



FALL 2019

# NEWS FROM THE DESC

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## Uncle, nephew find shoes, hope at DESC

For most of those involved with the Downtown Ecumenical Services Council (DESC), it seems the basement of the First Presbyterian Church in the heart of downtown Jacksonville has always been a place for people to get emergency assistance.

We know that can't possibly be true given the church, and its basement, date to 1903.



Thanks to a special donor, Rodney received new shoes when he came to DESC over the summer.

But Rodney, one of our recent visitors, certainly remembers when the basement was quite different, back in the 1970s. He says the memories of playing billiards in the church basement with his friends is still crystal clear. He fondly recalls the pastor at the time going out of his way to "straighten-out" the local boys and keep them out of trouble. It was the kind of help that meant a lot to him and his friends.

Today, Rodney comes to the same basement but for a different kind of assistance. Suffering from a bad hip that gives him plenty of trouble and pain and prevents him from working, Rodney comes for clothing and food assistance.

Rodney brought along his nephew, Haneef, on his last visit. Rodney is channeling the pastor from his youth, serving as the role model and giving his nephew from Atlanta the chance for a fresh start here. They both received groceries and, more importantly, new shoes – a real treasure and the result of a

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## From Venezuela to America

It's a long way from Venezuela to America. In fact, 1,890 miles long.

In 2015, Yonier, his wife and two children made the long trek to escape crime and violence that were ravaging their homeland and sought asylum in the U.S. Leaving behind everything wasn't easy for the young family. But Yonier was willing to sacrifice his work as an engineer and the life the family had lived to offer his children a better future.

Yonier could not speak English when he first arrived but slowly built his language skills enough to get by. Getting a job proved to be harder than he expected as his degree in engineering didn't hold the same value in the U.S.

Things took a decided turn for the worse earlier this year. During the Easter season, the family had been out enjoying an Easter Egg Hunt, when their lives were about to change. Once home, Yonier's wife suffered a massive stroke and passed away – leaving Yonier as a single father with few resources or contacts for support.

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### Answer the call to wipe out poverty.

*Turn to Page 6*



## From Board President Rolly Berrey

It's been said many times, "Change is inevitable." Though it can happen whether you plan or not, the DESC Board and staff leadership felt it would be more effective to stop and plan for it. So, as we reported in the Spring newsletter, we received a grant from The Community Foundation that allowed us to engage a consultant and embark on a Strategic Plan to lead our activities over the next few years.

There's an article on the facing page with more details about the plan, so I want to use this space to highlight the commitment of the DESC Board, staff, donors, partners and volunteers. Before we ever started, we asked God to lead us along this journey. We asked Him to show us what DESC should do to help the people of our community and to use His timing for our work.

As our conversations built and we gathered more feedback from those close to DESC, we became more certain that DESC should allow itself the opportunity to help families in more ways than groceries, clothing and financial assistance. We also

committed to focus our work on the broader definition of poverty alleviation. I applaud the courage of our Board and staff to embrace this expanded definition of our work and am excited to see where God leads us over the next few years. As for the "inevitable change," DESC will be ready thanks to all who worked on our new plan.

I am also enthusiastic about the changes to our events. Our new DESC DEFENDERS: Superhero Challenge is going to be an entertaining evening and rallying point for our community. Our new, one-event-a-year strategy will help streamline our activities and keep us focused on providing services to families in need. The new event also ties in nicely to our expanded mission to wipe out poverty.

We welcome our new superhero, Queen Appétit, who is helping to highlight the challenges of food insecurity and getting food into the hands of those who need it. In fact, research shows that 1 in 4 local children struggle with hunger. Queen Appétit is joining Captain Underwear, Princess Pantaloons and Commander Current to show how each of us can call upon our superhuman powers of compassion and generosity to make a difference for those in need. You can find more details on pages 6 and 7.

Thank you to all who are reading this newsletter. You're an integral part of DESC and are helping those in need every day.



