



Visions

FALL 2018

FLORIDA PARISHES AREA

You Help Persons with Mental Illness Build Healthy Lives



Visit voasela.org to check out our mental health services.

When people with mental illness have nowhere to turn, Volunteers of America Southeast Louisiana is there because of your support of our mission.

Beth, a 25-year-old Covington woman, learned this firsthand. She was living in a local women's shelter with her toddler son, suffering from anxiety and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder. Beth had fled domestic abuse—physical, emotional, sexual—by her boyfriend.

She left when her son's safety was threatened.

Complicating the

situation was Beth's cerebral palsy.

Despite these challenges, things started looking up for Beth when the shelter referred her to Volunteers of America. Our Mental Health/Permanent Supportive Housing Program is designed for people like Beth because mental health challenges and housing difficulties often go hand in hand.

Our staff is experienced in helping people with mental illnesses find the resources they need to enjoy healthy, happy and productive lives.

A caseworker named Ann became Beth's guardian angel. The goal: help Beth get back on her feet and independently care for herself and her son. The first task was finding them a place to live. Then, Ann helped Beth get the medical care and other services she needed to stabilize her health. They worked on getting doctor's appointments, counseling, transportation and more.

"Ms. Ann changed my life tremendously," Beth says. "She helped give us a home, a new life. We are finally free. If I just need to talk, she is there."

In addition to practical help, Ann focused Beth on her future to build on the positives in her life. Beth already had overcome many difficulties. Born a twin, Beth was not expected to live and was diagnosed with cerebral palsy as a

continued on page 7

See Firsthand How You Help Take an #ExperienceWhy Tour

There's nothing like seeing things for yourself. Volunteers of America invites you to take an inspirational #ExperienceWhy tour of one of our program facilities. You can see how you help people in need and hear real stories of change and triumph. Tours last one hour. RSVP at voasela.org/experiencewhy.

UPCOMING TOURS

SEPTEMBER 13 and DECEMBER 6 | 8:30 a.m.

The Groves at Mile Branch at 424 Purslane Drive, Covington
Tour our unique workforce apartment complex that gives working families high quality, affordably priced places to call home.

OCTOBER 4 | 5:00 p.m.

Fresh Food Factor at 746 Tchoupitoulas Street, New Orleans
Tour the 8,000-square foot commercial kitchen that provides healthy and nutritious meals and snacks to at-risk kids in our community.

NOVEMBER 1 | 8:30 a.m.

Veterans Transitional Housing Center at 1002 Napoleon Avenue, New Orleans

This center serves homeless male veterans with counseling for substance abuse, access to housing, intensive care coordination and support services.



President/CEO
Message
James M. LeBlanc

Changing Adversity into Inspiration: You Help Us Do It Every Day

At Volunteers of America, we work to change adversity into inspiration. New Orleans Saints running back Mark Ingram knows about that, too. Though his father was in and out of prison, Ingram grew up to win the Heisman Trophy—and help youngsters with incarcerated parents, including those in our Mentoring Children of Promise Program.

It was a great occasion in June, here in New Orleans, when our national organization gave Ingram its highest honor, the Ballington and Maud Booth Award. Local philanthropist and business leader David Fennelly and the Oscar J. Tolmas Charitable Trust received the Outstanding Community Service Award, and *New Orleans Advocate* owner and publisher John Georges was the recipient of the Empathy Award.

Other community leaders help us in other ways. I welcome two new members to our Board of Directors: Christy Ross, Vice President for Health Grants, Baptist Community Ministries, and Rupa Jolly, community activist who received her doctorate from LSU School of Dentistry. We are privileged to benefit from these committed leaders, who bring expertise and experience.

Please note the heartwarming stories in this issue about two consumers with disabilities, Beth and Gary. Thankfully, the state legislature recently maintained essential funding for the programs, Mental Health Services and Community Living Services, which have helped them build meaningful lives. We appreciate your advocacy and our legislators for understanding the importance of these services for our vulnerable citizens.

There's much more in this issue. Check out photos in Snapshots and read about people helped by our Repairs on Wheels Program and Fresh Food Factor, which has stayed busy all summer cooking up healthy meals for 50 summer camps. And, it's never too early to start thinking about the holidays. Look for our Christmas Wish preview and sign up to spread joy this holiday season.

