

Community Connection

Community Connection is the quarterly newsletter of Metro Social Services

Winter 2012 Edition

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Message from the Director

If there was one word to best describe Metro Social Services during the first half of Fiscal Year 2011/12, it would be change.

Among the most visible changes is of course the resignation of our former board chair, Howard Gentry, who was sworn in as Davidson County's new Criminal Court Clerk in September 2011.

I would like to take this opportunity and once more thank Mr. Gentry for his long service and dedication to Metro Social Services. Under his leadership we have seen many changes through which he has helped shepherd this Department gracefully.

Mr. Gentry was replaced as board chair by Dr. Frank Boehm who has immediately dedicated himself to receiving an inside view of the workings of

Metro Social Services, which you are able to read about in one of the following articles.

We also welcome three new board members— Kristine LaLonde, Marlene Santana Perez and Renard Francois—who were appointed by Mayor Karl Dean within the past six months.

On the program front, we have introduced a new Health & Wellness campaign for our staff, which was launched with a successful Health Fair in June. The momentum was captured with the creation of a committee who focuses on events and positive changes that we as a Department can do to help the well-being of our staff.

With the introduction of our Prepared to Parent! class, we are able to offer a proactive parenting support class to adults in Davidson County. In addition,



Renee Pratt,
Executive Director

this program has given us the opportunity to partner with the Whites Creek Cluster of Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools.

Developing and maintaining strong partnerships with other organizations in our community continues to be a main staple of

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New Board Chair Tours Programs

After serving on the Metro Social Services Board for the past four years, Dr. Frank Boehm became the new chair of the Metro Social Services Board of Commissioners in November 2011.

Soon after taking over the board leadership, he started visiting the different programs within MSS,

saying that after becoming the chair, he felt he had a fair amount of knowledge about the Planning & Coordination Unit, but not about the direct services programs.

“Ninety percent of our activities are in direct services,” he said. “So I decided that it was best to go and visit people who are re-

ceiving our services.”

In November Dr. Boehm started his learning expedition examining MSS' Homemaker Program. First, he and Renee Pratt went to a senior housing tower in Madison.

“I visited with an individual for

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New Board Chair

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one hour, asked questions and came away with a better understanding of how the process works,” he said.

Next, Dr. Boehm went to see a grandmother who takes care of her 12-year-old grandson and spent a couple of hours with people at the Elizabeth Park Senior Citizen Center where he had dinner with them.

In addition to learning about the impact of the Homemaker Program, Dr. Boehm sat down with Clifton Harris, the executive director of the Metropolitan Homelessness Commission, who told him about the complexities of homelessness. Dr. Boehm has also toured Room In The Inn, one of the largest homeless services providers in town.

Dr. Boehm said the time he spent with the different programs allowed him to learn from the provider’s and client’s point of view as well as from executive director Renee Pratt who talked to him about the budgetary impact of each program.

“I came away really understanding what Metro Social Services does,” he said, explaining that rather than hearing about the program from a distance while sitting on the board, he feels he now has a better, first-hand perspective.

Dr. Boehm said that until he made the personal visits, he didn’t realize how many people could use homemaker assistance.

“The need is so great and we keep getting budget cuts,” he said.

Another issue that stood out to him was the intricate complexity of the homelessness situation in Nashville.

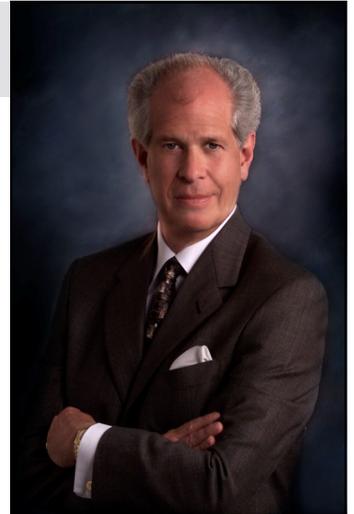
“Homelessness is an enormous undertaking, and it heavily involves economic and workforce opportunities.”

While all client stories were personal, what especially touched him was the story of the grandmother with her 12-year-old grandson.