DESC staff and volunteers pose for a photo with UP Orlando leadership staff during a tour of the awesome facilities.

## Vols, staff visit UP Orlando

At the suggestion of Robert Lupton, author of *Toxic Charity*, DESC Board and staff wanted to visit United Against Poverty in Orlando to gain a better understanding of how the agency is working toward poverty alleviation.

As fate would have it, the best date for DESC was also the date of a "Poverty Conference" hosted by UP Orlando (as the agency is more commonly called).

At the end of June, three Board and three staff members learned more about the eviction process and its impact on all sides of the issue. The conference provided tremendous insight and illuminated the challenges surrounding a key piece of DESC's financial assistance services.

"The tour of the UP Orlando facility was incredible," said Julie Handley, Board member. "They have so many services all under one roof, a huge grocery store and a training and education program. Together, they are pulling dozens of families out of poverty every year!"

The grocery store is the most visible part of the agency because of its volume and size, which is similar to a neighborhood grocery store. But, at UP Orlando, clients purchase food at dramatically reduced costs and most use food stamps.

"The customers come for the prices, but they have a sense of pride knowing they are helping the agency too," said David Clark, Executive Director. "We were all inspired by the success of moving families out of poverty."



By fulfilling Jesus' call for us to assist the poor and homeless, DESC uplifts families and individuals in real-time crisis. Thanks to amazing volunteers and staff, our neighbors receive a helping hand during hardship with emergency groceries, clothing and financial assistance.

### Families receive care with dignity.

Thanks to extremely generous donors, more than 13,500 families will receive services this year. Through strategic partnerships with key organizations, amazing volunteers and thoughtfully managed systems, we maximize our impact within the community while minimizing our costs.



## Special Thanks

- ♥ One of our long-time volunteers, Susan Bancks, created interactive booklets to keep our clients' children engaged over the summer and using skills they need for school. The booklets were packed by age and included coloring pictures, games, puzzles and wise quotes from historical figures. Booklets included a pencil pouch packed with markers, pencils and a surprise toy!
- ♥ The First United Methodist Church ACTS Circle stays busy all year helping families who come to DESC. Recently, they provided Easter baskets again this year and collected a big batch of back-to-school supplies.
- ♥ Also helping with back to school was OnPay Solutions which collected backpacks, lunch boxes and more to help the children get ready for a successful school year.
- ♥ Thank you Hueman for all you do including sending volunteers to DESC every month! We love having your talented, happy folks at DESC.
- ♥ Bombas is amazing! The company gives one pair of socks to the homeless for every pair sold and sent a huge donation over the summer to help us cover feet all the way until the end of the year.
- ♥ Thank you to South Jacksonville Presbyterian Church and Mandarin United Methodist Church for organizing Undie Sunday drives over the summer. The underwear and cash are both needed and much appreciated!
- ♥ We are so thankful for our amazing donors. Some key gifts since the spring are from the Thomas M. & Irene B. Kirbo Charitable Foundation, Bank of America, THE PLAYERS Championship's Red Coats, Riverside Presbyterian Church, Cavan Family Foundation, Coldwell Banker Vanguard Cares and so many more!
- ♥ Just when we needed it most, Deermeadows Baptist Church shared a ton of children's clothing (and more) with DESC. The donation came at a critical low for children's inventory and was put to good use immediately.

## New Strategic Plan set in motion

After much introspection, reflection, research and prayer, DESC has a new Strategic Plan to lead the organization for the next few years and a slightly modified mission statement to carry us far into the future.

The new Mission, "To proclaim the love of Jesus Christ by meeting the needs of people in emergency situations or experiencing poverty," affirms the organization's commitment to alleviate poverty. The broader mission also allows DESC to reach beyond basic needs to provide life-fulfilling services.

The strategic plan is supported by a grant from a discretionary fund at The Community Foundation of Northeast Florida and included the development of a vision statement along with affirming the organization's values and creating strategic priorities and goals.

