

## Supporters and Camaraderie

2004

2004 was a banner year. Care & Share made a concentrated appeal for increased membership. One very visible result was in increased C&S monthly meeting sign-ins, from 15 to 40 persons.

Publicity about Care & Share and several of its special programs and projects, as well as a very successful Open House in October 2004 at Crescent Point, introduced the organization to many citizens and resulted in an increase in volunteer membership and donations.

In addition to looking for individuals who would volunteer, Care & Share directed energy and attention to partnering efforts with already existing organizations and institutions in the East Lyme region. One of those groups enjoying a history with C&S since 1989 was the local Lions Club. According to Jim Harris, during a phone interview in 2025, the initial overture he recalled from Care & Share was made by Mae Hills. She was interested in C&S deepening its collaboration with both the Lions Club and the youth group it sponsored, the LEOs. Jim Harris was a long-time adult leader of the youth group.

As part of the same outreach effort, C&S looked to leverage or expand its relationship with local retail stores, banks, and churches. Prior to 2004, St. Matthias Church on the northern end of Route 161 hosted summer picnic basket distributions with Care & Share. More sponsors and donors were sought, in order to increase the number of families who would receive a basket when school was out on recess.

Another stalwart supporter of Care & Share and its mission was the East Lyme Stop & Shop. Beginning in August 2004, Stop & Shop began to provide day-old bread to C&S volunteer drivers. They would distribute the bread and bakery goods around town to senior living residences and service organizations.

A highlight of fundraising in November 2004 saw Stop & Shop's "Food for Friends" program designate C&S as its charity. The S&S store also hosted a

Care & Share “angel tree,” from which Stop & Shop patrons took an ornamental tag identifying an anonymous gift recipient. Gift donations were made to that season’s C&S Holiday Store.

Throughout the rest of town for those 2004 Holidays, money jars were placed in stores, food collection bins were set out in cooperating businesses and stores, and Christmas angel trees for present donations were erected in participating banks, schools to collect coats, hats, and gloves for C&S clients.

That autumn and holiday season mutually benefited Care & Share and collaborator like-minded groups, most notably the Local United Network to Combat Hunger and the New London Area Food Coalition.

What had become welcomed and anticipated seasonal events and efforts by Care & Share and its partners were based out of the Smith Pharmacy building in 2004. Thanksgiving Baskets were distributed on November 20, Holiday Shopping Day was December 11, and the Lions Holiday Baskets were assembled and distributed on December 18. The events were combined efforts, with Boy Scout Troop 66 assisting with assembling the Thanksgiving baskets and home deliveries. The Lions once again assembled and then delivered Christmas baskets to clients’ homes. The end-of-the-year efforts in 2004 debuted a further increase in liaison with and to local churches.

A seasonal protective clothing feature initiated that year and continuing for the next five was Care & Share designation by the Retired Seniors Volunteer Program (RSVP). Winter boots were acquired and given as gifts to C&S-designated clients:

- 2004 RSVP boots project provided 23 pairs
- 2005 RSVP boots project provided over 20 pairs
- 2006 RSVP boots project provided 32 pairs
- 2008 RSVP boots project provided 20 pairs

2005

The ever-nomadic Pantry continued its need for growth and C&S outreach to partners to make that future happen. By April 2005, in the new Hope Street location, additional electrical work and lighting was donated, in both labor and materials. The C&S committee's review of the building for expanded pantry use was completed. Then Care & Share requested the Town of East Lyme to purchase the building (the oft-referred-to Cone property) with the intention of continued C&S use of the entire facility.

That Spring of 2005 was a time of juggling hopes for the future while still relying on new and stalwart supporters to manage the on-going mission of feeding and caring for those in need. Volunteers were stretched thin, with many doing "double duty." Churches, individuals, and IGA donated Spring basket hams, assembled by Care & Share and delivered to 53 families.

An East Lyme school-wide, inclusive letter introducing Care & Share family services and volunteer opportunities was given to all 3,000 students after approval from School Superintendent. Care & Share continued to assist school nurses, whose youngest and troubled students needed the C&S-donated underwear and socks to get through their school day safely and cleanly.

