



Bethesda Children's Home

THE BETHESDA FOUNDATION FOR CHILDREN
15667 STATE HIGHWAY 86
MEADVILLE, PA 16335



NON PROFIT ORG
US POSTAGE
PAID
ERIE PA
PERMIT NO. 199

The Grapevine is published semi-annually by Bethesda Foundation for Children in support of Bethesda Children's Home/LSS

Bethesda Children's Home Gains National Attention with new Adolescent HealthRhythms Program.



Bethesda Children's Home is garnering national attention with its new Adolescent HealthRHYTHMS drumming protocol and we couldn't be more proud. Our mission may be local, but our vision is far reaching... whenever and wherever we can help kids in need, we'll be there. One of the most effective ways of expanding our circle of caring is to share what we know. And that's exactly what we'll be doing in Orlando, Florida from April 29th to May 1st when we hold our Adolescent HealthRHYTHMS Facilitators Training. Designed as a train the trainer program, this workshop will help mental

health professionals tap into the secrets we've discovered about the healing power of beating drums. Check out our website or call **Maryann Koman** at **814-724-7510 ext. 229** if you would like more information.



Mike Murnock

Bethesda is pleased to announce the addition of Clinical Director, Michael Murnock, NCC, LPC, BCPC, to our team. Mike comes to us with a wealth of clinical and administrative experience in the non-profit arena, specifically in the areas of addictions, juvenile justice, education, refugee as simulation, and community development. Mike is the recipient of several prestigious awards, including those bestowed by the National Alliance of Families and Children, the Pennsylvania Governor's Office, the Erie County Bar Association, and the City and County of Erie. A proud Alumnus of Gannon University, Mike's knowledge of and commitment to the health and vitality of Northwest Pennsylvania is evident in all his accomplishments.

Mike and his wife, Debbie, have three children and five – soon to be six – grandchildren. Welcome, Mike, to the Bethesda family!

THE GRAPEVINE

THE BETHESDA FOUNDATION FOR CHILDREN

VOLUME 11/NUMBER 1

SPRING 2010



BETHESDA CHILDREN'S HOME • LUTHERAN SOCIAL SERVICES

From the Executive Director

I must confess that, in all that we do to help kids, occasionally things become a whirlwind and the sharp focus of the "Big Picture" is replaced with the cloudy image of the day to day busyness that consumes us all here at Bethesda Children's Home. However, this past Christmas was a magical time for everyone at Bethesda to bear witness to wonderful reminders of why we are all so dedicated to our mission...

Thank goodness we didn't have a Board meeting in December; there would have been no room for us to convene. The Christmas gifts for our kids, so lovingly donated by our Lutheran Churches and individual friends, took up every square inch of table, floor, and chair space in our Board Room! I was amazed that,



despite the shadow of these tough economic times, so many opened their hearts in response to the needs of our kids. The importance of these material

gifts may seem a little paradoxical. After all, as a Christian organization, we do our utmost to instill in our clients the value of gifts such as love, generosity, and a listening ear. But let's face it, everybody loves a nice present... and oftentimes presents are the first step on the road to showing a child that we care. Gifts can work as bridges toward trust and understanding, which eventually lead to communication and healing.

For years now, Board members, Ida Right and Vic Kwiatkowski, have served as Santa & Mrs. Claus. They do such a good job that even I'm convinced they hail from the North Pole. It's a delight to watch them chat individually with every kid, asking them what they want for Christmas and what they think is in the package they are about to open in front of their friends. There's no short measure of teasing, either: Ida seems to have a fascination with the history of tattoos, and Vic can't quite wrap his mind around some of the modern hairstyles.

Along with the joviality, there are moments of tenderness, humor, and wisdom that flow from our residents. Using pseudonyms, I'd like to share

a few of these, so that you can gain an understanding of how your generosity impacts our kids in ways you might not imagine..

When asked what he would like for Christmas, Juan, a strapping 6-footer, thought for a while, then - with a gentle, but clearly audible voice - told Santa that he would most like peace, love, and joy in the world. You could have heard a pin drop. Juan also asked if he could take two stuffed animals instead of the customary one that each child selects. Greedy? Hardly... one teddy bear was for his mother, the other for his sister.

When Santa asked Jane what she had written on her Christmas wish list, Jane couldn't remember. Santa was puzzled, how could she forget such an important thing? Without skipping a beat, she turned to Santa and protested, "Why should I remember - that's **your** job!"

