

# Community Connection

## Summer 2013

### RIDE 2 THRIVE

Ride 2 Thrive, a new community event organized by MSS, was held on April 20 at Hartman Park, which offered free health screenings and a lot of family fun.

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## 2012 Community Needs Evaluation

Metro Social Services (MSS) presented its 2012 Community Needs Evaluation Update at an event called Poverty in Nashville at Lipscomb University on March 20. Approximately 100 people gathered to learn more about the fourth annual report produced by MSS' Planning & Coordination Unit. A second event was held on May 3 at Looby Center with about 65 additional participants.

The report provides data and descriptive information about existing and projected unmet social service needs in Davidson County. Specifically, the Community Needs Evaluation provides information about the following topics:

- Food and Nutrition;
- Health and Human Development;
- Housing and Neighborhoods;
- Long-Term Services and Supports; and
- Workforce and Economic Opportunity.

The evaluation includes information about the importance of using

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A new community campaign called *How's Nashville* launched by the Metropolitan Homelessness Commission is gaining traction.



# Message from the Executive Director

It is once again time to reflect on the past year as we enter into a new fiscal year. Metro Social Services has seen an increase in demand for services, an observation that was validated by the 2012 Community Needs Evaluations.

Poverty continues to increase rapidly around the country including in Davidson County where it reached 19.3% in 2011, higher than the national poverty rate of 15.9% and Tennessee's poverty rate of 18.3%.

In Davidson County, more than 95,600 households paid over 30% of their income on housing expenses. Consequently these families often could not meet their basic needs such as food and medical costs. They also faced an increased risk of eviction, foreclosure and homelessness.

When looking at the Metro Nashville Public Schools data, during fiscal year 2011-2012, about 54,000 students (72.8%) participated in the free or

reduced lunch program. In comparison, 54.5% of students statewide receive free or reduced lunches.

With all this data, it is no surprise that Metro Social Services continued to serve large numbers of people. MSS staff was able to:

- Serve 183,522 meals to over 10,000 senior citizens;
- Provide 117 burials and 38 cremations;
- Place 65 families in housing;
- Prevent 355 families from being evicted;
- Provide 192 emergency food boxes; and
- Serve 2,244 new and existing customers through the Family Support Program.

These statistics do not include the countless hours of case



Renée Pratt  
Executive Director

management provided by our incredible social workers on staff who are attentive to the various needs of our customers.

Moving forward, Metro Social Services is dedicated to continue our community collaborations and work toward assisting Davidson County residents. In the coming year we plan to expand our Nutrition Program

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## Luz Belleza-Binns Honored ...

MSS Social Worker, Luz Belleza-Binns, was recognized as the Most Influential Latina in Nashville.

The contest was sponsored by ComunicarteUSA.com, a media platform that provides information from the immigrant perspective in Tennessee.

Ms. Belleza-Binns won top recognition from the community for her social engagement and dedication to help families obtain appropriate educational, cultural and life skills. She serves on multiple boards in the city and currently holds the chairmanship of the Latinos En Accion professional network.

Luz Belleza-Binns was born in Lima, Peru, and moved to the U.S. in 1984. She holds a B.A. in Business Administration and Foreign Language Education and is a certified medical interpreter and a certified mental health interpreter. This fall, Ms. Belleza-Binns is planning to pursue her Master of Science in Public Service Management through Cumberland University. She has been with Metro Social Services since 2003.

# Ride 2 Thrive: Helping Families Thrive

Ride 2 Thrive was a free community event organized by Metro Social Services and held on Saturday, April 20, 2013, at Hartman Park in North Nashville. The event provided a wealth of resources and information including free food, health screenings (vision, hearing, clinical breast exams, blood glucose, glaucoma) and fun for the entire family. About 1,000 individuals and families took advantage of the event.



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evidence-based practices and gives examples of best practices in each issue area.

