



SPRING 2026

NEWS FROM THE DESC

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Rebuilding with Resilience

Jayne has lived a life most people would never expect. She's worked overseas, teaching English in places like India and Dubai and building a life marked by independence and courage.

That life looks very different now. Today, Jayne is working to rebuild stability after losing her income and housing.

Growing up in a family that faced significant challenges, Jayne learned early how to navigate life with resilience. She built a career with lots of variety, raised her children and consistently found ways to support herself through hard work and determination.

But when Jayne returned to the U.S., everything changed. A Social Security error cut off her benefits and access to medical care, and serious health issues left her unable to work. As costs continued to rise, she eventually lost her housing and spent nine months living in her car.

Today, Jayne is working to rebuild stability while navigating ongoing health challenges and the long process of securing disability benefits. She stretches every dollar, even growing vegetables on her apartment balcony to help make ends meet.

Through DESC, Jayne receives groceries and clothing. This support helps relieve



Jayne smiling bright after a DESC visit.

some of the daily pressure of living on a limited income. More than that, DESC has become a place of connection.

"It provides a place where I can come and realize I am not alone," Jayne said.

Jayne now offers that same encouragement to others, often taking time to talk with people in the lobby and reminding them that they're not alone and encouraging them to keep going. "You can always be nice. That's easy," she said.

Building a Better Future

Ryan has spent the past decade working a wide range of jobs, from restaurants to demolition to construction.

Like many striving for stability, Ryan works hard but struggles to find the consistency needed to build the life he wants.

Determined to change his story, Ryan decided to invest in himself and pursue a new path forward.

Ryan also carries a heavy personal burden as his father battles cancer. The situation provides extra motivation to keep pushing forward and create a more stable future.

He enrolled in Goodwill's GoodTrades program, a hands-on training course designed to prepare individuals for careers in the skilled trades. Through the program, Ryan is gaining valuable certifications, including OSHA safety training, forklift operation and CPR, skills that will open doors to better job opportunities.

Continued on Page 3





From Board Chair Debbie Pierson

As I begin my service as Board Chair of DESC, I do so with a deep sense of responsibility and gratitude. DESC was built by people who care deeply about their neighbors and their ability to meet basic needs.

The people bringing DESC all the way to 2026 are the kind of people who look at their grocery bill and wonder, "How can DESC clients buy groceries and gas?" That empathy shapes everything happening at DESC from direct client services to planning and strategy.

I am grateful for our previous leaders who guided DESC with wisdom and dedication. Their work, along with the steady support of donors, volunteers and staff, has positioned DESC for an important season ahead. The future of this organization is now, and the opportunities are both exciting and significant.

This progress is most obvious in our Capital Campaign (read more on page 4). Our new facility will serve more people with greater accessibility,

dignity and opportunity, while creating space for services and partnerships that are simply impossible in our current setting.

At the same time, our new Help Hub is already creating deeper engagement with clients. It's exciting to see them sit one-on-one with our Community Resource Manager, talk through their circumstances and work on next steps. As we continue those conversations, DESC will become even more responsive and will develop more meaningful relationships with those we serve.

Speaking of our team, DESC has always had the best volunteers in Jacksonville. As we celebrate Volunteer Appreciation Week, we applaud our volunteers who give their time, energy and compassion to ensure that every person who comes to DESC is met with care and dignity. Thanks to all of our volunteers for their service!

The DESC Board of Directors is included with that wonderful group. We are pleased to welcome **Duncan Sawyer** as our newest member and to welcome back **Chris Buckley**. We also extend our sincere thanks to **Pam Prier** and **Tim Hedrick**, who reached their term limits after years of faithful and impactful service. Both have been instrumental in our success, and we're deeply grateful for their leadership.

Take a look at page 3 to see an update on our annual fundraiser. **DESC Defenders: Stand Together** is June 11 with a goal of raising \$335,000. We have a wonderful Host Committee led by Honorary Chairs, **Melissa and Dick Lewis**. I hope you'll join as a sponsor, attend the event or support this effort so we can stand together for families facing poverty.

Thank you for your continued kindness of the families we serve. I look forward to the work ahead!



