



Visions

SPRING 2019

GREATER NEW ORLEANS AREA

Your Generosity Is Helping Patrick Make a Difference

Pat doesn't let his intellectual disability limit him.

When people with intellectual disabilities have nowhere to turn, Volunteers of America Southeast Louisiana is there because of your support.

Meet Patrick, a New Orleans man in his 30s who lives a full life in Mid-City. He loves his job at Fresh Food Factor. He enjoys music, drawing, bowling and friends, who know him as Pat.

Pat is a resident of our Rendon Street community home, one of seven managed by our Community Living Services program. Pat, who has a moderate intellectual disability, is non-verbal. But he communicates with sign language, participates in what's going on around him and has emerged as a leader in the home.

His job at Fresh Food Factor, Volunteers of America's program that provides nutritious school lunches, is making a difference in the lives of school children. "He always wants to work more hours," says Susan Smith, manager of the home.

Pat works Monday, Wednesday and Friday, which are some of the busiest days in the kitchen.

"He came in from day 1 and took his job seriously," Fresh Food Factor assistant program director James Zelaya says. "He takes a lot of pride in the sanitation area and maintains it perfectly. We knew what his challenges were when he came in, and he's been one of our best employees. He comes to work early and is ready to start this day. He's a very important part of the team."

Into adulthood, Pat lived at home with his parents—until his mother became ill and could no longer care for him. He moved into a Volunteers of America community home five years ago. All of our community homes house six to eight residents with varying levels of intellectual and physical disabilities, providing 24-hour care.



Patrick enjoys making a difference by working at Fresh Food Factor.

Volunteers of America helps persons with intellectual disabilities rise to their potential. The staff evaluates all residents to develop their abilities, and Pat was no different.

"We helped him with hygiene and to relate better to others," says Natasha Edwards, home manager, who was among the first to work with Pat. "He drew on everything, including his walls. So we painted a wall of his room with chalkboard paint, so he could draw all he wanted with chalk to express himself."

Pat is now more interested in the world around him, but he'll need support for the rest of his life. Volunteers of America is honored to provide a loving home and opportunities to grow for Pat and many others like him.



President/CEO
Message
James M. LeBlanc

New Year Means New Energy for Uplifting People in Need

Each year brings new energy and excitement about ways Volunteers of America Southeast Louisiana can help our most vulnerable neighbors, and 2019 is no different.

One new initiative focuses on the 634,000 persons in our state with mental illness. We all have family and friends in this number. Volunteers of America is joining with other organizations to form the Louisiana Mental Health Coalition, which brings together advocates to speak as one for quality community services. Get more details on the next page, and consider how you could support the coalition.

We're encouraged by our innovative Fathers Focused on Family and Faith Program, which guides young men being released from prison as they reconnect with their children and communities. The program offers mentoring and transitional services before and after the men complete their sentence. The third cohort just graduated and is ready to be the best fathers they can be.

Connecting men to their families is a powerful way to reduce recidivism among former prisoners and help lower our state's high incarceration rate. We are proud to offer this evidence-based fatherhood program, which combined with our mentoring experience, is making a profound difference in many local families. Check out this good news on page 5.

As Spring approaches, that means it's time for the annual GolfStar Classic, which supports our Adoption and Maternity Program. This single event is a huge source of funding for our adoption program. The tournament—held on March 12 at TPC Louisiana—is one of the happiest days of the year for me because it attracts so many friends and supporters of adoptive families. Look for a heart-warming story about this year's adoptive family—Kim, Calvin and baby, Luke—in this issue.

Whether it is playing in the tournament, buying a raffle ticket for a dream vacation or bidding on an auction item, there are many ways to get involved, enjoy the day and support adoption. Thank you for all that you do for Volunteers of America, and I hope to see you at the GolfStar Classic.

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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.

Join Us to Improve Mental Health Services

Learn more: lamentalhealthcoalition@gmail.com or (504) 482-9707.

More than 634,000 Louisianians suffer from mental illness. It's a sobering statistic that shows the challenges many of our neighbors face. But now, they have a new voice.

As a long-time advocate and provider of mental health services, Volunteers of America Southeast Louisiana is part of a unique new initiative to ensure these citizens receive quality care.

The Louisiana Mental Health Coalition, formed by Volunteers of America and other organizations, is designed to promote community-based treatment that is adequately funded. The coalition held community forums in Metairie, Hammond, Opelousas and Shreveport last month to start conversations and unite all persons and organizations advocating for mental health. More than 300 people attended the four forums across the state.