“The grandson is really doing well,” Dr. Boehm said. “She told me that if it wasn’t for Metro Social Services, her grandson probably would now be in foster care.

“I realized what a thin thread she and her grandson were living on,” he continued. “Her house was neat and warm and it was obvious to me that we are doing a good thing in supporting her.”

Dr. Boehm said he will encourage all board members to go on some visits, even though he won’t ask them to do it at the level of intensity that he plans to continue his visits to be.



Dr. Frank Boehm,
Board Chair

In addition, Dr. Boehm is assigning each board member to take on one program and become an expert about the issues concerning that program. This way, he hopes, board members will become advocates for that aspect of Metro Social Services.

“We spend a lot of time in our board meetings asking questions,” he said. “And that is good, but we need to really know a little more about the services we provide.”

That’s why Dr. Boehm plans to get the Board more involved at a grander level to help advocate for resources that support direct services programs.

The need is certainly out there and growing, Dr. Boehm said, pointing to homelessness, poverty and the need for food.

“We spend a lot of time in our board meetings asking questions and that is good. But we need to really know a little more about the services we provide.”

*Dr. Frank Boehm, MSS
Board Chair*

Members of the MSS Board of Commissioners are appointed by the Mayor.

Terms are staggered and board members are usually appointed to serve for three to five years, but can be reappointed to additional terms.

If a member leaves early, the Mayor is to appoint a replacement to fulfill the term.

Board Members and their Terms:

| | | |
|-----------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| Dr. Frank Boehm, chair | — | Oct. 20, 2008 through April 3, 2014 |
| Bill Sinclair | — | April 20, 2010 through April 3, 2015 |
| Mary Rolando | — | April 21, 2009 through April 3, 2015 |
| Bishop George W. Price, Jr. | — | Oct. 20, 2008 through April 2, 2014 |
| Marlen Santana Perez | — | July 5, 2011 through April 3, 2016 |
| Renard Francois | — | Oct. 19, 2011 through July 20, 2014 |
| Kristine LaLonde | — | Oct. 19, 2011 through April 3, 2016 |

Health & Wellness Program

At the beginning of 2011, Yuri Hancock, the Human Resources Manager for Metro Social Services, and Renee Pratt started talking about the launch of a wellness initiative for staff.

“Renee and I were just looking at some of the issues we’re facing with staff in terms of health,” Ms. Hancock said. “We’re seeing a lot of staff going out on leave for various reasons. The goal was to examine what we could do to increase staff’s awareness as it relates to their health and well-being.”

Consequently the Health & Wellness Initiative officially was launched with a health fair for staff in June.

“The health fair was very successful,” Ms. Hancock said. “We got a lot of feedback from staff. They especially enjoyed the health screenings we were able to provide.”

To continue the momentum gained in June, Ms. Hancock pulled together a Health & Wellness Committee consisting of seven MSS staff members representing different units within the Department.

“This is the first time since I have been here that we have actually developed such a committee,” Ms. Hancock said. “My hope is that we can rotate staff in the future to give everyone an opportunity to participate on the committee, but we want to keep it around seven to eight individuals.”

The purpose of the Health & Wellness Committee is to increase the awareness of staff.

“We want to actually make



health & wellness a part of Social Services’ culture and not just a one-time event that we do and then just kind of throw it on the shelf.”

Since inception of the committee, staff has had the opportunity to participate in several brown bag lunches where outside individuals are invited to come and speak about their area of expertise such as nutrition, exercise, and stress reduction – anything to address the overall wellbeing of the person.

On Sept. 30, 2011, Metro Social Services held a staff retreat called Caring for Caregivers, which was sponsored by the Baptist Healing Trust and organized by the Health & Wellness Committee.

Ms. Hancock said Caring for Caregivers focused on resources and information to help staff take care of themselves.

“We here at Social Services are always doing so much for other people and are the caretakers for others that we sometimes forget to take care of ourselves,” she said.

