FOCUS: Keeping the Family Together

Mary Ann and Bill Blaufuss, Mike Miller to be Honored at Celebration of Mission to Service

Longtime community volunteers Mary Ann and Bill Blaufuss and Saint Mary Villa Child Development Center (CDC) director Mike Miller have been making Middle Tennessee better for years.

To honor their contributions, they will be presented with the Spirit of Service Award during the 2014 Celebration of Mission to Service on Wednesday, October 22. The event, benefiting Catholic Charities of Tennessee and Saint Mary Villa Child Development Center, will be at Hillwood Country Club from 5:30 - 7:30 p.m.

“The Spirit of Service Award is presented to individuals who have been significant contributors to the well-being of clients served by Catholic Charities and the CDC and who reflect our values of love, good will, and kindness, blended with learning and laughter,” explained Bill Sinclair, executive director of Catholic Charities.

Mary Ann and Bill Blaufuss have called Nashville home since 1979, raising three children here. Both have been active in church, school, and community organizations. They have four grandchildren.

Mary Ann Blaufuss was the founding chair in 1997 and 1998 of the Celebration of Charity and Service, a forerunner to Celebration of Mission to Service. She also served on the Catholic Charities board and the Cathedral of the Incarnation parish pastoral council, and was president of the Tennessee League of Women Voters.

Bill Blaufuss, retired KPMG partner, has served on the Diocese of Nashville finance committee, was board vice chair of Saint Thomas Health Services, board treasurer of Pope John Paul II High School, and on the board of trustees for the Catholic Charities school district.

Mary Ann and Bill Blaufuss

Mike Miller

Employee Spotlight

Focus on the Present: Mauni Mitchel

I am a present-time kind of person,” Mauni Mitchel explained.

That description applies to her personally, as well as to the professional approach she takes when counseling her clients. Mauni has been a Catholic Charities school counselor for 22 years. Currently assigned to St. Pius X School, she served St. Ann School for 20 years.

She is also a counselor with the Individual, Family and Marriage program and has been involved with CHAP (Creating Hope by Assisting Parents).

Whether assisting children or adults, her approach is the same…and it is based on her “present-time” belief.

“I try to get them to focus on being in the present,” she said.

“I want to help them develop skills or strategies to increase their functioning…to help them be happy, functioning individuals in society.”

This approach, she continued, includes meeting people where they are, helping them to believe in their own goodness, and learning how to make better decisions in life.

She is grateful that Catholic Charities provides her with the opportunity to include spirituality in her discussions with clients, if appropriate.

If someone wants to explore who they are in relation to God, she can do that in relation to their own faith. “I don’t get into theology,” she stressed, but she can include faith in the conversation.

“It is good that I can offer God as a resource.”

Young Professionals
Set 1st Meeting
Oct. 18
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Christmas Wishes
Needs Nearing
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Family Empowerment Program: New initiative fills major area service gap

Family homelessness is a growing problem in Middle Tennessee. Making matters worse, there are very few agencies specifically addressing family homelessness here.

“We are going to fill this gap,” said Matt Preston, program coordinator for Catholic Charities of Tennessee’s new Family Empowerment initiative.

The agency was recently awarded a multi-year grant from the United Way of Metropolitan Nashville (UWMN), as Preston explained, “to fill a unique service gap in Nashville.”

The number of children experiencing homelessness in the Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) is “staggering,” he said. “The worst part, though, is that those numbers do not include those at risk for homelessness.”

No one really knows for sure how many are at risk for homelessness.

During the 2012-2013 school year, MNPS reported 2,821 enrolled students as being considered “homeless” (as defined by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act – see box).

“Our overall objective is to implement case management, coordination, and financial assistance with families experiencing homelessness and those at risk of being homeless,” Preston added. “As many as 105 families – approximately 400 individuals – will be involved with the initiative each year.”

Case managers are positioned at three existing United Way Family Resource Centers, including the South Nashville Family Resource Center (FRC) which is managed by Catholic Charities. Their job is to identify, assess, and connect families to basic needs such as food, clothing, housing, and medical/mental health services.

