

# Community Connection

*Community Connection is the newsletter of Metro Social Services - Fall 2012 Edition*

## Message from the Director

As we move forward in the new fiscal year, record numbers of poverty continue to rise across the nation.

About 15% of the population meets the federal definition of poverty, which compares to a poverty rate of 17.8% in Davidson County.

Nationwide, one in five children live at or below the poverty level. In Davidson County about one in four children grow up in poverty. What is more, we know that 2,495 children were registered as being homeless at one point during the past school year in Nashville's public school system.

These staggering statistics leave me with mixed feelings. The need we see in our office is so big, that it can be overwhelming. Yet, I see the dedication and compassion of our staff that produces life-changing results for individuals and families every day.

Our last-year data ending in June 2012 show that we have made a difference.

We were able to:

- ◆ Serve 195,944 meals to 12,389 seniors and the disabled;
- ◆ Provide 118 burials and 32 cremations;
- ◆ Place 108 families in housing;
- ◆ Provide 9,123 transportation trips to 940 seniors;
- ◆ Serve 2,904 new and existing customers through the MSS Family Support Program; and
- ◆ Provide over 187 food boxes.

These are mere numbers that do not capture the many personal stories of hardship our social workers listen to as desperate



Renee Pratt, Executive Director

families reach out to us for help. They do not show the relationships between a homemaker and a senior, which is often the only lifeline to assist a person to age gracefully in their own home. And they do not reflect the social gatherings and community building that happens around one of our nutrition sites.

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## Community Needs Assessment Update

In February, MSS unveiled the 2011 Community Needs Assessment update.

The annual Community Needs Assessment helps MSS determine trends and best practices of services that the department currently delivers and services that it may possibly deliver in

the future," Executive Director Renee Pratt explained.

Mayor Karl Dean and MSS Board Chair Dr. Frank Boehm were present at an event introducing the updated document to the public.

The needs, service gaps and trends described in previous versions of the Community

Needs Assessment promoted positive results, Mayor Dean said, explaining that through efforts of the government and private sector working together, nine banks in the Nashville community are now offering low-cost banking products for people who have a hard time opening a bank account.

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## Retirements

Three long-term MSS employees retired in April.

**Ruth Lewis Sutton** started out as a receptionist with MSS 33 years and nine months before she retired. She eventually became the administrative assistant to the director during the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Eventually she transferred to the Family Resource Center at Martha O'Bryan Center and remained there for about 10 years. When the Family Resource Center was closed, Ruth moved back to the main office.

Her plans in retirement are to continue her part-time work as an usher at the Schermerhorn Symphony Center. "It gets me out of the house and keeps me busy," she said. "You meet interesting people and at the

same time you're still helping people."

**Sandra Bivens** said her retirement was going to be "just a different phase of life I'm going to. I don't plan to sit down."

She said she'll definitely stay involved and volunteer with the TCSW, the Tennessee Conference on Social Work.

In addition, she plans to pay visits to the Tennessee legislature and follow the legislative process up close and up front.

"I want to know where and how politics and laws are put in place," Sandra said. She also plans to stay connected to her MSS friends.

**Joyce Chandler**, who retired after 23 and a half years, said she got her first job in social work in 1975 after getting a degree in home economics because "they

**"In this line of work it is essential to be honest."**

- Joyce Chandler, retired MSS social worker.

I had this girl come into my office one day. I think she had three children. She lived in an apartment and was about to be evicted from that apartment. Her children were all in school, and she was just sitting at home. And I looked at her and I said, 'Why are you sitting at home when your children are in school?' And she looked at me and she said, 'I don't know.' About a year later, she came back into the office and she said, 'Ms. Chandler, nobody has ever said that to me.' And she had gone and gotten a C&T in medical assistance and is now working every day. - As a social worker, this is the best part.

didn't have a social work major in Texas then." Instead, she put an emphasis of family relations on her degree.

"I think it was a calling," Joyce said, adding she wanted to

work with people.

"I'm going to miss everybody. I thank the administration for giving me the opportunity and allowing me to be me on this job."

**Renée Pratt joins the Metropolitan Homelessness Commission and MHC Staff in thanking Clifton Harris for his long-term service at the Metropolitan Homelessness Commission and wishing him well in his future endeavors.**



### IN OTHER STAFF ANNOUNCEMENTS

**We welcome our new employees:**

**John Hite (March), Laura Boswell (April), Bambi Worden (April), Tojuana Kendall Jordan (April), Allan Johnson (July), Sonya Emerson (July), Vicki Underwood (July), Marie Newsom (August)**

**Congratulations to the following employees on their promotions:**

**Crystal Lee (April)  
Angela Jordan (August)**

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**Congratulations to Yuri Hancock on the arrival of her baby girl Kynadi**

## Education Corner: U.S. Poverty Rate Projected to Increase

As projected by economists, think tanks and academics (nonpartisan and partisan), the poverty rate increased for the U. S. Data from the 2011 American Community Survey was released by the U. S. Census Bureau on September 20, 2012, which showed an increase in poverty from 15.3% in 2010 to 15.9% in 2011.

The Census Bureau identified that change as statistically significant to a 90% confidence level. The poverty rate for Davidson County decreased slightly to 19.3% and is statistically similar to 20.2% rate in 2010.

