

# ORION Communities

Summer 2018



## Journey Home With A Stop in Phoenixville

He was obviously distressed. It took time to understand the particulars of his crisis but we quickly knew it included needing to get home with three young children in a car that was out of gas.

Turns out that their country of origin was Romania, but 'home' was now in Texas. Ian, his sister Marie and her children had been in New York for immigration reasons but fees had cost \$500 more than expected. They made it as far as Phoenixville and then made a sign that read "Need Gas".

Ian was very clear that they didn't want money just gas. It was also clear that they had two more days to travel and that even with preparing the family meals on his cook stove, money for a hotel, food as well as gas would be essential.

In one hour, Orion's staff was able to raise \$500 with our wonderful partners in addition to an emergency food box from PACS and children's books from STARS\*. The family was beyond grateful and even the children said, "God bless you."

This family found Orion because someone stopped on the side of the road and handed Ian a piece of paper that read, 'Orion Communities, 237 Bridge St. across from the Black Lab.' Whoever you are, thank you for helping this family get home!



A Night of Music & Stories was held in April at the Kimberton Inn to share and be inspired by the stories of our neighbors. Many thanks to Nathan Miller for his wonderful music!

## Holiday Cheer All Year

The summer kicks off on June 3rd with Phoenixville's second annual Art Street Festival in the 200 block of Bridge Street, right in front of Orion's office. Orion joins the celebration with our Christmas In June event in response to requests from our neighbors in need.

You see, our neighbors are grateful for the help they receive each Thanksgiving through New Year's with holiday meals and gifts to help stretch their family budgets and add some special treats. However, some budgets are tight all year round and could really use a little something extra as the summer begins - be it sun block, a gift card for new clothes for growing children or the basics like laundry detergent.

Many thanks for all the contributions - from a bar of soap or \$10 gift card for Target to a case of paper products or a previously owned bicycle - these gifts add holiday cheer for our neighbors all year round!



# Neighbors helping neighbors!



While the moms are at GLAD, the children are busy with Orion friends....

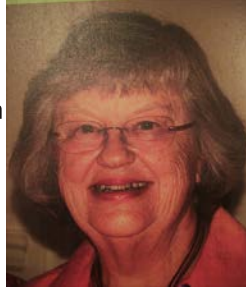


## Supporting Moms and Children

If it really takes a village to raise a child and you're a single mom feeling very isolated – what are the options? And how can Orion help?

A friend of Orion's, Gladys Black, was passionate about the underserved, women and education. When she passed away a year ago, Orion's Board of Directors wanted to honor her and a new program, GLAD – Gutsy Ladies Achieving their Destiny – was born.

GLAD is a 12 week program created and led by Richard Lange, Ph.D. LCSW, who was also a close friend of Gladys. GLAD focuses on helping mothers become better parents by improving the relationship between themselves and their children, as well as developing relationship with each other. Richard explains that GLAD teaches parents to see the hidden potential in each child, to encourage communication and to learn to be present for each child.



Additionally GLAD's approach recognizes that the people who come to Orion often have experienced trauma and may continue to have trauma in their lives. Women who live through trauma tend to be on hyper-alert most of the time. Teaching mothers to focus on their children and to listen better has been shown to lower stress.

Richard points out that another symptom of trauma is to withdraw. "Trauma-informed work encourages mothers and families to slowly become more involved with each other and the community. This is why GLAD is done in a group format. It encourages sharing and fosters mothers to begin to help each other."

This leads to the women identifying their own passions and setting personal goals. Orion then helps to secure funding to put their plans into action.

The first series of GLAD began this Spring and the response has been positive. While gathering her children to go home after a session, a mom shared, "I'm glad I stayed. This is important for me. This is important for my family."

This is part of being a village to help our single mothers and to help raise the next generation of our children.

Proud member of  
**Cc**  
the Community  
Coalition

## With Help From Our Friends

We feel blessed to have so many friends and partners come to Orion to share their services with Phoenixville area residents....



### This Winter...

This tax season, Life Transforming Ministries brought VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) to Orion's office twice a week to help people complete their tax returns... for free!

It was a full house of volunteers and grateful taxpayers who knew they were getting professional help completing their IRS obligations. In Chester County, VITA completed 1459 tax returns with 225 returns prepared at Orion resulting in \$338,544 in refunds.

Many thanks to the VITA volunteers for giving their time and expertise to our community!

### Beginning in June...

Orion and CVC are partnering to bring new services to Phoenixville! If you've been impacted by crime, either as a victim or the loved one of a victim, the Crime Victims' Center of Chester County, Inc. offers free and confidential crisis response, advocacy and counseling.