Honorary Chairs, Melissa and Dick Lewis



Event Co-Chairs, Alex Benavides and Debbie Pierson with David Clark, Executive Director



DESC Defenders Host Committee

- Jim Babcock
- Matt Carlucci
- Katie and Michael Fackler
- Anita and Steve Goyer
- Stuart and Mark Harbison
- Kae and Al Harding
- Randle and Jodie Marchman
- Kayla and Eustachius Roberts
- Susan and Percy Rosenbloom
- Carolynne and Al Rutland
- Nancy Schneider
- Laura and Ben Wuerffel



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 unhoused, 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: STAND TOGETHER, our annual fundraiser that brings our community together for an evening of purpose, connection and celebration.

This year's theme, Stand Together, reflects the heart of DESC's work by meeting urgent needs, removing barriers and helping families experiencing poverty.

We're honored to welcome **Melissa and Dick Lewis** as our 2026 Honorary Chairs, and they've assembled a terrific Host Committee.

DESC DEFENDERS: STAND TOGETHER is more than a fundraiser. It's a critical part of how DESC sustains and grows its work. This year, our goal is \$335,000 to support groceries, clothing, emergency financial assistance and case management for families facing hardship.

"You're going to have a great time," said Event Co-Chair **Alex Benavides**.



"It's one of the most enjoyable nights in our community, and it's also an opportunity to better understand what families experiencing poverty go through and how DESC steps in to help."

You'll enjoy a fun and engaging evening with great food, meaningful moments and powerful stories that connect you directly to the people you're helping. It's a great chance to celebrate what you make possible and to see how your support brings hope to people in need.

Come for the fun. Stay for the purpose. Leave knowing you made a lasting impact.

We look forward to seeing you at DESC DEFENDERS: STAND TOGETHER.

Current Sponsors as of 4/1/26:

- A DESC Angel
- Jim Babcock
- Ken and Fran Baker
- Arden Brugger
- David Clark
- Bob and Valerie Dannals
- Delores Barr Weaver Legacy Funds
- John and Jean Grant-Dooley
- Mattox Hair
- Julie Handley
- Mark and Stuart Harbison
- Al and Kae Harding
- Alison Hill
- Melissa and Dick Lewis
- John and Ginger Manley
- Jodie and Randle Marchman
- Mitch22 Foundation, Inc.
- Lee and Susan Norville, Norville Realty
- Dottie Nutant
- Bud and Kathy Para
- Dave and Debbie Pierson
- Ed and Jo Pratt-Dannals
- Lesley Roberts
- Paula and Steve Rosenbloom
- Larry and Pearl Roziers
- VyStar Credit Union
- Warner and Sherrie Webb

Thursday | June 11, 2026 | 6 p.m. | WJCT Studios
 Visit descdefenders.com for more information



Ryan in his brand new steel-toed work boots.

Building a Better Future Cont.

Ryan hit a barrier when he discovered the program required steel-toed work boots. The boots were essential to continue the training and find employment, but they were costly.

Thanks to DESC donors, Ryan received the boots he needed to stay in the program. With that support, he's now on track to complete the program.

For Ryan, the boots are more than just a requirement for class. They removed an obstacle that could have brought his progress to a halt.

Instead he was able to stay on track without interruption. At a critical moment, that support helped him focus on his training and preparing for steady work.

"This class is going to change my life," Ryan said. "And you guys are helping me make it happen."

Ryan's goal is simple. He wants to find stability through steady work, take care of his father and build a life he can be proud of. With new skills, determination and the right support, he is well on his way.

Permit Approved

MOVING FORWARD AT 956 NORTH LIBERTY STREET



Capital Campaign Update: Moving Forward

After months of delays, revisions and unexpected challenges, DESC has officially received the permit for our new facility at 956 North Liberty Street.

This is a major milestone for the project and a moment we have been anticipating for nearly a year.

“This is an exciting step forward for DESC,” said **Debbie Pierson**, Board Chair. “Receiving the permit moves this project from planning into reality. You can now clearly see what this space will become and how it will serve our community.”

With the permit in hand, our team is working closely with the contractor

and architect to finalize updated plans and confirm construction costs. This step ensures clarity and strong stewardship as we prepare for construction.

Once construction begins, the transformation of the space will move quickly. What is now a warehouse will become a welcoming, fully functional service center designed around dignity, accessibility and connection.

Clients will enter through a street-level entrance rather than a basement stairwell. Conversations will take place in private, dignified spaces. A dedicated community room will allow partner organizations to meet

with clients onsite. A true warehouse will strengthen how groceries and clothing are received, organized and distributed.

