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Ginny Weatherstone
Chief Executive Officer

Summer 2010

Dear Friend of VMC,

Do you remember that old summer song “Hot, Hot, Hot?” And so it is!

I need to share with you that hot weather brings special challenges to VMC. The number of people coming to us is up, and that’s really a good thing. But it means that our expenses are up as well.

And our contributions always drop at this time of year as people go on vacation and summertime activities take precedence. I understand that. But I also understand that it is incumbent upon us to find a way to handle the special financial challenges that summer brings.

That’s why this letter may sound a little more urgent than it usually does. Our need, quite frankly, is more urgent. A fundraiser which we have customarily sponsored in the summer has been postponed, for good reason, to the fall. Philanthropic giving is down as it usually is in the summer. And, folks, we are hurting.

In the interest of helping us help Knoxville’s homeless find a place of their own, can you consider a gift beyond what you would normally do? Believe me, I don’t ask because I want to. I ask because I must.

Please know how very grateful we are for anything you can do to help us in our mission. Probably not as grateful as a homeless person when they move off of the streets into a place of their own – but almost!

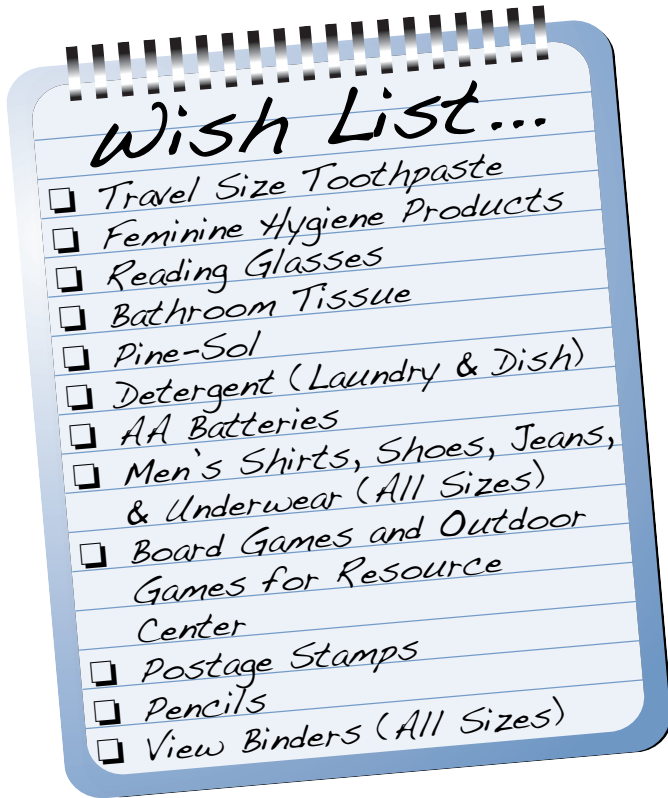
Sincerely,

Ginny Weatherstone
Chief Executive Officer



Participating Agency

Ending Homelessness – One Person at a Time



The Bush Family Refuge Needs Your Help!

With the extremely hot temperatures through the month of June, the Bush Family Refuge has seen record numbers of individuals and families requesting help with their utility bills. Most of these families are on the brink of becoming homeless, and our goal is to prevent that from happening.

The Bush Family Refuge has a program to provide Direct Assistance (primarily for utilities and rent) to individuals and families in dire need. Those requesting assistance are interviewed by trained and experienced volunteers who verify the situation. All requests are approved by the Refuge Director and vouchers, not cash, are issued to the utility company or landlord.

You can help by making a donation to the Bush Family Refuge for Direct Assistance. These donations will be applied to the payment of utility bills and rent for families and individuals desperate for help. For



Fred Stephens, Refuge Volunteer (right) talks with a gentleman in need of Direct Assistance

more information on the Bush Family Refuge, please call 524-3926 or visit our website at www.vmcinc.org. Thank you for caring.

Lessons Learned

By Ginny Weatherstone

Kesha Huffstettler would want you to know that she comes from a good family. It is not her parents' fault that she became homeless. "I chose the road I took," she says. "Every little bad choice I made brought me down." And then she acknowledges that she is a recovering addict and that opiates were her drug of choice.