An additional resource Ms. Hancock implemented is the email distribution of The Corporate Wellness Alert, an online newsletter containing information that staff can use to make healthy choices such as tips on how to better sleep, how to improve nutrition and how to start an exercise routine – various tidbits that are easy to use in day-to-day life.

The Health & Wellness Committee also tried to introduce the Weight Watchers at Work program. Unfortunately there has not been enough participation at this time.

However, the committee is open to considering the opportunity again should staff interest increase.

“People are excited right now,” Ms. Hancock said. “They appreciate the fact that we offer something that allows them to focus on themselves because, once again, staff tend to do and care so much for other people that they easily forget about their own well-being.”

Benefits of a Healthy Diet

Eating a diet high in fruits and vegetables as an overall healthy diet may...

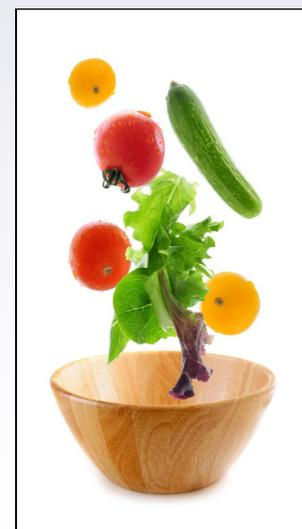
...reduce risk for stroke and other cardiovascular diseases.

...reduce risk for type 2 diabetes.

...protect against certain cancers, such as mouth, stomach, and colon-rectum cancer.

...reduce the risk of coronary artery disease.

...help decrease bone loss and reduce the risk of developing kidney stones.



Prepared to Parent!

Prepared to Parent! is a new program that Metro Social Services social worker Corliss F. Nelson started for the Department in September.

“We will be in our third series of classes,” Mr. Nelson said, adding that each series contains six classes. The next sessions will start in late January.

Classes are open to 12-15 individuals and are aimed at parents of teenagers, even though parents of all age groups are welcome.

The goal of the PTP program is to raise awareness of the primary responsibilities and skills needed for effective parenting.

In addition to offering classes at Metro Social Services, Mr.

Nelson has forged a partnership with Metro Nashville Public School’s Whites Creek



Cluster, where a session started on Jan. 23 targeting parents from that area.

PTP classes are specifically helpful for parents dealing with truancy issues since they can serve as a pretrial diversion.

“Parents can avoid court by participating and completing the PTP classes,” Mr. Nelson said.

The cost for PTP is based on a sliding scale according to income. The upfront minimum

cost is \$21, which can go to \$75. Low-income families will receive a rebate of a portion of the cost upon completion of the program. The size of the rebate also depends on the income level and can be as much as 100%.

So far, feedback has been very positive.

“Parents have been thankful,” Mr. Nelson said, reading aloud one card he received from a parent, “I have enjoyed the classes and would do it again.”

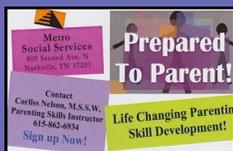
Mr. Nelson said the program involves a pre-test and a post-test to better evaluate how parents feel about their kids at the beginning and the end of a PTP series.

“At this point we do not have statistics on this new program, but similar programs have shown clear success in that parents report having a better relationship with their kids at the end of this course.”

**TO SIGN UP FOR
PTP CLASSES**

CONTACT

**Corliss Nelson
at
615-862-6934**



**FOR MORE
INFORMATION
VISIT**

**preparedtoparent.org
or
Preparedtopar-
ent.blogspot.com**

Prepared to Parent Program Content:

1. Pre-Test & Taking the Family’s household temperature
2. The Parent’s Job v. the Teen’s Job & Barriers to Becoming Prepared to Parent
3. Teach Your Children & Think, Speak, Behave
4. Teen Relationship Builders/Destroyers/What are Consequences & Organizing Consequences
5. Parent Responsibility Checklist & Setting Up a Household Routine
6. A Community of Social Encouragement – Potential Parenting Pitfalls & Post-test and Graduation

Assisting a Family in Need

Metro Social Services social worker *Angela Schmidt* shares a story of assisting a family in need:

A mom in her early 30s with four children ages 6, 4, 3, and nine months left a Domestic Violence situation in her home state and came to Nashville to stay with a friend. The room-

mate situation was short-lived. Soon, the family was forced to move to the Family Hope Center at the Nashville Rescue Mission.

