



SPRING 2023

NEWS FROM THE DESC

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Abdella visited DESC to help her daughter and three grandchildren.

All kids, all the time

Abdella has dedicated almost her entire life to caring for children – as a mother, grandmother and day care worker. She loves children and being with them 24/7.

Abdella moved to Jacksonville from Grand Rapids, MI and lives with her grown daughter and her three grandchildren, ages 5, 6 and 12. She stopped into DESC recently for groceries, clothing and other help for her family.

Since COVID, the multi-generational family has spent a great deal of quality time together, homeschooling and practicing reading, math, sciences, art and history. Abdella not only acts as a grandparent but frequently parent as well.

The family enjoys daily walks in the neighborhood, basketball, picnicking and playing in the nearby football fields, as well as occasional trips to the zoo or a museum.

Unfortunately, Abdella has been experiencing severe arthritis in her hip and is likely facing surgery but is trying to “keep on moving and go-go-going.” She says she loves living with her daughter and her grandchildren. Every once in a while, they enjoy a treat of a movie or pizza night – “something special to look forward to.”

In her quiet time, Abdella likes reading, a little TV, ice cream and cleaning. She says the kids can create a lot of chaos, and she enjoys restoring order to the house.

Abdella says DESC has been such a blessing to her family, helping with her electric bill, groceries, toiletries and clothing. She says the canned goods, especially the meats and soups, allow for easy-to-make meals. She is thankful for peanut butter, jelly, sandwich meats and breads as well, and the frozen meats she receives are always good for 2-3 meals.

“God bless you and thank you very much!” Abdella said wanting DESC donors and volunteers to know how much they are appreciated.

From despair to a new awareness of those in need

Leona was in despair when she called United Way's 2-1-1 just one day after a house fire consumed most of her belongings. She was hoping to get a referral for clothing, but that call turned into a whole bunch more.

It was clear from the onset; Leona was in utter shock, and she was encouraged to join our DESC Empowerment Program (DEP). As a program participant, Leona could receive services to help her put the pieces of her life back together.

The first objective was rapid rehousing. However, Leona had other needs that our DEP staff helped her navigate through more effectively. “I didn't know what to do or the first step to take,” Leona said.

To help through the transition, DESC covered hotel fees and worked side-by-side to encourage a heartbroken Leona in her search for available housing. She explored temporary housing solutions, but she found waiting lists at most places.

Continued on Page 2

DESC Defenders BROKE all records!

Details on pages 6-7





From Board Chair Pamela Prier

Every morning when DESC opens to our clients, an army of volunteers is ready and willing to help. With each event, there's another group of volunteers tirelessly planning and preparing to raise more money. At each Board meeting, and in the time in between, there's yet more volunteers ready to tackle the governance and fiduciary requirements.

DESC has been blessed by incredible volunteers who give so freely to help families fight poverty. In fact, if you look at the contribution of DESC volunteers, you can see that they donated almost 11,000 hours in 2022 at a value of \$315,000!

We are so grateful for all of our volunteers all year long, but especially as we approach National Volunteer Week, April 16 – 22.

So to all of you who volunteer to help our clients, plan our events, serve on our Board or help with drives at work, school or more, THANK YOU for being the best volunteers ever!

Three of those amazing volunteers attended their last Annual Meeting

for the Board of Directors in January. **Rolly Berrey, Lani Redington** and **Al Rutland** reached their term limits for our Board. They have faithfully served on the Board for many years and have contributed countless hours to ensure DESC's success.

Thank you Rolly, Lani and Al for all the amazing support over these many years. We owe you a great debt of gratitude. We would love for you to stay close to DESC!

I hope you read the articles in this issue of our newsletter so you can see how your donations have helped people fight back against poverty. It's so encouraging to hear how groceries, clothing, emergency financial assistance and case management can make such a difference in the lives of the folks we serve. All told, DESC provided more than 15,000 services in 2022.

Also included in this issue are photos and highlights from last year's DESC Defenders: Journey Through Time. It was an amazing event, and we thank all of you for your incredible support!

Our Event Chair, **Alex Benavides**, and Fundraising Chair, **Julie Handley**, are already working with their committees to produce this year's fundraiser. We will be back at the WJCT studios, but this time at the end of September. Alex, Julie and the volunteers are working out the details to make it another spectacular event. I hope you're planning to contribute and attend again this year.



