

# ORION Communities



## Warmth for All!

It was quite a wrap up to a very exciting week of activities - four minivans full of *blankets, coats, food and more* for local food pantries and shelters! The community shared dinner, music and warmth to benefit neighbors in need.

That was the idea behind the last night event for Chester County's National Hunger & Homelessness Awareness Week. Nine area non-profits helped organize Warmth for All at the Kimberton Waldorf School on November 21<sup>st</sup>. It was a week of 'awareness raising' in our generous county - including food and

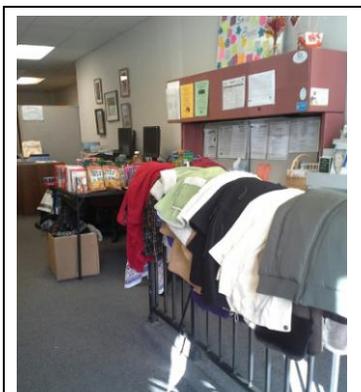
clothing drop offs, tours of shelters and food pantries, and a Hunger & Homeless walk at West Chester University.

For this last event, Warmth for All, everyone was invited to bring warmth to share, and share they did! Even people with other evening commitments dropped off items during the day. Individuals, families and groups like the Chester County Ballet contributed to the bounty.

Dinner was provided by the Waldorf school's Kitchen supplemented with donations

from the community. Fabulous music was provided by Charlie Frey's Blue Plate Specials that inspired many people to dance.

So again, thanks to everyone for their contributions to help keep our most vulnerable neighbors warm!



Preparing to share the warmth with our neighbors.

The nine Phoenixville non-profits collaborating on Warmth for All:

Good Samaritan Shelter, St. Mary's Shelter, The House - Women's Outreach, Open Hearth, PACS, St. Peter's Episcopal Lunch Program, People To People, Growth Ministries, Orion Communities

70,000 people are food insecure in Chester County including 13,000 children.

Fortunately our county has thirty plus food cupboards provide assistance to our hungry neighbors.

## Together for the Holidays?

It was a simple request. A couple wishing to spend Christmas Eve together - she was staying at a women's shelter and her husband was staying at a men's shelter.

The circumstances were complicated but the request wasn't. It was the holidays and could Orion help them have this special time of year together?

They showed up at Orion's door last year, a half hour before we closed for the holidays. A couple of phone calls were made and we had a place for them to stay together for both Christmas Eve and Christmas night.

Plus the Colonial Theatre had gifted tickets for Orion's clients and so we were able to offer a night at the movies

as well.

They held hands and said thank you and she asked if she could give me a hug. How wonderful that Orion could help make some holiday wishes come true!

## Matching Gift Campaign – *Almost There*



So close at press time! This summer, in support of Orion's mission and recent reorganization, friends presented Orion with a challenge – if we could raise \$50,000 of new funds, these friends would provide a dollar for dollar match for the second \$25,000 raised – for a grand total of \$75,000!

Thanks to the generosity of long time and new friends, we are over \$45,000 but we

need to reach \$50,000 by the end of 2015 to earn the full \$25,000 match. These funds will help Orion connect our most vulnerable neighbors with life's basic essentials.

What will Orion do with these funds? Our biggest expense is our Community Emergency Fund which provides money for food, rent, utilities, clothing and transportation. We receive very specific requests to help keep the

heat on or provide food when an unexpected car repair eats into the monthly budget or bus tokens to get to a new job.

Orion strives to be a high impact/low cost provider to our neighbors in need. Please consider making a tax deductible donation to Orion Communities before the New Year and your gift will be doubled!

## College Intern's Experience

When I walked into the volunteer fair at West Chester University, I never thought it would lead to such a meaningful experience. There, I met a representative from Orion Communities who encouraged me to apply as an intern.

My time at Orion has been full of learning opportunities.

I have gained invaluable, hands-on experience that will prepare me for a career in social work. Specifically, I am so grateful for the case managers who allow me to see the skills from the classroom put into practice. With their mentorship, I have begun to orient myself to all of the local agencies and government programs

available to Orion's clients.

I am also thankful to all of those who come through the door and allow me to listen to their stories. The people I have met through Orion have truly solidified my decision to enter the helping profession!

*Thank you Jess for your care and concern of Orion's clients!*

## Varied Reasons for Need

The reasons people come to Orion sometimes began with the previous generation. Poverty, limited education and health challenges can impact future children.

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) and Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS) are preventable conditions that develop during pregnancy and permanently affect the life of a newborn child. During pregnancy, consumption of alcohol, certain medications, and other substances are harmful

to the embryo. Deformities and behavioral problems are just some of the possible symptoms.

It is important to understand these conditions so we can promote awareness in our community and encourage all individuals to seek treatment. Cases of FAS and NAS often go undiagnosed or misdiagnosed. The birth mother may be ashamed of telling her doctor. This stigma should be broken down so more mothers are comfortable seeking help.

In reality, a mother may become addicted to a substance (often painkillers prescribed by a doctor) through no fault of her own. Individuals may also be unaware of substances considered damaging to the embryo.