Kesha graduated from Seymour High School with honors in 2000. The future looked bright for her; she had been accepted into college to study marine biology. It was then that she became involved "with a boy and with drugs." Kesha became pregnant and gave birth in 2003. She left her boyfriend and returned to closer proximity to her mother. And while Kesha had not used drugs when she was pregnant, she became heavily involved after her daughter's birth. The prescription drugs she craved were \$80 a pill. "I worked. I always worked. I was a server in a restaurant and drugs were plentiful in that atmosphere."

In 2006, Kesha was married but she hid her habit from her new husband. When he found out, he wanted her to enter a rehabilitation program but she refused. "I wasn't ready," she says. Eventually her drug usage led to a divorce in 2008. With her drug habit out of control, Kesha's mother took her daughter. "I couldn't be there for her emotionally because of the drugs. I was falling apart. By the spring of 2009, I had lost everything – my apartment, my car, my phone, everything."

By February of this year, Kesha was on the streets. She had previously judged homeless people and found them lacking. Now she was one. "When I found out what people would expect of me to get the drugs I needed, I was horrified. I was no longer any better than anyone else."

On March 1, Kesha walked through the doors of VMC. On March 15, she enjoyed her first "clean" day. How has she done it? "God," Kesha answers. She participated in the VMC Alcohol and Drug Abuse class for six weeks and found it helpful. "And Wokie," Kesha adds, "has been a huge part of my recovery."

Wokie Massaquoi-Wicks is Kesha's Case Manager. You don't have to be around them long to realize that their bond



*Kesha Huffstettler (left) and
Case Manager, Wokie Massaquoi-Wicks (right)*

is very real. "Wokie has been a female role model and that has been a big deal to me. I'd always turned to men because I could manipulate them, get drugs from them. Wokie holds me accountable and that had never happened before." Kesha tells me that she is remaining clean; she doesn't want to let Wokie – and herself – down.

With Wokie's help, Kesha moved into the YWCA. She has a private room now. It is a first step. She is job hunting and hopes to move into a larger room. And then she will move into a place of her own. Eventually, Kesha hopes to go back to school.

What has Kesha learned? "I've learned to forgive myself, for one thing. I've learned that I am responsible for the decisions I make. I've learned that I can't blame anyone else for those decisions. I've learned that you can't put a price on happiness because I'm happier now in my small room than I ever was in a more luxurious place."

"And one more thing," Kesha adds as she smiles at Wokie and takes her hand. "I've learned humility – and gratitude."



From the Director's Desk

Excitement is building! The other day, our Designer Extraordinaire, Carol Nooe, stopped by with color samples to be used in Minvilla Manor. I can see progress daily as I walk through the building. Some of the floor tile is

down. Many of the apartments are painted. Even a person of limited imagination such as myself can tell that it will be beautiful when it is completed. And more importantly, it will be HOME.

At this time of year, it seems as though I always have the experience of coming home. Even if I have traveled on vacation, it is always so good to turn that last corner and see our home. It is good to sleep in my own bed. It's good to fix a pot of tea in my own kitchen. It is the kind of good feeling that everyone should have.

Minvilla Manor will be placed in service in October of this year, good Lord willin' and the creek don't rise. We're busy planning the celebration. But we're even busier helping

people make application, thinking about what they will need and about how they want their new life to look. For Knoxville's homeless, these are happy thoughts. They begin to feel that there is real hope for them. And they begin to know that they live in a community that cares.

Minvilla Manor will provide housing for 57 people. While there will be on-site case managers, there will be many opportunities for volunteers to be a part of this good endeavor. We hope to offer numerous activities in the evening and we would love to have you be part of that. Can you call bingo? Can you initiate a group conversation about a movie you've just watched together? We have a role for you. Can you flip burgers on the grill? We'll have a great outdoor space for residents and guests and we'd love for you to be part of that. Can you teach microwave cooking? Can you cut hair or give manicures?

There's an old saying that it takes a village to raise a child. I know this for sure; it takes a village to bring Knoxville's homeless HOME.

Volunteer Spotlight

In an effort to get to know the community we serve a bit better, members of the Knoxville Symphony Orchestra served lunch to our neighbors on May 3rd. For most of the KSO volunteers this was a first time experience engaging with Knoxville's homeless. The experience was so moving that they all agreed to come back and serve again. Maestro Lucas Richman said he was humbled and honored to participate.

