

Distribution of Other-Than-Food Items

Holiday Store

Historically, although not exclusively, the greatest impetus for non-food items distributed by Care & Share were those donated toys and gifts made available at the Holiday Stores.

In December 2006 the Town made space available in the old Police Station on Pennsylvania Avenue. In that bell-weather holiday season of 2006, about 120 families visited the Holiday Store and half of them were given wrapped gifts previously prepared for family members of all ages. During the 2006 calendar year dozens of bicycles were refurbished and distributed.

The 2008 Holiday Store was made available by the Mitchell Trust, at 17 Hope Street, right nearby the Pantry next to Burke's Tavern. This was immensely timely in light of the local economic landscape, affected by the progressing statewide and national housing-collapse sparked recession.

With the increase in volunteer assistance to homebound, unemployed, or over-extended working families, it became necessary for C&S leadership to issue a clarification that effective in 2008, volunteers needed to insure their own participation, at the Pantry and conducting activities, including driving. Once again, it was evident that Care & Share did not operate in a vacuum, but was immersed in the same cultural and civic milieu as its clients-in-need.

Happily, bikes and clothing were donated to the 2008 Holiday Store, including 25 washed or dry-cleaned coats from Christ Lutheran Church. And 49 adults had already signed up for Angel Tree gifting, once they are placed in stores and businesses around town. Angel trees were commercial entities' way of participating at Christmas. Angel Trees placed and decorated by C&S volunteers were accepted by like-minded businesses, churches, stores, etc. Tags were hung on trees with gender, age, and requested presents listed. Patrons of participating businesses took tags, purchased presents accordingly, and brought them back to place under the tree. C&S volunteers ran pick-ups, retrieved gifts to the Holiday Store, where they were wrapped and labelled with the tree tag for client-shoppers.

The traditional Holiday Store returned to Hope Street and early on indications were that the harsh economics of 2009 were behind the doubling of requests—the most ever—for over a hundred children, up from 46 the year before. All the Angel trees around town wore only tags for children's gifts, at That Look, Savings Institute, Liberty Bank, Chelsea Bank, Smith Acres and Stop & Shop, and for the first time, Charter Oak Credit Union. As well, there were one hundred and fifty requests for adult gifts. Hopeful recipients requested clothing gifts more than the year before. Prompted by a *Lyme Times* article submitted by Mary O'Connor, St. Sophia's church designated Care & Share as a recipient of their giving, which included gifts, food, and gift and food cards.

On that same front, publicity, Mary O'Connor related that Care & Share would be highlighted in a new Christmas seasonal item in New London's *The Day*, which would feature an area agency that served the general public in its readership region. That was to stimulate *Day* readers to donate to the agency.

The always-anticipated and much-appreciated Holiday Store for 2010 had applications from 160 families with over 500 persons. On the actual shopping day, 92 families visited a store that was filled with gifts at 8am and was completely empty of presents by 2pm that day.

After the 2011 Holiday Store, the Pantry continued to make winter coats and outerwear available well past the New Year and into 2012, principally due to a massively generous donation from Flanders School of 91 coats, 18 scarves, over 225 pairs of mittens/gloves, some with matching hats, and even 5 umbrellas.

Bikes and Household Items

As time went by in the first decade of the 21st century, Care & Share became known as a source of community assistance in East Lyme and Salem. C&S members heard needs expressed, or intuited them, and felt they were particularly interested or situated to provide responses to those needs. And so, other outreaches came into existence over those years. As with so many Care & Share programs or activities or initiatives, these outreaches were organic, neighbor-helping-neighbor responses. Some of those needs were

fulfilled unilaterally, while others were satisfied with cooperation of regional social services.

One member of C&S who seemed to specialize in these latter sorts of outreach was Brian Gough. He was known for acquiring damaged or out-of-service bicycles and resurrecting them as gifts of renewed bikes in the Holiday Stores, as Diamond Dig prizes, or just straight-out provision to a child or adult in need or personal transportation or entertainment.

Membership meeting minutes began to note such activities outside of the holiday seasons in 2004—when coats & bedding were sought, appeals made, and donated items distributed by C&S. Refurbished bicycles also started to appear in 2004, as available to families.