"We've haven't had anything like this before," says Caroline Meehan, Volunteers of America's Director of Government & Community Relations. "Because mental illness still carries a stigma, this population has lacked advocates. We are working for a unified voice that speaks for accessible mental health services for all."

The coalition embraces several basic principles including that people with mental health needs should have access to high-quality, community-based services and treatment so they can live integrated, independent lives. Persons also have a right to participate in their own treatment decisions and care.

Meehan says the idea for the coalition arose when state mental health services were threatened during last year's budget crisis. About 67,000 persons living with mental illness receive treatment through the state's Medicaid program. Funding was not cut, but advocates saw a need for more public awareness about mental illness and its prevalence in our state.

Louisiana Mental Health Coalition Partners

- Advocacy Center of Louisiana
- Catholic Charities, Archdiocese of New Orleans
- Focus Clubhouse, Inc.
- Institute of Mental Hygiene
- Kingsley House
- Louisiana Center for Children's Rights
- Louisiana Public Health Institute
- Mental Health Association for Greater Baton Rouge
- NAMI Louisiana
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- Resources for Human Development
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- Volunteers of America



FLORIDA PARISHES AREA

Helping Others on Their Journey of Recovery

Your support is turning the tide in the opioid crisis.

Tina still gets a little choked up when she talks about helping individuals in the Florida Parishes overcome opioid addiction.

Your support allows Tina and the rest of our newly created Opioid Mobile Response Team turn the tide against the growing opioid epidemic.

"As a peer support specialist, I try to advocate for the individual as much as I can," Tina says. "I want to be their voice when they can't speak or can't find the words to express what they need. I try to help them find their journey of recovery. I

don't want to push my journey on them. I want them to find their way."

Tina knows what they're going through. She'll make five years clean from opioids this May. She didn't have any peer support on her journey which included experiencing homelessness before spending some time in jail. "It was literally life or death for me," she says.

continued on page 4

GREATER NEW ORLEANS AREA

Your Support Answered Kim and Calvin's Prayers

Support our Adoption and Maternity Program at the GolfStar Classic on March 12.

Kim and Calvin knew they wanted to be parents when they said "I do" more than eight years ago, but they never imagined the long road ahead.

Your generosity to our Adoption and Maternity program made sure their dreams would come true.

"He's every dream come true for our family," Kim says, about their son, Luke. "He's our little miracle that we've been praying for. It's been a very quick 15 months. It's just amazing to see him pick up something new and look at something in a whole new light."

Luke, a curious blue-eyed boy, has a smile that lights up his entire face, but it took years for Kim and Calvin to find their "little miracle."

After many unsuccessful attempts to conceive, the couple met with other local adoption agencies, but it wasn't the right fit. After meeting with Lori Arceneaux, the program manager and social worker from Volunteers of America Southeast Louisiana's Adoption and Maternity program, the couple said it felt "like meeting a friend." Their dream was closer to reality.

Their adoption journey continued by supporting the program's annual golf tournament—this year's tournament is March 12—to help create forever families and educate others about the loving choice of adoption. The waiting process was difficult at times, but the couple supported each other every day. Kim did not allow herself to even begin buying things for the baby that they prayed for.

Then, their dreams came true when a call meant that Luke was going to change their lives forever. With just a car seat in the vehicle, Luke came home, and Kim ran to the store for diapers, bottles and the other essentials. Kim said that day was "scary, awesome, and a mix of everything—our dreams were finally coming true!"

Now, more than 15 months later, they can't imagine their lives without their son.

"He means everything to me," Calvin says.

Visit www.501auctions.com/voasela to support this year's GolfStar Classic.



Kim and Calvin say Luke is their "little miracle."

Journey of Recovery *continued from page 3*

Fast forward to today, she's changing lives along with our highly trained team that includes a licensed mental health professional and registered nurse to ensure individuals take the first step to finding help. The response team works in innovative ways to connect individuals to community-based services that deliver effective mobile response services such as overdose support, recovery care as well as individual and family counseling.

It's a holistic approach to an epidemic that kills more than 130 Americans every day. Two million individuals misused opioids for the first time last year while 11.4 million Americans have misused prescription opioids in their lives. Those are daunting statistics.

But that doesn't deter Volunteers of America's commitment. Tina says the job is rewarding and life-changing to our most vulnerable neighbors.