Moreover, the students were not just on the receiving end of Care & Share's mission. Considerable interest was growing on the part of students to volunteer at C&S. Client privacy and confidentiality considerations were discussed at the Board level. Talks began on how to integrate student volunteers into Care & Share needs. Early projects included: food drives, cleaning the yard around the pantry, starting a garden, planting flowers, and having a booth at the East Lyme Days and/or the Art Show. Recruitment and information efforts had spurred an overall adult and youth membership, currently then up to 75 volunteers.

In May of 2005, many town organizations, clubs, businesses, and communities held drives to raise funds and collect food for the C&S Pantry, bearing evidence of continued growing support for the C&S mission in town. Among them were: St Matthias K. of C., Niantic Center School PTA, Church World Service Crop Walk, Horse Country Real Estate, and Tri-Town.

Discussions began to expand the food drop off locations, and perhaps include the new Hope Street Pantry two hours on a Saturday; with pick-ups still scheduled at partnering churches, food stores, and the town library.

Churches were approached to participate in the summer picnic basket program, with 21 baskets in all prepared by: Niantic Baptist Church, Flanders Baptist, and Community Church each contributed 6 baskets, with another basket provided by an individual citizen.

Summertime of 2005 also saw food and money donated by Tri-Town, Stop & Shop, Mid-Shore Association of Realtors. Additionally, a small freezer was donated for use at the newly opened Hope Street pantry site.

A remarkable synergy was growing in the earlier 2000s between Care & Share of East Lyme and regional service organizations, including OIC in New London, TVCCA Meals on Wheels, and New London Area Food Coalition, among others. Some of these service organizations began approaching Care & Share for assistance in food contribution and volunteers to help in their programs.

2006

In March of 2006, The Liberty Bank Foundation awarded a landmark grant of \$ 3,500, designated for the Care & Share Emergency Assistance Fund. As reported in *The Post Road Review*, “Grant funds from Liberty Bank will expand the agency’s ability to provide emergency financial assistance to clients, which can include assistance with various utilities, rent, prescriptions. groceries, etc.” That summer 5 churches helped Care & Share provide 28 picnic baskets.

The holiday season wrap-up at the end of 2006 demonstrated that partnerships with Lions, C&S and other community sponsors combined to feed over 120 families a holiday meal. C&S delivered 32 pairs of RSVP boots, took part in the local civic activities, and had a successful fundraising year.

It was continually obvious that several significant and meaningful relationships were developing between Care & Share and community activists and that this camaraderie was maturing into treasured partnerships—perhaps most broadly year ‘round with the Rotary and Lions / Leos Clubs.

The 2006 year-end report by the publicity committee commented on the perceptible link between print media and local televised coverage of C&S activities and an increase in donations and inquiries about volunteerism. As a blossoming teenager, at 17, Care & Share was coming on strong, gleaming attention and was well-respected in the community.

Four residents of the Spinnakers Community were welcomed to their first Care & Share meeting in April 2007, a little over two years after the first families began moving into the new over-55 community. Spinnakers would become over the next decade a valuable partner to Care & Share.

As in past years, local entities continued their relationship with Care & Share, with winter and springtime food and monetary donations, project assistance, and seasonal activities, including: Stop and Shop, downtown IGA, Flanders Baptist, St Vincent DePaul, Harvest Christian Fellowship, Niantic Baptist Church Women, and scores of volunteers and citizens of Salem, Old Lyme, and East Lyme.

2007

The General Meeting minutes for June in 2007 signal the beginning of a formal overture by a group of volunteers, all residents of the Spinnakers community, calling itself Helping Hands. These townspeople bonded their neighborhood to raise awareness and funds and materials exclusively for Care & Share. Already having completed food drives, more were indicated to occur on a regular basis. Helping Hands representatives came to the meeting because they wanted to hear directly what needs Care & Share had, and how C&S thought it could benefit from the involvement of the Spinnakers community.

By the fall of 2007, it was apparent that Care & Share was mutually benefiting from relationships among the community of non-profits who assisted Connecticut citizens in need. Computers and bicycles, baby food and date-expiring perishable food were being exchanged with Catholic Charities of Hartford, OIC in New London, and St Vincent's soup kitchen in Norwich. C&S was intrinsically bonding and becoming a reliable and reliant member of volunteer and social service agencies compelled to help those in need. For that year, 27 C&S clients received items they needed, 37 clients were successfully referred to other agencies, and 16 donors were still actively awaiting persons in need to request the items they wished to contribute.