Others appreciated the opportunity to learn more about the Volunteer Ministry Center and the programs offered to help the homeless.



KSO volunteers serving lunch

VMC 5K RACE AND FUN WALK



Are You Ready to Run?

Or walk with a stroller and your four-legged furry friend? The VMC 5K Race and Fun Walk will be here before you know it and this year's race will be the best yet! We have a fall date and a new venue with lots of fun activities including an inflatable obstacle course for the Kid's Fun Run. This year's theme is "It's a Family Affair" and Charlie Daniel captures it perfectly in his drawing featured on the race t-shirts. There are great prizes for the race winners and for pledge raising; and if \$30,000 is raised in pledges, Ginny Weatherstone will kiss a pig! So get the whole family together and plan on participating in our race on October 2, 2010, at 9:00 am at the World's Fair Park Festival Lawn. For additional information on race registration, sponsorships, or raising pledges, please call Karol Harper at 524-3926 or visit our website at www.vmcinc.org.

The First Tomato

Lost Coins – Share the Joy

Have you ever lost something and looked and looked until you found it? Do you recall the joy you felt when it was no longer lost? What if you captured the joy of finding that lost item and then gave that item away? Would your joy be greater because you gave away something that was of value to you? You can experience that joy by participating in our Lost Coins program. All of those coins that were lost and now found can be put in a jar or box and collected for VMC. What an easy and meaningful way for persons of all ages, especially children, to support the many programs here at VMC. If you are interested in this easy project for your children's group, Sunday school class, church or business, please contact Mary Beth Ramey at 524-3926.



It's here – the first tomato from our brand new herb and vegetable gardens. Thanks to B&W Y-12 and All Souls Church, money, materials, and labor were supplied to build VMC's first ever vegetable and herb gardens. The benefits are many: VMC members learn how to plant and tend to a garden, they plan meals using their home grown veggies and herbs, they learn to save money by planting versus buying, and they reap the satisfaction of transforming a seed into an edible delicacy. This is just one more way VMC is preparing homeless neighbors for a home of their own.

The Journey Home

Beads and Earrings Offer Hope

Did you know that a cottage industry has been started at VMC for the women in our program? Every week the ladies gather to hand roll beads and attach them to sterling silver ear wires creating unique and attractive earrings which are then sold. The proceeds from the sales of the earrings cover the cost of materials and a percentage is put in an account for the women which they can access at the time they move into housing to purchase new items for their new homes. The program has many benefits. It teaches an art, it develops self-esteem, it promotes creativity, and it instills hope in a better life. If you would like more information on our program or would like to purchase some of the earrings, please call 524-3926.



The Torch Was Carried

Inspiring, humbling, and magnificent describes the music and the message of our 2010 Carry the Torch event. The Knoxville Symphony Orchestra, under the direction of Maestro Lucas Richman, our 2010 Honorary Chair, captured our hearts and ears with their music. Steve Lopez shared the story of his relationship with Nathaniel Ayers and how one person can make a difference in another person's life. Neither the book nor the movie came close to describing this unusual yet compelling relationship between the two men.

Issues of mental illness, homelessness, and permanent supportive housing were shared with 980 caring individuals of our community. Steve's message was deliberate and pointed. Mental illness can and does affect so many in our society today. Regardless of talent or wealth, ethnicity, culture, or class, the tentacles of mental illness reach out beyond the norm and touch the most unsuspecting. Neither mental illness nor homelessness are glamorous topics for discussion, but they are issues which must be addressed. We are our brother's and sister's keeper, and it is with dignity and respect for all mankind that we heed the call and support the organizations established to help and



Lucas Richman (right) presents a special arrangement of "Ode to Joy" to Steve Lopez (left)

care for the mentally ill and homeless of our community.

Steve shared how permanent supportive housing works in Los Angeles and other parts of the country, and is the proven method for helping the homeless and the mentally ill move from the streets to a quality life in a place of their own.

It was a powerful message coupled with the inspiring music by the KSO which left a lasting impression on our hearts. We are a caring community. It was evident that day!