"Helping people is something that makes me feel better," she says. "It gives me peace, and it warms my heart. I have a passion for helping people. I've always been a caretaker, and now I've learned how to use that to my advantage. It's rewarding to see people start to overcome this addiction with a little help from people who care."

GREATER NEW ORLEANS AREA

Your Generosity Is Helping Incarcerated Fathers Overcome Their Past

New program brings families back together.

Kevin is one of 27 fathers who are looking forward to a brighter future because of you.

Kevin is a graduate of Volunteers of America's Fathers Focused on Family and Faith program, which provides counseling and parental skills education to incarcerated fathers who will be released within six months.

"Rev. Thibodeaux and Ms. Abbie taught me fathering skills that I really think will help me become a better father upon my release," Kevin says. "I really enjoyed the help from this class and appreciate the help from them."

That help is more than just 12 weeks of classes following the Inside/Out Dad® curriculum, which is designed specifically for incarcerated fathers and used in more than 400 facilities in all 50 states. The program helps reduce recidivism rates by reconnecting incarcerated fathers to their families, providing the motivation to get out and stay out.

The fathers, all age 17 to 24, also participate in a mentoring group where they receive both one-on-one and group mentoring services—arming them with the tools to be successful upon their release. Fathers also receive comprehensive transitional services to expedite their community reintegration as well as intensive case management to reduce recidivism while reintegrating into the community.

Rev. Kenneth Thibodeaux serves as the mentoring coach and teaches the Inside/Out Dad® curriculum while case manager Abbie Freeman provides case management and mentoring.



Kevin (right) pictured with mentoring coach Rev. Kenneth Thibodeaux is looking forward to a bright future, thanks to your support.

... the Inside/Out Dad® curriculum ... helps reduce recidivism rates by reconnecting incarcerated fathers to their families, providing the motivation to get out and stay out.

"It's been very rewarding to see their growth," Freeman says. "They get both a male and female perspective on the program, and you can see them grow. It's usually quiet at first, but by the fifth class, they really, really open up. All of these fathers want to grow and become better individuals for themselves and their children. They all want to be the best fathers that they can be."

Currently, the program serves the Plaquemines Parish Detention Center, but Abbie says they hope to grow it to other parishes in the future. The program is supported by a grant awarded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice.

SNAPSHOTS

PORTRAITS of GRATITUDE

How many ways can volunteers serve at Volunteers of America Southeast Louisiana? There are as many ways as there are volunteers, as these photos of recent acts of generosity show. Thanks to all volunteers who make a real difference in the lives of those we serve.



The Association of **Legal Administrators New Orleans Chapter** helped collect school supplies and build backpacks for children in our Mentoring Children of Promise Program. Nearly 150 children in our MCP program received the backpacks ensuring that their school years got off to a great start.



The **Mark Ingram Foundation** provided a HUGE Christmas gift to participants in our Mentoring Children of Promise Program when Mark and several of his Saints teammates took our mentees on a Christmas shopping spree at Target.

Volunteers with our **Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP)** commemorated the 17th anniversary of 9/11 by placing 1,644 American flags on grave sites at the Southeast Louisiana Veterans Cemetery in Slidell. It was a beautiful ceremony honoring the men and women who lost their lives in the attacks.



Our senior residents at The Terraces on Tulane got a special treat when **JenCare** held a jewelry making day! The seniors showed off their artistic side and took home some new jewelry.



Robert, one of Supportive Living Services consumers, shows off his painting skills during an afternoon creating beautiful artwork at Painting with a Twist.

Simon, Peragine, Smith & Redfean LLP put in some elbow grease to fix up the bookshelves in the common area at our Tulane single room occupancy facility. Our residents, who are overcoming homelessness, are so thankful for the new reading material!



Your Gift Brightened Christmas Day for 1,633 Neighbors

Every year our Christmas Wish project brings Christmas morning smiles to our most vulnerable neighbors. Without your support, these individuals and families would still be waiting on Christmas. But you stepped up like never before. This year, we filled 1,633 wishes, which is a 400-person increase from last year! Special recognition goes out to our sponsors, who stepped up to support parties and gifts for large groups of our consumers. Thank YOU for making our Christmas Wish Project a success yet again!



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Drawing will be held March 12, 2019,
at Volunteers of America's GolfStar Classic.
Winner need not be present to win.



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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.



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