Amanda was leaving Bethesda a couple of days after Santa's visit. We were thrilled for her; she had completed the program and was anxious to return home. Like all our clients, she received a chocolate bar with a picture

Continued on Page 2

Table of Contents

From the Executive Director.....Pg 1
Trinity Center.....Pg 2
Ease on Down the Road.....Pg 3
Bethesda Gains National Attention....Pg 4
Mike Murnock.....Pg 4

Board of Directors

Dr. Barry Bittman, *Meadville, PA*
Rev. Steven E. Broome, Vice Chairman,
McMurray, PA
Ms. Rachelle Fritz, *Valencia, PA*
Michael Halliday, *Greenville, PA*
Rev. Robert C. Hawk, Chairman,
Greensburg, PA
Mrs. Joyce S. Kilgore, *McMurray, PA*
Mr. James W. Kirk, Treasurer, *Edinboro, PA*
Mrs. Pamela S. Kusserow, *Allison Park, PA*
Mr. Victor E. Kwiatkowski, *Edinboro, PA*
Mrs. L. Lea Marshall, *Saegertown, PA*
Mr. Paul Moore, *Sharon, PA*
Rev. J. David Mumford, *Erie, PA*
Mrs. Patricia F. Ptasick, *Edinboro, PA*
Mrs. Barbara A. Ravenstahl, *Pittsburgh, PA*
Rev. W. Owen Rhodes, *Erie, PA*
Mrs. Ida M. Right, *Cambridge Springs, PA*
Rev. Philip Scherr, Secretary, *Oil City, PA*

SW Pennsylvania SYNOD Representative

Rev. Sandra J. Kessinger, *Pittsburgh, PA*

NW Pennsylvania SYNOD Representative

Ms. Mary Housholder, *Oil City, PA*

Leadership Team

Mr. Gene Wisinski, *CEO/Executive Director*
Mary Ann Koman, *Administrative Liaison*
Becky Hover, *CFO*
George Trauner, *Operations Director*
Michael Murnock, *Clinical Director*
Karen Crump, *Human Resource Director*
Dave Johnson, *Development Director*

Executive Director

Continued from Page 1

of Santa & Mrs. Claus on the wrapper. As she hugged them both, she held the bar tightly and exclaimed, "Now I have a picture of both of you that I'll keep forever". Needless to say, Amanda received a big glossy picture in the mail.

It was nothing extraordinary, but Mike was thrilled with his gift of T-shirts and underwear. Smiling from ear to ear, Mike reached around his neck, removed his beaded necklace, and placed it over Santa's head. "Here", he said, "You gave me something, Santa, now I'm giving you this in return."

And that's the way it is at Bethesda. All gifts go full circle, from you to a child who learns gratitude and who feels propelled to give to others. Thank you for helping us in our mission to help kids and families... and for helping us to always remember why we do what we do.

As Juan would say, Peace to all.



Gene Wisinski, CEO

trusting in networks of resources and support, which fight against violent crime, drug abuse, and gang activity. At Bethesda, we know an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. However, when it comes to violence prevention, we think the cure is priceless. It's no wonder, then, that Rev. Owen Rhodes, Bethesda Board member and Pastor at New Jerusalem Lutheran Church, has taken such an interest in the Trinity Center. After all, the Trinity Center is in his neighborhood, and its mission is right up his alley!

Rev. Rhodes is a well known figure in the Erie community, and he has a passion for violence prevention, which he shares in his advisory role at our Trinity Center and in his work in the larger community. Rev. Rhodes hosts workshops at various Erie locations, which focus on how community members can empower themselves to be vital forces of change. In addition, he holds weekly group sessions at our Trinity Center with an aim toward strengthening families and building a more peaceable

Continued on Next Page

Trinity Center

Bethesda's Trinity Center has always represented Bethesda's commitment to the Erie community. We are proud that, as well as acting as an independent service agency, the Trinity Center is a long term partner in Erie's Weed and Seed initiative, a comprehensive community development program. Consisting of a large, integrated network of providers, each addressing a unique aspect of community care, the Weed and Seed program focuses on a few target neighborhoods, including Little Italy, where the Trinity Center resides. The Trinity Center's services fall under the "Delinquency Prevention" arm of the Weed and Seed umbrella...but the kids who grace us with their presence don't care about that; in fact, if asked, most would probably guess that "Weed and Seed" is the beginning of a catchy nursery rhyme. And that's just the way we like it. Our kids enjoy coming to Trinity; our educational, social, recreational, and enrichment programs are just plain fun – especially our summer program which serves more than 200 youth over an eleven week period.