These improvements are not just about space. They are about creating a better experience for every person who comes to DESC for help.

This new center will allow DESC to serve more people, more efficiently and with greater care.

With the permit secured, the path forward is clear, and the next phase of this project is underway.

Closing the Gap: The Campaign Continues

DESC’s Capital Campaign continues to build strong momentum as we move closer to our goal.

Thanks to generous supporters, nearly \$3 million has been raised toward the \$3.6 million needed to complete the project and open the new facility.

“With the progress we’ve made, this is an exciting time to be part of DESC’s future,” said **Julie Handley**, Capital Campaign Co-Chair. “We are incredibly grateful for those who have already given.”

That momentum is continuing to grow. Several early donors have

increased their commitments, and new donors are stepping forward to be part of this effort.

“As we get closer to the finish line, we invite others to join us and help bring this project fully to life,” Julie said. “Every gift helps move this project forward and brings us nearer to opening the doors of this wonderful new space.”

With just over \$600,000 remaining, the campaign is within reach. This is a moment of opportunity.

Please consider how you can help close the remaining funding gap and bring this vision to completion.

There are many ways to be part of this effort:

- Make a gift
- Introduce DESC to someone who may be interested
- Invite others to take a tour
- Host a small gathering or conversation
- Connect DESC to business or foundation partners
- Share DESC’s story with others who care
- Lift this work up in prayer

Help Hub: A Place to Connect

DESC is pleased to introduce Help Hub, our newest initiative to support clients beyond groceries and clothing.

Our focus has always been on meeting immediate needs, but the need for help doesn't stop there. Once that immediate crisis is addressed, the next question is often, "What now?"

Help Hub is a place where clients can sit down, talk through what's going on and begin to take the next steps forward. It is a relational program intended to build deeper connections with the people who come to DESC.

"Help Hub is all about meeting people where they are," said **David Clark**, Executive Director. "Just by talking, we can identify ways to help that our clients haven't even considered."

A visit to Help Hub will look different for each person. Some clients need help getting an ID, building a resume or enrolling in a GED program. Others are navigating housing challenges or trying to understand what resources are available. And sometimes, people simply need someone to listen and help them sort through where to begin.

Help Hub is also about connection and navigating social service systems. If DESC cannot meet a specific need, we connect clients with trusted partners across the community. The goal is to strengthen the safety net by introducing clients to existing services rather than duplicating them.

"We're grateful to the City of Jacksonville's Public Service Grants for helping launch Help Hub," said David. "That support, along with funding from our events and donors, allows us to meet immediate needs while helping clients take their next step forward."



Kimberley talks with Yancy, our NCBA team member.

Meet New DESC Staff

DESC is excited to welcome **Kimberley Griffiths** as Community Resource Manager, where she will lead the Help Hub program.

Kimberley brings a strong background in social work. Her path has taken her from the U.S. Northeast to international settings and now to Jacksonville, where she supports individuals and families navigating difficult situations.

For Kimberley, the most meaningful part of her work is simple: walking alongside people as they figure out what comes next.

"What I love about this work is giving people the opportunity to find happiness," she said.

Kimberley recognizes that everyone has a unique

background and different challenges. Her role is to break things down into manageable steps and support clients as they move forward.

"Everyone has their own story," she said. "We help them navigate the path they want to be on, one step at a time."

Kimberley plays a key role in building connections across the community and ensuring clients are linked to the right resources when their needs extend beyond what DESC can provide.

She has quickly become a trusted resource for both clients and staff. Her thoughtful, steady approach creates a space where people feel comfortable, supported and encouraged.

Finding Support



Chantay received support after facing challenges.

With her head down and her spirit heavy, **Chantay** used all her strength to walk through the DESC doors and down the stairs.

She quietly asked for help while feeling, in her words, "like a bum."

Chantay's life has not been simple. She grew up with complicated family relationships and a difficult marriage. Yet, she survived emotional and physical abuse while earning her CNA and raising two children.

Chantay shared that when she called United Way 211, she spoke with a woman named "Ms. Ann." Chantay explained what was happening in her life, and Ms. Ann referred her to DESC. Still, Chantay wondered, "Will they judge me?"

Instead, Chantay said she was met at the door with compassion.

