

REAL LIFE CENTER

Annual Newsletter

December 2017

We Are Exceptionally Grateful For You!



**A Word From
Real Life Center
Executive Director**



Cathy Berggren

One of the things I love about working at the Real Life Center is hearing the stories of the individuals and families we see. While the stories are unique, the one common thread is that *unexpected hard times can happen to any of us, at any time!*

What I see is that when those times *do* happen, it is an incredible gift to know that you are not alone.

It is a gift to receive help while feeling valued and keeping your dignity, and it is a gift to feel loved, cared for, encouraged, and prayed for.



Mary said it beautifully as she gave me a hug. *"I never thought I would be someone to need help, but having my child go through cancer has rocked my world. What a gift it is to be able to come here and feel like I am not alone."* At the Real Life Center, we are honored to walk alongside our neighbors during these hard times, loving them, meeting needs and reminding them of God's love for them.

As I reflect on this past year, I am incredibly grateful for the many of you who have played a part in helping make a difference and allowing us to continue to be there for families like Mary's. In a time of unrest and mistrust in our world, I have been blessed to see firsthand the beautiful picture of *neighbors caring for neighbors* every day at the Real Life Center. Thank you for being that neighbor!

Cathy

All client names have been changed for confidentiality.



Cynthia Radically Changes Her Life Circumstances!

My story of life transformation ...

"We had the privilege of catching up with Cynthia, a single mom of two precious girls," shares Cathy Berggren. "Cynthia radically improved her circumstances by setting three life-changing goals and by committing to doing the work to achieve them. She truly inspired me!"

"A few years ago, I separated from my husband under stressful conditions," explains Cynthia. "I was able to overcome the emotional and hard reality of starting from scratch. Unfortunately, due to lack of support, everything started falling apart quickly, and I was confronted with a home eviction notice," she adds. "I was devastated. I had grown up in a stable environment with my grandparents and wanted to provide the same for my girls. I found myself without resources."

One day, Cynthia blessed the Real Life Center with a visit. *"I had my kids with me, and I remember being so emotional. I cried."* She spent her first appointment with one of our assessment counselors who asked questions about her emotional, financial, spiritual and physical state. She felt loved!

I am not defined by my temporary struggles!

"What stood out to me that day was the fact that my counselor engaged me in a dialogue about my goals. He was so compassionate. I learned that I am not defined by my temporary struggles, and he gave me hope for change. He encouraged me to think about a small achievable goal first. At the end of our session we worked on my top three long-term goals together. Wow, it was a powerful dialogue!"

Cynthia's greatest desire was to stand on her own two feet again! *"I proudly took my three goals home," she recalls. "1. Get my own place and reliable transportation; 2. Go back to nursing school; and, 3. Find a new job so I can pay my bills again," she adds. "The Center provided me with resources to get started and followed my progress for one year."*

I did the hard work ...

The Center also assisted Cynthia with food, clothing and financial assistance. Additionally, she received our Dave Ramsey financial planning tools to help her save and budget for her new life.

"If you are willing to do the work, the results will follow. Less than two years later, I moved into my own place, went back to nursing school and got a job as a Hospice Aid. Finally, I was able to purchase my own car. It was a true celebration!"

Life has been good since then, although not without struggles. Cynthia learned valuable coping skills, and they have served her right over the years. *"If it was not for the Real Life Center, I do not know which direction my life would have taken. I am grateful!"*

"Cynthia needed someone to really listen to her, challenge her to think beyond her circumstances, encourage her, love her and provide the support she greatly needed," adds Karen McLean, Real Life Center Client Manager. "Cynthia worked hard and knew she was not alone as she strived to overcome her difficulties."

My children learned too!

Today, Cynthia's daughters are thriving in school as honor students. *"My girls went through the struggles with me and learned that if you are committed to doing the work, the results will follow. We are all doing well!"*

It was an honor to watch Cynthia transform her life and see the impact on her children - our next generation! What a gift!

A Couple Serving Together

You will not meet two more enthusiastic people than Michael and Bertha Amosu! They met back in 1974 while attending church together. After service one day, Michael mustered up the courage to ask her out to a movie.

