



Shannon is reunited with her daughter Sterling.

Mom reunited with her only child

“There was nothing more important than getting my daughter back!” stated **Shannon**, a former client of the Volunteers of America **Supporting Stronger Families** program. “With Volunteers of America’s help and support, it happened.”

The Supporting Stronger Families program was created in 2010 in partnership with Luzerne County Children & Youth to help prevent child abuse of any kind or prevent out of home placements. Shannon’s five-year-old daughter, **Sterling**, was already in foster care when the family

was referred to Volunteers of America.

Shannon, a single parent, had health issues and lived with her child and grandparents in a small home. Children and Youth removed Sterling from the overcrowded living conditions and required Shannon to be involved in parenting classes.

She was referred to Volunteers of America for additional support and help her to be better prepared for reunification with her only child.

The Supporting Stronger Families program helped Shannon access services and resources, including medical assistance and health related management as well as helped Sterling enroll in kindergarten. The family was able to move into a larger home and Supporting Stronger Families was also

“It was a lot of work and Volunteers of America was right there with me.”

~Shannon, Supporting Stronger Families client

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Toy Drive will make the holidays a time of joy

You can give Christmas cheer to deserving children

The holiday song says “May your days be merry and bright,” yet not everyone’s holidays will be merry this season. Some families are desperately struggling to make ends meet. With cold weather on the way, winter clothing, heating and other bills add up to make holiday spending a luxury for disadvantaged families.

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A flood of hope

Here in Pennsylvania, we know major floods – Irene and Lee in 2011, Ivan in 2004, the flood of 1996, Agnes in 1972, Diane in 1955, Hazel in 1954, the St. Patrick's Day flood of 1936, the Johnstown flood, and many others recorded over the past 200 years.

Our rivers are beautiful, yet having several of the most flood prone river basins in the country can be devastating at times.

Just a few weeks ago, the day before this most recent flood our Dial-A-Driver staff helped elderly citizens and others evacuate from a flood zone. At the same time, other staff members were working as quickly as possible to evacuate residents living in our facilities and protect what we could from the flood waters.

Two days later, when the evacuation orders were lifted, we learned that one of our buildings, which houses program offices and apartments for homeless young adults, was flooded with five feet of water. It destroyed our supplies, phone system, electrical panels, heating systems, plumbing and laundry equipment.

Within hours friends and volunteers immediately came to our rescue. Working side by side with staff these caring people spent days cleaning out the mud, materials and supplies destroyed by the flood waters.

While they were working, the director of a community foundation came by to see how much damage we had suffered. Within two days Air Products, The Luzerne Foundation, Rosenn Jenkins & Greenwald, and other friends sent much needed financial support to help us begin our own recovery.

In the midst of flood waters, we were immersed in a flood of hope – thanks to volunteers and donors who saw our need and acted to help us. They knew the sooner we got back on our feet, the sooner we could get back to helping others.

One of the things unique to those who love and help others is they gain love and strength themselves, even in the physical exhaustion of their labor.

Maud Booth, one of Volunteers of America's founders, wrote in 1919, "The more one loves, the stronger becomes the capacity for loving, and it is the hands that are always busy with helpfulness that always find yet more to do."

Your love, support, and helping hands have been invaluable in assisting us in helping others in the past.

Today, we still have many needs because of the flooding. And with the holidays coming, we will have many more requests for help than usual.

I am asking for your support more than ever before. Please send a generous contribution.

You can be a part of immersing others in a flood of hope.



*Alan R. Garner
President*

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alan R. Garner". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a dark ink on a light background.

Your legacy . . . plant the seeds for our community's future

Did you know you can include a bequest to Volunteers of America in your will or trust which may also bring you significant financial benefits?

- Your assets remain in your control during your lifetime.
- You can modify your bequest to address changing circumstances.
- You can direct your bequest to a particular purpose or program.
- Your bequest will help underserved individuals have a better quality of life, strengthen families, and build communities.

To learn more about gifts that create a legacy, contact:



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Toy Drive

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Individuals, businesses, community organizations and faith communities are needed to help collect new, unwrapped toys for children, newborns to 14-year-olds.

Families that have never before needed help are asking the agency for toys so their children will have a brighter holidays. Just a single toy can bring joy to a child's life. For more than 100 years, the Volunteers of America Toy Drive has brought the gift of hope to children who desperately needed it.

Businesses or organizations wishing to be a toy collection site can call Volunteers of America at 717-236-1440.