Orion connects neighbors to prenatal care and addiction treatment services as well as helping neighbors challenged by actions of the previous generation with the intent of helping everyone move towards self-reliance.



Jess and holiday food boxes for local families.

*Once you choose hope, anything is possible.*

Christopher Reeve

## Board Announcement

The Board of Directors at Orion Communities is pleased to announce that effective October 1, 2015 Kris Keller was appointed as the first paid executive director since Orion's organizational transition in March 2014.

Kris had been serving as the volunteer executive director since December 2014 and her leadership in that position was a major factor in bringing Orion from the brink of closing its doors to a position where it has become

a viable and critical provider of services to those in most need in Phoenixville and the surrounding areas.

Ken George president of Orion stated, "Kris's enthusiasm, energy, business acumen and dedication to Orion's mission has been both an inspiration to and catalyst for all the members of the Board."

Please stop by to meet Kris and visit the new Orion!



Pat Bokovitz, Director of Chester County Department of Community Development, on behalf of the Chester County Board of Commissioners, presented Kris Keller, Orion Communities and Cheryl Miles, Bridge of Hope Lancaster & Chester Counties a Proclamation for National Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week

## It Takes a Village

What would you do if you lost your home suddenly?

In early November, a Phoenixville apartment building closed abruptly due to structural concerns. And the tenants had to leave immediately at 5pm on a rainy Friday night.

For many of us, this would be a huge inconvenience but we would probably have family or friends to stay with, insurance coverage or the

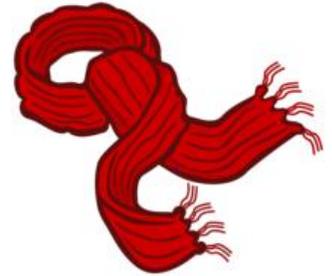
financial means to stay at a hotel.

When someone is living at or below the poverty level, often their support networks are also financially strapped or there are limits on how many people can stay in their rental and creative options need to be found. Depending on the cause for the displacement, sometimes local governments have emergency plans for natural disasters but not for all of

life's surprises.

What happened in Phoenixville has been the rallying of faith groups and partner agencies to secure temporary and long term housing options for our most vulnerable neighbors.

We are blessed with a very cooperative community who work together to problem solve for those less fortunate who have fewer safety net options.



## Homeless in Chester County

January 27, 2016, Chester County will do an overnight Point-in-Time Count of individuals and families who are homeless. This is done each year nationally to understand the scope and the real impact in different areas.

While the numbers of homeless people have

dropped nationally, the numbers have increased in Pennsylvania, rising over 6% since 2010. There have been more than 15,000 Pennsylvanians who were homeless in 2015 and 614 homeless in Chester County on any given night.

If you would like to volunteer to help with the count,

please email [chescopit@gmail.com](mailto:chescopit@gmail.com) or check out facebook Chester County Point-in-Time Count. Everyone counts, let's be sure no one is overlooked.

Thanks to all the volunteers for raising awareness of homelessness in Chester County!

**941 people** spent at least one night in a Chester County shelter in 2014 and **58%** of the children were under the age of 5.

from  
Decade to  
Doorways



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Phoenixville, PA  
19460**

Phone  
**610.415.1140**

E-Mail  
**info@Orion  
Communities.org**

*We're on the Web!*

**www.Orion  
Communities.org**



**www.facebook.com/  
Orion247**

## Cell Phone Means Not Poor?

'He says he's homeless but he has a cell phone.' This is often said with an assumption that if someone can afford a phone, they can't be poor.

However, frequently a person with low income will give up their apartment before giving up their phone because the phone is a lifeline to

employment for intermittent work which means income and the possibility of food or getting another home.

Sometimes a cell phone is a gift from a well meaning family member or friend who wants to help a person with limited income feel a little more normal in their time of crisis.

Cell phones are no longer a luxury but can be an integral part of living in this decade.

The next challenge can be how to recharge a cell phone when living on the street so the next call for work can be received. Neighbors are welcome to stop in at Orion to charge their phones.

## About Orion...

This has been quite a year for Orion, our staff, volunteers and neighbors. A big part of the year was reacquainting everyone (clients, partner agencies, funders and friends) with Orion's mission and commitment to our most vulnerable neighbors.

Orion has been compared to the Phoenix rising from the ashes. This rebirth is due to Orion's dedicated staff and volunteers who have earned

the trust of our 'neighbors in need' allowing us to work together to help provide life's essentials, such as food, shelter, clothing and transportation.

It has been an honor to work collaboratively with partner agencies, faith organizations and so many wonderful people from the Phoenixville area. Wishing everyone a joyous holiday season and best wishes for the New Year!



*Volunteering makes a difference in the community and in you!*



Can you help Orion help our neighbors in need?

- ✓ Receptionist
- ✓ Social Worker
- ✓ Grant Writing
- ✓ Typing
- ✓ Event Planning
- ✓ Event staffing
- ✓ Mailings
- ✓ Other \_\_\_\_\_

Contact us or go to our website  
[www.OrionCommunities.org/volunteer](http://www.OrionCommunities.org/volunteer) to learn more

Thank you!

*Join Orion Communities... neighbors helping neighbors!*