



CHRISTIAN NEIGHBORS

A Beacon of Hope and Stability

Neighborly News

2024 July Edition



Caring for our neighbors of the Almo, Cooper, Martin, Otsego and Plainwell communities since 1983.

Our Mission is to provide local families in need with food, emergency financial assistance, skill-building education, and other resources offering stabilization.



-The Director's Note-

Jennifer Collins, Executive Director

Since becoming the Executive Director of Christian Neighbors on April 1, 2024, I've had six weeks of mentoring with retiring Executive Director Terri Shaler. Since taking the reins I have been on what I call my "listening tour." I am eager to listen and learn from everyone connected to our organization. Understanding our past and present is crucial to guiding us forward. Meaningful change is a gradual process requiring patience, dedication, strategic planning, communication, and relationship building. I'm open to conversations with those that support and utilize our services, so please reach out. Succeeding someone who held this role for over 30 years is challenging. At Terri's retirement open house, I was talking with a group of volunteers and teachers about "filling Terri's shoes" and a beautiful and insightful teacher said something very profound to me. She said, "You don't need to fill her shoes, you'll wear your own." I have taken that to heart.

Christian Neighbors has evolved since its early years, so as the new Executive Director, I felt it was important to go "back to the basics" and give an updated overview of our services.

Christian Neighbors is a unique agency in Allegan County, providing a multitude of services under one roof. Our Stabilization Programs address both immediate and long-term needs, offering essential support such as food, secure housing, emergency utility assistance, medical prescription help, and educational training opportunities. This compassionate and holistic approach ensures the most vulnerable members of our community receive the help they need to achieve sustainability and improve their quality of life.

This newsletter will detail each of our Stabilization Programs.



Food Pantry

All food pantry clients begin by meeting one-on-one with our Food Pantry Director or a Case Manager.

Increasing food security and access to nutritious food for individuals, families, senior citizens, and veterans is at the heart of our food pantry. Many of our clients are in the ALICE population, (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed). ALICE represents those in our communities who are working yet still struggling to make ends meet. They make too much money to qualify for government assistance but not enough to afford daily life in our county. We all have felt the pinch of inflation in all areas of our lives. Our food pantry service is provided by our compassionate and trained volunteers. Clients have the option of a drive through service on Mondays or in-person shopping for their food of choice on other open days. Each shopping trip provides a family 3 meals a day for each person in the household for 5 days. These shopping trips include protein, milk, eggs, fruits, vegetables, soups, starches, toilet paper and many other items. We provide monthly food shopping unless needs reflect additional services. The impact our Food Pantry has on the daily lives of those we serve cannot be undervalued.



Emergency Financial Assistance

All of our financial requests begin with a one-on-one assessment with a trained Case Manager.

Housing:

When assessing the housing needs of our guests we always focus on keeping individuals/households in their homes, when possible, to prevent them from becoming homeless. It is always better to divert a family or an individual from eviction. We collaborate with other local housing agencies to maximize financial assistance. Finding new housing is very difficult in Allegan County due to a lack of affordable housing. In the past five years, rent has increased significantly.



Rental payment help is one direct way we assist in the housing arena, but we also impact many clients with the help of food assistance or utility payment help which then frees up their budget to make their mortgage or rent payment.

Utilities:

Emergency financial assistance that covers electricity, gas, propane or heating oil is essential. The seasons of Michigan make heat and air conditioning or fans a necessity to stay comfortable and safe. Once a need is established, barriers are also identified and discussed with the client to determine what the next steps might be. Perhaps they would benefit from one of our educational programs, such as our Energy Savings class, or to be connected with one of our trained mentors. Our goal is to help first with their immediate need(s) such as paying a utility bill to keep a "shut off" from taking place, then offer a long-term partnership to secure positive outcomes that improve the lives of those who participate in our classes.



Medical Prescriptions: Limited prescription help is available on a case-by-case basis. Pain, narcotic or controlled substances are not covered.