“We want to assist families in obtaining financial stability, maintaining stable housing, and making healthy choices,” explained Preston.

“The Nashville Family Empowerment Program and the collaborative work that UWMN will be doing with Catholic Charities, Safe Haven, MNPS, MDHA, the Nashville Financial Empowerment Center, and others is important because it creates a pathway toward independence for families,” explained Rebecca Carter, United Way associate director Community Impact.

“It addresses needs through a multi-generational case management model focused on the financial, educational and health needs of students and their families.”

Preston continued, “After an initial assessment addressing basic needs, we develop and implement a plan focused on services that foster and sustain self-sufficiency for the family.”

Through this approach, participants develop skills and gain knowledge in areas such as healthy socialization and life-skills in order to support growth in the caregiving system, and strengthen the well-being of children as families transition out of poverty.

Case management is collaborative. Partner communication on each program’s cases occurs weekly, in order to prioritize available resources and collaborate on programmatic activities.

“Catholic Charities was selected as a partner through the Volunteer Review Process,” noted Carter. “The strength of their application, history with case management during times of crisis, existing relationships in-at-risk communities, and ability to reach across multiple parts of the city were all strengths of the Family Empowerment Program proposed by Catholic Charities.”

“This led to us understanding the importance of Catholic Charities’ Family Empowerment Program and the potential it has in meeting the needs of children and families in the community.”

Who is homeless?

The term “homeless children and youth” (A) means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. and (B) includes (i) children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to a lack of alternative accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement; (ii) children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings; (iii) children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substations, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and (iv) migratory children who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii).

McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (Section 725) (as provided by the National Center for Homeless Education) health services.

Pokémon cards, Action figures, Board games

Celebration of Mission (continued from page 1)

and president of the Serra Club.

Mike Miller has more than 30 years of experience in social services, after earning his MSW degree from the University of Tennessee College of Social Work.

For 10 years, Miller has served as the CDC’s executive director. Prior to that, he was Commissioner of the Tennessee Department of Children’s Services, a cabinet level post, and was director of the Metro Nashville Social Services Department.

Miller was on the Father Ryan High School board for 12 years. In addition, he has lectured at Cathedral of the Incarnation for 15 years and has helped promote Room in the Inn and Catholic Charities’ Christmas Wishes program.

Miller and his wife Judy have four children and seven grandchildren (with two more expected in November).
Enhanced financial literacy has become an even more critical component of Catholic Charities of Tennessee’s efforts to help its clients break the cycle of poverty.

Participation in a 4-session financial literacy class is a requirement for receiving any financial assistance from the agency’s North Nashville Outreach program. “Class participation is treated as the basis for a pledge we will make to provide bill payment assistance,” explained case manager Kylie Grae.

“We start with a short pretest of 6 basic questions, so that front-end knowledge of financial matters can be determined,” Financial Literacy trainer Davina Kraeger said. “We end the class with the students taking a similar test. This allows them to see how far they have come by participating in the class.”

Kraeger uses a 4-step curriculum developed by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation.

“We start with an evaluation of each student’s current situation for income and expenses…what’s coming in and what’s going out. Since the people have come to North Nashville Outreach for help, there’s usually more going out than coming in.”

The second step involves developing a basic financial recovery plan which will be followed by its implementation. The final step involves evaluating and, as appropriate, adjusting the plan to maximize its potential for success.

Each class can accommodate up to 10 students and each session lasts for an hour. The course is completed over a 10-day period. A Regions Bank representative is typically invited to address each group to clear up misunderstandings that many of the students have about bank services. Between October 2014 and July 2014, 117 students participated in the class.

Kraeger teaches in a very engaging, conversational manner, quickly putting class participants at ease. This helps to encourage group participation.

The examples she uses are “real world” in nature: groceries, eating out, utilities, rent, credit card purchases, and how to save money.