Anyone can participate by placing a new, unwrapped toy in the special Volunteers of America toy drive box at various locations such as the Volunteers of America **Thrift Stores** at 2550 Paxton St. in Harrisburg, on the Carlisle Pike at Silver Spring Road in Mechanicsburg or 400 S. Main St. in Wilkes-Barre. Toys can also be dropped off at any of the agency's regional offices listed on page 8 of this newsletter.

Cash donations are greatly appreciated! In addition, customers of the Thrift Stores can get a "Toy Joy" card for a \$1 donation at the register. The proceeds will support the Toy Drive.

Volunteers of America **LEAVE A LEGACY**
rebuild lives and strengthen communities

How do you want to be remembered?

Can't you hear your grandchildren some day say, "My grandparent's gift helped build this community center"?

With careful charitable and estate planning, you can create a legacy for future generations.

Please contact Volunteers of America for information on leaving a legacy.

Consult your tax advisor regarding these types of gifts and estate planning.

give

Storms strengthen agency's resolve to serve

The Volunteers of America administrative building on North River Street in downtown Wilkes-Barre was flooded in September in the aftermath of tropical storm Lee. The raging waters of the Susquehanna River caused enough damage to the levee flood gates on the Market Street Bridge to flood nearby buildings.

furnaces, phone system, fire/alarm system, plus thousands of dollars of supplies for our **Caring Alternatives Pregnancy Counseling** program. Power was out for several weeks. The building is also home to the **Manna House**, a transitional housing program for eight homeless young adults. The residents were displaced

“We have a remarkable staff who really put the safety of others above everything else.”

~Bill Jones

“Our building is just about a hundred yards from the bridge,” explained **Bill Jones**, vice president/chief operating officer. “We had five feet of water in our basement. It could have been much worse though, thankfully it wasn’t.”

Still, the muddy waters destroyed the building’s electrical panel,

while the building was being repaired.

Agency staff and volunteers worked tirelessly to ensure that the residents in the various programs were safe. In addition to the Manna House, Volunteers of America’s **Hartman Home** residents and **Garrahan Street** residents were evacuated and the

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Bill Jones, V.P. and Chief Operating Officer, was one of many staff and volunteers to help clean the mud and debris from the basement.

All of Us Care program “Steps It Up”

Reading program implemented for children and youth at-risk

Research shows that kids who read 20 minutes a day, five days a week will see improvement in their reading comprehension. Better yet, children who read 40 minutes a day, three to four days a week will experience optimal improvement.

This is the basis for the accelerated reader initiative, which the **All of Us Care** program in Pittsburgh has implemented for children and youth in its after-school computer center. This component of the program, known as **Step-It-Up**, is made possible through support from the **PNC Foundation**.

Step-It-Up is designed to give children the opportunity to read outside of school by offering them the same tools used by the school, including books, an online

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Hannah Ufnar, Manager of All of Us Care, shares her enthusiasm for reading with the children.

Storms strengthen agency's resolve

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Family Thrift Store was closed for several days.

During the evacuation period, the agency's **Dial-A-Driver** vans were on the road late into the evening helping to evacuate elderly individuals and those who needed wheelchair accessible transportation. The program's vans also returned a number of individuals from

the emergency shelters when the evacuation order was lifted.

Another notable act of service was demonstrated by Clinical Director, **Meg Byrne**. Because other staff could not make it to the temporary evacuation site, Meg stayed with the Hartman Home residents for 27 straight hours.

After eight weeks of recovery,

the building is fully functional and Volunteers of America is back in business doing what it does best . . . serving others.

*Donations are urgently needed to help cover "out of pocket" costs created by the flooding. Donors are invited to use the enclosed donation envelope. To designate your support, write "Storm Relief" on the inside. **Thank you!***

Foster parents guided by faith and love for children



The goal is to reunite families when possible and provide the best of care while the children are in foster care.

Lorraine and Charlie Alexander were introduced to the Volunteers of America **Foster Care** program through another foster parent. Although they had always wanted children, they were unable to have their own. Instead, they decided to become foster parents and began by providing respite care. They quickly realized how much they enjoyed raising young children.

"Some foster children come from families who have been down on their luck," Mrs. Alexander explained. "Some of the children come from single parent families. Some had

a rough start. Charlie and I really wanted to be a mother and father figure for them."

Between respite and foster care, they have shared their loving home with 18 babies and toddlers over the years. "We have been so blessed to help them and be a guiding influence. In fact, we adopted two children who have filled our home with much joy.

