



Friends to friends

Friends Association for Care and Protection of Children

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S CORNER

Dear Friends,

There are so many ways a community can come together to help those in need. Indeed, we are lucky to live in a vibrant, engaged and giving community. The West Chester Charity Ball is one of the best examples of a community coming together to ensure that all can grow and thrive.

In 1988 a group of people met to create the first West Chester Charity Ball with the goal to raise funds for the families served by non-profits agencies in West Chester. Thirty years later the West Chester Charity Ball is still going strong and truly serving families in need in our community.

We dedicate this newsletter to 30 years of community giving from ending homelessness for families to ensuring that families never experience homelessness. I offer heartfelt thanks to the many donors and volunteers whose generosity proves that our community cares and the families we serve matter. .

Catherine

Catherine Friedman,
Executive Director



Kelly Raggazino and Catherine Friedman at the September 2018 United Way Kick Off

Thirty Years of Community Giving

Last year, Friends Association helped 270 children and 122 families overcome homelessness, a feat that might not have been possible if not for the generosity of the sponsors and patrons of the West Chester Charity Ball — the Association's largest fundraiser. Replete with gourmet food, music, a lively auction and attendance of community leaders and hands-on participants in charitable causes, the event has grown to become one of the most awaited events in town. And this year, the Ball celebrates 30 years of community giving.



Valerie Jester, who was a guest at the inaugural Ball in 1988, recalls the jamboree that marked the birth of the event: "The Ball was held at a building in town that wasn't used much — the New Century Club on South High Street. The Charity Ball Committee decorated it for what would be a true Victorian Christmas Ball. Everyone was encouraged to dress in Victorian garb — men in tuxedos and top hats, women in long gowns. The evening started at 9 pm; patrons went out to dinner in town first. Dancing and celebration started at 9 pm, followed by a midnight breakfast."

A highlight of the event is the acknowledgment of the Friend of the Community Honoree who has been instrumental in curbing homelessness in Chester County.

Over the years the Committee changed the location to the West Chester Golf and Country Club, and the evening to a 'dinner and dancing' event starting at 6.30 pm. "When I began chairing in 1998, we were donating about \$25k a year net proceeds from the event. It has grown exponentially during the past 20 years and has become a 'not to be missed' event in Chester County and certainly one of the best attended," added Valerie.

The Ball was started by a local group of charitable community leaders to be the final event of the Borough's West Chester's Old Fashioned Christmas. 'It was a unique several-day celebration of Christmas in the Borough of West Chester that featured a real hometown parade — concerts at local churches and the finale, the Charity Ball,' added Valerie.

The Ball's mission at the beginning was to raise funds that would aid women and children of the West Chester community. Each year the Committee would select different local children's charities to receive the Ball's proceeds. Later the event would evolve to aiding families experiencing homelessness.

"This gala, is essential in funding the important work Friends Association does to improve the community: preventing and ending family homelessness," says Catherine Friedman, Executive Director. "We are grateful to the community for supporting this important event which helps to support the families we serve. It is so great to see guests reinforcing our work through their generosity. With everyone's help we are able to raise crucial funds for our four programs."

This year's Charity Ball will be held on Saturday, December 1, from 6.30 pm to 11.00 pm, at the West Chester Golf and Country Club.



THE UNSEEN SIDE OF POVERTY

Last year, Friends Association's donors and supporters helped the small staff of eight to prevent homelessness for 270 children. A recurring theme among parents seeking entry into our Programs is how hard they worked to avoid becoming homeless.

By the time they reach our doors, most of our clients have tried everything to provide stable housing for their children. They've borrowed money for rent, taken second jobs, and slept on couches in relatives' homes. For some, it is a matter of pride; for others, and some are fearful a time of fear due to the way shelters are portrayed on television or in the movies.

"For many of us, Chester County seems like a place where most people have the resources they need to survive. Yet homelessness is an invisible, but very real, struggle. Last year 871 children were identified by our school district as having unstable housing. This number includes children living on the street, in emergency shelters, in transitional housing, and those bounced between relatives and friends," said Catherine Friedman, Executive Director.

As one mother, Keesha, summed up, "I'm willing to do the work. I understand my choices have landed me here. I hadn't intended to be a single parent. I'm not looking for handouts, but sometimes when I'm juggling all of these things. I need some help."

Keesha and her daughter, Ceyenna, came to us needing emergency shelter. We welcomed them into our program and began the case management this family needed to regain independence. It is a time-consuming process for a family receiving help. There are many forms to fill out, questions to answer and rules to follow. "For a brief time, their lives may actually become more disrupted, as our clients have multiple appointments with different local agencies," explained Nova Adams, Director of Programs.

Keesha began working for a cleaning service while Ceyenna attended a local day care facility. Since Keesha had a serious health issue, we helped navigate the process of obtaining disability benefits to help offset the expenses of her medical care.

When Keesha and Ceyenna successfully completed the shelter program, our case managers determined this family should continue receiving support through the Homeless Prevention Program. Friends Association helped move them into their own apartment and continues to provide case management as well as rental subsidy as the family continues the process to become fully independent and self-sufficient. Keesha's journey to her new apartment was both complicated and successful. All pays off in the end when hardworking families move into stable housing.