Thank you for reading our newsletter and, more importantly, thank you for all you do to help families in need!

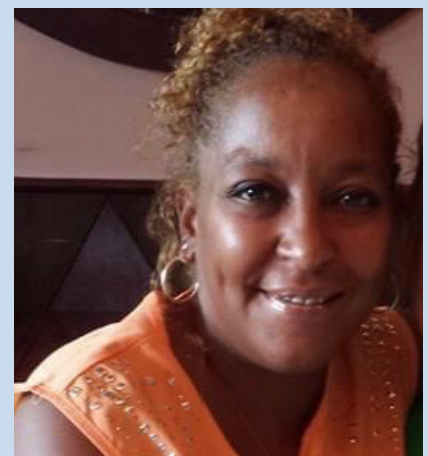
Despair (cont.)

After a couple weeks of searching, Leona connected with a landlord who had a rental house that had become vacant. Once Leona let DESC know about the property, she got help to facilitate the move-in process and emergency financial assistance to help cover the security deposit and move-in costs.

It took round-the-clock work, but thankfully, Leona was approved for the rental quickly. "I am humbled," Leona said, expressing that she has gained a new awareness of the needs of those struggling with keeping a roof over their head. "This experience has given me a desire to help those in need."

Working with personal connections, the DESC team secured several donations and budget-friendly purchases to help Leona set up her new home. Leona received furniture, a washer and dryer set, dishes, small kitchen appliances, bedding and kitchenware. She also received groceries, clothing and toiletries from the other DESC programs.

"DESC has gone above and beyond to help me get back on my feet," Leona said. "I thank you for all you've done!"



Leona got help after a tragic loss.



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

Families receive care with dignity.

Thanks to extremely generous donors and amazing volunteers and staff, our neighbors struggling with hardships receive a helping hand with emergency financial assistance, groceries, clothing and case management.

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—**Cavan Family Foundation, Hall-Halliburton Foundation, Herb and Ann Rowe Charitable Foundation, Krause Family Foundation, Lucy Gooding Charitable Foundation Trust, MaryEllen Willis Charitable Trust, Sunshine Health, The Lord's Foundation, The Olive Tree Foundation, THE PLAYERS Red Coats, and United Way of Northeast Florida.**
- ♥ **Gardner Davis Jr.** hosted another successful November fundraiser. This year, his last, was appropriately named "One Last Ride."
- ♥ **Linda Ferrigno** kindly donated stacks of children's books.
- ♥ We are so sorry to see the closing of **Lake Shore Presbyterian Church**. Thank you so much for the generous gift of \$16,000!
- ♥ **Bob Gittings** collected, bought and donated a trunk full of diapers, twice!
- ♥ **Riverside Presbyterian House** donated toiletries, adult diapers, crocheted blankets and shawls, socks, coats, a suitcase and sewed pantry bags.
- ♥ Food drives were hosted by **Riverside Presbyterian Day School, First Presbyterian Church of Jacksonville Women's Circle, Sandalwood High School, Ribault High School** and the **Mitch22 Foundation** who all donated canned and boxed pantry items. As well as **Lake Shore Presbyterian Church** who donated Thanksgiving items and **Riverside Avenue Christian Church** who hosted a Food Advent Challenge.
- ♥ **Pure Barre Dance Studio** and the **Mandarin Presbyterian Church Ladies** donated food and clothing.
- ♥ **Cecil Pines Retirement Community** and **Gifted Hands Sewing Group** donated food, handmade baby dolls, toys, games, socks and hair items.
- ♥ We have newly purchased items thanks to **Hueman's clothing drive** and **Mimi Stephens' "Hump Day Group"** gift of toiletries, feminine products, toilet paper and blankets.
- ♥ **Jacksonville Memorial Hospital Auxiliary/Jacksonville Memorial Hospital** donated blankets and tote bags.
- ♥ **Riverside Presbyterian Church, Riverside Presbyterian Day School, YMCA Yates, UNF Chapter Sovereignty of Destruction Dance Troupe, Garden Club of Jacksonville Annual Flea Market** donated children's and adult clothing.
- ♥ **First Presbyterian Church of Jacksonville** donated blankets.
- ♥ **Ortega Church** donated clothing and new underwear.
- ♥ We're grateful to receive handmade items such as a patriotic quilt from **Quilts of Valor** and scarves from **Cindy Livings**, a Clothing Center volunteer.
- ♥ We are so thankful for the huge donation of children's clothing from **WeeTRADE's** most recent bi-annual sale.
- ♥ We are grateful for continuous donations of clothing, food, toys and more from **Riverside Avenue Christian Church, Mitch22 Foundation, Larry Roziers** and **First Presbyterian Church of Jacksonville Pathfinders Sunday School Class** and **Mission Team**.