"My daughter has so much personality," she added. "Soon after she learned to walk, she would sing and dance with the cartoons on TV. Our son has been with us for only a year, yet he is very loving and always so helpful."

For those who may consider becoming a foster parent, Mrs. Alexander offers this advice, "It takes a lot of love and affection. You have to love kids, and you need to be patient."

In addition, their faith has been a significant influence. "God has been good to us. We attend church with our children. We are a bi-racial couple and the congregation has been very supportive . . . and our pastor is just wonderful."

Equally supportive is the Volunteers of America Foster Care staff. Every two weeks, a social worker makes a home visit to discuss

upcoming doctor appointments, activities with the children, and how things are going. "While the staff tells us we are doing a fine job raising the children—and that is important to hear—it is truly a gift from God for us to see the kids grow, develop and realize how much we touch their lives!

Charity Navigator – America's premier independent charity evaluator working to guide intelligent giving, has given Volunteers of America a ranking indicating we exceed or meet industry standards and perform as well as or better than most charities in our cause.

The Volunteers of America Children's Center is accredited by the **National Association for the Education of Young Children** and has received the **Keystone Stars** highest rating of Four Stars!



Your support helps children learn, laugh, thrive

Imagine a place where every child can learn to laugh, play, trust and love. At the **Volunteers of America Children's Center**, children enjoy a warm, inviting environment that helps them reach their full potential. The teachers engage young minds with a wealth of activities!

Serving the Lehigh Valley, the Children's Center offers affordable, early childhood education programs for approximately 150 children, 13 months to 10 years of age. Programs for toddlers, pre-school and school-age children are provided.

"Our child development center has become a vital part of the community and is indispensable for working families," said **Dolores Swavely**, director. "The curriculum addresses each child's unique social, intellectual, emotional and cognitive development."



Childcare that prepares children for academic success!

Mom reunited with her only child

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able to help obtain the furniture and household goods the family would need.

Sterling was able to come to her new home from foster care within only two months. The quality and standard of living for both mom and daughter improved tremendously.



Learning is often a group activity—each child learning from another's exploration and discovery.

Preparing children for academic success, the curriculum is based on literacy and language development, character building, computer skills and creative arts. "Learning by doing" activities encourage positive interactions and support formal learning.

Recently, one mom conveyed her heartfelt gratitude to Dolores and her staff: "Thank you for being in my children's lives and making a positive impact. I truly appreciate you for interacting with my kids. This has been the longest time that both my kids have been in one daycare.

"Special thanks," she continued, "to Iris as she was my son's favorite

teacher and he still talks about her to this day. She showed him so much affection and I am so grateful for her presence in his life. The staff impacts every child's life. My children have had wonderful memories at the Children's Center."

The children are able to grow and thrive, in large measure, with the generous support of individuals, companies, foundations and others who understand the value of early childhood learning.

Said Swavely, "We prepare today's children to develop the skills, values and confidence necessary to become successful adults, parents, citizens and community leaders."

"Not only do we have a new roof over our heads, we have something even more important . . . a much stronger foundation for our family," Shannon said with much excitement. "Things for us are getting better and I am thankful for Volunteers of America."

The Supporting Stronger Families program has served nearly 100 families since it began. As indicated by Shannon and Sterling, the program is succeeding in what it was designed to do—helping families and changing lives.

Your gifts support many services in Pennsylvania

Children, Youth & Families Programs

The Children's Center – Allentown 610-432-8352
Affordable childcare for children 13 months to 10 years old. Playgrounds for toddlers, pre-school and school age children.

Foster Care – Philadelphia 215-930-0129
Foster and kinship homes provided for abused and neglected children from birth to age 18.

All of Us Care – Pittsburgh 412-782-5344
Program to prevent crime and substance abuse among children and youth ages 5-19.

Caring Alternatives – Wilkes-Barre 570-825-5261
Crisis pregnancy counseling, education and support services provided as an alternative to abortion.

Hartman Home – Wilkes-Barre 570-825-5261
Serves females ages 14-17 who have been severely traumatized through abuse, neglect and/or exploitation.

Supporting Stronger Families – Luzerne Co. 570-825-5261
Assists families with children, ages birth to five, that may be at risk of out of home placements.

Community Enhancement Services

Books-to-You! – Statewide
In partnership with Scholastic, Inc., children's books are distributed free each year to underprivileged children.

Operation Backpack – Statewide 717-236-1440
New backpacks and school supplies are provided to underserved children to give them a jump start for a successful school year.