The September 2005 minutes reflected that, once again, some furniture had been donated and distributed to clients. The process began somewhat informally. A client would ask a responder if a certain item was available or could be found for their unfurnished or sparsely furnished rental space. Brian would put out the word and should one be found, it would be provided. At first, it seemed to be an on-request response. But shortly thereafter, like many C&S experiences, it took on a life large enough to recognize, and a cycle of awareness led to increased requests.

Since there was little to no room to store such bulky donations at the Pantry, client needs dictated what C&S could take and immediately distribute, with the remainder of such donors' items being referred elsewhere or given to non-profit partners for their clients. In 2007, CCI Computers donated a pair of systems and several monitors. Furniture was routed to Good Will, the New London Furniture Coalition and Gorin's Furniture Program, the latter donating a new, free mattress whenever a bed was required.

As the recession year of 2008 drew near to its last few months, the New London Police Department donated 10 unclaimed mountain bikes, which C&S repaired, refitted, and distribute as needed.

Later in 2008, C&S had an off-site storage unit for its oversized seasonal and event materials, like tables, chairs, etc. Brian Gough continued to use that space for commonly needed donated materials and to solicit household items to “match” requests C&S received. At that time, for example, there was a

request to seek out an available electric range and double bed frame. Across-the-board needs like those were received from the community and were increasing significantly enough to consider adding a second-tier rack in the storage unit for suitable items to have on hand in anticipation of requests.

In the post-recession summertime of 2009, C&S needed a new Donation Coordinator to systematically continue the work established by long-time member, Brian Gough. That work involved matching willing donors and clients' needs for furniture, household and baby items, medical assist, and assorted other types of client-driven needs. That outreach and volunteer transition provided the occasion for a very thoughtful Board of Director's discussion about Care & Share's role in such client assistance. In a somewhat historic focusing on purpose and identity, the Board of Directors decided, as the September general meeting minutes stated, "to back off and discontinue this project. The Telephone Responders will direct donors and clients to other sources, such as: Goodwill and Gorin's Furniture."

More than just a factual item from the past, this vignette provides a glimpse into the organic nature of Care & Share and one of its enduring strengths: Individuals perceive and volunteer to meet and satisfy what may perhaps be a dual need—that of the client's to receive and the member's own to serve. And from those dynamics and zeal emerges a formative recognition of an organizational persona, with distinct priorities of service within and to the larger community.

Home Heating Fuel, Electricity, and Gasoline

Brian Gough also was the lynchpin C&S member for several years providing liaison with social services providing home heating fuel assistance, furniture, and household goods. Most of his activities were incorporated into the programs managed by other C&S volunteers in the category of Emergency Assistance or Designated Assistance.

Part of that activism was coordinating C&S involvement in the regional Project Warm-Up (with United Way's free one-time, 100-gallon home fuel oil delivery) for several years. In 2009, the C&S participation was entering its third season, with expectations of more C&S client requests than the 5 homeowners of the first year and 15 in the second season.

Mr. Gough continued C&S's relationship with United Way to refer qualified clients to Project Warm-Up, which remained a home heating fuel assistance program providing a once-a-year, free 100-gallon delivery.

For the approaching year and winter of 2010, United Way alerted Care & Share that Project Warm-Up would begin being serviced only through TVCCA. Brian Gough continued to stay up-to-date on program requirements for Project Warm-up and Operation Fuel for many years. He'd coordinated for Care & Share and was the liaison with the East Lyme Senior Center, United Way, TVCCA and other regional and state programs. Due to his efforts, Care & Share was very well positioned to help neighbors who might qualify for a delivery of home heating oil. By November of 2011, the State program had been drastically cut. Brian kept C&S aware of how clients and callers could best navigate a complicated system that stratified requests by applications, fuel-in-tank levels, and age of citizens (60 or over) and medical needs. Late in 2011, the funds available through United Way and TVCCA for Operation Warm-up were exhausted—almost two months earlier than planned (into 2012). Care & Share itself thereafter supplied 7 clients each with a 100 gallon delivery of fuel oil.