



SPRING 2025

# NEWS FROM THE DESC

From the Board Chair .....	2	A timely lifeline for Miguel and Tasha.....	6
Preview of the DESC Defenders fundraiser .....	3	Special Thanks .....	7
DESC Rising.....	4-5	Steel-toe strength.....	7
Welcome Shayla, Savannah and Jaili'.....	6		

## Dancing through life with love

Jessica's home is filled with music, movement and love. A Jacksonville native with a heart for children, she is fostering 14 kids – ages 1 to 14 – and teaching them how to express their gratitude and happiness through "Praise Dance."

Caring for so many children comes with challenges, but Jessica has found steady support at DESC thanks to the many donors who make that help possible. With groceries, diapers and clothing, DESC helps Jessica stretch limited resources to meet the children's most basic needs. "The clothing especially has been so good," she said. "Everything gets passed down with care."

Many of the children in Jessica's care have experienced trauma early in life. But in this joyful, crowded home, there is hope for healing – and for the future.

Though she never had children of her own, Jessica says mothering came naturally. She helped raise her siblings then took in two young cousins. That act of love led her to become a foster parent through the Florida Department of Children and Families. Over the years, more children followed, and Jessica embraced each into her family.

While three of the children are still in diapers, all are in school or day care.



Jessica smiling big at the DESC counter.

Jessica, her wife and her sister care for them together, with occasional help from her two adult nephews. Life in their five-bedroom home is busy and sometimes chaotic, but Jessica works hard to keep things happy and grounded.

"I want the older kids to still be kids," she said. "They help, but I make sure they get to have fun and be with their friends."

Dinnertime brings everyone together, with favorite meals like baked fish, mac and cheese, hamburgers and cereal – often thanks to DESC. And when the music comes on, the children move freely – dancing with joy, dancing with purpose, dancing through life with love.

## A will, a way and a new beginning

Katrina is focused, determined and hopeful about the future. With her three youngest daughters now in middle school, she's eager to return to full-time work and recently interviewed for a production job that could bring long-awaited stability.

Even with her strong work ethic and optimism, it's been hard to keep her family afloat. The sharp rise in food costs has stretched her budget to the breaking point. That's where DESC donors have stepped in to provide critical support.

Katrina first came to DESC for emergency financial assistance to help cover rent. Later, when she and her children were staying in a hotel, DESC provided groceries and clothing. "The food and clothes have been such a blessing," she said. "Even the socks and underwear—those little things most people don't think about—mean a lot."

She still turns to DESC to help meet her family's basic needs. "A big pot of rice goes fast," she laughed. "I come to DESC first, then go to the store to fill in what's missing."

*Continued on Page 3*

## Building Toward Hope

*Details on pages 4-5*



## From Board Chair Claude Moulton

With this issue of our newsletter, we proudly unveil a bold next step in DESC's mission to help families fight poverty: a new, one-level facility that will transform how we serve those in crisis.

With the public launch of our \$2.9 million capital campaign, we are sharing a vision that has quietly taken shape over the past year—one that will expand access to groceries, clothing, financial assistance and case management, all under one roof. You'll find photos and more details on pages 4 and 5. We are deeply grateful to the donors, volunteers and leaders who are bringing this vision to life.

As we step forward, we also celebrate the people who continue to make this work possible.

National Volunteer Week is April 20–26, and we are proud to recognize the many individuals who serve DESC with compassion and commitment. Whether you volunteer in the Food Pantry, support events, lead donation drives, serve on the Board or help behind the scenes, your

time and energy are deeply valued. And if you've been thinking about volunteering—now is the perfect time. We welcome new faces and would love to have you join us. Just reach out to **Beth Wilson** at [beth.wilson@descjax.org](mailto:beth.wilson@descjax.org) to get started.

We also express our gratitude to **Chris Buckley**, who recently retired from the Board after eight years of dedicated service. Chris provided steady leadership through complex seasons, and we are thankful she will continue supporting DESC in other ways.

At the same time, we are thrilled to welcome three new Board members: **Julie Anderson**, a retired business executive and entrepreneur; **Elizabeth Meux**, a realtor with Miller & Company Real Estate; and **Rae Owens**, Director of Discipleship at The Church of Oakland. Each brings a fresh perspective, a deep commitment to our mission and an eagerness to serve.