CVC will offer walk in intake hours at Orion Communities every Tuesday from 12:30 - 2:30 as well as their West Chester location plus the 24/7 hotlines (Sexual Assault 610-692-7273 or All Other Crimes 610-692-7420).

Access to these critical services is now easier for Phoenixville residents.



At times, every space available was in use!

## Thoughts from an Orion Volunteer

There are thought/talk bubbles hanging from the ceiling at Orion's office with words like "Encouragement", "Resources", "Job Search", "Self-Reliance", and others indicating services and objectives. As a volunteer at the front desk, the words I hear when answering the phone or greeting those who walk in the door are spoken by people in need... or in desperation. Here are some of their words... "I'm homeless", "My children need food/clothing", "I need to use a computer/phone", "My electricity is being turned off", "I need bus tokens", "I'm hungry". Often I hear "Thank you!"

I worked in healthcare for 30 years. My work as a medical technologist required me to utilize precise methods to ensure accurate, reproducible and reliable results.

The Social Workers, Staff and Volunteers at Orion don't rely on a "method". One of the first things I heard when beginning to volunteer was, "Every person is unique." Instead, they listen, assess, search for resources, make suggestions, and support... and then listen some more.

Sometimes, often, they get results. Often the results are helpful... sometimes miraculous!



*The truth is, Orion could not do this work without our wonderful volunteers! Last year, our volunteers gifted Orion their time - which was valued at over \$120,000 - plus essential hugs. We are so grateful for each of you and this generous community!*

## Angels Helping Neighbors

Last week a woman who is homebound called in trouble. She was having surgery in 4 days and her utilities were scheduled to be shutoff in 10 days. With the extra medical appointments and reduced time to work while preparing for her surgery, she had fallen behind with her payments. She was worried that her Life Alert, lights and refrigerator would not be working when she returned from the hospital.

Her disability income is often stretched to meet her special diet and other needs. She is pro-active and accesses resources available to her but this time she needed extra help. Here is where Orion's Angels stepped in! The night before she went into the hospital, we were able to say that her utility bill would be paid. Our friend was relieved and shared that she had also just found someone to take her to and from surgery so her stress levels were much improved.



## Friends and Contributions

It's been over 40 years since a small group of people started Orion as a grassroots organization with the mission to address the unmet needs of our most vulnerable neighbors and to do so without government funding. Some Orion friends recently decided it would be fun to kick off Orion's fifth decade with a matching gift challenge.

To that end, Orion has been promised \$41,000 if we raise \$41,000 in new or increased gifts from individual donors, foundations or trusts (up to \$5000 per donor) during our 41st year. This is a big deal – in 2017, Orion was able to help stabilize over 1100 families averaging just **\$70 per household** which is phenomenal! Yet each year the number of families struggling with increasing living costs and financial challenges increases.

Can you help Orion and our families in need? To date, we have received \$14,000 towards our \$41,000 Matching Challenge! If you would like to know more about our work, please contact us. If you can be part of Orion and neighbors helping neighbors, please know that we will put your gift to help with life's basic needs.

On behalf of our Board, Staff, Volunteers, Clients,  
*Thank you!*

**ORION**   
**Communities**

is a 501(c)3 non-profit  
organization

# Neighbors helping neighbors!

Jamaican Vacation raffle tickets available at [www.OrionCommunities.org/raffle](http://www.OrionCommunities.org/raffle)

Save the dates!

July 28, 1-4 pm Bingo @ Phoenixville Middle School with PAPA, CTC and Orion  
September 9 - Neighbors Helping Neighbors - Run, Walk n Roll

**Happy Summer Everyone!**



237 Bridge Street  
Phoenixville, PA 19460



Volunteering at Orion is a great way to be part of **neighbors helping neighbors**. Wondering how you can get involved?

- \* Answer the phone
- \* Provide tech support
- \* Help with mailings
- \* Plan or staff events
- \* Write grants
- \* Join committees
- \* Clean the office
- \* Teach digital literacy or reading with STARS\*



Over 70 children have been part of STARS\* this year. In addition to giving away computers, STARS\* has gifted **1400 children's books!** It's fun to read to our Pfizer volunteers or guest reading dog.



Town Watch, Diversity In Action, Miss Kitty Cares, Bethel Baptist Church and Orion Communities organized an introduction for Phoenixville's newest police officer. Welcome Officer Lee!

The rains took a break and the Dogwood Parade was a blast!



"In honor of the amazing staff and volunteers at Orion. Thank you for all you do for our neighbors in need."

A note with a recent donation