As you read *Visions*, keep in mind that you—as a supporter, volunteer, donor or friend—make everything we do possible. You energize all our efforts to help those in great need. Thank you.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Geoffrey C. Artigues, *Chair*
- Christy M. Howley Connois, *Chair-Elect*
- Chanel Lagarde, *Secretary*
- Tod Smith, *Treasurer*
- Wayne M. Baquet, Jr., *Immediate Past Chair*
- M. Isabel Barrios; Rupa Jolly, DDS; Nathan J. Junius;
- David Konur; Fred H. Myers; Christy Ross;
- Leonard D. Simmons, Jr.; Lynn Swanson and Chuck Viator
- James M. LeBlanc, *President/CEO*

MISSION

Volunteers of America is a movement organized to reach and uplift all people and bring them to the knowledge and active service of God. Volunteers of America, illustrating the presence of God through all that we do, serves people and communities in need and creates opportunities for people to experience the joy of serving others. Volunteers of America measures its success in positive change in the lives of individuals and communities we serve.

Getting Involved to Make a Difference

Board welcomes two new members.



Rupa Jolly

Community leaders Rupa Jolly, DDS, and Christy Ross are the newest members of the Volunteers of America Southeast Louisiana Board of Directors.

“We are so honored to have Rupa Jolly and Christy Ross join our board. They have expressed such an interest in the mission of Volunteers of America, and I know they will touch the lives of so many people in a valuable way through their service with our organization,” said James M. LeBlanc, President and CEO of Volunteers of America Southeast Louisiana.



Christy Ross

Rupa Jolly received her doctorate in dental surgery from Louisiana State University School of Dentistry in 2003. She spends her time as a community activist involved in many local organizations and is deeply interested in creating positive change, starting with the youth of our community.

Christy Ross is the vice president for health grants at Baptist Community Ministries and brings more than 10 years of administrative, fiscal and programming expertise in the healthcare services sector. She has held numerous leadership positions within the public health arena and is passionate about initiatives that have the potential to change systems and impact policy.

“For years, Volunteers of America has served those with greatest need. As a public health practitioner, I understand the complex challenges our community faces and the need for community-based organizations to step up and offer a helping hand,” said Ross. “Volunteers of America has been a longstanding source of support and comfort for our community.”

RIVER PARISHES AREA

A Simple Ramp Changes Life for Man with Disability

You help individuals overcome challenges.

Leroy Davis has been hit with one challenge after another over the past decade. The losses kept coming. An automobile accident resulted in loss of his leg and his job. His marriage ended, and he had to move from his comfortable suburban New Orleans home.

Davis, now in his 50s, found himself living in a family home in Boutte and doing occasional odd jobs. A major problem was that his house needed work and was not designed for a man with a disability. Despite his handicap, Davis was determined and was working with a friend to improve the house himself.

That’s when Volunteers of America Southeast Louisiana’s Repairs on Wheels Program in St. Charles Parish stepped in to help. The staff provides needed home improvements for low-income elderly and disabled homeowners. Though every project is unique, the goal always is to help persons live safely and independently in their own homes.

Repairs on Wheels put its extensive experience in helping persons with challenges to work on Davis’ house. One of his greatest needs was a handicapped ramp. Davis uses a scooter to get around, and a ramp would enable him to get in and out of his home easily and safely.

But in Davis’ case, building a ramp was complicated because of his house design and other factors. Our team figured out how to position the ramp on the back of the home and did carpentry work to attach it properly. Repairs on Wheels met the challenge, and now Davis’ daily life is much easier. Things are looking brighter for this Boutte resident.

Through Repairs on Wheels, Volunteers of America serves low-income homeowners and persons with disabilities in Jefferson, St. Charles, St. Tammany and St. John parishes. After building hundreds of ramps and making countless other improvements, Repairs on Wheels knows the value that basic repairs can bring to seniors and people with disabilities.



You Help Nourish the Minds and Bodies of Children

An empty belly is no way to start the school day. Thanks to your generosity, students like Cruz and his siblings start the day off right.

Cruz, a curious, polite sixth-grader, is just one of the thousands of school children who enjoy our Fresh Food Factor Program's nutritious meals each day to nourish his mind, body and soul.

"I think it's very important that my children eat healthy food, and they enjoy it," said Cruz's mother Jacky, who is a single, working parent of four elementary school children. "They're excited about lunch. They tell me when they eat a good breakfast at school that they can focus better and do better in class."

Cruz agrees: "I like all the food. They give lots of nice foods that are good, and I know that they are good for me. My favorite things to eat at school are the pizza, watermelon, carrots and the fish tacos."