And we have the good fortune of welcoming **Lani Redington** back to the Board. She graciously rejoined us after a short break. If you or someone you know would be interested in Board service, we would love to hear from you.

I hope you will continue to take pride in all we are accomplishing together. Your generosity—whether it is time, resources and/or leadership—is helping families across Jacksonville find stability, strength and hope.

Thank you for being a part of this remarkable journey.



*Chris Buckley and Claude Moulton*



*Julie Anderson*



*Elizabeth Meux*



*Rae Owens*



DESC's long-term vision is for individuals and families to achieve and sustain financial stability and independence. By answering Jesus' call to serve the poor and homeless, DESC uplifts families and individuals in real-time crisis.

### Families receive care with dignity.

Thanks to generous donors and incredible volunteers and staff, neighbors facing hardship receive help with emergency financial assistance, groceries, clothing and case management.

# Preview of the DESC Defenders fundraiser

We're excited to invite you to DESC Defenders: Generations, our annual fundraiser that promises to be an unforgettable event! This year, the theme "Generations" holds a powerful meaning—representing the generations of DESC supporters, the ongoing cycle of generational poverty and the enduring work of DESC to combat homelessness and poverty in our community through a new facility.

We're honored to welcome back Mary and Hank Coxe as our 2025 Honorary Chairs. Although last year's event was canceled due to the hurricane, they're returning to help finish what they started.

DESC Defenders: Generations is more than just a fundraiser—it's a celebration of the community that's come together over the years to help break the cycle of poverty. It's a reflection of the many generations of donors, volunteers and advocates who have stood by DESC's side. And it's a reminder of the generations of individuals affected by poverty, homelessness and hardship, and how DESC works tirelessly to offer hope and opportunity.

Join us for an evening of fun, inspiration and connection! You'll enjoy delicious food, interactive activities and a program filled with stories of transformation. You'll hear how DESC clients' lives have changed thanks to critical support.

The funds raised will go directly toward sustaining DESC's vital programs and services, ensuring we can continue our mission for generations to come. Your involvement will help build a future of hope and opportunity.

Don't miss this chance to be part of something bigger! Come for the fun, stay for the impact and leave knowing you've helped change lives. We look forward to seeing you at DESC Defenders: Generations!

Current Sponsors as of 4/9/25:

- Delores Barr Weaver Legacy Fund
- John and Jean Grant-Dooley
- John and Susan Humes
- Debbie and Dave Pierson
- Fran and Ken Baker
- Julie and Michael McKenny
- Jack and Claudia Calhoun
- Julie Handley
- The Lord's Foundation, Inc.
- Mayo Clinic Community Contributions Program
- Bud and Kathy Para
- Lesley Roberts
- Warner and Sherrie Webb
- David Clark
- John and Ginger Manley



## A will, a way and a new beginning, cont.



*Katrina and two of her children.*

Katrina has worked in bakery production, customer service, front desk roles and housekeeping. She earned her cosmetology license after high school and still enjoys doing hair, though maintaining a booth is too expensive, she says. Now, her focus is on finding steady, dependable work.

She lives with her mother, sister, partner, cousin and four of her five children. "Everyone plays their role," she said. "I make sure we have what we need."

As the oldest girl in a Navy family of five kids, Katrina learned

responsibility early. When her father left and her mother was hospitalized, 15-year-old Katrina stepped in to cook, shop and care for her siblings. It was her caretaking nature, she says, that taught her to "sacrifice yourself to take care of others."

Katrina hopes to return to school and work with seniors. For now, she's building a better future for her daughters and passing along the strength and compassion that have carried her this far.



## DESC Rising: New Home Is Coming

After 42 years in the basement of First Presbyterian Church, DESC is moving forward—literally and figuratively. Renovations will soon be underway at 956 North Liberty Street, where a 10,000-square-foot building will become the agency's new Downtown Emergency Services Center.

This move reflects DESC's long-term vision: to serve more people, more effectively, with compassion and dignity.

The new center will offer a street-level entrance, parking and transit access and a much more functional, accessible layout. Inside, clients will be greeted by a spacious lobby and private counseling rooms along with first-time access to an ADA-compliant restroom.

A large community room will allow DESC to collaborate with partners like Sulzbacher, the Literacy Alliance, Vision Is Priceless and Jacksonville Area Legal

Aid. There will be space for SNAP enrollment, educational workshops and legal support—all under one roof.