She sat with the agency's new Community Resource Manager, shared her story and, for the first time in a

long while, felt heard. There was no judgment, only care, understanding and help.

"That moment warmed my heart," Chantay said. "I got help, kindness and compassion."

The impact reached her family as well. Her sons were overjoyed to receive clothing and food, along with career support for her eldest son. "Grace and mercy," she said. "I'm glad you all were here that day."

May's Story of Strength



May recently received services.

May has always centered her life around family.

May grew up as one of eight children in a close-knit household. Life was simple—school, church, family and work.

Those early years shaped a deep sense of responsibility and strength that has carried May through every season since.

She spent most of her adult life working in management roles in restaurants and convenience stores. Eventually, May moved to Jacksonville to care for her sister's children.

What was meant to be temporary became permanent, and May built her life here.

Today, May's home is filled with family. She lives with her son, his fiancée and their children and grandchildren. "It's been me and him all his life," she said.

In recent years, life has slowed in ways she never expected. May now lives with COPD and relies on oxygen, making it difficult to get around.

On a fixed income, the cost of rent, utilities and caring for a full household stretches every dollar.

"It's hard," she said explaining that there's not enough to cover everything because the bills take up all the money.

May first came to DESC several years ago when she struggled to keep food on the table. She speaks often about the kindness she experiences and how grateful she is for the groceries, clothing and support when she needs it most.

"Y'all are just a group of nice people who help people out when in need," she said. "A Godsend!"

Charitable Giving and Your Taxes

Recent tax law changes may affect how you approach charitable giving.

Beginning in 2026, taxpayers who take the standard deduction can now receive a tax benefit for charitable giving. Individuals may deduct up to \$1,000 in charitable gifts, and married couples filing jointly may deduct up to \$2,000, even if they do not itemize.

For those who do itemize, new limits may influence how and when gifts are made. Some donors may choose to combine multiple years of giving into one larger gift to maximize their deduction.

For individuals age 70½ and older, Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCDs) remain one of the most tax-efficient ways to give directly from an IRA.

These tax updates create new opportunities for both new and long-term supporters to give in meaningful ways. As always, we encourage you to consult your financial advisor when considering charitable giving strategies.

Thank you for your continued generosity in helping others find help and hope.

A Light Restored

Clinton* is a single father doing everything he can to provide for his three children, ages 12, 10 and 9.

He had steady work until the winter months brought reduced hours and a drop in income. What started as a temporary setback quickly turned into a larger challenge, and before long, Clinton fell behind on his utility bill.

For two weeks, the family lived with no power.

Everyday tasks became difficult. Things that used to be simple, like keeping food fresh, helping with homework and maintaining a

sense of normalcy were suddenly much harder. Clinton was doing his best to catch up as his work hours had increased, but the balance had grown too large for him to manage on his own.

After being referred through United Way 211, Clinton came to DESC for emergency financial assistance. After a careful review, and thanks to generous donors, DESC stepped in to pay the full overdue balance, restoring power to his home.

For Clinton, this support was more than just keeping the lights on. The help meant his children could

return to a stable environment and he could move forward without the pressure of falling further behind.

Clinton's story shows that a temporary loss of income can quickly turn into a crisis. Timely assistance restores essential services while helping families regain stability so they can breathe freely again.

Clinton expressed sincere gratitude for the support he received and shared that he is doing everything he can to overcome this set-back and provide for his family.

*Name changed

Special Thanks for Special Donors

♥ **Larry Roziers** and the **Mitch22 Foundation, Inc.** organized food drives across local schools and partners including **ESS Duval County Public Schools Substitute Vendor, UNF Admissions, Atlantic Coast High School, Ribault High School, Sandalwood High School, Beaches Chapel School** and **Northwestern Legends Elementary School.**

♥ We're grateful to have received holiday donations including, **First Presbyterian Church Women's Circle's** Thanksgiving Baskets, frozen turkeys from **Impact Church**, and a large canned good haul from **Riverside Presbyterian Day School's** Thanksgiving food drive.

♥ **Baptist Health** provided funding for protein purchases, allowing DESC to stock up on hamburger meat, hot dogs, pallets of peanut butter, beef stew and other canned proteins.



