

Stewpot

Faith meeting needs in our community



A Newsletter of Stewpot Community Services

Spring 2021



DIRECTOR'S CORNER

Dear Stewpot friend:

It's been a year. *One year* since the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted and reoriented our lives. Like so many of you, I am exhausted. Exhausted

from the pervasive and persistent demands of these times. And I can't wait until it's over.

But I am also exhilarated. Exhilarated because many unexpected blessings and opportunities have come our way at Stewpot to help us serve our community; some of which are highlighted in this newsletter.

For example, in January, thanks to a partnership between Stewpot, Downtown Jackson Partners, Galloway Church, and Visit Jackson, we welcomed onto our staff a new Outreach Worker, Tommie Brown. Tommie's primary work is to engage and befriend people experiencing homelessness who make downtown their "home base," so that he can connect them with the resources they need.

During February's winter storm, Stewpot worked with an informal coalition of partners to identify over 200 people who were homeless and who needed shelter in the subfreezing temperatures. Connected by a text thread, we worked together to find hotel space or other shelter accommodations to serve our neighbors during this critical time. We actively checked on those who did not want to come inside, and we all shared our resources according to the greatest need.

Also in February, Stewpot received an allotment of CARES Act funds through the City of Jackson to rehouse people experiencing homelessness. (Think about it: people experiencing homelessness are safer from COVID when housed rather than in congregate shelters or in encampments, where outbreaks could occur.) These

same funds will also allow us to hire another Outreach Worker, who will be present in the community on our behalf, connecting people experiencing homelessness all over the city with resources at Stewpot and beyond.

And finally, another game changer for Stewpot was when the St. Dominic's Care-A-Van came last month to give staff and clients COVID vaccines. As you can imagine, this was more than a "shot in the arm" for our community, as it was yet another step in us being able to gather with one another as God intended and to welcome back the remarkable Stewpot volunteers we have missed for an entire year of the pandemic.

We hope you will read more about these wonderful opportunities here in our newsletter. We also hope that you will take note of the changes we are making to our annual "Taste of Mississippi" event, which has been raising funds to help undergird our ministries for over 25 years. This event is more important than ever, as we continue to respond to the challenges of COVID-19, one-year in.

The pandemic has tried all of us, but as a community, we have risen to serve the least among us in beautiful, life-giving, and soul-supporting ways. We have witnessed many remarkable moments of resilience, grit, and determination, even at the most difficult moments. Thank you for your many, many prayers, and for continuing to show up on beside and on behalf of your neighbors in need.

In it together as ever,

Jill

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A New Partnership

As COVID-19 creates new challenges, a new partnership is responding with innovative approaches to homelessness in downtown Jackson.

According to John Gomez, President of Downtown Jackson Partners, “In 2018, Downtown Jackson Partners realized the need to actively address homelessness in the downtown district. DJP contacted nearby homeless service providers for ideas on how DJP could partner with different organizations. After a number of discussions and developing a financially manageable program, we sought a partnership with Stewpot Community Services to create a homeless outreach worker specifically assigned to downtown. We approached Visit Jackson, and they enthusiastically supported our efforts. Stewpot approached Galloway UMC, and they also agreed to provide financial support.”

Tommie Brown is the Outreach Worker assigned to downtown Jackson who actively searches out homeless women, men, and children in need.

Mr. Brown states, “My job presents the opportunity to build relationships with our partners and with people who are currently experiencing homelessness; relationships that are necessary to identify and bridge the gaps in the current framework or build a new framework that supports efforts to reduce and ultimately eradicate homelessness.”

Mr. Brown’s consistent presence allows him to engage people in a sustained way over time that builds trust.

“I travel to each of the downtown hotspots [areas where clients frequent] in an attempt to locate clients that we either haven’t seen in a while or that we need to make contact with for various

reasons. I seek out newcomers and make an effort to build relationships with them as well. Each hotspot is visited several times a day because clients move around a lot. I’m also following up with clients to make sure they are following through with requests from caseworkers or outreach workers to apply for or provide documents needed to get them into housing, or other services they are applying for.”

Moreover, Mr. Brown says, “homeless people have the same needs as people who are not homeless. They need a safe place to live, quality medical care,

positive encouraging relationships, inspiration and motivation, and a strong support system. They need community. Any attempt to address homelessness without consideration of these things will result in failure.”

Stewpot was created by a group of congregations who wanted to work together to address hunger, homelessness, and poverty. For the past 40 years, collaboration has remained one of our core values and has been one of the reasons we have been able to have such an impact on people’s lives.