The new facility includes a large warehouse with increased storage and a proper loading dock to simplify food and clothing distribution. In keeping with our faith-based mission, the new center will also include a quiet prayer room for clients, volunteers and staff.

In 2024, DESC provided more than 15,000 services to over 8,000 households, including groceries, clothing, work boots and emergency financial help. As the need grows, so must our capacity—and the space where we provide services.

"This building represents more than bricks and mortar," said **David Clark**, DESC's executive director. "Our hope is that the transformation of this space will help DESC continue to transform the lives of its clients. There are so many who need help, and there is

so much more we can do to support them."

Support for this campaign has come from foundations, individual donors and professionals offering pro bono services. More than \$2 million in cash and pledges has already been raised toward the campaign's \$2.9 million goal.

"DESC's mission—to proclaim the love of Jesus Christ by meeting others' needs—totally aligns with our beliefs," said longtime supporter **Vince Ferrigno**. "We are thankful for all who have helped bring DESC's original vision to a greater level in our community."

Campaign volunteers Julie Handley, Mary Littlepage and Lesley Roberts are leading the effort with heart and determination. Every gift is an investment toward better services, deeper compassion and a stronger, more hopeful Jacksonville.

## Donors to-date

Julie Negrete Anderson  
and Neal Anderson  
Anonymous  
Robert Barzler  
Gabrielle Bellamy  
Kevin and Chris Buckley  
Daniel and Trista Carraher  
Mark David Clark  
Vince and Linda Ferrigno  
Michael Fisher  
Calvin and Voncea Fuller  
Bob and Bobbie Gittings  
John and Jean Grant-Dooley

The Lucy Gooding Charitable  
Foundation Trust  
Diane Hale  
The Hall-Halliburton Foundation, Inc.  
Julie Handley  
Hart & Associates  
Tim and Jessie Hedrick  
Jesse James  
The Thomas M. & Irene B. Kirbo  
Charitable Foundation  
Laura Lane  
Ron and Mary Littlepage  
Gretchen and Tom Lynch

Mitch22 Foundation, Inc.  
Claude Moulton & Christine Whitney  
Bud and Kathy Para  
David and Debbie Pierson  
Jo and Ed Pratt-Dannals  
Pamela & LeMorris Prier  
Lesley Roberts  
Rotary of Jacksonville  
The Terry Family Foundation  
In Loving Memory of Charles D.  
(Charlie) Towers  
Edna Sproull Williams Foundation

# Wall Breaking Kicks Off Construction

On April 4, DESC marked the official start of renovations at 956 North Liberty Street with a symbolic wall breaking. Donors, community leaders, volunteers and staff took the first swings of the sledgehammer—launching DESC’s new chapter.



*Will Messer, Pam Prier, Lanette Hart, Alex Benavides, Lesley Roberts and Julie Negrete Anderson*



*Daniela Zerrate, Dave Pierson, Lani Redington, Debbie Pierson, Fran Moulder and Katy Towers*



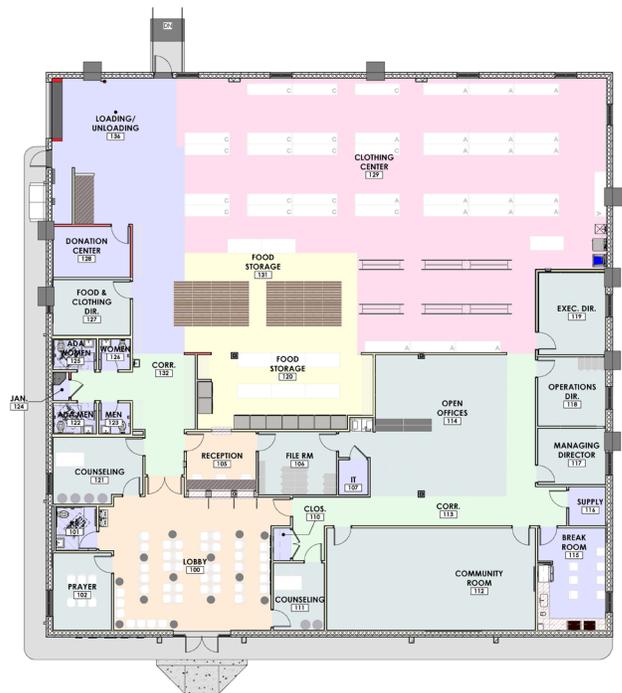
*The aftermath of the ceremony.*



*Claude Moulton, City Council Member Jimmy Peluso, Vince Ferrigno, Linda Ferrigno, David Clark and Julie Handley*