Mom found a job at Taco Bell. While still living at the Mission, she enrolled the kids at Buena Vista Elementary School.

“We helped her get vouchers to get birth certificates and bus passes to pick them up,” Ms. Schmidt said, adding the mom was highly motivated and immediately followed up with everything to obtain the documents she needed and apply for subsidized housing with MDHA.

**GETTING PEOPLE
HOUSED IS NOT EASY.
IT TAKES 100% FROM
THE SOCIAL WORKER
AND 100% FROM THE
PERSON IN NEED TO
OVERCOME BARRIERS
TO HOUSING.**

Staff Updates

When Judy Hargrove first became involved with Metro Social Services, she was a customer. At that time, her brother who was living with her showed some behavioral problems.

“Richland Village was recommended to me,” she said. “So my brother went and he stayed maybe five months at Richland Village and I was his guardian.”

She said she came every week to check on her brother’s progress and learn how to prepare for his homecoming.

“That’s how I first became involved with Richland Village and grew to love the place,” she said. “And then a few years down the line, not many, I was trying to change jobs and saw a job [opening] for working at Richland Village.”

She applied and was hired as a group care worker, which involved her staying in the cottages working with teens.

After one year, Ms. Hargrove became a supervisor. Over the years, Ms. Hargrove and her husband became known as the Santa Clauses over the holidays. She said he was perfect for the role of Santa Clause with his full white beard, so it was only natural for her to play Mrs. Clause during the holidays.

She stayed with Richland Village for 27 years until the facility, which was located in the Sylvan Park area, was closed and Ms. Hargrove moved to Metro Social Services’ main office in Downtown Nashville.

“Judy is one of the stellar examples of what Metro Social Services has to offer to its clients,”

MSS Executive Director Renee Pratt said. “She has always been focused on customer service and the needs of the people around her. She is a leader and a hard worker we will miss dearly.”

Ms. Hargrove has been working for Metro Social Services for 34.5 years.

“I just am so thankful to Metro Social Services because through most of the 34 years [I have seen] lots and lots of ups, but there have also been many downturns when people were losing their homes, their cars and not having enough to eat and I’m just thankful,” Ms.

Hargrove said. “Now with retiring, I have a nice retirement package and I will continue for the rest of my life being thankful to Social Services.”



Renee Pratt, Judy Hargrove and Demitria Vaughn at Ms. Hargrove’s retirement party

Renee Pratt together with the Board of Commissioners and MSS Staff thanks



Sonny Hicks for his 35 years of service and wishes him all the best in his retirement.

IN OTHER STAFF ANNOUNCEMENTS

We welcome our new employees:

- Maria Warrick—Homemaker
- Genie Deckard—Homemaker
- Mary Simmons—Homemaker
- Sharonda Thompson—Nutrition Site Coordinator

Congratulations to Angela Winters on the arrival of her baby girl Melody.

Metropolitan Homelessness Commission Move to Metro Social Services

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Project Homeless Connect will be held on March 28, 2012. 500 volunteers are needed to help escort hundreds of guests affected by homelessness through the event. To sign up, email your contact information to PHCNashville@hotmail.com

The Run for the Homeless, a 5K walk/run in Downtown Nashville will be held on May 12, 2012.

Visit thekeyalliance.org for details.

To submit your events to our Community Calendar, email your information to jtackett@thekeyalliance.org

CONTACT:

MHC—862-6401

MSS Homeless Services—
880-2526.

The Metropolitan Homelessness Commission moved back to Metro Social Services at the beginning of the current fiscal year.

Clifton Harris, executive director of the Metropolitan Homelessness Commission, said the Commission always knew that moving to the Metropolitan Development and Housing Agency (MDHA) was only a temporary solution.

“The reason the Commission moved to MDHA in the first place was because we could not raise dollars from the private sector under Metro government,” Harris said. “So it was decided to move the Commission, create private fundraising capacity and then find a permanent home.”