Emergency Services – Central PA 717-766-2999
Based on referrals from churches and social service agencies, program provides free clothing and furniture to individuals and families in emergency situations.

Toy Drive – Central PA 717-236-1440
Toys donated from businesses, organizations and individuals are given to underserved children at Christmas.

PA Workwear Program – Luzerne Co. 570-829-5100
Work appropriate clothing is provided to help individuals transitioning back into the workforce.

Action Team – Pittsburgh 412-782-5344
Volunteers of America teams up with Major League Baseball Players Trust to promote youth volunteering. Join an Action Team and get in on the action!

Thrift Stores

Clothing, furniture, appliances and household goods at traditional thrift store prices. Community is encouraged to shop, donate items and volunteer. Proceeds provide financial support for our programs.

Harrisburg – 2550 Paxton St. 717-558-0400
Mechanicsburg – 675 Silver Spring Rd.

717-766-2999

Wilkes-Barre – 400 S. Main St. 570-829-5100

Elderly and Disabilities Programs

Working Order – Pittsburgh 412-782-5344
Supports entrepreneurship for individuals with disabilities and others seeking to be self-employed.

Dial-A-Driver – Wilkes-Barre and Wyoming Valley 570-825-5261
Specially equipped shuttle vans provide transportation for elderly citizens and people with disabilities to get to medical appointments, grocery shopping and other quality-of-life destinations.

Affordable Housing

For individuals and families living on limited incomes.

Family Apartments

Allentown – Family Apartments 610-432-8352
Apartments for low-income families.

Wilkes-Barre – Garrahan Street Residence 570-825-5261

For young adults ages 18-25 with limited incomes and who may be at risk for homelessness.

Elderly Apartments
For the elderly living on fixed incomes.

Harrisburg – Laurel Towers 717-233-1340
Wilkes-Barre – The Palmer House 570-829-6542

Special Needs Apartments
Independent living for adults with mental health issues designed to foster independence.

Harrisburg – Creekside Village 717-695-2826
Harrisburg – New Song Village 717-561-7270
Harrisburg – Third Street Apartments 717-236-1440
Wilkes-Barre – PlainsView Apartments 570-829-6542

Master Leasing Program - Luzerne Co. 570-825-5261
Offers rental housing assistance program for individuals referred by Luzerne County Mental Health Court.

Homeless Services

Manna House Apartments – Wilkes-Barre 570-825-0542

Transitional living program that serves homeless adults ages 18-25 to achieve independence and housing permanency.

Mental Health Services

Supportive Living Program – Harrisburg 717-236-1440

Serving adults with severe mental illness in Dauphin County to promote recovery and improve or maintain independent living skills.

All of Us Care program

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management program, and incentives. Students who participate in this program at local schools can increase their daily reading at All of Us Care with the help of staff and volunteers.

Hannah Ufnar, All of Us Care's new manager, is excited to take Step-It-Up to the next level with the help of Literacy*AmeriCorps member, **Ashley Corey**, who facilitates the

program. "All of Us Care provides a safe and supervised environment for local youth during at-risk after-school hours and Step-It-Up is a way for us to add significantly to our positive enrichment programs," Ufnar said. "Step-It-Up will not only improve individual reading skills, but ultimately it will increase the child's grades across all subjects."

Step-It-Up began at All of Us Care in March 2011 and over the course of five months, fourteen of the fifteen participants showed an improvement in their reading skills, demonstrated by their increased reading level, high scores on reading quizzes, and achievement of various certification levels.



**Volunteers
of America®**

PENNSYLVANIA

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You can help people by donating a car

If you are interested in making a practical gift to Volunteers of America of Pennsylvania, consider donating your used car, truck, RV, boat or other vehicle. Our vehicle donation program offers several attractive benefits.

- It is easier to donate your used vehicle than it is to sell it yourself.
- You may receive greater value for your used car as a charitable contribution on your itemized tax return than you could receive from a trade in.
- Most of all, you'll be making a

valuable contribution to help people in need in your community.

To learn more about the easy steps to donating your car, motor home (RV) or boat call the number listed below at the location nearest you. Please have your vehicle registration information available when you call.

- In Central Pennsylvania, call 717-766-2999.
- In Eastern Pennsylvania, call 888-350-4862.
- In Western Pennsylvania, call 888-233-3828.



If you prefer to connect with Volunteers of America's national Auto Donation Program, call 800-407-2600 or visit www.carshelpingpeople.org.

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Please remember Volunteers of America in your will.