"My first impression of Bertha was that she was very smart," shares Michael. Bertha noticed his big smile, which melted her heart. Today, they serve together at the Center. Bertha volunteers as an Assessment Counselor. She connects our families with resources and tools for change. Michael works with our families once they are enrolled in our programs and assists them during their service visits.

"During my initial assessment with a new family, my first priority is to set the stage for safety," Bertha explains. *"I love that we set goals with them so they can grow to be on their own again."*

"Truthfully, all of us can fall into a difficult position in life," Michael adds. *"When you give a man a fish, he will eat for one day. When you teach him how to fish, he will eat for a lifetime."*



Look At What You Helped Us Achieve!

The Center launched a new Introductory Program to meet the rising demands of struggling families. It provides quick access into a subset of programs such as bread, produce, classes, financial counseling and more.

We added over 20 new educational classes and created fresh content based on the top five underlying reasons families seek our assistance: job loss, underemployment, health problems, divorce and family issues.

We started a new life coaching program to achieve life transformation. Sessions are delivered by licensed professionals.

Our 2nd Harvest for Hope Gala yielded \$72,908 in net profit. This is an increase of 80.8% over the prior year. Funds will be utilized for new life coaching programs, educational classes and operational enhancements.

We received the 2016 Inaugural Non-Profit Award of Excellence by the Fayette Chamber of Commerce in January. Thank you for your support!

October 2017 Year-to-Date Operational Highlights

- Received 8,542 visits serving 3,258 unique individuals.
- Distributed over 420,400 pounds of food to our families.
- Distributed 13,219 pounds of produce through our Orchard & Garden.
- Offered 55 educational classes attended by 309 participants.
- Mentored 25 individuals during their job search.
- Received \$72,000 of net profit from our stores for Center operations.
- Provided 7,162 articles of clothing and 361 household items.
- Volunteers served 16,746 hours.
- 98% of families contacted achieved stability at the end of 3 months.
- 83% of families contacted achieved 50%+ of their one-year goal.



Real Hope ▪ Real Hope ▪ Real Change

Since 1998, the Real Life Center has provided help to families who have fallen on the unexpected hard times of life. We aim to provide a safe environment and a first step toward hope for their future. Our goal is to get our families to self-sustainability and to be a catalyst for long-term change. We walk alongside our families for one year and encourage them to take responsibility for their lives. We care about each person physically, emotionally, spiritually, relationally and financially ... a holistic path for lasting impact.

Will You Help Us Transform Lives in 2018?

Ways To Support Us and Get Involved

Real Life Center: You can serve families, sort incoming donations, hold a food drive or fundraiser, donate your expertise, teach a class, make a financial donation at www.RealLifeCenter.org or return the enclosed donation card with your gift. You can also contribute by shopping at AmazonSmile or by purchasing groceries through the Kroger Rewards program at no cost to you. For more information, visit www.RealLifeCenter.com/Get-Involved.

Real Life Stores: You can assist shoppers, create store displays, sort incoming donations or gift gently used clothing, home décor and furniture. All net profits are invested in the Center operations.

Real Life Orchard and Garden: You are directly responsible for planting, nurturing and harvesting nutritional produce for our families.

Our **Annual Harvest for Hope Gala** affords us a fundraising path to expand our programs, add new classes and make operational improvements. To learn more about corporate sponsorships or underwriting opportunities, visit www.HarvestForHopeGala.org.

*Thank you for your generous donations of time, goods and money.
We wish you a Merry Christmas.*

Our Programs

- ◆ Assessment Counseling
- ◆ Educational Classes
- ◆ Food Pantry
- ◆ Bread and Fresh Produce
- ◆ Clothing Closet
- ◆ Financial Assistance
- ◆ Financial Counseling
- ◆ Extensive Network and Referral
- ◆ Mobile Food Pantry
- ◆ Job Assistance
- ◆ Life Coaching
- ◆ Senior Program

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Real Life Center is an integrated auxiliary of Dogwood Church.