Carey and Ruth Ann Hepler with students from Riverside High School.

Heplers last run

It was another amazing collection of shoes and clothes from **Carey** and **Ruth Ann Hepler** who have been rounding up donations for 21 years!

This year's collection is bittersweet as the Heplers have announced a big move to Spain. That means year number 22 will have a new leader – yet to be identified.

In the meantime, it was another chance to thank this dynamic duo for all they've done for DESC.

"The race shoes that Carey and Ruth Ann collect and donate are an indispensable donation," said **Beth Wilson**, DESC Program Director. "The donation drive is such a great way to involve the city in helping those in need and is a great community service project for the teens who help sort and prep the shoes."

This year's energetic volunteer crew came from Riverside High School. We owe a special thanks to **Larry Roziers** from the Mitch22 Foundation (and a DESC Board member) for encouraging **Roslyn Bloxom-Johnson**, Athletic Director, to participate!

"Our volunteers were phenomenal this year," Beth said. "They are such a great group of students who are going to make our world a better place!"

If you are interested in picking up where Carey and Ruth Ann are leaving off, please call us at DESC! We need some help! Call Beth at 358-0809.



Brittany, back row, second from right, with her aunt and children.

Partnership helps avoid eviction

As a working mother of two, who also has a disabled relative living with her, **Brittany's** worst fears were about to come true – she would be evicted from her home in a matter of days.

Working with the Jacksonville Area Legal Aid (JALA), a determined Brittany had a fighting chance to avoid being put out on the street, but she still needed funds to cover all her overdue rent. That's where DESC and our donors stepped in.

Thanks to a new partnership between DESC and JALA, we can now help clients facing court-ordered evictions, and Brittany was our first case.

The DESC Emergency Financial Assistance team worked diligently

with JALA and Brittany's property management to complete the case quickly as time was of the essence.

With all parties working in tandem, the case was completed, and payment was issued the same day Brittany's response was due in court.

Brittany was hopeful she could stay in her apartment and had saved a substantial amount to contribute towards her outstanding balance, so that meant DESC could help and not exceed our typical maximum for rental assistance.

Meeting the deadline was a victory for all involved.

"I cannot express enough how

amazing DESC and JALA were in helping me and guiding me through one of the most stressful situations," Brittany said. "I could not have done this alone! I am forever grateful!"

Theresa Tippins, DESC Program Director said the new partnership was a great success. "The JALA team, Brittany and the property owner were great to work with. There's a lot of potential in this partnership moving forward."

Brittany is now determined to get on a path toward long-term economic stability, so she won't face this situation again.

"Theresa even talked to me about their program and assistance they offer with financial planning and buying a home," said Brittany who has signed up for services in the DESC Empowerment Program.

"You all have been a beacon of hope, and I look forward to what the future holds," Brittany said. "The work you all do is amazing, and I am positive that it is life saving for many!"

Brittany plans to learn more about her finances and future opportunities while working with DESC. "Buying a home seems impossible, but I now have hope," she said. "My goals of educating my kids and building generational wealth is possible."



Mother & daughter, Latonyal & Latoyal, visited DESC for food and clothing.

Family Matters

With names so similar, it might not be surprising that mother and daughter duo, Latonyal and Latoyal, are extremely close.

The pair recently came to DESC together and shared more about

their lives and what DESC has meant to them.

Latonyal returned to work after seven years of retirement to earn some additional revenue. Unfortunately, she suffered a severe burn on her leg requiring extensive medical attention and physical therapy which ultimately created more challenges. Even through the hard times, she enjoys spending time with her daughter and grandchildren.

Latoyal, who works from home, says she is "very fortunate" to have her mother's help with the kids, especially during the summer months.