Peter Edleman, director of the Georgetown Center on Poverty, Inequality and Public Policy describes the factors that contributed to changes in the economy, including long-term globalization, automation and outsourcing, as well as the recent recession. He noted that the lowest U. S. poverty rate in recent U. S. history was 11% in 1973, resulting after the war on poverty that created social welfare programs such as Medicare, Medicaid, etc.

Poverty is closely related to unemployment. The unemployment rate remains high, in addition to the increasing number of people who just stopped looking for

work. Those who are not seeking work are not considered unemployed but are categorized as not in the work force.

In a recent column in the *New York Times*, Edleman noted four factors that are related to continuing poverty:

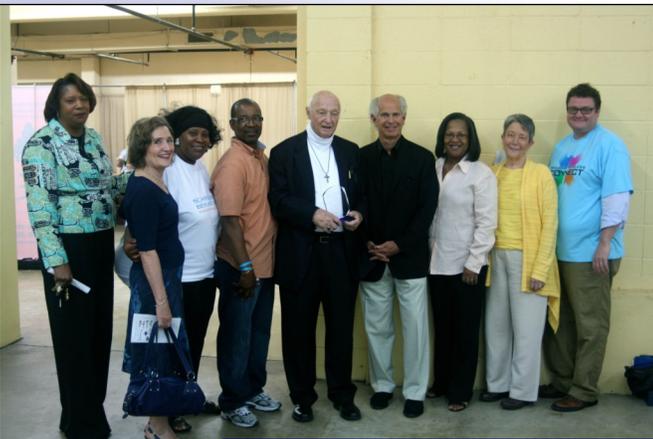
- 1) Many people work at low-wage jobs;
- 2) There is an increasing number of households headed by single parents;
- 3) Lack of cash assistance for low-income mothers and their children; and
- 4) Persistent issues of race and gender result in higher poverty among minorities and families headed by single mothers.

- submitted by Dinah Gregory, Director of Planning and Coordination.

### FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

- <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/us-poverty-track-rise-highest-1960s>  
[www.nytimes.com/2012/07/29/opinion/sunday/why-cant-we-end-poverty-in-america.html?pagewanted=all](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/29/opinion/sunday/why-cant-we-end-poverty-in-america.html?pagewanted=all)

### Project Homeless Connect—March 28, 2012



The Metropolitan Homelessness Commission with support from Metro Social Services held its fourth annual Project Homeless Connect on March 28, 2012.

Thanks to the efforts of 72 service providers and 700 volunteers, we were able to provide 8,300 services to about 800 guests who were homeless or on the brink of homelessness in a six-hour period at the Tennessee State Fairgrounds.

The next Project Homeless Connect is scheduled for February 13, 2013.

### MSS All Staff Retreat—June 29, 2012

Metro Social Services held an all staff retreat on June 29.

Mayor Karl Dean addressed MSS staff thanking everyone for their commitment to the department and the city.

Brenda Hunter McCoy of B. Hunter Associates talked about personal development and growth. The afternoon program was a refresher of the February staff meeting, which focused on financial planning.

All staff members received an appreciation gift from the Metro Social Services Department.





**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](http://www.nashville.gov/sservices)*

## Community Needs Assessment (from page 1)

Dr. Boehm thanked Dinah Gregory, the Director of Planning & Coordination, for her professionalism that ensured a document of such a high quality.

“This particular document carries a significant importance to the city of Nashville,” Dr. Boehm said. “Before we did this, there really wasn’t a document that [contained] what I would call evidence-based social data.”

He said MSS wants to be data-driven and evidence-based in its process. The Community Needs Assessment helps community agencies and government departments understand where the problems are based on annually updated data.

The full document is available at [www.nashville.gov/sservices](http://www.nashville.gov/sservices).



## Message from Director

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Metro Social Services provides a true safety net. Beyond our service programs, we also continue to maintain partnerships in the community, which are visible at our annual events like our Back to School, Thanksgiving Basket and Christmas giveaways.

As communities across the nation struggle with increasing poverty, Metro Social Services’ Planning & Coordination Unit examines where the gaps are in Davidson County, what they are and what we, as a community, can do to alleviate some of the hardship.

Our third annual Community Needs Assessment Evaluation was released this past fiscal year. It is a valuable tool to policy makers and providers serving Davidson County residents.

We continue to carefully examine what our

role as a government agency is in filling gaps of services. Our staff consists of professionals committed to providing the best service to our clients – whether it be through the meals we provide, transportation, family support services, or intake & assessment. This is also evident by the new initiatives we were able to start at MSS to reach out directly to the community.

Among these new initiatives are:  
Ask A Social Worker – a program, where a MSS social worker is at a congregate meal site one day a week to provide resource and referral information. This initiative has proven to be very beneficial to residents in high rises and surrounding communities.  
Social Worker in West Police Precinct – a partnership with the West Police Precinct, where a MSS social worker is on site to assist officers and the public with any social service needs or concerns.

Metro Nashville Public Schools Partnership with Metro Social Services – a partnership with MNPS and their social workers to provide resource referral and case management for parents and families.

Through these initiatives MSS has helped individuals and families maintain self-sufficiency during these hard economic times.

As we move forward, we will carefully examine our direction as it relates to serving the increasing demands of the baby boomer generation. Our programs and services are anchored on data that is researched and localized by our Planning & Coordination Unit.

Metro Social Services continues to provide outcome-oriented assistance to Davidson County residents in need and fulfill our role of alleviating hardship.