His excitement about the menu is music to Fresh Food Factor Program Director Lawrence Dodds' ears. Dodds says the tasty menu options are crafted with the child's health in mind. Cruz's favorite pizza starts with a 51% whole grain dough, pizza sauce and a low-fat cheese.

"Volunteers of America started the Fresh Food Factor Program because children aren't eating enough healthy food, which is causing an obesity problem nationally," Dodds said. "We're influencing children to eat healthy by offering healthier options without them ever realizing it."

Cruz and his siblings have spurred healthy home-cooked meals as Jacky has started cooking their favorite lunchtime dishes at home.

Four in 10 children in Louisiana are overweight or obese. By providing nutritious meals—that students enjoy eating—Fresh Food Factor helps children become healthier and improves their wellbeing, behavior and academic performance.

Your support means that children are not only eating healthier today, but they'll have a brighter future tomorrow.

Hunger Doesn't Take a Break

Just because classes were out for the summer doesn't mean that hunger took a vacation.

Your support made it possible for Fresh Food Factor to continue to provide nutritious meals for children across southeast Louisiana at summer camps.

That's more than 3,000 healthy meals a day, and those meals not only filled empty bellies but also continued healthy habits that will last a lifetime.

Obesity is a major—and growing—problem among American children. The rate of obesity among U.S. children has tripled in the past 30 years. Today, one in five American children is obese, which increases their risk of lifelong health problems such as heart disease and type 2 diabetes.

You're helping to change that.

Fresh Food Factor's focus on healthy foods not only nourishes young minds and bodies during the school year, but it encourages students to maintain that healthy lifestyle into the summer and for the rest of their lives.



Fresh Food Factor helped Jacky and her children discover that nutritious food can be delicious.



GREATER NEW ORLEANS AREA

Freedom. Respect. Dignity.

That's exactly what your support gives Gary, and now he knows that people truly care for him because of your generosity.

When Gary came to Volunteers of America's Gayoso Community Home, he was aggressive, loud and consistently hoarding food. The ideas of freedom, respect and dignity seemed like a pipe dream as he continued to hoard snacks and gain weight.

It turns out all Gary needed was a little personalized attention and patience. The staff figured out that he came from

another group home that was too restrictive, and he felt like that would never change. He was hospitalized for verbal and physical aggression toward staff and other residents.

It took time, but Gary's life is changing for the better. He feels important because of the direct support professionals in his life—how they care for him and ensure his safety, dignity and health.

Today, Gary has a positive outlook and is giving back. He loves volunteering three days a week at University Medical Center. He started out labeling packages of bandages, and now, he is in the kitchen making sandwiches.

"He's got a really bubbly personality," says Lionel Harrison, a direct support professional with our Gayoso Community Home. "He's got a good spirit. If you're down, he'll try to pick you up. That's special. He's becoming more responsible with his house responsibilities, and his attitude as a whole is much better. He's just a joyous person."

Your support provides Gary with his Volunteers of America home and the personal attention that has changed his life forever.

He feels important because of the direct support professionals in his life...

YOUR CALLS, EMAILS MADE ALL THE DIFFERENCE

Did you know that your support and advocacy for Volunteers of America's services—such as Gary's community home—also helps ensure that our state uses its resources more wisely?

Earlier this year, our state faced a major budget shortfall, and community-based services for people like Gary were threatened. These services for individuals with disabilities and mental health conditions are not only a more dignified and nurturing option for people like Gary, but also save public money in the long run. They ensure that persons remain in less costly community settings rather than more expensive options such as hospitals or state institutions. For example, the cost of caring for an individual in a community-based setting is less than half of the cost for care in a nursing home.

Your support provides Gary with a community support system that is better for everyone! The message you delivered to your state legislators via calls, letters and emails shows our legislators how critical these services are. The legislature ultimately voted to fully fund disability and mental health services in the budget, meaning that individuals like Gary can continue to receive this lifesaving care. Additionally, the money the state will save by investing in these services can be used to fund other critical priorities across Louisiana in the years to come.

Thank you for using your voice to lift up the needs of people like Gary and countless others who rely on us for dignified, personalized care in our community.



SNAPSHOTS

PORTRAITS of GRATITUDE

Volunteers who help us uplift people in need show there are many ways to help. Your gifts of time, knowledge, donations and financial support make a real difference in the lives of those we serve.