Both mother and daughter wanted donors to know how appreciative they are of DESC. Both have received

groceries and clothing. Latoyal also received emergency financial assistance when she was behind on her utilities. She said she greatly appreciates anything that helps with the kids and gives her more time with them.

Both mother and daughter want to start their own, separate businesses one day – Latonyal has her sights on a mobile boutique while Latoyal wants a hair business.

Latonyal said the DESC Clothing Center "is the only place I ever get new clothes from." She loves the mix of gently used items along with new socks and underwear. She said sometimes the donations come with the tags still on.

Partnerships key to DESC's success

Partnerships among downtown churches created DESC 40 years ago this year. Today, those partnerships and many new ones continue to be a driving force today.

When DESC was chartered in 1983, there was a cooperative spirit to help those struggling with poverty. Most of those initial churches are still DESC partners: **First Presbyterian Church, St. Johns Episcopal Cathedral, First United Methodist Church and South Jacksonville Presbyterian Church.**

That sense of teamwork is alive and well today. DESC works with many similar charitable organizations throughout the year to provide services to the community including the **United Way of Northeast Florida, Presbyterian Social Ministries, Sewing Hope for DESC,**

Feeding Northeast Florida, Waste Not Want Not, LJD Jewish Family & Community Services, Catholic Charities, Clara White Mission, Sulzbacher, Operation New Hope, Chrysalis Health and many others.

We also have new member churches: **Riverside Presbyterian Church and Riverside Avenue Christian Church.** And there are many other churches that partner with DESC: **Crossroad Church UMC, Impact Church and Mandarin United Methodist.**

DESC's collaborators extend beyond churches. For example, DESC started a new partnership recently with the **Jacksonville Area Legal Aid (JALA)** in hopes of helping households already engaged with the legal proceedings of eviction.

"DESC had long believed that the process to help these households was too entangled with complications from the legal system," explained **David Clark**, Executive Director. "But a conversation with **Jim Kowalski** at JALA revealed an eagerness to work together."

That conversation led to assistance for a household already in the courts facing certain eviction. With case workers in both agencies focused on finding solutions, the process was smooth and a resounding success (read more on page 4).

"Partnerships are quintessential for DESC," said **Pamela Prier**, Board Chair. "We are so grateful for shared resources to help families who are experiencing emergencies or poverty."



Lani Redington and Rolly Berrey (not pictured, Al Rutland).

Board members roll off

We are sad to announce that three long-time DESC Board members are rolling off the board this year.

Rolly Berrey, Lani Redington and Al Rutland have served on the DESC board for longer than most know, and have contributed so much to the growth of DESC over the years.

Rolly did everything from running payroll to balancing the books before serving as our fearless leader from 2018 to 2020.

Not only was Lani a board member, she has also been a devoted volunteer and led the DESC Defenders event in 2020 and 2021 breaking records each year!

Al has brought so many new people to DESC and has been a key member of every committee over his years of service. He is leaving a legacy of good work all throughout DESC.

These three leaders are irreplaceable and we feel blessed to have had them on our Board for so many years. We wish you all the best!

Shining a light on volunteers

The DESC staff often brags that our volunteers are the BEST VOLUNTEERS EVER! That's because it's true.

DESC volunteers are the lifeblood of the agency. They go above and beyond every day to make sure families and individuals fighting poverty get the services they need.

DESC simply couldn't provide more than 15,000 services a year without this incredible group of dedicated people. "DESC volunteers make a difference every day," said **David Clark**, Executive Director. "Their dedication and commitment to helping our community is extraordinary and is critical to keeping our doors open."

The week of April 16 is officially National Volunteer Week, and we want our volunteers to know that we THANK YOU FOR ALL YOU DO!

"We love the volunteers for all they do, but we also love them because they're great people," said **Beth Wilson**, Program Director. "Their loyalty is awesome, and their faith is inspiring."

If you would like to volunteer, please reach out via clothing@descjax.org.





Ruth Ann Hepler, Alex Benavides, Carey Hepler with the DESC Defenders

A HUGE success!

The DESC Defenders traveled back in time to 1983 to begin the celebration of 40 years of DESC. Not only did we enjoy celebrating together in person again, we also had our most successful fundraiser yet. With your help, we raised more than **\$310,000!!** Thank you to everyone who attended and those who donated. We couldn't have done it without you!