While Nashville has been praised in the past few years for its business climate, culture, and tourist destination, there are still significant disparities in the quality of life of Davidson County residents. The opening pages of the Community Needs Evaluation discuss the situation of Davidson County in terms of poverty, citing data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey:

- The median income in Davidson County dropped from \$50,164 in 2007 to \$43,556 in 2011.
- During 2011, the poverty rate for all people in Davidson County was 19.3% and was higher than the U.S. poverty rate of 15.9%. Tennessee’s poverty rate was 18.3%.
- The poverty rate for Davidson County residents under the age of 18 was 30.5% in 2011.

But not everything was bad news. Davidson County achieved recent improvements in the employment area. After reaching an unemployment rate of 8.9% in 2009 and 2010, it is now down to 5.7%. In 2012, nearly 20,000 more people were employed than in 2009, at the height of the recession.

“The Community Needs Evaluation is becoming more and more important for the community,” Dr. Frank Boehm, chair of the Metro Social Services Board of Commissioners, said. “I hope we continue to do it annually. You cannot buy information like that and interest in it from local leaders is increasing.”

The document is based on primary data from grassroots community surveys, 2-1-1 data and other local sources and utilizes secondary data from the U.S. Census Bureau and other federal and state agencies. It maps out poverty rates according to Council Districts and breaks down data according to demographics in each issue area.

*The full report can be viewed online at [www.nashville.gov/social-services](http://www.nashville.gov/social-services).*

*Click on Planning & Coordination, then on Community Needs.*

# Board Update



Krissy Kirkwood, the owner of Kirkwood Property Group, and the Rev. William R. Harris, Sr., pastor of the Galilee Missionary Baptist Church of Nashville, were appointed by Mayor Karl Dean to the Metro Social Services Board of Commissioners in late 2012.

Metro Social Services welcomes the two new board members who replace Marlen Santana Perez and Bishop George W. Prize, Jr.

## Director’s Message continued from page 2

in Madison. We also will continue our new Ride 2 Thrive event that brings together community service providers for a day of free health screenings and other services.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank our Board of Commissioners for their service. Their continued guidance helps us keep our focus on the needs in our community. At this point, I would especially like to acknowledge and thank our Board Chair, Dr. Frank Boehm. This will be his last year on the Commission, and his stepping down will be a great loss to us.

Commissioner Boehm’s unwavering support for our department is evident by the commitment he has made over the last five years to help us reach and identify goals that will result in the uplifting of our community.

## After 15-Year Search, Nashville Mom Finds Son in Pauper's Grave

*The Tennessean gave us permission to reprint excerpts of the following article written by reporter Brian Haas and published on Aug. 3, 2013. A special reports page offers additional coverage at [www.tennessean.com/specialreports](http://www.tennessean.com/specialreports).*

In a graveyard filled with those who died with no money and sometimes no family, he died with even less.

His gravestone simply read, "John (19) Doe."

He was the 19th unidentified man buried in the Bordeaux Cemetery. He lies in plot #555, a grave overlooking the Whites Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant. And around him lie 1,001 others who died penniless and, in some cases, unmourned.

They're just a few of those buried in Nashville's paupers' graves. And the city says the numbers have been growing.

Names and dates of most of the 10,000 buried in Nashville's paupers' graves in cemeteries throughout the city are most likely lost forever.

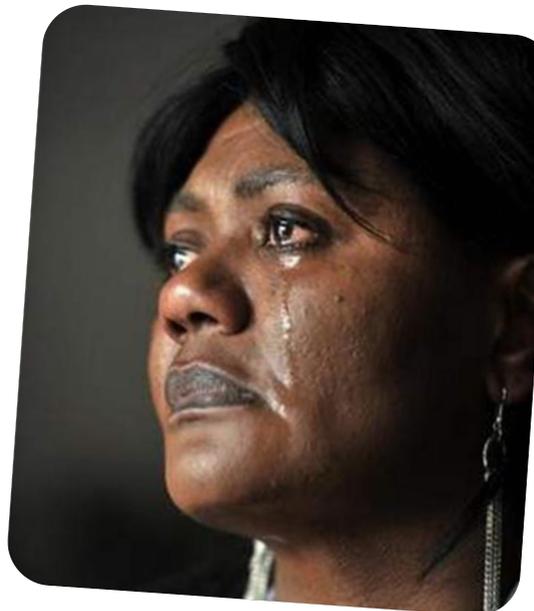
Among those who died penniless this year: a country music writer who kept Johnny Cash's number in his Rolodex, the mother of a disabled adult daughter who cannot care for herself and a man whose death was mourned only by the social workers who helped him at the end of his life.