To learn more about volunteering, visit voasela.org or call (504) 482-2130.



Mentors and mentees in our Mentoring Children of Promise (MCP) Program came together to sweat and leave a lasting mark in the Desire neighborhood. With help from members of **Sustaining Our Urban Landscape (SOUL)**, mentees helped plant 23 live oak trees in a three-block radius near Carver High School. Representatives from SOUL trained youth and their mentors on how to plant trees while providing shovels, rakes and mulch to help with the project, and the mentees got to keep their work gloves from a job well done!



Ashleigh and her friends decided to give back for her birthday party by building 400 hygiene kits for the homeless. The group also took some time to hand out some of the kits to help our city's homeless population!



Consumers in our Supported Living Services Program recently took a trip down the Mighty Mississippi River on the Natchez Steamboat. Thanks to the generosity of the **Monroe Foundation**, 50 of our consumers enjoyed jazz as many rode on a paddle boat for the first time.



Saints running back **Mark Ingram II** knows the struggles of growing up with an incarcerated parent, and that's why he gives back by helping children in our Mentoring Children of Promise Program. He was honored at our national conference with Volunteers of America's highest honor, the 2018 Ballington and Maud Booth Award. Mark is pictured receiving his award from Volunteers of America President and CEO Mike King, left, and Volunteers of America Board Chair Rubye Noble. The Booth Award is given each year to individuals who demonstrate distinguished service to humanity. It is named after Ballington and Maud Booth, who founded Volunteers of America with a promise to "go wherever we are needed and do whatever comes to hand."



The staff at our Single Room Occupancy facility on Canal Street hosted a special Father's Day meal for our residents. The facility provides housing for formerly homeless people in recovery as well as programming to help them get back on their feet.

More than 20 volunteers from **Stryker Corporation** took a hands-on approach to helping people experiencing homelessness. The group built hygiene kits and personally distributed them to people in downtown New Orleans with the help of our outreach staff.



Beth Builds a Productive Life with Your Help and Support

continued from front cover

toddler. Her maternal grandparents adopted her because her mother was in and out of jail—and Beth's life.

But her grandparents were a constant loving, encouraging presence. Beth credits her grandmother, "her rock," with helping her do well in school. She attended community college after graduating from high school, but dropped out when her grandmother was battling cancer.

Ann learned how smart Beth is. She also saw Beth as a dedicated mother and excellent housekeeper. Though Beth's cerebral palsy keeps her from standing for long periods, she is able to walk and get around. She worked a job in retail.

Ann helped Beth capitalize on these strengths. Months after joining our Volunteers of America program, Beth continues to do well. Her mental health has improved, and her son is enrolled in Head Start. She is dealing with cerebral palsy issues, but is finding the independence she seeks. Beth is also considering returning to school to keep a promise she made to her grandmother.

Beth says, "We truly love Ms. Ann. She helped save us. I wouldn't be where I am today without her and Volunteers of America."

YOU CAN MAKE SOMEONE smile THIS CHRISTMAS

Participate in our Christmas Wish Project. Help spread holiday joy to 1,500 people we serve who will not receive a gift or essential item this upcoming holiday season without you.

Here are **THREE** good reasons to participate:

1. **Jasriel** in our mentoring program who received a toy on her list that her guardian couldn't afford and one of our Santa's helpers provided.
2. **Dustin** in our veterans program who wanted nothing more than a new work uniform and his wish came true.
3. **Rebecca** in our supportive services program who couldn't make ends meet in time to provide Christmas gifts for her four children and was blessed by the selflessness of others.

It's simple to participate: Go to www.voasela.org/christmaswish or call 504-486-8699.

1. **Sponsor** one or more individuals.
2. **Purchase**, wrap and deliver to our office a moderately priced (\$25 - \$30) gift from a person's wish list.
3. **Donate**. Make a monetary donation online and we'll make the purchase for you.

Let's bring *joy* again this holiday season!



Join the Booth Legacy and remember us in your will.

Call Caitlin Scanlan at (504) 486-8686 for more details.

Various Volunteers of America Southeast Louisiana services are accredited by CARF, the Rehabilitation Accreditation Commissions, and ACA, the American Correctional Association. Volunteers of America is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation. Contributions are tax-deductible to the full extent provided by the law.



Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 1716
New Orleans, LA

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



4152 Canal Street
New Orleans, LA 70119
(504) 482-2130 | (504) 482-1922 fax
www.voasela.org