The Metropolitan Homelessness Commission is Metro’s coordination and planning entity that brings advocates, nonprofit organizations, for-profit business leaders, government agencies, and the general public together to end homelessness in Nashville.

While at MDHA, the Homelessness Commission formed a nonprofit organization called The Key Alliance. The Key Alliance is a 501(c)3 and is a

separate fiscal entity administered by its own board.

It works in close partnership with the Metropolitan Homelessness Commission and helps bring the private sector to the table in support of the city’s Ten Year Plan, which aims to end chronic homelessness and reduce overall homelessness.

“Now that we are able to receive private dollars that go directly to the programs we support through our partnership with The Key Alliance, we were able to transition back to Metro Social Services,” Harris said, adding MSS is the permanent home for the Commission.

HIGHLIGHTS

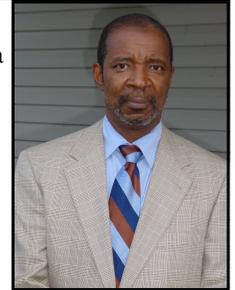
The Metropolitan Homelessness Commission developed Nashville’s Housing First program, which through a contract with Eckman/Freeman and Associates provides housing and case management to some of the most vulnerable homeless individuals in Nashville.

The Commission partnered with Park Center to create an SSI/SSDI outreach program in 2006. The program now is recognized at the state and

national levels as a best practice initiative for getting homeless individuals in-

come through the Social Security Administration. The city’s largest direct service provider event, Project Homeless Connect Nashville, was launched by the Metropolitan Homelessness Commission in 2008. Project Homeless Connect is an annual one-day event that brings more than 70 service providers together in one location and offers services to about 1,500 individuals including children who experience homelessness or find themselves on the brink of homelessness. Project Homeless Connect aims to remove barriers to housing and employment.

In addition, the Commission supports the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) as well as the annual homeless count, which is required for the city to receive federal funding. HMIS is currently housed at MDHA.



Clifton Harris

The Difference between MHC and the MSS Homeless Services Unit:

The Metropolitan Homelessness Commission (MHC) was created in 2005 with the task to implement Nashville’s Ten Year Plan to end Homelessness (the plan can be reviewed at www.nashville.gov/ssservices/hc). MHC focuses on creating new housing opportunities to get the most vulnerable chronically homeless individuals off the streets and into permanent housing. MHC does not provide direct services, but contracts with partner agencies to implement solutions to homelessness.

The MSS Homeless Services Unit is a part of the Adult and Family Support Services Unit and directly helps address the needs of homeless individuals and families by providing supportive services and coordinating direct services with partner agencies (see “Assisting A Family in Need” on page 4 of this newsletter).

Education Corner: What is Poverty?

The Webster dictionary defines poverty as “the state of one who lacks a usual or socially acceptable amount of money or material possessions.”

According to the latest U.S. Census Bureau data, 46.2 million people were considered poor in the United States in 2010. That signifies a 15.1% poverty rate, up from 14.3% in 2009.

But what does that really mean?

The United States government defines poverty based on the total income received. In 2011, for example, the poverty rate for a family of four was set at \$22,350 in total annual income.

However, there are two slightly different ways the government measures poverty.

One is the poverty threshold issued by the U.S. Census Bureau, which looks at poverty as a lack of goods and services that are taken granted by members of mainstream society. The poverty threshold is used for statistical purposes.

The second is poverty guidelines, which are established by the Department of Health and Human Services and are a simplified version of the poverty threshold. The poverty guidelines determine eligibility requirements for certain federal assistance programs.

Metro Social Services’ Planning and Coordination Unit is about

to release its third annual Community Needs Evaluation update.

Key findings from last year included:

- Davidson County’s poverty rate for all people increased from 13.0% in 2000 to 16.9% in 2009;
- During the same time period, the poverty rate for persons under the age of 18 increased from 19.1% to 27.3%;
- 28,599 families had incomes of less than \$25,000 in 2009.