DESC's Vision "is for individuals and families to achieve and sustain financial stability and independence." And our strategic priorities are to align services with our updated mission statement, explore fostering sustainable change for the individuals served and consider improvements to physical space to match program services.



*Board and staff worked on the strategic planning process with help from Clarity Transitions at Riverside Avenue Christian Church.*

Over the next three years, DESC will review its business models and program service delivery to identify opportunities to have a greater and farther-reaching impact on the lives of those who come to DESC. In addition, DESC will explore pilot programs such as case management for families receiving financial assistance and other options around groceries and employment.

"I am grateful for the amazing spirit of our Board of Directors for building on an incredible foundation established by donors, volunteers and staff over the years," said David Clark. "The Board's willingness to explore ways to do even more for those in need is a testament to their dedication for the poorest among us."

## Interns increase capacity

DESC has been reaping the benefits of our partnership with the University of North Florida bringing students to help families in need without adding costs to run programs.

Our most recent communications intern, Terence "TJ" Murphy, just finished his semester and passed the baton to Steven Haas who will be with DESC until December.

"The energy and exuberance of youth brings a lot of excitement to DESC," said Beth Hood, Operations Director. "The interns have helped us manage many communications projects but also pitch in whenever we are short an extra set of hands."

DESC is taking a significant step to expand the partnership with an intern

from UNF's Department of Social Work. This position is the first dedicated case manager at DESC and is in partnership with United Way of Northeast Florida.

Kim Pollock will be at DESC through April 2020 and will have licensed supervision meetings with Jan Morse, United Way's Director of Childhood and Youth Strategies.

"I am thrilled someone will work with our financial assistance families after we help with overdue rent or utilities," said David Clark. "Within her part-time hours, Kim will help any client looking for extra help to navigate systems leading to a pathway of success."

## Helping those who help others

Often those who come to DESC for help are doing their part to help others in their communities. Shona, who recently came in for groceries and clothing, is a shining example.

A hard-working mother of five who has been to DESC intermittently over the years, Shona has been working as a life enrichment counselor at an assisted living facility for 10 years and before that spent years caring for her grandmother who suffered from dementia. By word of mouth, she's been helping others with similar challenges.



*Shona is happy to receive some additional help for her family of six.*

Shona enjoys her work as it allows her to share joy with the elderly. She says she and the residents talk a lot, play games (their favorite is Bingo) and do exercises (mostly in wheelchairs). Shona admits it takes patience to deal with those suffering from memory loss, but she does what she can to help them talk about their lives, keep them motivated and not feeling down. She feels blessed because her job doesn't feel like work, rather it's like hanging out with your grandparents every day.

When not working, Shona enjoys her family with her children ranging in age from pre-K to high school. She is proud of her older children who help with the younger ones.

She also enjoys singing, swimming and catching up on sleep. She says in lean times DESC has been a helping hand by supplementing groceries and clothing especially for her large family.

## Uncle & Nephew (cont.)

generous gift from an anonymous donor.

Haneef, moved in with his uncle after being released from prison. Orphaned at a young age, Haneef was left to depend on his friends for support. He reflects now on the people who he thought were his friends. "They had hidden agendas," Haneef said. They weren't looking out for his best interests.

Haneef believes the relocation to Jacksonville will start a new chapter in his life where he can take the lessons he's learned from mistakes and use them to succeed. He has big ambitions to get back to work relying on his handy-man skills.

"I lay wood, I do tile, sheetrock. I could build a house if you gave me the materials," Haneef said. "I don't have any disability; I just have a criminal record."

He hopes to one day own his own painting and construction business. "I want to be an entrepreneur," Haneef said. "One day I'll be the one donating shoes and clothes here."

Like his nephew, Rodney has business aspirations himself. He wants to combine his two passions of fishing and cooking into a family seafood restaurant. When all is said and done, Rodney wants to leave a legacy for his family.