"No telling how many stories are in those graves," said Sylvia Nolan, a lifelong Nashville resident.

One of them, she just found out in March, is her son. His story spans 15 years of heartache, loss and mystery — one in which the answers lay just 3 miles away from her home in an anonymous grave.

One where a police mistake in 1998 may have needlessly prolonged her pain.

He was a reserved boy who found release from a hard life in North Nashville in sports. He was a budding track star, nicknamed "Flagpole" because of his skinny frame, who wowed coaches at Pearl-Cohn High School with his speed. He was a young man



**Sylvia Nolan**

Photo Courtesy of The Tennessean, copyright 2013. Photographer: Dipty Vaidya

whose mental illness may have led him to the end of his short, tragic life, in a burnt, rolled-up carpet on a dead-end street.

When his body was found, nobody knew who he was. He was just "John (19) Doe."

Today, thanks to DNA testing, we know his name was LeRyan Nicholson.

"I've been looking for him and I don't know. Honest to God, I didn't know. I just prayed. One night I just prayed, it was his birthday ... last year. And I said, 'Lord give me closure because I'm so tired of pain,' " Nolan said. "But I didn't want this kind of closure."

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**"The least of these my brethren"**

Two miles north of where Nolan lives, Carol Wilson unlocks a gate in the 2400 block of 18th Avenue to a 27-acre, fenced-in field of well-mown grass surrounded by tall horse apple and elm trees.

Wilson heads up Nashville’s Indigent Burial Program. She makes sure those in Nashville who die poor or without families are given a respectful burial. The job has demanded more of her time in recent years than ever before.

“This is where it started,” she says looking at the lonely field. “Way back.”

This field is thought to hold the remains of more than 10,000 people going back to at least 1798. But only a handful of grave markers exist in what is now called the Davidson County Cemetery. The few that do, are marked only by a softball-sized chunk of rock with a brass plate denoting the row and plot.

C.2. B.7.

The most visible landmark in the field is a large memorial stone, erected June 11, 1950, by “Christian Friends”.

“In memory of all who sleep here: Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me,” the marker reads.

Today, the cemetery is locked up. You have to make an appointment if you want to visit.

No one quite knows why, but there’s only one full grave marker there. Wilson walks over to it and pauses.

“Temeka S. Ward, Oct. 24, 1978-Jan. 1, 1979.”

“Only a couple of months,” she says. “I just find it so amazing. A baby, the only marker that is visible.”

The same year little Temeka was taken from her parents, a boy was born to Sylvia Nolan, who lived in the Jo Johnston Avenue area in North Nashville. She was young and didn’t have a lot of money. But she had a big family to help take care of her.

On Oct. 5, 1979, she gave birth to a healthy baby boy. She named him LeRyan. LeRyan Nicholson.

“It was wonderful. It was the best day of my life,” she said. The memory of his birth mad her laugh. “He came right out. He was ready to come home.”

*Continue reading the full story at [www.tennessean.com/specialreports](http://www.tennessean.com/specialreports)*

*Courtesy of The Tennessean, © 2013*

**Metro Social Services’ Burial Program**

Metro’s Indigent Burial Program helps pay for those who die without the means to pay for burial. More than 10,000 people have been buried in Nashville’s paupers’ graves since 1798, more than 1,000 of them since 2006 alone.

**ELIGIBILITY**

- Deceased must have died in Davidson County or been living there when they died.
- Family cannot afford burial.
- Annual income must be less than \$11,160 for a single person, less than \$23,040 for a family of four.

**CONTACT**

Metro’s Indigent Burial Program can be reached at 615-862-6458.