At its heart, Little Italy's community development is about building and

Trinity Center

Continued

community. Men meet every 1st and 3rd Tuesday at 7:00 PM; women meet every 2nd and 4th Thursday at 6:00 PM; and families meet every Wednesday at 6:00 PM.

With 30 plus years of experience in this field, Rev. Rhodes has seen people grow from crib to college to productive citizen, and he knows that treating at risk groups with love and respect makes all the difference in the world... especially in their world.

If you'd like to learn more about the programs offered at our Trinity Center, please contact Dave Johnson, Director of Development.

Not one to shy away from his strengths, Markus is quick to boast, "Everybody loves me". Too true. But it's part and parcel of our mission here at Bethesda to love and let go, always maintaining healthy boundaries that allow our clients to grow into independent young adults. And so it was with Markus; when he had finished our program and reached the age of 18, county agencies dictated that it was time to bid him adieu.

Markus, however, did not have a family to return to...and Philadelphia was now a strange and intimidating place. Despite his best efforts to become reintegrated into the community, Markus was at a loss, and he reached out to us one night from a homeless shelter where he was taking refuge.

What to do? Here was a kid in need. We **knew** Markus had potential, **knew** that with a little more help he could create a fulfilling life for himself, **knew** that we couldn't turn our backs on everything that we had accomplished together. Suffice to say, we decided to give Markus temporary shelter at our Independent Living Center, where he's now residing. Without your generous support, this would not have been possible. Since we receive absolutely no county reimbursement for Markus, all his expenses are paid from contributed funds. Thank you!

Markus is now gainfully employed at Ponderosa Steak House and, in his spare time, he helps out at our maintenance department. But transportation was a problem... getting him from A to B took significant effort, especially since he works 2nd shift!

Then providence intervened in the form of an anonymous donor...

Ease on Down the Road

Markus has a voice that matches his personality perfectly – it's gentle, almost serene, which is amazing considering the obstacles he has faced in his young life. Leaving his hometown of Philadelphia at age 15, Markus came to Bethesda about 4 years ago to face the multiple challenges that his upbringing had presented.

Admitted initially to our Emergency Shelter, Markus progressed to our boys residential unit, and then to our Group Home at Morris Road. Along this path, he worked hard at becoming a responsible young man, earning his High School Diploma from Saegertown, and being a semi-permanent fixture in our Maintenance Department, where he was a more than willing accomplice!

Not one to shy away from his strengths, Markus is quick to boast, "Everybody loves me". Too true. But it's part and parcel of our mission here at Bethesda to love and let go, always maintaining healthy boundaries that allow our clients to grow into independent young adults. And so it was with Markus; when he had finished our program and reached the age of 18, county agencies dictated that it was time to bid him adieu.

What to do? Here was a kid in need. We **knew** Markus had potential, **knew** that with a little more help he could create a fulfilling life for himself, **knew** that we couldn't turn our backs on everything that we had accomplished together. Suffice to say, we decided to give Markus temporary shelter at our Independent Living Center, where he's now residing. Without your generous support, this would not have been possible. Since we receive absolutely no county reimbursement for Markus, all his expenses are paid from contributed funds. Thank you!

Markus is now gainfully employed at Ponderosa Steak House and, in his spare time, he helps out at our maintenance department. But transportation was a problem... getting him from A to B took significant effort, especially since he works 2nd shift!

Then providence intervened in the form of an anonymous donor...



This donor had driven by Bethesda regularly...and often wondered what we "did". While sorting through belongings following the passing of his mother, he decided to call us. "Would we like some silk flowers?" Absolutely, the kids love to do crafts. On his arrival, we chatted about Bethesda's mission. Having parented adopted children, he felt a kindred spirit toward Bethesda's kids. As he was leaving, he had an afterthought...his mother's 1989 Honda Civic with only 70,000 miles on it... would we have a use for it?

Beaming from ear to ear, Markus received the keys to his first car a few days ago. A driver's license is not far behind, but the car has already been washed and waxed, several times! And Markus now has one more tool in his arsenal of independence. Before leaving after dropping off the car, our donor rolled down the window of his van...another afterthought. "Markus", he said, "My Dad was from Philadelphia. It's nice to know that his car has gone to a neighbor."

It's amazing what a small world we inhabit. And it's been our experience that this world is full of generous people. They may choose to stay in the background, but the impact that they have on our kids is front and center. Just ask Markus.