

# Neighborly News



2025 November Edition



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

**Our mission is to provide a safe place for people in our community who need food, rent and utility assistance, education, or other resources to help create stability in their lives.**

## November is Homeless Awareness Month

So far this year, Christian Neighbors has helped over **80** homeless households, which includes veterans, seniors, and families with children. **34** of these households are living in inhabitable situations such as cars, tents, storage units or on the streets. The other households are often couch-surfing or double-upped in households with family or friends. These numbers are just those who have come to us for some form of help, we know the total number of homeless individuals and families in our community is certainly larger.

According to the Michigan Interagency Council on Homelessness, the leading cause of homelessness across all demographics in Michigan is the lack of affordable housing. A recent study in Allegan County found that the county is short **6,214** housing units. The capacity rate at the time of the survey was nearly 100%, meaning virtually no housing was available at that time – renting or owning.

For women and children specifically, domestic violence is the leading cause of homelessness. Recent statistics show an increase in the number of women and children accessing temporary emergency violence shelters but then have nowhere to go once their time expires at the shelters. Other dominant factors leading to homelessness are being a veteran, youth aging out of foster care, and those living in generational poverty situations.

We know that housing people in our area is very difficult and one of our main strategies is to keep people housed who currently have a home but are struggling. This means sometimes helping with higher amounts of back rent, helping to mediate with landlords about issues, and offering courses in budgeting, energy savings, and food resources to help families to stay in their homes.



### *- The Director's Note -*

*"Now more than ever, kindness matters - in our words and in our actions. If you are in a position to be able to help - please help. Remember even a smile can help brighten someone's day."*

- Jennifer Collins, Executive Director, Christian Neighbors

# Affordable Housing Need Rises

What was once an affordable way to live for many who live on fixed income or are low-wage earners has slowly become unobtainable. At the largest mobile home park in the area, the lot rent back in 2018 was \$315 and this included water. That same park is now \$573 a month and tenants have to now pay their own water. Many new tenants also have to pay to own the trailer, usually a 10-year mortgage averaging \$450 a month.

The rule of thumb is to have your housing and utilities be no more than 30% of your gross monthly income. As you can see from the chart below, to meet that threshold to live in this mobile home community, your income would need to be \$4443 per month or \$25.63 an hour.

Cost of Living in a Mobile Home Community	
Lot Rent	\$573
Mortgage (for purchasing mobile home)	\$400
Utilities (includes water, electric, heat, internet)	\$300
Home Insurance	\$80
<b>Total Monthly Housing Cost</b>	<b>\$1,353</b>

My lot rent now takes over 50% of my social security check. I am flat broke every month.  
-Mike J.



Shannon Zabaldo  
Financial Case Manager

Simply put, many of the traditional affordable ways of living have become unaffordable. Another option would be renting a subsidized apartment. However, the waiting lists have become extremely long. For instance, a local subsidized apartment complex reported to us that the most recent 1-bedroom they rented out was from an application that was turned in January of 2021. A four-year waiting list! It is so important that we work hard to prevent evictions for those who come to us for help because as you can see, new housing takes too long to obtain or is simply not affordable.

## Meet Valerie



*Domestic violence is a significant contributing cause of homelessness. We were able to circumvent Valerie from becoming unhoused in our area and unfortunately, her story is not unique. She had been married for a long time, raised children with her husband and had been led to believe that she was not capable of supporting herself, that she needed him to survive. She had been pushed into taking low paying part-time work so she could manage the household and was not confident in her own abilities to reach for bigger opportunities due to emotional abuse, which inevitably turned into physical abuse. The abuse flew under the radar for years until one day, the assault was vicious enough that she needed emergency medical assistance and he went to jail. No one bailed him out, so he needed to stay incarcerated while he awaited his trial, which obviously left her with only her part time income and that was not enough to pay her rent. We were able to help her bridge the gap by helping her with rent while she found the confidence to go for a full-time, better paying job, which she was able to secure quickly. She is now on her own, making a decent wage, working full-time and getting health insurance. Thankfully, Valerie was able to remain housed with our help and is well on her journey of healing and is gaining confidence in her own abilities' day by day.*

# Ways to Help During Uncertain Times

Meet Collin! He is the new representative from Otsego High School leading the Share Table at the high school. Fruit that students would otherwise throw away, is instead placed in a crate and Collin delivers the fruit here to Christian Neighbors. He delivers approximately 8 crates a week full of apples, oranges and bananas. Our clients are so thankful for fresh produce and we thank Collin for taking the time to do this for the food pantry.



November is Homeless Awareness Month and we have a designated area in the pantry specifically geared towards needs that homeless clients have. Blankets and sleeping bags, clothing, socks, hygiene items, can openers, hats and mittens & easy to eat and prepacked meals are all items we currently have and like to keep on hand. Specific needs are men's and women's underwear and warm socks, blankets or sleeping bags, protein bars, individual fruit cups and other easy to eat food items.