Care & Share had once again organically grown from an idea to action. What started as a plea to acquire needed materials asked for by clients quickly grew into a flow of donated goods, in advance of them being requested by a C&S client. Once this “happy dilemma” became known, a local merchant came forward and donated the use of a 10’ x 10’ storage unit for a year’s time in Lyme, since there was not sufficient room in the Hope Street pantry to hold on to the goods and materials until such time as they were needed.

Several businesses supported the 2007 Holiday Store by displaying an “Angel Tree” with 26-30 recipients designated on each. Most gift requests were filled by their patrons who took tags and gave gifts: That Look, Smith Acres, Stop & Shop, Liberty Bank, Savings Institute, Chelsea Groton Bank.

The Lions and LEOs contributed 40 assembled holiday food baskets and assisted in the December distribution of 80 baskets to clients’ homes. Coats not distributed in the Holiday Store were contributed for the homeless (MALTA) and for shipment to troops in Afghanistan (CT National Guard). The recap C&S General Membership Meeting minutes in January of 2008 state: *“Working along with the Lions and Leos was a pleasure and lots of fun! The Lions and Leos worked hard especially on the cold and icy delivery day Saturday, filling the boxes with their purchases of fresh produce, dairy, bread, cider, poultry and then delivered them. What a great group of people!”*

2008

The newly opened Starbucks (early 2008) contacted Care & Share to pick up day-old pastries for redistribution. The bread deliverers added this task and brought some of the fresh perishables to MALTA and Shoreline Soup Kitchen. The bread pick-up and deliveries continued by Care & Share volunteers, who went to the homes of those C&S clients who couldn’t get themselves to the pantry. For its part, C&S continued social overtures with the NL Homeless Hospitality Center and NL Breakfasts, who served the neighboring city. Five churches again prepared summer picnic baskets for twenty Care & Share client families.

The Hope Street Pantry was adjacent to the downtown parking lot in Niantic. Deep in that year, numerous citizens noticed the active pantry door was ajar and stopped in to ask what was needed for Thanksgiving baskets. They received a list from the pantry volunteers. Many people returned shortly

thereafter, bringing goods they had just gone and bought to donate. The C&S mission was continuing to be infectious among fellow townspeople.

Many of the residents of two “over 55” housing developments built in the 21<sup>st</sup> century were new to East Lyme when they moved in. It did not take very long for them to catch on to the Care & Share mission and its spirit of neighbors helping neighbors. Spinnakers Helping Hands held a “household product” donation drive in November 2008 to benefit Care & Share clients. And Chapman Woods residents assisted in packing Thanksgiving baskets, in advance of that year’s distribution.

Twenty-three businesses in town placed Food Donation Boxes for the 2008 Holidays to encourage and collect their patrons’ non-perishable food donations.

2009

The beginning of 2009 continued to bless Care & Share and its clients with support from local organizations and merchants, including: Liberty Bank, Spinnaker Community, Niantic Center School, St Vincent DePaul, and the Pequot Cyclist Club. Stop & Shop made large contributions of frozen foods to be placed in the freezer for client distribution. The Bread Program continued at full speed, seven days a week; with excess bread shared before it got stale to: OIC, New London Food Kitchen, Salvation Army, Senior Center, and AHEPA.

On May 9, 2009, the US Post Office in Waterford included Care & Share in the Postal Service Employees’ Union “Stamp Out Hunger” food drive. C&S Pantry benefited from that generosity, receiving two full truckloads of donated food.

In that same month, there were several initiatives that contributed food to the Pantry, and would continue to do so thereafter, including: a Salem Elementary School Food Drive, food donation bins placed in the Salem Town Hall and Library, exclusively for Care & Share.

Also in May, the LEOs again donated food to the Pantry, derived from LEOs sponsoring a food drive.

In the summertime, Rocky Neck Inn honored Care & Share as the recipient of table rent proceeds from its craft/yard sale.