*Haneef came to DESC with his uncle and both left with new shoes.*

## Mayor's Downtown Homeless Taskforce making a difference

Even after opening the Urban Rest Stop, the Mayor's Downtown Homeless Taskforce has continued to work toward other improvements around those who are living on the streets in downtown Jacksonville.

David Clark is a member of the task force and is now leading the Outreach Ministry Subcommittee. This subcommittee is bringing together ministries from all over the community. The groups are sharing their services with each other, making connections and improving access to resources for those in desperate need.

The goal of the subcommittee is to identify the best way to share all the resources available with those who are homeless or those helping them.

United Way and the City's 630-CITY have joined the group to gain a better sense of the great work being done across Jacksonville.

The overseeing task force has already had great success with the opening of the Urban Rest Stop earlier this year. The site is helping those from the street by providing a place to rest, access to showers, laundry facilities, lunch and other clinical and support services.

The task force is also working to bring mobile services to Jacksonville and is getting closer and closer to functional zero for homeless veterans, meaning there are essentially no veterans who are homeless in our city.



# Davis named City's Volunteer of the Year

Everyone should know by now that DESC has the most incredible volunteers in all of Jacksonville. Well, now there's official proof.

Judy Davis, the lead member of our "Food Acquisition Team," was named Senior Citizen of the Year by the City of Jacksonville's Council on Elder Affairs. The prestigious award was presented to Judy at City Hall May 22.

While Judy clearly doesn't like or want the extra attention of the award, she certainly has proven time and time again that she's a volunteer extraordinaire. As described in her successful nomination, "Downtown Ecumenical Services Council's secret weapon, Judy Davis, is the volunteer power behind the organization's Food Pantry."

Judy has always cared a great deal about others and the Jacksonville community. It's common knowledge in Ortega that anything you want to donate can be placed on Judy's porch because she will take everything.

Beyond DESC, Judy also volunteers with multiple schools and nonprofits in the Jacksonville community, such as Rise to Inspire, John Stockton Elementary School, Long Branch Elementary and Christian Fellowship Church.

Just like a true Floridian, Judy comes into DESC with hurricane force, and there is no limit to how far her arms will reach. Judy goes on two or three separate food trips a week, loading her truck each time and unloading at DESC. Along with transporting and unloading, she unpacks boxes and stocks the freezers, refrigerators and shelves.



*Judy Davis is surrounded by staff and volunteers after receiving her award.*

## From Venezuela (cont.)

Somehow, Yonier remains positive in these trying times. "I love America," he says reaffirming he wants to stay to provide a better life for his children. Yonier is an Uber driver but has had to cut back so he can take care of his children during the summer.



*Rosmery called for assistance and encouraged her neighbor, Yonier, to call too. They came in together, met with Nancy Chamblin and received financial help.*

Yonier is grateful for his neighbors who have been helping him out with the children and providing support as well as identifying additional resources. One of his neighbors, Rosmery, was also struggling to make ends meet. She told Yonier about DESC and the opportunity for financial assistance.

Somehow, both Rosmery and Yonier got through to DESC and were able to make appointments. Both received financial assistance to cover overdue rent and groceries for their families. Maybe more importantly, they also received encouragement and hope.



# DESC

Downtown Ecumenical Services Council

## Volunteer Needs

If you can, please help provide services to the homeless & impoverished in our community.

### Clothing Closet

Monday - Friday  
8:30 - 11:30 a.m.

Pull and bag clothing orders for clients

### Pantry

Monday - Friday  
8:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

& Monday - Wednesday  
2 - 4:30 p.m.

