Volunteers: Quietly Behind the Scenes

Each year, volunteers contribute over 35,000 hours of service to the Chattanooga Community Kitchen. Some serve a meal, others may hand out soap and shampoo, but all meet critical needs. We simply could not do what we do without volunteers.

Fortunately, we are open seven days a week and daily opportunities exist that are suited for both individuals and groups. Each year, we recognize an individual and group for exceptional service.

John Leavens has volunteered in a variety of roles including valuable leadership as our past board chair. Not only did he guide us through strategic planning and by-law revision, but he could also be found answering phones around the office and lending a helping hand wherever it was needed.

We will miss John as his retirement takes him out of town and into new adventures. However, his influence will continue as a result of his leadership.

Many of our volunteer groups, especially those who serve in the kitchen, have done so faithfully for a number of years. In the fall of 1981, six downtown churches met together to determine how to best meet the needs of a growing population of hungry and homeless individuals in Chattanooga. The next year, these churches came together with a seventh and founded the Community Kitchen. One of those very first churches was First Baptist on Gateway Avenue.

Over the past decades, First Baptist and its members have provided sustained leadership and service. Everett Kerr, one of our founding board members, served faithfully until his passing last year; and Edith Yantis, for whom our kitchen area is named, led a team of servers for nearly three decades! Their lunch crew still serves at least twice a month under the leadership of Delores Markham, and one of their team members, Mary Jayne Allen, serves as our current board chair.

We greatly appreciate our volunteers and welcome anyone who would like to get involved. Signing up through our website is easy. Go to homelesschattanooga.org and click the “Get Involved” button to explore current opportunities and schedule a time to volunteer.
Finding Success: On Your Own 2 Feet

Three years ago, a couple of innovative volunteers joined the Track Club to form a walking and running program for the people we serve. Their idea was simple: exercise builds self-confidence and initiative.

They met a couple of times a week and started either a walk or a run from our Day Center. Expecting maybe one or two participants, they found many; thus “On My Own 2 Feet” was born.

After an encouraging first season, they quickly realized that these participants were not only gaining the benefits of physical health, they were also building a community, which led to greater confidence and improved stability in housing and employment.

Building on that success, a bicycling component was added the next year; the program became known as On My Own 2 Feet and Wheels. To date, 45 participants have graduated from the running program which includes a 5k race; 24 people have completed the biking component, which includes street safety.

Upon graduation, runners earn a new pair of shoes as well as supporting materials; bikers who complete the program earn a new bike, helmet, lock and light!

Today, the program has expanded to include outreach to camps and regular giveaways. It has also officially become a program of the Chattanooga Community Kitchen; volunteers are critically needed. Please let us know if you’d like to participate today. Learn more by visiting: https://www.facebook.com/onmyown2feetchattanooga/

2019 Winter Shelter: Evidence of the Great Need for Emergency Shelter in Our Area

By the Numbers:
Individuals Served: 770
Most in One Night: 150
Average per Night: 92
One evening, as she was leaving work, Kathy Long was approached by a young couple asking about our Maclellan Shelter for Families. They’d been staying in our cold weather warming shelter and wanted to know how the family shelter worked. As Kathy explained to them that the program is designed to keep families with children together as they seek housing, they looked at each other, smiled and said, “Let’s go get our baby!”

The next morning she found them seated in the lobby asking to meet with her. She ushered them into her office, where they told her their story. He had lived a life of crime as a younger man; she had been abused and passed from foster family to foster family and later was in and out of rehabilitation. Along the way, the couple met and had a baby, who was now seven months old.

As Kathy explained the program, they asked her how to start over; they took her advice and never stopped, reaching out for every resource available (from employment to mental health assistance). They signed up for couples counseling and enrolled in a program called Baby University so they could become better parents. He sought employment and quickly advanced, finding better pay and benefits as a chef at one of Chattanooga’s finer dining establishments. The mother completed the HI-SET program and passed her GED test. She is now enrolled at Chattanooga State.

Not long after, they began searching for a home. After being turned down several times due to the father’s criminal history, they nearly lost hope. But shelter staff continued to encourage them and they never gave up. Finally, they met the right landlord.

They have since moved into their new home. The father is loving his job, and the mother is excited about going to college this fall.

