

Sharon Shares Her Story of Life Change

My name is Sharon and I am a 62 year old widow with a traumatic brain injury. I have lived with a disability since 1986 as a result of an auto accident. I was in a coma for 2 months and then a rehab facility for 5 months learning how to live again. I lost it all: emotionally, mentally, physically and spiritually.

I have been on a 38 year journey of recovery and discovery. One of my best discoveries yet has come through AARP. This program allows senior citizens to participate in gaining experience at a non-profit in order equip them for employment in today's world. In the fall of 2024 I was sent to Interfaith's Center for Life to interview with the Manager, Cherie Galloway. When I walked into the Center for Life I could instantly feel the presence of God. I felt a divine connection that caused me to fight back my tears. For the first time I felt the reality of life with neither judgement or shame. It had been a long time since I felt dignity and worthiness. After leaving the interview I began to pray and ask God for an open door and to make room for me at the Center for Life. A few days later I received an invitation to become part of their training program. Since then my life has changed for the better.

As a greeter, I have been blessed to become the first face clients see when they come into our building. I have become a participant and a recipient of the many blessings provided by Interfaith. **These blessings have been countless because of the generosity and determination of each department at Interfaith.** From Andrea at Social Services that helped me get my leaking roof repaired, Shannon at the Thrift Store helped me with a walker, Karla and Emily found funding for a heater to keep me warm during the winter months, and to the staff at the Center for Life who made me a part of their team. These women are determined to serve everyone with kindness and dignity in meeting the constant needs of our community.

Every day I show up to serve our community's most vulnerable population. I am able to show love, dignity and respect to others because it has been given to me through the actions of those who serve at Interfaith. I thank God everyday for such a rich, meaningful and fulfilling experience at the Center for Life. This experience has given me a second chance to experience life at its fullest and I thank you so very much.

Help be a Blessing in March for us! by Maxi Rodriguez, Food Distribution Manager

Are you feeling lucky? Would you like to share your luck and be a blessing to our community? Currently our Food Pantry is in need of food. Can you donate food or help do a food drive for us? You'll be helping the individuals and families we serve every week – and then they'll feel lucky (and blessed) too! Items we need most are: **canned veggies & fruit, mac & cheese, pasta & rice, pasta sauce, cereal & oatmeal, canned meat and soups!**

Donations can be dropped off at 450 NW 2nd Street Ocala. Thank you and God bless you!



Smiling Sharon at the Center for Life

From the Chief Executive Officer: Karla Grimsley-Greenway



Finally, Spring is upon us! If you find yourself doing any Spring cleaning keep Interfaith in mind. We could turn that lamp into medicine! Often people reach out to me and say they have a household item to donate but they want it to go to someone in need. So I want to explain how your gently used items (household and clothing) benefit those in need when given to Interfaith. All clothing donations go to one of three places; the Interfaith Thrift Store where they are sold to help us pay for prescription medications for those who do not have insurance, or our FREE Clothing Boutique where we allow people to come in 5 days a week and get clothing at no charge; what is left is sold with a company that sends it overseas. Some of the gently used furnishings donated at our Thrift Store are given to our shelter residents as they move out and set up their apartments. We also help families that have been victims of a fire. This year we will be working with 2 partner agencies to furnish apartments for them. Last year, our store donated over \$26,000 worth of merchandise to help people in need. The store also donated \$6,000 worth of shoes to our free boutique. With the proceeds that were left, **the store funds critical services at Interfaith**. You simply can't go wrong when you donate to the Interfaith Thrift Store! And it's also a great place to shop for deals. If you stop in, please tell Miss Angie behind the register that I sent you! You may get a free hug.

Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.
2 Corinthians 9:7

Partnering with the Boys and Girls Club, by Yanique Duff-Ballard, Shelter Case Manager

For many years, The Boys and Girls Club of Marion County has helped the residents at Interfaith's shelter. Each year, the children at the shelter are awarded scholarships for their summer program in addition to regular scholarships for parents who work and need childcare. Because of their continued generosity, **parents can work longer hours, knowing their children are safe and being taken care of.**



Boys & Girls Club with staff and residents

Our partnership with the Boys and Girls Club has been ongoing for many years, but has taken on a new role recently. Our Shelter Manager, Michelle Collier, received a call from them wanting to do even more for our shelter residents and their children! They offered a pancake breakfast, gifts, and entertainment so on Saturday, January 18th, the members of the Boys and Girls Club came to our shelter and cooked a wonderful breakfast for us. We had pancakes, fruits, coffee, tea, juices, donuts, muffins, and lots of love - there was even a pancake cook-off to see who made the best pancakes! They served and fellowship with us, and even played games outside. They brought donations to share with the residents of the shelter and the remainder went to our free clothing boutique for our community members. The residents were overjoyed! We are beyond grateful to the Boys and Girls Club and its employees for always going above and beyond for our shelter residents and the rest of the community. Serving the community comes in different forms and we welcome this awesome partnership. As the Lord said, *"Give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to."*

May God continue to bless and keep April Savarese and her team at The Boys & Girls Club.