“I like seeing the process work, seeing it in their eyes at that moment when the light bulb in their head goes on and they get it,” she said.

“They come in with down faces because they have to be there. Then, when they understand that they really can do something about their situation, the frowns turn to smiles.”

One recent client, a student concurrently pursuing MD and Ph. D. degrees locally, was about to have her lights turned off. She turned to North Nashville Outreach as a “next option.” Being required to attend a financial literacy class was not something she expected to face.

Her experience, however, was very positive. “It was worth the time invested,” she said. “Having the class over four sessions helped to reinforce the information.”

At the South Nashville Family Resource Center, Refugee Services staff member Hem Kharel, Job Skills coach in the Job Training OutSOURCE Resource, teaches recently arrived refugees financial literacy.

The program focus is ultimately the same; however, for a number of reasons, Kharel’s approach is different. He starts with the basics during his 2 hour classes. Like Kraeger, his classes can accommodate up to 10 students per session.

Several agency programs offer clients financial literacy training.

“In my annual United Way designation. There was no real connection with the agency or its work, though.

In January 2007, a deeper connection began: 18 months as a Young Leaders Council Board intern and then, starting in July 2008, six years on the Board of Trustees.

My education was fast and furious. It quickly was clear that Catholic Charities was different. I knew of no agency that served people in need over such a broad geopolitical and economic spectrum.

Most organizations serve a narrow population. Not Catholic Charities.

It serves such a wide range of clients, from the unborn to the elderly. It helps those in need regardless of religious affiliation, race or country of birth. And its array of programs is so wide, too…immigration services, financial literacy classes, pre-K readiness, after school tutoring and mentoring, health programs, pregnancy counseling, adoptions, job readiness, meals for the hungry, and on and on. They are good at what they do, or they don’t do it, though.

As I completed my Board term in June, I knew that I did not want to just walk away. Of all the organizations I have been involved with, this one means the most to me; it is so impactful in the community. I want to stay a part of it in some way.

More than 1,000 Christmas wishes of children, seniors and families will go on display starting November 7 on the Catholic Charities Christmas Wishes tree.

The wishes – for food, clothing, and other basic needs, along with toys – are received through referrals from Catholic Charities staff and other area agencies. Families in severe need also receive food baskets, household staples and personal care supplies.

“If not for the generosity of churches, community organizations, businesses, and individuals, Catholic Charities simply could not bring Christmas to so many people in need in this community,” said Megan Slack, the Family Assistance and Community Employment (FACE) director. Last Christmas, more than 1,200 people had their Christmas wishes come true.

You are invited to share Christmas joy and blessings by participating in this year’s Christmas Wishes program. Call 615-760-1931 or e-mail ChristmasWishes@ctcenn.org for information on how to adopt a Christmas Wishes recipient.

Wishes will be available starting November 7. All gifts must be returned by December 15 to the Catholic Charities office at Saint Mary Villa, 30 White Bridge Road, Nashville (37205).
Refugees Giving Back: Their actions make us better

Most news stories on refugees tend to focus on the ways that they receive help to ease their transitions to new lives. Very few address the positive contributions made once the refugees settle in.

In late June 2011, Bakry Mohamed, then 22, arrived in Nashville alone after spending two years in Egypt as a refugee from his hometown, the Darfur region of the Republic of the Sudan. (His parents and five brothers still live there.)

In a relatively short period of time, he earned both a general equivalency diploma (GED) and computer service technician certification through a Memphis Job Corps office.

Upon returning home to Nashville, he hosted a party designed to not only recognize his achievements, but to also offer encouragement to fellow refugees.

It was important for him to tell his guests to keep moving forward.

“If you can travel as far as you did [to get to Nashville], you can do this,” he said of the steps he took to position himself for employment.

Increasingly responsible lodging industry jobs and computer science project work have allowed Bakry to “move on.” In doing so, though, he continues to remain a part of Refugee Services, not as a recipient, but as a giver.

“As the Volunteer and Resource Coordinator for Refugee Services,” said Aaron Toran, “I have never experienced someone so steadfast in his or her pursuit to volunteer.”