*Our Capital Campaign Committee – Julie Handley, Mary Littlepage and Lesley Roberts*



*The future home of DESC.*

**Photography donated by Mike Erdelyi**

# Welcome Shayla, Savannah, Jaili'!

We are excited to introduce three new faces to our organization, **Shayla Hammonds**, **Savannah Russ** and **Jaili' Johnson**, and we couldn't be more thrilled to have them join our team. Each brings unique skills and a passion for the mission of DESC.

Shayla will be stepping into the role of Emergency Financial Assistance Specialist. Shayla's experience in financial assistance programs and her compassion for our clients will undoubtedly make a difference in the lives of those we serve.

Savannah is our Administrative Assistant. Savannah most recently worked for Habijax as a Family Engagement Specialist, and her passion and enthusiasm for her work makes her a welcome addition to our team.

Jaili' will be with us this Spring as our Social Work Intern. Jaili' brings a strong passion for helping others and is eager to learn and grow within our organization during her time with us.

We asked Shayla, Savannah and Jaili' what makes them excited to be a part of the team at DESC and this is what they said:

## Shayla:

Working at DESC, the satisfying feeling of giving back and contributing to society, is unparalleled! As the EFA Specialist, I have a great sense of pride in aiding our clients and ensuring they can stay safely in their homes. I'm a part of a caring, dependable and people-driven team. The most enjoyable part is finding available resources for the community I serve and providing temporary financial assistance.

## Savannah:

I am so passionate about helping the staff and our volunteers assist the most vulnerable in our community and look forward to more days stocking the pantry, stacking diapers and toiletries in the back, and assisting in any way I can with the staff to help make a difference in our community. I am so enthusiastically looking forward to continuing to work at DESC and getting to know our amazing volunteers and clients better!

## Jaili':

I'm excited to be a part of the team because of the opportunities to learn and work alongside likeminded individuals who have a passion for serving one of Jacksonville's most underrepresented communities. Witnessing the positive impacts that DESC has on each client is admirable, and I'm excited to apply what I learn to support those efforts.



*Jaili', Shayla and Savannah*

## A timely lifeline for Miguel and Tasha

Miguel and Tasha worked hard to build a stable life for their two teenage children. For more than a decade they held steady jobs at the same company, paid their bills on time and were known as reliable, responsible tenants.

But when a sudden mass layoff hit their workplace, everything changed. Their income disappeared overnight and with no savings to fill the gaps, they quickly fell behind. The fear of eviction set in—along with dreadful questions no parent wants to face. Where would they go? Would their children be safe? Would they end up in a shelter or have to sleep in their car?

They called United Way's 211 helpline, which connected them to DESC's Emergency Financial Assistance program – a resource designed to provide immediate relief to families facing financial hardship.

A DESC case manager reached out to the couple's property manager, who expressed concern and praised them as model tenants. That relationship opened the door to a solution. If DESC would cover the overdue rent, he would waive the late fees—allowing the family to start fresh with nothing owed.

Thanks to DESC's swift intervention and compassionate support, both

Miguel and Tasha have now started new jobs at separate companies. Their lives weren't turned upside down because DESC donors stepped in at just the right time.

Today, the family is still together under one roof, eating meals at their own table and sharing laughter, noise and normalcy. The panic that once filled their days has been replaced by peace, stability and a renewed sense of hope.

Thanks to your support, this family held on to their home, their dignity and their future.

# Special Thanks for Special Donors

♥ There are so many incredible donors to thank for helping families fight poverty! Here are a few generous grants received since our last newsletter—**Bank of America Neighborhood Builders, Cavan Family Foundation, City of Jacksonville Public Service Grant, The Clinton Family Fund, Delores Barr Weaver Legacy Funds, Edna Sproull Williams Foundation, Hall-Halliburton Foundation, Inc., Herb and Ann Rowe Charitable Foundation, Krause Family Foundation, Lucy Gooding Charitable Foundation Trust, The Lord's Foundation, THE PLAYERS Red Coats, The Thomas M and Irene B Kirbo Charitable Foundation and United Way of Northeast Florida.**

♥ **Larry Roziers** and the **Mitch22 Foundation** donated a giant truckful of canned goods and non-perishables collected by **Sandalwood High School, Ribault High School** and more.