Client Specific Training:

Over many years of serving our communities, one thing has become apparent: the lives of individuals improve with education to increase their financial stability. Our Education Resource Center (ERC) offers one-on-one mentoring for budgeting and computer literacy. We offer weekly resource workshops which are held in our computer lab where case managers will work with clients to help them gain resources that will benefit their household. The classes may provide access to the MI-Bridges online programs, getting IDs updated and/or added, filling out home heating and rent credits as part of their tax returns. Our Case Managers are able to help complete a SOAR (SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery) application for disability benefits for those at risk of homelessness, have serious mental illness, medical impairment and/or co-occurring substance use disorder. Our clients attend these classes for free, go away with extra resources, and feel secure being able to work one-on-one with a knowledgeable Case Manager who can help navigate the complicated websites, forms, and bureaucracy.



Community training/events (open to all Allegan and Kalamazoo County residents):

The Education Resource Center is open to all Allegan and Kalamazoo County residents. Our trained staff can assist connecting clients to resources to attain a GED or a high school diploma. We provide our Matter of Balance class for senior citizens, "Dig-It" vegetable planting classes, provide "How to Avoid Scams" classes, and Energy Savings classes. In our Demonstration Kitchen we hold several cooking skills classes, for all ages. During our weekly Resource Workshop anyone in the community can drop in and have access to a computer and wi-fi, as we know in a rural county wi-fi is not available to all.

We are currently scheduling a free Expungement Clinic which is a service that helps eligible individuals remove criminal records, including arrests and convictions, from the public record. Expungement can offer a second chance for people who face barriers to employment, housing, education, and other opportunities because of a past mistake. We are also scheduling the Mobile Secretary of State to be at our Education Resource Center. This too will be open to all Allegan County residents. This offers the vast majority of Secretary of State services, including processing driver's license and state ID applications, corrections and renewals; disability parking placard applications, renewals and replacements; and vehicle title and registration transactions.



"Dig-It" Vegetable & Herb Planting Event



Energy Savings Class Participants



Christian Neighbors SE

282 12th Street

Correspond to:

PO Box 53

Plainwell, MI 49080

PH: (269) 685-4166

www.christianneighbors.org

info@christianneighbors.org

MISSION STATEMENT

Our Mission is to provide local families in need with food, emergency financial assistance, skill-building education, and other resources offering stabilization

*"Together we are Neighbors
Caring for Neighbors"*

Learn more about volunteer opportunities on our website under the "Ways to Help" tab.

Our New Website has launched!

VISIT IT TODAY!



WWW.CHRISTIANNEIGHBORS.ORG

PATH Walk 2024

Join us Sunday, October 6, 2024 at 1:30pm as we step off to raise awareness and funds for PATH Walk. PATH stands for People Advocating To end Hunger, and all funds raised go to our stabilization programs including food, emergency financial assistance, skill-building education and other resources.



PATH Walk is a 1.5-3 mile fun walk along the Kalamazoo River and through Plainwell. NEW this year, we will have trophies for: 1. church/business with the most walkers, 2. church/business who raised the most funds, and 3. individual who solicited the most donations by entity, not funds.

Registration packets will be available Thursday, August 15 and can be requested by contacting Eric Hoffman at Christian Neighbors, either by email: ehoffman@christianneighbors.org or calling 269.685.4166, ext 100.

SAVE THE DATE



Resource Workshop - every Monday at 10am
7/8 - Mobile Food Pantry 11am-12pm in Hope Lutheran Church parking lot

7/8 - Surfing the Internet Safely class - 11am

7/8 - Matter of Balance classes start - 1:30pm

7/11 - Link with Lunch - 11am

7/12 & 7/13 - Stuff the Bus @ Plainwell Harding's

7/16 - Cooking for One classes start - 11am

8/5 - Mobile Secretary of State - 10am-3pm

Find out more by scanning the QR code above or visit www.christianneighbors.org/calendar

Meet the Clarks



Recently, the Clarks reached out to us in urgent need of rental assistance. They had to relocate to our area on short notice because their previous rental home was sold, leaving them only a few weeks to secure new housing. This sudden move prevented them from saving enough for the first month's rent and security deposit. They were referred to us by a local acquaintance familiar with our agency and mission. The family includes a non-verbal autistic son and a very active toddler, making it extremely difficult to find suitable childcare. As a result, they rely on a single income. We were delighted to assist them in settling into their new home. Their landlord informed us that the father has taken on a part-time job in addition to his full-time position to cover the rent and utility costs. To help ease their financial burden, they can visit us monthly for food assistance to reduce grocery expenses. Additionally, we provided them with information about other local resources since they are new to the area. We are grateful that Christian Neighbors was the first agency they thought of in their time of need. Thanks to the generosity of our community partners and donors, we can continue to offer vital support and resources to families like the Clarks.