Today the family continues to do well. But they haven’t forgotten being cold and on the street, first calling the Community Kitchen Day Center home and later finding success through our Maclellan Shelter for Families. They’re using this experience to mentor other parents at Baby University. And they continue to visit us, reminding us that they are grateful for all you have done to help them succeed!
A Note From Our CEO

With spring come the flowers, leaves and dreaded pollen. Life speeds up three-fold it seems, and days rush right into weeks. Especially with kids – the flurry of summer planning (camps, vacations, etc.) coupled with end-of-year school projects, testing and celebrations…it all merges into one big blur of yellow dust, sweat, loose-leaf paper and lack of sleep. I’m most definitely in that mix right now!

This might sound like a bit of a complaint, but not at all. I’m grateful. My daughter, Maggie, turns 14 this summer. She seems happy; she’s becoming more comfortable in her skin every day. She just won the Carson scholarship and she’s asked for two camps this summer: Camp Ocoee (YMCA) and comedy camp. My son, Ezra, turns 10 this summer. He’s a heckuva soccer player (I may be biased…I’m not just his dad but also the coach), loves to draw and he experiences the world at 1000 miles an hour. They bring a lot of joy.

Of course, they also bring that sweaty, papery, sleepless blur.

But imagine that blur with the added trauma of homelessness. The pollen may burn my eyes, but that incredible insecurity, uncertainty, even fear – well, that’s a whole lot worse than a little pollen.

Nearly 40 years ago the idea for the Chattanooga Community Kitchen was born of a compassionate calling to help homeless and hungry people in our community – many of these were older men living on the streets.

Today, that demographic has changed dramatically; the change is most visible in our family shelter, where daily we witness children struggling through the blur of life, while their parents walk right with them – trying to overcome homelessness.

For these families, the sweaty, pollen-filled blur has an added level of challenge: the challenge of juggling life’s regular battles while the ground beneath you moves.

But, because of your support, we are able to help these families find stability, get onto a path of success and ultimately escape homelessness once and for all.

Naturally, we are still here for those hungry and homeless men and women in Chattanooga, for anyone needing a meal or simply a safe place to get out of the rain.

As I mentioned above, spring may bring a bit of exhaustion, but I am grateful. I am grateful for my family and friends, for the blessings we enjoy. I am grateful for knowing that there is a place for families to turn (like our shelter) during their greatest time of need and uncertainty. I am grateful that we have programs to help men and women get off of the streets and into permanent housing. I am also grateful for the brief break summer brings.

But today, I am grateful for you – for believing in the work we do, for wanting to help those in need, and for being incredible volunteers.

Thank you.
In Their Own Words...

Our Maclellan Shelter for Families will celebrate five years of operation this year, and for nearly all that time, Nicole Cox has served as one of the team members. With a background in social work, Nicole brings a lot of experience to the family shelter; however, it is her role here that brings her joy.

“I love it here! I get to be me and work one-on-one with people. As a case manager, it was difficult at times to meet up with people and fulfill the requirements. But here, I meet all kinds of families, and I’m able to help and encourage them in their situation.”

Nicole remembers a young lady in particular who was very distraught about staying in the shelter. “She was crying and felt like she was being punished, so I had to remind her that this was not a punishment or a bad place but rather a place to get a new start. People just need a little encouragement, and that’s why I like it so much. We get to help families start over.”

As with any workplace, change can be a constant, but Nicole says, “I have seen many changes and people come and go, but the thing that has remained the same (and is probably better than ever) is the love and compassion of our staff members. I know we love our jobs because it is evident in how we love people.”

Thanks, Nicole, for your hard work in helping families start over and find “home”!

Thanks to all who participated in our Job Fair!

Local employers representing food services, factories, healthcare providers and even a voter registration agency recently came together in our Day Center to take applications and provide information to our guests. Over seventy-five applications were submitted and many jobs were acquired!

Nicole Cox
Maclellan Shelter for Families Supervisor

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Krystal was among several employers represented.
We value your support and regard ourselves as accountable not only to you but also to God for stewardship of the funds you entrust to us. We are audited by a recognized, local independent CPA firm and publish an audited annual financial statement.

The Chattanooga Community Kitchen is a 501(c)3 organization. Qualified contributions are tax deductible.

Thank you for making our work possible!