Mr. Gomez agrees: “The partnership is so important because we are bringing the business/tourism sectors and faith-based organizations together to improve the lives of the homeless so they don’t have to survive on the streets.”

Photos: Barbara Gauntt/Clarion Ledger



BLUE CROSS & BLUE SHIELD TASTE OF MISSISSIPPI IN A VIRTUAL WORLD



By: Michelle Bingham

As you can imagine, in-person fundraising has been hit pretty hard since March of last year. There are so many questions to consider when trying to plan for events that our supporters favor. Just a few are: How do we safely have an event attended by hundreds of people? Who's going to come if we put an event together? Will restaurants participate, especially since they've been struck hard by this pandemic? What is the best decision to make for all involved? Truthfully, the best decisions are often the hardest ones to make, and because of them, somehow, things are reshaped.

We canceled Taste of Mississippi last year because Coronavirus rapidly made all gathering on a large scale; impossible. The Mississippi State Department of Health strictly advised against all events and functions hosting ten or more guests. So, what did this mean for Stewpot? Well, at the time, we were unsure. Because the Blue Cross & Blue Shield Taste of Mississippi is one of Stewpot's most significant fundraisers, we were not in a position to lose the revenues of the event. So, we reached out to all our event sponsors and asked if they would be willing to redirect their donation dollars to assist us in our plight, to make sure those affected by these unprecedented times could count on Stewpot to be there. Thankfully I can share, ALL of our sponsors maintained their commitments.

Although we've made significant strides to regaining our normalcy, we still aren't at a point where we think it's the right time to entertain guests by hosting an in-person event. However, we want to make sure we keep Taste of Mississippi on your minds, so when the time comes, you feel like you have not

missed a beat! Soooooo, the Blue Cross & Blue Shield Taste of Mississippi fundraiser will be going VIRTUAL!

Stay tuned for more details coming soon! In the meantime, take a look at some memories from the past.



Housing Hopes *Realized*

Stewpot Community Services has recently received \$600,000 from the City of Jackson's CARES Act allotment to provide Rapid Rehousing in the City of Jackson. Rapid Rehousing (RRH) is a short-term rental subsidy that helps connect people experiencing literal homelessness to long-term stable housing and case management support for other needs.

Stewpot has been operating RRH programs for four years, but never at this

level. Extra money has been given to RRH programs across the country, since being housed is safer against COVID than a congregate shelter or encampment. We are excited about the potential impact this can have on homelessness in our City. Through our RRH programs, we have helped over 150 households to work toward housing stability.

Specifically, Stewpot has used our RRH grant funds to help those who seek us out for emergency shelter. Case workers actively engage our overnight guests at the Opportunity Center, Matt's House Shelter for Women and Women with Children, and Billy Brumfield Shelter for Men. CARES Act funds have also allowed us to

hire a Housing Navigator to help smooth the process of looking for a place to live.

We are working in partnership with the Central MS-500 Continuum of Care and Grace House, both of whom have also received funds to help house people experiencing homelessness and to help prevent people from *becoming* homeless by paying rental and utility arrears.

We know that housing is foundational to helping move people to stability. These RRH programs bring together lots of folks working together to end homelessness and to provide a better life for our neighbors. Because at Stewpot, we believe that none of us are home until all of us are home.

Staff Transitions

To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose
under heaven: Ecclesiastes 3:1

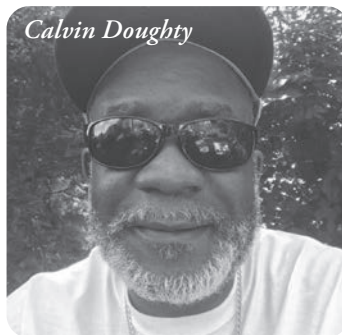
To say the last year has been quite a season is an understatement with COVID-19. Stewpot has never missed a day of serving our community in new and creative ways while maintaining necessary safety guidelines. Rising to meet challenges, the staff found ways to make it happen, stepping up and in to do whatever it takes. That's the kind of commitment and dedication that makes Stewpot so special. And in the midst of this time, we have said goodbye to three long time staff members: Tara Lindsey, Calvin Doughty, and Sgt. Montel Cleaver.

Tara served as Director of Volunteer Services, a big encompassing task at Stewpot that counts on volunteers to do what we do for the community we serve. She filled many roles overseeing the Clothing Closet, assisting with Special Events, and with the Volunteers Assistants Program. Steady and purposeful, Tara always found ways to welcome individuals and groups both large and small to serve in the Stewpot community. After more than 12 years of service, she left Stewpot at the end of December to take care of herself and family.