*Courtesy of The Tennessean, © 2013*

## Metropolitan Homelessness Commission Hires New Director, launches Community Campaign

The Metropolitan Homelessness Commission hired Will Connelly as its new director in January and since has launched a community campaign that aims to end chronic homelessness in Nashville in the next four years.

“I believe Nashville can end chronic homelessness,” Connelly said. “To begin with, we need to look at existing resources and streamline our housing placement process.”

Connelly is bringing a laser-sharp focus to his task and has been forging partnerships among service providers, business people, government entities, and faith-based groups.

The new community campaign is called *How's Nashville* and aligns Nashville with a national movement called *100,000 Homes Campaign*, which assists cities such as Nashville with tools to house chronically homeless and vulnerable individuals and families.

“It is easy to get distracted when we want to end homelessness,” he said. “There is so much need and the people affected by homelessness are from very diverse socio-economic backgrounds.”

However, Connelly believes that a focus on moving people who have experienced homelessness for a long time and are medically vulnerable from the streets or shelters into permanent supportive housing will help streamline our local housing placement process for all populations.

The Metropolitan Homelessness Commission serves as the backbone organization of the *How's Nashville* initiative.

“*How's Nashville* is a collaborative effort driven by community partnerships,” Connelly said. “The Homelessness Commission is a planning and

coordinating entity and as such, we manage the campaign for our partners.”

The first task of *How's Nashville* was a Registry Week scheduled for May 28-June 4, 2013.

Volunteers scanned the streets of Nashville in the early morning hours and surveyed homeless individuals to determine whether they are considered medically vulnerable.

By mid-June more than 500 surveys were entered into a database, which created the Vulnerability Index, a housing prioritizing tool based on medical vulnerability. Currently more than 250 people have been identified as medically vulnerable. The partners of the *How's Nashville* Campaign hope that by housing the most vulnerable individuals and families first, Nashville can reduce street deaths. In 2012, more than three dozen homeless people died in our city.

At a public briefing on June 4, *How's Nashville* partners set a goal to house 200 people in the next 100 days and asked for \$1,000 contributions to cover move-in costs. *How's Nashville* received \$36,000 in pledges within 10 minutes.

“Nashville is a great community with generous individuals and organizations,” Connelly said. “The *How's Nashville* campaign is a way for us to show the rest of the country what we, as a city, can do when we come together. I believe Nashville will become a national model.”

Follow the *How's Nashville* campaign online at <http://howsnashville.org>.



Will Connelly  
Director

# Financial Empowerment Center

Metro Social Services is one of the sites selected by the Nashville Financial Empowerment Centers to provide free, professional financial counseling to Davidson County residents.

“We have a financial counselor present on Tuesdays and Thursdays to assist our clients with money management and credit counseling,” MSS Executive Director Renée Pratt said. “Walk-ins are accepted based on appointments and recommendations.

“This is a valuable service,” Pratt said. “As we assist with necessities to help people stay in housing, they receive financial counseling and help with their budget to reduce debt and build assets.”

Nashville received a \$2-million grant from the Cities for Financial Empowerment (CFE) Fund, which is a project of Bloomberg Philanthropies.

The Nashville Financial Empowerment Center is headed by Erik Cole out of the Office of the Mayor. The program works in partnership with United Way of Metropolitan Nashville.



*Sabrina Francis is available at Metro Social Services/Metro Action Commission on Tuesdays and Thursdays, 8 am to 4:30 pm.*

The Financial Empowerment Centers are open to all Nashvillians.

People interested in talking to a professional financial counselor can call the United Way 2-1-1 Helpline to make an appointment at one of multiple locations across the city.

## Metro Social Services

800 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue North, Suite 100  
 Nashville, TN 37201  
 (615) 862-64000

**Board Meeting:**  
**Every fourth Wednesday**  
**of the month at the**  
**address above.**

### Contact Numbers:

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) 862-6494

*The best number to call to find out about services available through MSS and elsewhere in the Nashville community is (615) 862-6458. More information is available online at [www.nashville.gov/social-services](http://www.nashville.gov/social-services)*