As part of its custom upon opening a new branch, Liberty Bank made a monetary donation to C&S and several other charities on the occasion of its new branch in downtown Niantic in the summer of 2009. In that same time and vein of marking new starts, C&S minutes called for extra volunteers to write 'thank you' notes, because donations were on the rise from citizens marking birthdays, anniversaries, and the like.

A generous overabundance of items for the 2009 Holiday Store were shared, after the store closed, with the Hartford Catholic Worker organization, in an example of on-going synergy of mutual communication and assistance between Care & Share and like organizations across the region.

2010

In the Fall season of 2010, there were several supportive activities:

- George and Terry Mitchell donated baby food.
- Westbrook Emblem Club donated paper goods.
- St Agnes Knights of Columbus donated \$515 toward an additional freezer for the Pantry's excess meats during the holiday season.

Getting ready for the coming 2010 Holiday season and the Indorato's impending retirement, a late August Saturday surge of C&S volunteers helped put the Pantry in order, in light of large donations from Niantic Baptist Church, St Agnes St Vincent de Paul, and residents of Chapman Woods. Stop & Shop also sponsored a Fall Food Drive by patrons using a flyer distributed at store entry, with purchased donations placed upon their store departure in a marked C&S truck parked outside.

2010 Holiday programs had taken shape by the October meeting when President Jim Hall announced all the support from the community to make the programs possible.:

- George and Terry Mitchell donated the space at 55 Pennsylvania Avenue for use as The Holiday Store.
- Eight entities had signed on for "Angel Trees:" That Look, Savings Institute, Liberty Bank, Stop & Shop, Chelsea Groton Bank, Charter Oak Credit Union, Smith Acres, and St Sophia's Church in New London.

- Board Member Carol Lauzon spoke of hoping to have a bank in Salem take an Angel Tree that year.
- Alongside this, East Lyme Youth Services sponsored “Gift-to-Gift” to provide Holiday Store presents for teens, an age group found in the past to be underrepresented in Angel Tree gifts.

Jim also announced that C&S decided not to pursue a Light Parade Auction in 2010.

2010 was no exception to the oft-apparent altruism of autumn’s approaching holiday spirit:

- The Spinnakers Association activists, Helping Hands, represented the generosity of their neighborhood who donated 65 bags of paper goods and household items to C&S.
- East Lyme Firefighters pledged 24 turkeys toward the holiday baskets.
- Alan Rossler pledged another 12.
- Target employees promised to return for another year of helping with basket assembly.
- ELBO switched plans from a restaurant night to a food drive.
- Chelsea Groton Bank sponsored an “after the holidays” food drive.
- Care & Share benefited from a share of the proceeds from the Mighty Kids Triathlon Race, sponsored by the East Lyme Aquatic Center.
- Lastly, Niantic Rotary made a \$ 500.00 donation.

2011

East Lyme Police Department sponsored a Shredding Day in May 2011, where shredders were asked to bring food donations for C&S. 9 large boxes of food were donated. In June, Horse Country Real Estate again this year sponsored a food drive at Tri-Town to benefit C&S, with three car trunk loads of food, along with cash and checks for \$111.

The Helping Hands group from Spinnakers also donated 25 bags of groceries and \$370 from its June 2011 Food Drive. Additionally, the St Agnes Knights of Columbus collected and donated from parishioners 34 bags of food for C&S.

Through the summertime of 2011, ELHS Classes of ’76 and ’77 Reunion Food Drives resulted in two carloads amounting to 450 food items.

Stop & Shop provided two carloads of surplus grocery items.

Care & Share formally and publicly acknowledged the huge support offered over the years by the local Stop & Shop management and employees by giving them an Appreciation Event in March 2012. C&S members baked cakes and cookies to bring to the store for the celebration. It was greatly appreciated. The event reaffirmed the mutual concern and respect each organization had for one another. Several Stop & Shop employees volunteered to return to help with the impending Spring basket assembly again, as they had the previous year.

The blessed and pleasing irony of a huge food chain partnering with a local volunteer organization begun in 1989 and persisting into 2011 to fight hunger was lost on none of those gathered for the celebration of the partnership and the people taking part in it.