IMPACT FIGURES THROUGH JUNE

307

Clients Have Received
Financial Support totaling
\$33,683



248

Education Resource
Center class and event
participants



2,174

Clients Have
Received Food
Pantry Support



485
Households
Served



20
Veterans
Served



39
Homeless
Served

THANK YOU

Christian Neighbors is grateful for the recent grants we have received from: Allegan/Ottawa County United Way, Great Lakes Energy People Fund and Foresters Financial.

Food Pantry Hours: Mon: 10-Noon and 4-6pm drive through only,

Tues: 10-Noon and Thurs: 2-5pm for in person shopping.

Emergency Financial Assistance Hours: Tues: 10-Noon and Thurs: 2-5.

Resource Workshop Hours: Mon: 10-12pm. Get help signing up for benefits and resources.

This agency will pursue a practice where the education, health and human service needs of residents within our service area are addressed without regard to age, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, national origin, or any other classification or category.

Honor and Memorial Tributes

In Honor of:

Anne & Art Hartman's 40th!
 Antoon & Lieve Brusselmans
 Diana Gilmer's Birthday
 Fred Jacobs
 Gwen Holden-Norton
 Malachi's Birthday
 River Bend Yoga
 Terri Shaler & her retirement!
 Trent Bouma

In Memory of:

Alyce (Colyer) Tice
 Bill & Flora Moore
 Bill Riley
 Bill Spencer
 Bill VandenBroeck
 Bob & Dixie Stratton
 Bob Green
 Bob Phillips (OHS Class of 1961)
 Bonnie Bonnes
 Bruce Binns
 Char Bailey
 Claus & Ruth Holtman
 Danielle Lemon
 Dave Levine

David Hartig
 Dorothy Gregory
 Dorothy Kissinger on Mother's Day
 Douglas London
 Dr. Jim Sell
 EJ Hart
 Ellen Frith
 Edward Rohr
 Esther Wyman
 Glenn Gregory
 Guyton Ray
 James P Bishop
 Jean Merrill
 Jerry Howrigan
 Jim & Nancy Page
 John Relken
 John Westbrook
 Joline A. Hoffman
 Joshua Coleman
 Joyce Spencer
 Judy Shumaker
 Julie Lenhart
 Keith Wilson
 Ken Doctor
 Kevin Charkowski
 Kyle Hegedus

Mable Storms
 Marc Russell
 Maxine McFanin
 Mike McFanin on his birthday
 Patsy Nyberg
 Peggy Madison
 Phyllis Drozd
 Ray Winkel
 Rich Campbell
 Richard Downing
 Richard Van Niman
 Rick Clemens
 Robert J. Holland
 Ron Mc Rae
 Ron McFanin on his birthday
 Ruthie Beckman
 Steve Kantz
 Ted Ellis
 Terri Lynne Moses
 Tim Daniels
 Vance Swope
 Vera Herin
 Wilbert "Dave" Fleser
 William Menck
 Yurgen Markewycz

Congratulations Dan Bushouse for winning our 50/50 drawing!

Total funds raised were \$2,275 = 91 tickets. We were short on selling enough tickets to offer the John Deere mower, so it reverted to a 50/50 drawing. Dan graciously donated his winnings of \$1,137.50 back to Christian Neighbors to help support our neighbors in need. Thank you so much Dan and thank you to everyone who purchased tickets for this raffle.

Special thanks to Steensma Lawn & Power Equipment for partnering with us.

Pictured are Dan Bushouse and Christian Neighbors Executive Director Jennifer Collins



STUFF THE BUS

Friday - July 12 from 10am-6pm and
 Saturday - July 13 from 10am-4pm
 Plainwell Harding's parking lot