Calvin Doughty, Director of Maintenance & Vehicles, has been a mainstay at Stewpot for almost 30 years. He has worked in many roles: Chef, Driver, overnight support for Brumfield House, and oversight of the Bratton Street Project. He has been especially involved in helping with our Special Events and many other behind the scenes acts of service for which he never sought attention or praise. Calvin retired at the end of February.

Sgt. Montel Cleaver has served as the security guard during our lunch hour and at the Opportunity Center's emergency shelter. He has also served an important role as Stewpot's liaison with the Jackson Police Department. A constant presence of strength, Montel made safety a priority for our community. He retires on March 31 after more than 25 years of service.

Yes, seasons come and seasons go. These faithful servants served long and hard, 67 years combined. They have touched the lives of many each in their own way. Letting them go is not easy. Their commitment to Stewpot Community Services over the years has been incomparable. We have been blessed by them and are forever grateful. And a new season begins. Tara, Montel, and Calvin, peace and all good to each of you on the journey ahead.



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Stewpot Staff Members

Rev. Jill Buckley, *Executive Director*
jbuckley@stewpot.org

Jackie Brown, *Chief Operating Officer*
jbrown@stewpot.org

Michelle' Bingham,
Special Events & Communications
stewpotevents@stewpot.org

Christie Burnett, *Opportunity Center*
cburnett@stewpot.org

Stephanie Echols, *Food Pantry*
sechols@stewpot.org

Brooke Floyd, *Children Services*
bfloyd@stewpot.org

Michael Harvey,
Facility & Vehicle Maintenance
mharvey@stewpot.org

Yolanda Kirkland, *Teen Services*
ykirkland@stewpot.org

Wilbur Logan,
Billy Brumfield Shelter for Men
wlogan@stewpot.org

Melvin Stamps, *RAMP,
Housing Program Manager*
mstamps@stewpot.org

Mary Thompson,
Women's Services & Rapid Rehousing
mthompson@stewpot.org

Rhonda Tomlin, *Accounting*
rtomlin@stewpot.org

Niya Wilson, *Receptionist*
nwilson@stewpot.org



St. Dominic's

PARTNERS WITH



THROUGH COVID-19 VACCINATION EFFORTS

By: Andrea Farmer, MSM

Senior Marketing Specialist - St. Dominic Hospital



St. Dominic's continues a meaningful partnership with Stewpot Community Services by providing clients with COVID-19 vaccinations. February 24, 2021, 76 Stewpot clients received their first vaccine dose during a visit from the St. Dominic's Care-A-Van team.

"We are grateful to be a site where people who are homeless can be vaccinated since so many members of our Stewpot community have underlying conditions that make them particularly vulnerable to COVID-19," said Jill Buckley, Executive Director Stewpot Community Services.

"God's word commands us to be open-handed toward our brothers and sisters in our community," said Portia Lee, St. Dominic's Care-A-Van Program Manager.

St. Dominic's Care-A-Van program provides community outreach throughout Central Mississippi via a 42-foot mobile screening coach. From the beginning, the program has positively impacted the health and well-being of thousands each year by providing a variety of services, including health screenings and educational programs for school-aged children and the elderly. This year, the Care-A-Van and its team have been enlisted to support St. Dominic's efforts to provide COVID-19 vaccines to the individuals we are called to serve.

"St. Dominic's has long been an important partner with Stewpot in helping people on the margins have access to primary healthcare," adds Buckley. "Their presence in our community over the past 20 years has been invaluable."

"The continued goal of St. Dominic's is to focus our efforts on disease prevention as well as provide healthcare," said Sister Trinita Eddington, Director, St. Dominic's Community Health Clinic.

The Care-A-Van will return to Stewpot in mid-March to administer second doses of the vaccine.



P.O. Box 3610
Jackson, MS 39207
Phone: 601-353-2759
Fax: 601-353-7071
E-mail: www.stewpot.org

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STEW POT SPEAKERS

Stewpot has so many purposeful ministries and we want to tell you and your groups all about them. If you would like for us to speak at your church, community fairs, civic, or school function, please call Michelle' Bingham at 601-353-2759. We will gladly share all of the exciting information about our ministries and how you can become a part of our Stewpot family.

Reminders

1. Stewpot's Post Office Box number is #3610. When sending your contributions mail to: Stewpot Community Services, P O Box 3610, Jackson, MS 39207
2. If you are interested in receiving email correspondence or the Stewpot newsletter, send your requests to: stewpotevents@stewpot.org.
3. If you are browsing the web, visit our website at: www.stewpot.org.



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