PA

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

UNITED METHODIST HUMAN SERVICES
510 Locust Street
Johnstown, PA 15901