To read more local poverty statistics and findings, visit www.nashville.gov/sservices.

Key differences between the poverty guidelines and the poverty threshold are explained at <http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/faq.shtml#differences>

THE COMMUNITY NEEDS EVALUATION UPDATE IS AVAILABLE AT www.nashville.gov/sservices

Fresh Start, Thanksgiving and Christmas



Metro Social Services provided assistance to the following number of children and families at three annual events (Fresh Start, the Mayor’s First Day celebration at the Bridgestone Arena in August; Thanksgiving Turkey giveaway in November; and the Christmas Basket giveaway in December). All three events are collaborative efforts with community partners.

*Fresh Start: 190 children; 86 families
Thanksgiving: 700 families
Christmas: 286 children; 120 families*





Metro Social Services
800 Second Ave. North
Nashville, TN 37201
(615) 862-6400

Board meeting:
Every 4th Wednesday of the
month at the address above.

Contact Numbers of Metro Social Services

Administrative Offices
(615) 862-6400

Adult and Family Support Services
(615) 862-6432

Information and Referral
(615) 862-6458

Brief Counseling
(615) 862-6432

Adult Homemaker Services
(615) 862-6480

Senior Nutrition Services
(615) 880-2292

Burial Assistance
(615) 862-6458

Relative Caregiver Assistance
(615) 862-6432

Homeless Services
(615) 880-2526

Planning and Coordination
(615) 862-6419

The best number to call to find out about services available through MSS and elsewhere in the Nashville community is (615) 862-6458.

www.nashville.gov/sservices

Assist A Family in Need (from page 4)

After about a month, she received the news that she was approved for public housing. She moved into Cheatham Place in October. "We were able to get her the deposits through the Metro Action Commission," Ms. Schmidt said. "We also assisted her in trying to find beds, household items and the things necessary for moving in."

Ms. Schmidt continues to be the family's case manager. The mom meanwhile has lost her job, "so we tried to help find her additional funds for her month's rent."

MSS helped her with assistance for Christmas for her children. "We're still in the process of trying to help her find a sofa and a chair and some furniture."

While MSS found a bed for the mom and twin beds and a crib for the kids, the living room is still empty.

"At this point, her rent is \$80," Ms. Schmidt said. "I believe she is getting some unemployment, but it is barely enough to pay the rent. She is looking for another job. It is just hard with the four kids."

While child care is provided through DHS, the mom is not flexible with shift hours. She has to find work during the child care hours.

"We work with lots of families," Ms. Schmidt said, adding if individuals do not have any income, it is nearly impossible to help. It also takes 100% from the case manager as well as from the individuals and families to do their part.

However, if a family has past-due balances, they are often ineligible for subsidized government housing. In addition, felonies are major barriers to housing and employment. What often happens is that when after three

or four months a crisis occurs, the families are in danger of losing their housing. That's when MSS social workers reach out to the Rooftop program to help people manage that first crisis.

So far, the mom with her four children has been a success story (meaning she is still in housing), but only because she is willing to do everything in her power to provide a home for her four children.

Ms. Schmidt said it was also important not to forget about the little things like pots and pans that can go a long way to help establish a household.

MSS social workers need to be creative and innovative to assist their clients. However, she reiterates that without a source of income, it is nearly impossible to end with a success story.

Message from Director

continued from front page

the work of Metro Social Services as seen in our collaborations on the Mayor's Fresh Start festival in August as well as our Thanksgiving and Christmas giveaways.

Internally, we also welcomed the addition of the Metropolitan Homelessness Commission, which moved in July from the Metropolitan Development and Housing

Agency (MDHA) back to Metro Social Services.

One last, yet very important, change I would like to mention is the impact that the baby boom retirements will have on our Department. We already said goodbye to several key staff members who have served Davidson County and its residents under Metro Social Services for many, many years. I cannot sufficiently express

my gratitude and appreciation to each one of them.

Change is not always easy to accept, but it generally shows growth.

As we move forward in this new year of 2012, I am positive we will continue to grow, improve and strengthen as an organization that is dedicated to serving some of the most vulnerable populations in our community.