Check out our Amazon Wish List by scanning with your camera phone the QR code to the right, for a list of all the current needs in this area.



## More Ways You Can Help and Make a Big Impact

As the holiday season approaches and the anticipated SNAP benefits not coming through for families, these two upcoming events for the Food Pantry are ones we are relying heavily on.

- Stuff the Bus is coming up on November 21 & 22. This is always a profitable food drive for us! Food donations, along with cash and gift cards are welcome too.
- Meijer Simply Give is ongoing at the Plainwell Meijer through December 28. The double match day for this is on **Saturday, December 13**. We rely heavily on these Simply Give dollars for ongoing pantry needs and placing large orders for delivery.
- How to purchase Simply Give cards.....You will find the cards at the end of the checkout lanes, pick one up and scan it for the minimum amount of \$10 and in any increment of \$10 (\$20, \$30, etc...) On **December 13**, Meijer doubles that amount turning \$10 into \$30, \$20 into \$60, etc... We are extremely thankful for our Plainwell Meijer! If you cannot make it to Double Day, you can drop off your check to us, made out to Christian Neighbors and we will take those funds collected to Meijer on that Saturday.



Amy VanPutten  
Food Program Director

And as always, donations in our bin are always welcome. Churches, schools, businesses all have food drives going on in November & December so our community support is simply amazing. Thank you so very much for all the continued support.

"I can eat scraps but my son needs nutritious food."  
-Client

## Special Thanks to Meijer Team Gives & Steensma Lawn & Tractor





**Christian Neighbors SE**  
 282 12th Street  
 Correspond to:  
 PO Box 53  
 Plainwell, MI 49080

PH: (269) 685-4166  
[www.christianneighbors.org](http://www.christianneighbors.org)  
[info@christianneighbors.org](mailto:info@christianneighbors.org)

**MISSION STATEMENT**

Our Mission is to provide a safe place for people in our community who need food, rent and utility assistance, education, or other resources to help create stability in their lives.

*"Together we are Neighbors  
 Caring for Neighbors"*

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

**THANK YOU TO THESE  
 BUSINESSES AND YOUR  
 COMMUNITY SUPPORT  
 DURING THESE  
 UNCERTAIN TIMES!**



Meijer  
 Plainwell Team

Culver's  
 Share  
 Night

Biggby  
 Round-Up  
 Event

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO MAKE A  
 DONATION TO CHRISTIAN NEIGHBORS,  
 PLEASE REACH OUT TO ERIC HOFFMAN  
 AT 269.685.4166 X 100  
 OR EMAIL AT:  
[EHOFFMAN@CHRISTIANNEIGHBORS.ORG](mailto:EHOFFMAN@CHRISTIANNEIGHBORS.ORG).

During these uncertain times, know that Christian Neighbors is ready to stand by you, your family, neighbors, and friends, by providing food, emergency financial assistance, and learning opportunities. For more information, please call 269.685.4166 or visit our website at: [www.christianneighbors.org](http://www.christianneighbors.org).

Thank You to these  
 businesses and the  
 community members who  
 supported Round-Up &  
 Donation Events!



**Simply Give: Meijer in Plainwell**

September 28 - December 27, 2025

Double Match Day: Saturday, December 13!

Turn your \$10 gift into \$30 on Double Match Day.



Gift cards are located at the check out registers, not express lanes. You may also drop off your donation at Christian Neighbors, please be sure to put Memo: Meijer Simply Give or visit our website at: [www.christianneighbors.org](http://www.christianneighbors.org), and hit the DONATE button, and reference Meijer Simply Give.

**Thank You from Christian Neighbors!**

\*Donate until end of 2025.

# Honor and Memorial Tributes (Jan-Sept)

## In Honor of:

Alice Lappin's 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday  
Ann James  
First Congregational Church  
PATH Walk Team  
Gene & Kathy Meert's 70<sup>th</sup>  
Anniversary  
Harleen's 49<sup>th</sup> Birthday  
Janet Benson's Birthday  
Janet Ragainis  
Kelly Smart  
Ken Anson  
Kim Rayburn - PATH Walk 2025  
Malachi Waters 14<sup>th</sup> Birthday  
Sue Priller  
Terry VanLent's Birthday  
The Lord and His Kingdom

## In Memory of:

Al Gearig  
Aunt Kathie Johnson  
Barb Smalla  
Betty Hotchkiss  
Betty Mahieu  
Bill & Merry Wallace  
Bill Bibart  
Bill Kissinger  
Bill Standish  
Bill Stout, Jr.  
Bill Vance  
Bob DeYoung  
Bret Sunnerville  
Bruce Steele

