

Winter 2017/2018

ORION Communities



Season of Grace & Gratitude

The day before its sale, my house with all my possessions burned down. I had recently left my job and owned only the clothes on my back. At a local event, I met Kris Keller who introduced me to Orion.

I had some financial and clothing issues which Orion helped me through. My emotional difficulties were enormous having lost my wife a year earlier, put down our dog a couple of months later and then the fire. Christmas Holiday 2016 was not looking good.

I had always wanted to volunteer but did not because of my job and family commitments. I realized that I no longer had that problem and asked Kris what I needed to do to volunteer at Orion. Her response was "just show up." So I did.

I helped deliver holiday cheer to their clients - getting a four foot box containing a Christmas tree into a three foot back seat was comical. Before I knew it, Christmas Eve was here. As I walked around looking at the lights, I remembered the joy on the faces of those less fortunate souls helped by the goodwill of Orion.

I realized that Orion helped with my physical needs and helped me so much more with my emotional needs. Though I was alone, I was very happy.

A neighbor



Some of our Santas and the goodies!



You Never Know Who Will Come in the Door at Orion

"Was he really homeless?!?" asked a new volunteer following a lengthy chat with a young man. "Well, he just blew all my images of who is homeless."

You cannot make assumptions at Orion. One day a gentleman in a suit and tie came in asking for a bus token. He had spent his last funds on the suit at a thrift shop and needed help getting to his grandmother's funeral.

Another time an Orion visitor in very 'comfortable' clothes dropped off one of the largest check's Orion had ever received! The reality is you just don't know another's life story and challenges until they share them with you.

Who will we meet tomorrow?



The STARS* are Aligning!

Orion's new STARS* pilot program is really taking off! It all started from two ideas...

First, a recognized need to address the academic gap that exists for students from low income households and their wealthier peers.

Second, the right resources at the right time. In this case it was the gift of 100 laptops pre-loaded with education and web-filtering software plus volunteers with education and computing expertise. And a whole bunch of books!

Incredibly, all of this happened last spring and early summer so that STARS* - a marriage of computer access, digital literacy and encouragement of reading - could begin this school year.

Imagine in this day and age not having a computer, not having Internet. That's the reality for many children across the country and it really limits the ability for parents and teachers to communicate with each other or for students to do their homework or for families to have access to enrichment opportunities. It's the modern version of telling children they cannot attend school if they don't have shoes.

Fortunately there are a whole bunch of people who want to be sure that our students not only have shoes but know how to tie them! Every day that the students come to Orion for a STARS* session there are plenty of smiles and surprises...

- The 6 year old who has been using a reading program for 5 weeks and made it to marker 32 and then in one half hour session went from 33 to 138!
- The middle school student tightly holding his new computer after demonstrating how well he can already program in Java – imagine what he will be able to do with his own computer!
- The Spanish speaking mother using a reading program intended for pre-schoolers to improve her English and the sheer determination and joy on her face!
- The books that go home nightly clutched in small hands after they have been assured that, yes, the books are theirs to keep. Plus the variety of requests – wishes for books on double dutch jump rope, penguins, and Japanese geography – who knew?!?

By the end of the fourth grade, low-income students are already two years behind grade level. By the time they reach the 12th grade they are four years behind.

HuffPost 6/4/14

Fortunately the STARS* team of volunteers is willing to search out new books on e-bay and coach the students – children and parents – to learn how to use the computer and access the many resources that are available online. It is incredible to see the positive responses, a 7 year old shouted, "This is the best present I ever got!"

The STARS* team is working with the Phoenixville Area School District to ensure that no child is left behind in our community because they don't have access to today's learning tools.

If you are interested in being a STARS* coach, reading to young children or learning more about STARS*, please go to Orion's website or contact us at info@OrionCommunities.org.

STARS* - Sharing Technology Advances Reading Skills

Proud member of

Cc
the Community
Coalition



So Many Do So Much With So Little So Often

The cold weather is a challenging time for our neighbors in need. Heating and lighting needs increase so utility bills go up, walking to work is less appealing so more funds are needed for transportation, winter clothes for the kids are more expensive, maneuvering a walker or wheelchair in winter slush can be downright hazardous.

Fortunately every week someone new shows up at Orion and says, "How can I help?" or in the case of organizations or corporations, "How can we help?"

We just wrapped up our 3rd annual Warmth for All blanket, coat and sock drive with our first corporate sponsor, Wells Fargo collecting coats as well as providing essential funding. A local church organized their ServeFest volunteers with lots of energy and smiles to help at Orion's Music For Everyone concert. A church youth group stopped by last spring to learn about Orion and now one of the adult chaperones has decided to share her business skills with some new free time volunteering at Orion.

Orion does not receive government funding so everything we are able to do is because of you, our community. For forty years, Orion Communities has been a grass roots organization relying on neighbors to help our neighbors in need... that foundation remains solid.

It has been a humbling honor for me to be part of the staff, Board, volunteers and clients who make up Orion's team. **Thank you for your trust and support as together we have helped our most vulnerable neighbors move to a more sustainable future from 1977 through 2017.**

Kris Keller, Executive Director



Orion Clients/Month



Answering a Call

In 2014, Orion's Board stepped back to re-evaluate the organization and mission delivery. It's been quite a journey.

There's good news and bad news - the bad news is that there are so many people in need of Orion's services but the good news is that those families and individuals who are in need are finding their way to Orion.

To learn more about our programs, please go to OrionCommunities.org or stop by the office, visitors are always welcome!



'You Are An Angel' Program

Sometimes the requests that come to Orion are particularly complicated and/or compelling and are in need of innovative solutions. They require extra creativity, collaboration and resources. Fortunately we have friends and religious organizations that can help provide that extra push to secure a healthy outcome but we always need more angels.

For example, a single mom lived in Chester County longer than she really could afford but she wanted a stable life and schooling for her children. When she was eventually evicted, Orion partnered with another organization to provide her family temporary shelter for one month in Montgomery County. During that time, we worked together, scouring the area for suitable and affordable housing, and finally found her family a new home in Delaware County.

The mom needed first & last months rent plus a security deposit to be able to sign the lease. She had saved \$700 during the previous month (food and transportation costs are almost always higher in temporary housing) but she needed more. Orion and our partners were able to come up with all but the last \$150 which was a real challenge because many organizations have legitimate concerns on helping a Chesco/Montco/Delco housing plan.

The landlord had other parties interested in renting the apartment and there was no viable second choice. This is where our Angel came in, an Orion friend who had said 'call me if you ever need a little extra to make a plan come together.'

Can we add you to our list of Angels?

Neighbors helping neighbors!

"Thank you a million times for all you do for the community. You provide such a valuable service to those in need, and I am grateful to live and work in a town with people who are so dedicated to giving their fellow human beings a hand up during difficult times in their lives." ~Community Partner~

Wishing everyone a joyous holiday season and best wishes for the New Year!

ORION  237 Bridge Street
Phoenixville, PA 19460



Well, that was a blast! Julia, Cory and Matt returned as The Mashups for Orion's 3rd Annual

Music for Everyone.

This time it also was the culmination of Orion's 40th Anniversary of neighbors helping neighbors in need.

Many thanks to our co-chairs, Terry Brett & Susan Mostek, local business sponsors and partners, benefactors and guests, ServeFest and other volunteers for helping to make it such a fabulous celebration!

Congratulations to all of the winners of the raffles, silent auction and our Jamaican Vacation Getaway!

Can't wait til next year!