

Real People, Real Stories, Real Investment

By Vikki Carpenter, Director of Human Services

There has recently been much in the news in Charlotte County regarding community visioning initiatives such as the Community Needs Assessment, a collaboration between the Charlotte County human services department, the United Way of Charlotte County and the Charlotte Community Foundation. These visioning initiatives are important processes and tools that assist in maintaining our commitment to improving the lives of Charlotte County residents. In the Community Needs assessment, numbers reflected in the data represent real people with real stories. Here below are some of the real stories that the staff of the human services department wanted to share.

Lillian, 89 years old, has been using Charlotte County transit since October 2011. Lillian used the public bus system, "Dial-a-Ride," to visit her husband at the local veteran's nursing home three times a week up until his recent passing. Unable to drive, Lillian was able to share special time with her husband in the last years of his life.

Jennifer, 29 years old and a single mom of two, was having car trouble and needed to get to work. Using Charlotte County transit services, Jennifer was transported from North Port to Punta Gorda for three months until she was able to get her car operable.

Simon, a veteran, came to the veteran services office with a major problem. His sewer line had broken and it was going to cost \$2,500 to fix. Although this is not a service provided by the human services department, staff recognized the urgency of the situation and contacted local veteran organizations and private funds were raised to help. Simon, having been a homeless veteran at one time, had struggled to buy his own home and was grateful for the assistance and for living in this county.

Gloria, 72 years old and a cancer survivor, has been caring for her severely disabled husband for 6 years. Through grant-funded programs, her husband is able to receive bathing and respite (supervised care) in home services to assist Gloria with his care. Recently, Gloria became the guardian of her very young grandchild. Also through supportive services, her grandchild is now attending a child care facility several times a week where he is able to interact with other children in a learning environment.

Toni Marie, a single mother of two, was qualified to participate in Charlotte County Habitat for Humanity's home ownership program and the county's State Housing Initiatives Partnership (SHIP) down payment assistance program. A group of high school volunteers from New Hampshire and the single mother worked side by side building her home. The teen volunteers and the mother have continued the contact and friendship throughout the years. When interviewed, the single mother said, "My life was truly blessed by this program and meeting these people." She pointed to her front door and said, "No one knows this but me because I was there. All of the students signed the frame of this door. How could I ever leave this home when so much love went into building it?"

Earlier this year, a 17-year-old high school dropout was arrested for marijuana possession and property damage and was referred to the County's Neighborhood Accountability Board (NAB). The teen came from an unstable family situation and felt lost and hopeless. Appearing before NAB, Seth took full responsibility for his actions. A case action plan was developed for him. With community support and counseling, the young man completed all the requirements of the NAB program and successfully received his GED. Seth recently returned to the human services department to show his diploma. He stated he was drug free, had a full-time job and was planning to attend college.

Could any of these people be your friends, family or neighbors? As the season of caring and sharing approaches, please think about committing to bettering the lives of others. By changing lives we are all making a real investment in and for our community.

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