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# Happenings

a publication of



## Making a change

Brenda and Jim are a couple who have faced tremendous obstacles while trying to reshape their lives. When Brenda and Jim\* first came to GSH, they were heavily burdened with debt and the remorse for past decisions. Brenda was pregnant and trapped in a job that offered no maternity leave whatsoever. Jim was a former drug user and gang member, still struggling to move on to a new life.

Until they became clients of Good Shepherd Housing, they had no idea how to improve their situation. They worked with their GSH Family Advocate on budgeting their money and cleaning up their credit. They also received counseling on how to improve their employment situations.

GSH was able to provide them the chance for their dreams of a fresh start to become a reality. Both were open to our assistance, and in the first few months of working with GSH, Brenda found a better-paying job, Jim entered an HVAC

job-training program, they were able to purchase a car and they found stable childcare for their oldest. Best of all, Brenda's new job allowed her to build up some savings to help tide them over when she took her unpaid maternity leave. Jim continued to prove himself a very hard worker and earned the respect of his coworkers.

Today, thanks to their hard work, Jim and Brenda have a stable home for their family of four and are continuing to pay off old debt and rebuild their credit history. They plan to someday become homeowners, recognizing that their long-term goal will take continued discipline and dedication. Thanks to Good Shepherd Housing and support from partners like you, Jim and Brenda were given the boost they needed to take hold of their dream.

\*Names have been changed in respect of clients' privacy

## Helping in an Emergency

In the past fiscal year, GSH was able to provide Emergency Services to 375 people on the verge of eviction or having one or more of their utilities shut off. Unfortunately, we had to turn away 159 people who called or stopped in at our office desperately seeking sometimes as little as fifty dollars. GSH stretches the funding received as far as possible to make sure the money provided is going to people in a crisis situation. Even a small amount can do wonders when not having that money will result in eviction or turning off of the power or gas.

A small amount often means more than can be imagined to a family desperately trying to stay afloat. "Providing these funds to people in dire need is a main function of our organization, but we must on a monthly basis turn desperate people away when we have nothing left to give," said Gloria Curry, Director of Emergency Services. There are other organizations around, but more often than not, these resources have already been tapped and we are their last hope. GSH is able to provide more than other local organizations as we believe that, if we are going to help, we should be ready to help with a substantial amount. That way, families can have their need met, and not have to continue on to other organizations to gather the full amount needed. Nevertheless, \$200 is still just a fraction of the amount needed for people behind on rent or one of many bills. GSH does as much as we can to help our clients financially and we rely on the generosity of our supporters to meet these needs. With your help, we can be there for our neighbors when they have a desperate need.

## Endless Summer

Mark your calendar for our Endless Summer Event on Saturday, October 21 from 7:00 - 11:00pm. Dance the night away to the tunes of Still Surfin', a Beach Boys Tribute Band. Dinner from Outback Steakhouse will also be provided. All proceeds from the event will go towards helping the working poor in need of housing and emergency services.

There are many options available for sponsorship of this event as well. To make a reservation or for more information, please contact us as 703-768-9404 or [kjupiter@goodhousing.org](mailto:kjupiter@goodhousing.org).



Client children volunteer at the GSH office.

## Walk the Walk

Last year, with your fundraising and walking legs, GSH was able to raise over \$70,000 through Fannie Mae's Help the Homeless Walkathon! This year's walk will take place on Saturday, November 18, 2006. Starting now, we challenge you to help us break that record by recruiting friends and family to walk. By encouraging schools, churches, local organizations, and businesses to contribute funds, walkers who are unable to afford the registration fees can be sponsored. This is a great opportunity to get the word out about problems facing the low-income population in and around D.C. The more money we can raise, the more people we can help equip with the necessary tools to become self-sufficient. For more information, visit [www.helpthehomelessdc.org](http://www.helpthehomelessdc.org) or call GSH at 703-768-9404.

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Check out our blog at  
<http://goodhousing.blogspot.com>

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Happy client children in their new home



## I am an Advocate

Written by Good Shepherd Housing Family Advocate, Tom Barnett

A list of thirty names sits on my desk. Each name represents a different household; a family of eight, a young married couple just getting started, or maybe a single adult. They're all parts of our community. To me, they are also clients. They call our apartments their homes.

As a Family Advocate I am their advisor and supporter. I am a constant in their sometimes chaotic, always changing lives. Some clients only need a sympathetic ear when they are overwhelmed. Others need a firm helping hand to show them the way. I can help clients avoid the common pitfalls in the maze of numbers, websites, bureaucratic red tape and acronyms that is social services.

Suppose you have no food in the pantry and the paycheck just doesn't stretch? Maybe you have a terrible toothache and no dental insurance? My job is to know where to go. People rarely consider these problems until they are the ones having them. To make matters worse, desperation and crisis only makes problem solving more difficult. I offer my clients options when they see none. I lend my voice when theirs is not enough.

But being a Family Advocate is more than listening and referring. It is about facilitating change. We help clients get out of crisis everyday. The real challenge is to help them avoid getting into the same trouble again. I focus a great deal of time on client budgeting skills. We talk about their dreams and goals for the future. We talk about how better money management can help them get to where they want to go. Of course, changing how people manage their money is a lot like telling people how to eat. Our attitudes about food, like our fiscal habits, are learned early in life and strongly affect our sense of well-being. But, unlike our stomachs, a little extra padding doesn't hurt when it's in the savings account.

My clients face every problem you could imagine. Surprisingly, that is the best part about being a Family Advocate: the variety. I get to help my clients in so many ways, both large and small. Recently I met with the Route One Taskforce, which was attended by the Mount Vernon District Supervisor and dozens of community leaders. We talked about whether \$22 million for affordable housing is enough. This morning I am simply figuring out whether I can get a donated couch to a new tenant's apartment. Tomorrow I am helping a tenant plan for her mother's funeral.

Working in a non-profit organization means thinking outside the box and beyond the job description. That is why it is a challenge and a pleasure working at Good Shepherd Housing and Family Services.

If you found this article interesting, you may enjoy reading my new Good Shepherd Housing blog which can be found at <http://goodhousing.blogspot.com>

## 2006 - A Year of Success

A note from Shannon Steene, Good Shepherd Housing Executive Director

It has been another amazing year at Good Shepherd Housing! Throughout the last twelve months I've watched many clients in crisis come to Good Shepherd Housing in need and leave with greater independence and self-sufficiency. Considering them all, I looked for common threads and strategies. And, there is a formula: hardworking but downtrodden people + honest opportunity for self-improvement = stable families. This year family after family proved that this formula works.

Our clients proved that our programs work by meeting most success measures set at the beginning of the year. That is no small feat. Graduating to independence comes only after regular, consistent contact with staff where the clients are introduced to new habits and thinking. As client behavior improves, so does their life situation. It is rewarding to see a family stabilize, regroup and then thrive, navigating situations alone. I offer my thanks to our volunteers and staff for the belief and dedication that they show as they work with our clients.

And none of the staff and volunteers efforts would have been possible without the support of our board leadership, as well as the support from community individuals, businesses and foundations. This year our board of directors responded to increased community need by boosting their fundraising involvement, our foundation support exceeded that of the previous year, and our business partners in the community contributed more than ever before.

We are building a better community and living our mission of reducing homelessness, increasing community support and promoting self-sufficiency. For the efforts of our clients, volunteers, board members, financial supporters and staff - - thanks for a great year!

Mattie Palmore, Director of the Homeless Transition Program, receives the Curvations Project Confidence Award from actress and singer Queen Latifah.



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