Still Time to be a Host for the 9th Annual High Tea

This beautiful event is a highly sought-after opportunity to enjoy an authentic high tea, around elegantly decorated tables. To attend you must be a sponsor, a host or the guest of a host. This year's event will be held inside, on May 17th at the Ocala UF Extension Auditorium. Interfaith invites you to raise a cup and make a difference as a Host for our High Tea Benefit! **Become a champion for our Homeless Shelter Program (serving homeless women, children and families).** We can promise this is one of the coolest events of the year. All the ladies work really hard to pull off amazing displays - from traditional, elegant tables, to themed Disney princesses and fairytales. For more information reach out to Sonya at (352) 644-9202 or Sonya@IESmarion.org.



Special Gifts

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Honor Someone Special

Give a gift to someone special - an honorary or memorial donation in their name to Interfaith! The person honored (or their family) will receive a letter of acknowledgement. Please contact Kayla at 629-8868 x202 or Kayla.Hess@IESmarion.org. Mail donations to PO Box 992, Ocala, FL 34478.

Special Thanks to...

Special thanks for these large donations (in pounds): Ocala Police Skate: 139; First Christian Church: 932; Peanut Butter & Jelly Man: 141; Countryside Presbyterian Church: 224; Alpha Delta Kappe Fidelis group: 102; Chapter GE P.E.D.: 71; Leadership Class 38; CEP LOM Class: 370; First Presbyterian Church: 110; Blessed Trinity Church: 90; Silver Springs Shores Moose Club: 128; Advent Health: 2,369; Iglesia Evangelica De Williston: 580; Marion Landing: 116; The Way Church: 5,379; Ocala West United Methodist: 259; Trinity Catholic High School: 250; Rose Grove Farm: 445; First Assembly of God Church: 85; St John Lutheran Church: 288 and Brian Battey: 8 large bags clothes.

Interfaith was honored by HCA Florida Ocala Hospital and HCA Florida West Marion Hospital with a \$10,000 donation to fight hunger in the Ocala/Marion County community! (pictured right.)

We are so grateful for a \$2,000 donation from the India Association.

What a blessing - Meadowbrook Church presented a check for \$30,000, providing support for our ministries! (pictured right)

A big thank you to Pastor Eric Cummings for orchestrating the MLK Food Caravan food drive. They collected 3,246 pounds for our community! Thank you for giving us the opportunity to give to those in need through your efforts!



Cameron and Nina's Story, by Melissa Hanson

It feels like family at the Interfaith Help Center as we settle in at the Engagement Center. Each day we have the opportunity to grow and introduce people to our ministry. Recently I met a couple, **Cameron and Nina, that came to us empty-handed. They were seeking shelter, food, clothing and guidance.** One of our volunteers was able to help them with a tent, food and clothing. As we continue to meet with them and guide them, 2 months later we see the couple are clean, sober, able to obtain their birth certificates and identification cards. Cameron is now gainfully employed and they are saving money to eventually get a place of their own. Both Cameron and Nina are also members of our Engagement Center Advisory Council. The council is comprised of our homeless "members" of the Engagement Center and staff, who establish the rules and guidelines for the Engagement Center and its operation.

As we continue to work them, their ultimate goal is for Nina and Cameron to be housed, get their family back together and to live the life that they want. In our eyes they are a success story and a true blessing to all that come into contact with them.

Volunteers Needed in Lots of Areas

With summer fast approaching we need you more than ever before our volunteers start their summer vacations. We have openings in all ministry areas! Please check out our volunteer portal for all the listings by going to iesmarion.org/volunteer and click on the want to volunteer button. You can also call Tina at (352) 644-9196.



P.O. Box 992 • Ocala, FL 34478

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Check out our website at
www.IESmarion.org



MISSION STATEMENT

Interfaith Emergency Services is a community of faith called by God to offer emergency assistance without judgment to all persons in Marion County.

Meet one of Food 4 Kids Dynamo Volunteers!
by Teesha Garcia, Manager



Ms Bonnie

Introducing Ms. Hollywood! To know her is to love her. Officially, she's Bonnie Parkhurst and she has been a faithful volunteer for many years at Interfaith. She comes every single week to both the Food 4 Kids backpack program and our Food Pantry to serve collectively thousands of local families in need. *In a single day, Bonnie packs food for over 600 children facing hunger* and she does it all while looking like she should be on the 'Red Carpet'. She is a beautiful, sparkly, loving woman, inside and out and we are blessed at Food 4 Kids to call her a friend. Bonnie says she heard about Interfaith through her church and "simply can't imagine children not having enough to eat." Food 4 Kids feel the exact same way and with volunteers like her we can help families for many years to come! We are so grateful to Bonnie and all our lovely volunteers for their hearts of service!



Thrift Store News,
by Shannon Pickering

Spring has sprung, and we are here for you! Are you spring cleaning and need a donation pickup? Call Shannon at 352-351-3541 to schedule a pickup in your home or business. Kids at home for spring break? Stop by our thrift store located at 718 North Pine Avenue near the heart of downtown Ocala to pick up games and toys for the kiddos! We can't wait to see you!