Carl Dortch  
Craig Pulver  
Dale Roth, Jr.  
Dave Moran  
David Hartig  
Dennis McConney  
Dick & Judy Ramm  
Dixon Pulver  
Donna Book  
Dorothy Gregory  
Dorothy Kissinger on Mother's Day  
Dot & Gene Watson  
Doug Wesler  
Dr. Cliff Haff  
Ernie Sunnerville  
Evelyn Klein  
Evie Sell  
Frank Nevison  
Glenn Gregory  
Helen Honeysette  
James Bevins  
James Dendel  
Jean Merrill  
JoAnn Eddy  
JoAnn VanderBorgh  
John Flatt  
John D. Westbrook  
Joline A. Hoffman  
Kathy Kowall  
Kathy Plotts-Shimnoski  
Kenneth Moran  
Kevin Richardson  
Kyle Hegedus

Larry Elgersma  
Marilyn Fenner  
Marion Lyon  
Mark & Kathy Tuinstra  
Mary File  
Mary Howe  
Maxine McFanin on Mother's Day  
Mick McFanin  
Mike McFanin on his birthday  
Mona Erickson  
Myrna Jacobson  
Oliver Ellis  
Patricia & Earl Gillette  
Paul Eddy  
Paul Kissel  
Paul Ponitz  
Paula Sunnerville  
Peggy Madison  
Regina Johands  
Rev. Jim Boehm  
Richard Wheatley  
Robert Scherzer  
Ron McFanin  
Ron McFanin Jr. on his birthday  
Sandi Withee  
Sandy Pomeroy  
Sherry Spencer  
Skip Finch  
Steve Kantz  
Sylvia & Dale Dratt  
Sylvia Davis  
Vance Swope  
Ward Kissinger  
William "Bill" Binning

# WOW!

## YOUR SUPPORT RAISED OVER \$11,000!

100% of funds raised were  
matched by an anonymous donor!



## 10<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL PATH WALK

### CONGRATULATIONS

- **Business/Organization with Most Walkers**  
**First Congregational Church of Otsego**
- **Business/Organization Raising the Most Funds**  
**First Congregational Church of Otsego**
- **Individual Who Raised the Most Funds not by \$\$, but by Number of People Talked to.**  
**Brandie DeHaan, First Baptist Church Otsego**

**SAVE the Date for 2026 : Sunday, October 4, 2026**

Thank You to our Financial  
Sponsors:

Saniface Heating & A/C  
Winkel Funeral Home  
Safari Circuits

Donations from:  
RJ Printing  
Cuber's

Martin Lovers Club  
Plainwell Ice Cream

Special Thanks to:

Aaron Mitchell, City of Otsego  
First Congregational Church of  
Otsego

## What a SUCCESS!

This year we had over 70 walkers participate in the 2 mile family fun walk in Otsego. 28 of the 70 were new walkers, and individuals raised over \$11,000.

We want to thank all of our sponsors, churches, walkers, and community members who supported our event.

Next year our 11<sup>th</sup> Annual PATH Walk to Stabilization will be held in Plainwell. To assist with sponsoring this event, or have questions in general about PATH Walk or fundraising efforts with Christian Neighbors, please contact Eric Hoffman, Fund Development & Volunteer Manager at 269.685.4166 x 100 or email at [ehoffman@christianneighbors.org](mailto:ehoffman@christianneighbors.org).

# ERC Work: Helping to Stabilize

Crisis hits everyone at some point. Sometimes the crisis is comparatively small – a misplaced set of keys, one missed work shift without pay, or a fight with a loved one. And some crises like losing a job, getting divorced or facing serious health issues rock a person's world.

One key to surviving – and even growing through – crisis is having a community or tribe that helps and supports you through the storm. That's where programs and classes in our Education Resource Center become important. The ERC is a safe space where the Christian Neighbors mission to provide people with the skills to build stable lives meets our vision to connect community members through shared learning and life experiences.

It's a space where some neighbors Marty Rose McLeod teach teens and adults how to cook healthy meals and others like Kim Stevens and Diane Holmes show people how to cut holiday costs by making gifts.

It's a space where local businesses like OMPT Physical Therapy show people how to improve their health or Plainwell Counseling Center owner Cheryl Parente-Roggow helps organize an annual high tea for seniors, and organizations like Meals on Wheels provide activities for folks to just gather and enjoy the company of others.

It's a space where groups like Community Action of Allegan County, the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan and the Allegan County Legal Assistance Center help provide educational programs.

What skills can Christian Neighbors offer to help you improve and stabilize your world?

Do you have gifts that could help your neighbors find peace and hope in these changing times? How might your presence make connections that will help a neighbor through a tough time?

Check the calendar at [christianneighbors.org](http://christianneighbors.org) to register for classes and programs to find out.



Find our Calendar of Events and more by scanning the QR code to the right or visit [www.christianneighbors.org/calendar](http://www.christianneighbors.org/calendar).



Need a notary? Christian Neighbors will have a notary available at the Education Resource Center on Mondays from 10a-12p. If you need to make an appointment for another time, please contact Shannon at 269.685.4166 x 106, or email her at: [szabaldo@christianneighbors.org](mailto:szabaldo@christianneighbors.org).