Janice and Garrett from Pablo Bay Neighborhood with their donation

♥ We're grateful to have received many other pantry donations from **Historic Mt. Zion Church, JEA,**

Long Branch Elementary School, South Jacksonville Presbyterian, Sarah Sharp and the Jacksonville Quaker Worship Group, The Well at Springfield, Pablo Bay Neighborhood and **Jewish Family & Community Services.**

♥ Several groups helped clients stay warm through coat and blanket drives, including **Julie Anderson, Meskel & Associates Engineering, J.Crew & One Warm Coat, First Presbyterian Church, Sweetwater by Del Webb Residents, St. Johns Discipleship Community Church** (via **Bill and Rosie Pezzutti**) and **Sandalwood High School National Honor Society.** Plus, the **St. John's Cathedral Outreach Council** delivered more than six van loads of clothing, winter coats and accessories, coordinated by **Laura Lane.**

♥ Many clothing drives were held by community partners including **Bank of America, Emerald C's Development, St. John's Cathedral, Bald Eagle Pub** via **Randy Martin** and **Salli Solow.** Plus other clothing donations from **City of Jacksonville Legislative Services, Keepsafe Learning, Inc., Crossroad Church Tuesday Morning Bible Study Group** and **WeeTRADE** following their fall and spring sales.

♥ **Dress-A-Girl Around the World** donated two bags of handmade dresses and skirts.

♥ We received support for children and families, including toys and games from **Cecil Pines Adult Living Community** and **Artisan Lakes residents.** Plus, diapers and wipes from **Bob Gittings** and **St. Vincent dePaul** and **Sacred Heart School's Minnie Vinnies.**



Ronald and Jim from Artisan Lakes Community toy drive

♥ We're thankful for several sock and underwear donations from **Family Promise - Operation Share Socks, Mandarin United Methodist Church's "Undie Sunday"** led by **Gabrielle Bellamy, Riverside Avenue Christian Church,** led by **Alison Hill, UF Health & Morrison Healthcare Food Services** and **First United Methodist Church.**

♥ **South Jacksonville Presbyterian Church** held a "Deodorant Drive," gathering deodorant, toothpaste, toothbrushes and body wash—along with clothing coordinated by **Lani Redington.**

♥ The **Hump Day Group** collected toiletries and feminine hygiene items, organized by **Mimi Stephens.**

Grant Highlight - Part 2

DESC is proud to continue highlighting our foundations whose generous grants strengthen our work. This group of partners reflects support received since our previous issue through the current reporting period.

Among these funders are two of DESC's longest-standing grantors whose consistent support has made a tremendous difference over time.

The **Edna Sproull Williams Foundation** and **The Thomas M. and Irene B. Kirbo Charitable Foundation** have each provided grants for decades, reflecting a deep and ongoing commitment to helping people in emergency situations.

Together, these investments support groceries, clothing, emergency financial assistance and case management for people experiencing poverty. Each grant helps ensure that when someone comes to DESC in a time of need, help is available and hope is within reach.

We are grateful for the following partners whose recent grants help sustain and expand DESC's work. To each partner, we extend our sincere thanks. Your generosity strengthens this work and reminds us that we are not alone in serving our community.

- Baptist Health System
- Cavan Family Foundation
- City of Jacksonville Public Service Grants
- The Clinton Family Fund
- The Community Foundation for Northeast Florida
- Delores Barr Weaver Legacy Funds
- Hall-Halliburton Foundation, Inc.
- Herb and Ann Rowe Charitable Foundation
- The Jim Moran Foundation Inc.
- The Lord's Foundation, Inc.
- The Lucy Gooding Charitable Foundation Trust
- MaryEllen Willis Charitable Trust
- Terry Family Foundation Funds
- United Way of Northeast Florida



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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 large and up) and pants (size 14 and up)
- ♥ Men's and children's shoes (all sizes)
- ♥ Children's clothing for all elementary age sizes, shorts especially
- ♥ Toiletries like deodorant, toothbrushes, toothpaste, razors, bar soap, shampoos and conditioners
- ♥ Diapers and wipes
- ♥ Work gloves
- ♥ Bibles

You can see the updated Current Needs List online at descjax.org/current_needs/



THANK YOU VOLUNTEERS!

Our volunteers are the heart of everything we do. Their time, compassion and dedication make a meaningful difference in the lives of those we serve. Whether they're offering a helping hand, a listening ear or simply showing up with kindness, their impact is immeasurable. We are so grateful for their commitment to DESC and our community.