Greet clients, prequalify them for services and assemble food bags

### Telephone

Times Vary

Answer primary line providing emotional support to clients as well as limited referrals

### Group Projects

- ♥ Fundraising Events
- ♥ Facility Cleanup (cleaning, organizing, construction, repairs)
- ♥ Community Drives
  - ♥ Underwear & Socks
  - ♥ Diapers
  - ♥ Toiletries
  - ♥ Peanut butter and jelly
- ♥ Special Projects
- ♥ Professional Photography
- ♥ Fundraising/Event Committee(s)



# Accept the Superhero Challenge and wipe out poverty!



Queen Appétit is uniting with Commander Current, Captain Underwear and Princess Pantaloons at our DESC DEFENDERS: Superhero Challenge. The heroes are throwing down a challenge to you and everyone in Jacksonville to join in and show your true superhero powers of compassion and generosity. Together, we can pull in more resources to help feed those who are starving. We can clothe those who don't own any underwear or socks. And, we can provide financial assistance to those at risk of being tossed on the streets.

**Saturday, October 26, 2019**  
5:30 – 9:30 p.m.

**New Location!**  
WJCT (100 Festival Park Ave)

*Bubba will be there too!*



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Allison & Randy DeFoor

John Delaney

Linda & Vince Ferrigno

Nathaniel "Nat" Glover, Jr.

Dr. Laura Grippa

Brian Hepler

Ruth Ann & Carey Hepler

Mary & Ron Littlepage

Jo & Ed Pratt-Dannals

Sherrie & Warner Webb

**EVENT COMMITTEE**

Alex Benavides

Rolly Berrey

Chris Buckley

Marshall Faircloth

Julie Handley

Tim Hedrick

Theresa Bennett Hill

Myra Martinez

Elizabeth Meux

Bruce Musser

Pam Prier

Lani Redington

Lesley Roberts

Al Rutland

Kady Smaglis

Salli Solow



# Vols, staff learn how to handle challenges

In early June, the DESC staff members and volunteers spent a day learning how to manage and ease conflict in potentially harmful situations during DESC's latest in-service training day.

Patrick Finn-Schultz, Sulzbacher's Behavioral Health Counselor and ADA Coordinator, volunteered his time and offered the use of the Villages' training center. He began the session by inviting our team to voice any concerns regarding client interactions that we face at our site. Patrick was familiar with the volatile situations described by the team and provided specific tips based on his experiences in the field.

Empathy was a large component of the training. Patrick made the point that, as charitable organizations, we serve many goodhearted people when they are often at their lowest or during extreme challenges. He reminded us to be mindful of each person's sensitivity. Even the most subtle expressions like word choice, eye contact and posture could make a big difference in how an interaction can become more precarious.

The session was animated and interactive for our group. Patrick employed reenactment and role-playing exercises to demonstrate how challenging confrontations can be managed and controlled in real-time.

When necessary, Patrick paused the role playing to clarify what was going on, so all members understood and remained engaged. "It was great to apply techniques immediately in a safe environment and receive instant feedback," said Eileen Smith, one of the Food Pantry volunteers who attended the training. "I got a lot out of the lessons and feel better prepared to work with all of our clients."

On top of the de-escalation tactics, we learned that the DESC team has some very talented actors! If only we had filmed it!



*Volunteers and staff listen to Patrick Finn-Schultz discuss using empathy when helping others.*





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United Way  
of Northeast Florida



## OUR NEEDS LIST

We are always in need of the items below.

- ♥ New socks and underwear (all sizes)
- ♥ Men's large T-shirts, shorts and jeans
- ♥ Women's larger sizes
- ♥ Men's shoes
- ♥ Backpacks and totes
- ♥ Children's clothing for all elementary school age sizes
- ♥ Toiletries like deodorant, toothbrushes, toothpaste, razors, shampoos and conditioners
- ♥ Hoodies for children, men & women

You can see our updated current needs list on our website at [www.descjax.org/current\\_needs](http://www.descjax.org/current_needs)

## VBS youth have fun learning

It was such fun to have the Vacation Bible School youth from Riverside Presbyterian Church during their "Summer in the City" program. The children spent time at a different nonprofit each day of the week to learn about local services. Upon their arrival at DESC, the kids toured the facility, helped sort shoes from the Gate River Run and pulled mock clothing orders for a hands-on experience of how our resources get in the hands of those in need.