Keesha's story is one example of how a client travels through the Friends Association programs that works best for them. This past year 92% of the clients walking through the door at Friends Association left with a one-year lease in their name to an apartment or home they could afford.

Every client receives an individualized program and is touched by the work of all staff members regardless of whether the client and staff have ever met. The case managers do the intakes to the shelter, provide case management, and connect referred families to necessary resources to end homelessness and stabilize housing, plus provide travel to families who do not have a means of transportation. Case managers are the lifeline for the clients to reestablish relationships and rebuild stability. The clients and case managers are the heroes that we see.

What we don't see is the entire group of behind-the-scenes or hidden heroes who work together to achieve the 91% success rate. Catherine Friedman works with the Board leadership to guide us in preventing and ending homelessness. The Development Team of three staff write grants, fundraise, manage special events, recruit and supervise volunteers and speak with donors to fund the work we do.

One adult with one preschool child would have to work

120 HOURS PER WEEK

at minimum wage to live in self-sufficiency in Chester County.

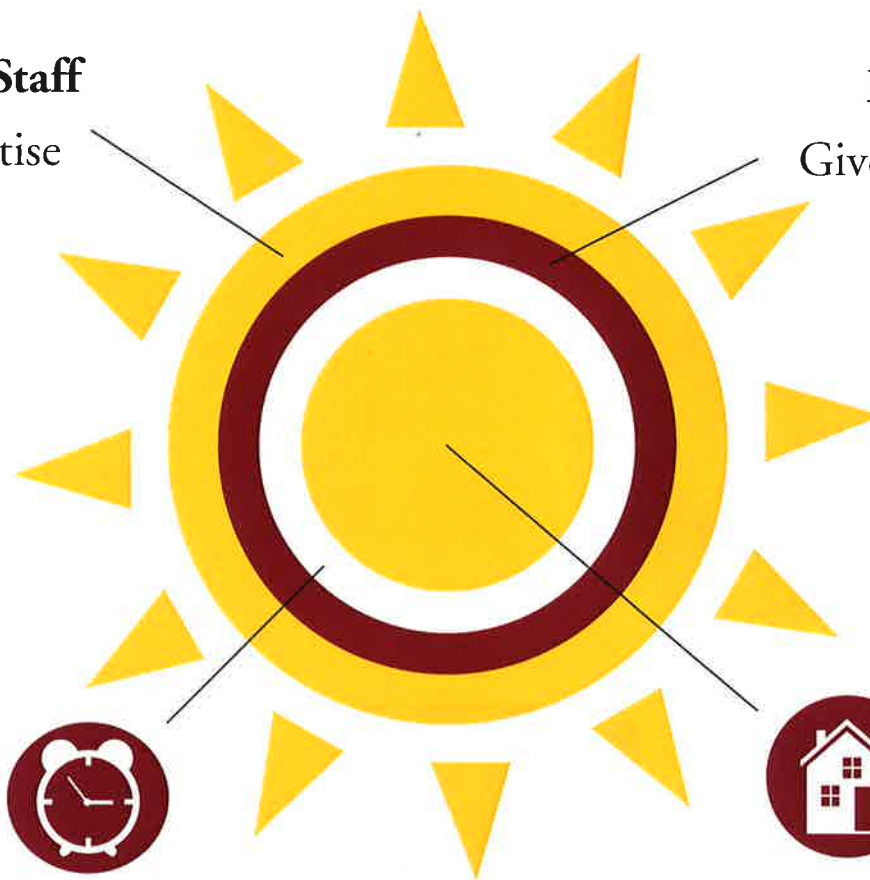




Board and Staff
Give Expertise



Donors
Give Resources



Volunteers
Give Time



Families
Get Home!



14 BOARD MEMBERS;

8 STAFF

6 Full Time &
2 Part Time

11,456
volunteer
hours

122 families *with*
270 children
found
homes



91%
Success
Rate

83%

of annual budget comes
from donors like you

All data from FY2017-2018

Yes, you can help prevent and end family homelessness in our community.

By contributing online
or
enclosing your gift.

See our wish list at
www.friendsassoc.org



It Takes A Village: The Big Bag Theory

A new school year offers a new beginning, but for Friends Association's families it also comes with a price tag they can't afford. Many of our families value education but they are caught between paying rent and feeding their families or buying backpacks and requested items that can total over \$100.



"When I got the list I did not know what to do, so I cried. I could not pay for the school list," said Alicia, mother to six-year-old Keegan. Alicia then learned of Friends Association's Backpack Program led by 14-year-old Flynn Truskett, a volunteer since 2011. Flynn coordinated the needs of the clients with the generosity of our donors to supply an individualized backpack and school uniforms to every one of the 76 children in need.

"Our Back to School program started years ago with general donations of backpacks and school supplies. The program was modified in 2014 to be individualized to each student after we received feedback that some of the children felt they stood out as different with generic backpacks sporting a corporate logo and not all of the specific items requested," explained Robin Meixner, Director of Development.

"The other kids saw that I was the poor kid with the donated backpack. I did not want to stand out," said Lionel, now 16 and a catalyst in the way we changed our program four years ago.



"My heart goes out to the person who helped Keegan because he now has all he needs for school. No one ever helped me and I dropped out. I hope he won't," added Alicia.

Because of all of the Friends Association's donors and volunteers, every child started the school year with everything they needed.

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