*Larry Roziers and Mitch22 Foundation helpers dropping off their donation.*

♥ We're grateful to have received lots of holiday donations. **The First Presbyterian Church of Jacksonville Ladies Circle** assembled Thanksgiving Baskets. Each basket included a gift card so recipients could shop for some of their own special items. **Impact Church** provided 20 frozen turkeys and 11 pies following their Thanksgiving Community Event. **Emerald C's Development, Inc.** brought a car full of clothing, toiletries and food following their 12 Days of Giving for Christmas event.

♥ **Viktor's Payless Groceries** and **Former State Senator Tony Hill** (through **Mitch 22 Foundation**) collected and delivered a large collection of Minute Rice and Ramen Noodles.

♥ **Presbyterian House** collected 199 pairs of socks from their sock drive. Thank you to **Debbie Pierson** for coordinating the delivery.

♥ **First Methodist United Church** held a Sock Tree event to collect new socks and other warm clothing.

♥ **Bank of America** collected three boxes of clothes, shoes and toiletries. Thank you to **Sheila Cribbs** for coordinating this collection.

♥ We're grateful to have stocked up on winter coats. **St. John's Episcopal Cathedral** held a coat drive, collecting and delivering four carloads of coats. **Dress A Girl Around the World** provided

two carloads from their coat and blanket drive. **Sandalwood High School** provided a van full of clothing and coats.

♥ **Evangel Temple** provided a van full of race shoes and shirts following the Gate River Run. These shoes were collected at the Gate River Run Race and Expo led by **Bucky Devereaux** and **Dean Hollingsworth**.



*Bucky Devereaux and Beth Wilson with the huge donation of shoes from the Gate River Run Expo.*

♥ Thank you **Books A Go-Go** for delivering children's books for our little clients.

♥ **Cecil Pines Retirement Community** collected 2 large bags of children's toys

♥ **Jan Carpenter**, former DESC employee, has been helping with bread deliveries, and has now committed to helping distribute work boots on Mondays and collecting stories for our social media pages.

♥ We were happy to have groups from **Bank of America** and **Hueman People Solutions** volunteer with us.

## Steel-toe strength

Kevin came to DESC needing steel-toe boots—and a fresh start.

He's faced a heavy few years. After losing his wife, Kevin struggled with grief, family tensions and alcohol. In 2023, he was incarcerated for several months. But now, after hip replacement surgery and time to reflect, Kevin is determined to rebuild.

With a background in construction, he's eager to return to work. The new boots he received from DESC are more

than just required gear—they're a symbol of his next chapter.

Kevin is also working on personal goals. He's setting boundaries, managing his money and building a more stable life for himself.

Thanks to the generosity of DESC supporters, Kevin walked away with the gear he needed—and the encouragement to keep moving forward.





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## NEEDS LIST

Families always need the items below.

- ♥ New socks and underwear (all sizes)
- ♥ Backpacks, totes and suitcases
- ♥ Men's, women's and children's shorts (all sizes)
- ♥ Men's pants (sizes 30-36), T-shirts and jeans (all sizes)
- ♥ Women's shirts (size medium and up) and pants (size 14 and up)
- ♥ Men's shoes
- ♥ Children's clothing for all elementary age sizes, shorts especially
- ♥ Toiletries like deodorant, toothbrushes, toothpaste, razors, bar soap, lotion, shampoos and conditioners

You can see the updated Current Needs List online at [descjax.org/current\\_needs/](http://descjax.org/current_needs/)

## WE LOVE OUR VOLUNTEERS!

Every day is Volunteer Appreciation Day because DESC has **THE BEST VOLUNTEERS EVER!**

If you're interested in learning more, please email [beth.wilson@descjax.org](mailto:beth.wilson@descjax.org).



Mary Ann Lindsey, Liz Bobeck



Yancy Bradley, Sarah Sharp



Betty Marty, Gay Hynes, Cindy Livings



Madeline Clark, Mike and Sharon Williams