Toran added that he frequently received weekly calls from Mohamed reminding me of his availability and personal need to volunteer.

In recent months, he has helped as a mock interviewer for refugees preparing for job interviews, by guiding work teams at Outsource/Resource (the agency’s light manufacturing and assembly operation providing job training opportunities), and by assisting with perishable food distributions.

He has also volunteered with Habitat for Humanity and is known as a “go-to” person when recently arrived refugees might need a ride to a doctor’s appointment or the store.

With U.S. citizenship a goal in a few years, Mohamed explained, “You just help people out as a human being; it doesn’t matter where people are from.”

Much like Bakry, Catholic Charities Refugee Services Employment coordinator Abdishakur Mohamed (no relation) uses his experience and knowledge to help his clients and the community. For seven years, he has helped refugee clients prepare for and secure employment.

A native of Somalia, he began a two-year term on the Metropolitan Nashville/Davidson County Human Relations Commission in May, after being appointed by Mayor Karl Dean and approved by the Metro Council.

Mohamed explained to The Tennessean in June 2014 front page story that he is mindful of the assistance he received as a newly arrived refugee.

“After living here for ten years, I am aware of how very diverse and welcoming Nashville is. I wanted to help the people of this city as they helped me when I first arrived,” he said. “I want to pay it forward.”

As the first African refugee on the Metro Human Relations Commission, Mohamed brings the Commission a unique perspective and, through his agency work, a unique expertise.

“His selection to the Commission is a point of pride for friends and family,” The Tennessean reported.

This desire to pay it forward is not limited to adults in the refugee community.

A few short years ago, Muna Mudag, a Somali Rantu, participated in the Refugee Youth program’s after-school and summer programs, where she received homework help and English language instruction, along with experiencing some of Nashville’s treasures such as the Frist Center for the Visual Arts.

Over time, she began to volunteer with an elementary youth program providing banking transactions by themselves.”

Financial Literacy (continued from page 3)

what they go through, want to go home,” said Todd-Gottrell. For Luke, Mark, and Matthew, this was not the best solution.

If Luke could not be with an adult in his family, then he wanted to be with his brothers. Todd-Gottrell and Goodsell knew what they had to do to provide permanency to the boys’ lives. They just weren’t sure how it was going to happen.

In February, Providence began to take over at the “Wait No More” information conference in Brentwood. The event drew nearly 1000 attendees, among them family friends of Martha and Peter Simmons, a couple who had provided foster care for the boys several years earlier.

The friends recognized the boys in a photo display and called the Simmons, knowing that they had had a good experience with the boys as foster parents. The Simmons contacted FOCUS and began a conversation about the boys.

After an extensive application/evaluation process, the Simmons were selected to provide a forever home for them.

“The first meeting was a magical moment,” recalled Goodsell. The boys immediately recognized the Simmons. Mark and Matthew jumped into their arms. Although standing back slightly, since he was not as familiar with the Simmons as his brothers were, Luke clearly was happy. His brothers were happy.

That’s all he needed.

The Simmons and the boys spent part of their first meeting looking at pictures of the boys taken several years earlier. This, explained Todd-Gottrell, is rare in these situations. Most of the children in foster care have very few keepsakes such as early photographs.

After the placement, Goodsell and Todd-Gottrell were involved in weekly meetings – sometimes more than once a week – to make sure that the placement stabilized, providing on-going support, such as that provided by Catholic Charities’ Adoption Support and Preservation (ASAP) program, and advice to the family.

Despite these efforts, unfortunately, Luke was separated after three months of placement. It just was not working.

Now, in addition to continuing to support the Simmons with Mark and Matthew, the FOCUS team is back searching for a family that will commit to loving Luke unconditionally by providing him a forever home.

Since FOCUS was founded in 2007, more than 800 children have been served in more than half of the children finding permanency through adoption, reunification with members of their birth family, or a resource family.

“FOCUS (continued from page 1)