Thank you, **Ruth Ann** and **Carey Hepler**, for kindly serving as our Honorary Chairs. We also want to thank **Tenikka Hughes** for being an amazing emcee!



Rolly Berrey & Pam Prier

Presenting Sponsors

Delores Barr Weaver ^{Legacy Fund}
established 2012

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HALL-HALLIBURTON
FOUNDATION

Mary Virginia Terry

Platinum Princess

AME Senior Housing Board

A "DESC Angel"

Ed & Jo Pratt-Dannals

Golden Captain

Hud & Rolly Berrey
John & Jean Grant-Dooley
Ruth Ann & Carey Hepler

John & Susan Humes
Julie & Michael McKenny

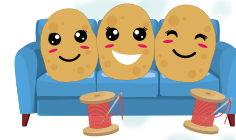


2022 Fundraising Teams

(ranked by funds raised)



Captain Underwear, Julia Suddath and Julie Handley



Sewing Hope's Comfy Couch



IntergALactics



Redington's Renegades



Queen Appétit & Tenikka Hughes

- Pamtastic
- DESC Frontliners
- Fund'er Roos
- Uptown Civitan
- The HUEMAN Touch
- Exigo Sales & Marketing
- The Guy with the Truck
- Dances with Dolphins
- Fireside Girls
- Hedrick's Heroes
- Tenacious T
- Holland & Knight
- The A-Team
- fundRaise the Roof

Silver Commander

Julie & Neal Anderson
 Fran & Ken Baker
 Black Knight
 Barbara English

Thad Eshelman/Eastern Quality Foods
 FNF
 Vince & Linda Ferrigno
 Henri Landwirth Family Endowed Fund

Jacksonville Jaguars
 Foundation, Inc.
 Steve & Paula Rosenbloom
 R. Lee Smith

DESC DEFENDERS' Elite Squad

Arden Brugger
 Kevin & Chris Buckley
 Daniel & Trista Carraher
 Tommy & Bonnie Dudley
 Judy Fackler
 Florida Blue
 Bob & Bobbie Gittings
 Mattox Hair

Julie Handley
 Joan Haskell
 Robert W. & Lindsay D.
 Helms Advised Fund
 Historic Mt. Zion
 AME Church
 JEA
 David Kirkland
 Mary & Ron Littlepage

Tom & Gretchen Lynch
 Clay & Elizabeth Meux
 Miller & Company
 Real Estate
 Claude Moulton &
 Christine Whitney
 Bud & Kathy Para
 David & Debbie Pierson
 LeMorris & Pam Prier

Sally & John Ragsdale
 Lesley Roberts
 Bill & Peggy Scheu
 SouthState Bank
 Uptown Civitan
 Sherrie & Warner Webb
 Larry Zenke

Faith Guardians

Ed & Helen Albright
 Carmina Aldana
 Baptist Health
 Alex Benavides
 Matt Carlucci State Farm
 The Chamblin Family
 Perry Chappell

David Clark
 Ham Cooke
 Mattie Fraser
 Calvin & Von Fuller
 Tim & Jessie Hedrick
 Sandy Jones
 Laura Lane

Dick & Melissa Lewis
 Sherry Magill
 Betty Marty
 Will & Karla Newton
 Dottie Nutant
 Drew & Kellie Prusiecki
 Mal & Lani Redington

Larry & Pearl Roziers
 Virginia Shields
 VyStar Credit Union
 Will & Crandy Wheeler
 Anne Williams
 David & Lisa Williams
 Sheila & Calvin Williams



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United Way
of Northeast Florida



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
- ♥ Men's pants (sizes 30-36), T-shirts and jeans
- ♥ Women's shirts and pants in larger sizes
- ♥ Men' shoes
- ♥ Work gloves
- ♥ Children's clothing for all elementary age sizes
- ♥ Bug spray, "Skin So Soft" and sunscreen
- ♥ Toiletries like deodorant, toothbrushes, toothpaste, razors, bar soap, shampoos and conditioners

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



SWAP DAY!

Twice a year volunteers and staff orchestrate a "Swap Day" to switch out our clothing from cold weather to warm weather attire (or vice versa). Volunteers and staff also use the day to do some deep cleaning throughout the facility. This year's effort was March 15 and our volunteers worked hard to be ready for our clients on the next day of service.

If you're interested in learning more,
please email clothing@descjax.org.

