

GATEWAY

JULY 2023
NEWSLETTER

Volunteer Recognition and Awards Dinner

On Monday, June 12th, Merrick Community Services hosted a Volunteer Recognition and Awards Dinner to appreciate all the work our volunteers do. We celebrated the gift of connection with a wonderful reflection from Jeff Loeks, Regions Hospital Guest Services Supervisor, background piano music performed by **Mary Lee Wright-Borges**, and a tasty dinner from **Little Oven**. Thank you, **Morelli's Market**, for donating beverages at our dinner.

We would like to congratulate our 2023 Program Volunteer Awardees:

Meals on Wheels Volunteer Award:
St. John Lutheran Church

Family Services Volunteer Award:
Ally Bank

Food Shelf Volunteer Award: Caren Chap



MCS had over 260 volunteers this past year with a total of 10,000 hours of service.



3M Legacy Award: SunStream Business Services represented by Tom McHale, Bill Christianson, Kate Kelly (MCS) and Mary Pelstring

Mary Virginia Merrick Award: Brian Swedeon, MCS Treasurer, with Daniel A. Rodriguez, Executive Director



Dick McCarthy Award:
Nancy Wellington with Dick McCarthy



Speaker: Jeff Loeks with Amy Votel, Development Manager/ Event Coordinator

Get involved:

Please contact **Kate Kelly** at kkelly@merrickcs.org or call **651-219-5557** with any questions or to discuss a partnership with MCS.



Brunson's Pub and Merrick Community Services Partnership

In June, Brunson's Pub and Merrick Community Services began to partner on **charitable gaming**, launching pull tabs to support MCS and its important programs and services on the East Side. As an existing supporter of Merrick and champion for the East Side, we welcomed Brunson's owner Thomas LaFleche's invitation to launch games at his establishment. This seems like a good fit for both of us.

This is an exciting opportunity for Merrick. Minnesotans have a long history of supporting charitable gaming to benefit local charities and the important work they provide. Partnering with a local business like Brunson's provides Merrick a new revenue stream, while also introducing us to potentially new supporters, who may not have known of our community impact on the East Side and beyond.

We can't thank Brunson's enough for their partnership and this opportunity. And we invite you to add a little fun to your next visit to the Payne Avenue tavern knowing you're supporting something good for the community. ■



MCS Welcomes Bill Gray to Board of Directors

Merrick Community Services welcomes Bill Gray to our Board of Directors. He's the Director of Stakeholder Engagement at the Minnesota Homeownership Center and has had 25 years of Public Relations and Communications experience in the Twin Cities. He is also a freelancer with GreaterGood PR, where he has used his extensive writing experience as a journalist and provided award-winning strategic counsel.

Bill lives in Maplewood with his wife Jenny. In the summer, he enjoys driving and tinkering with his 1965 Ford Falcon.

We are excited to be working with Bill Gray as he enters his new role on the Board of Directors. ■



Pazao Lee

Staying on Another Year...

This past year Merrick has had the pleasure of hosting Pazao Lee as an AmericCorps VISTA member. Her year of service was supposed to end this month (July), but we are happy she has decided to extend her service another year. Pazao grew up on the East Side of Saint Paul, attended Saint Paul Public Schools and then ventured to Washington State University and graduated with a degree in Environmental Science. Returning to Minnesota following graduation, she volunteered to become an AmericCorps VISTA member and found Merrick to be a place that she could give back to her community. Pazao has provided invaluable service to Merrick and its Development Department. She has managed a variety of special projects, including updating and maintaining databases that track donors, donations, and in-kind contributions. We know Pazao will continue to provide great service to Merrick this coming year, and she is happy to spend more time with her 93-year-old grandmother before setting off to graduate school. ■

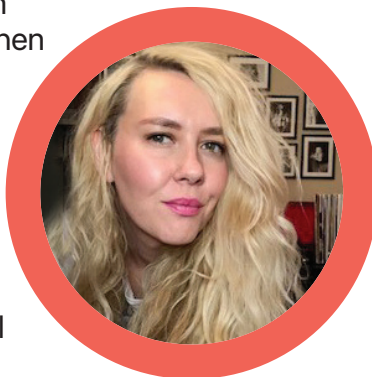
New Staff Join MCS

We are thrilled to introduce two new members of the Merrick team. They bring a wealth of education, energy and experience to our staff.

Gretchen Mitchell

Lead Employment & Career Services Case Manager

Gretchen is originally from Duluth. She brings over 18 years of Human Services work experience to Merrick. In addition to being an After-School Program Leader at Lincoln Elementary School, Gretchen has 17 years with Hennepin County. With the County, she has held the following titles: Human Services Representative, Senior Child Support Officer, and (most recently) Social Worker for over 13 years.



Her community volunteerism includes: Pride, Habitat for Humanity, Second Harvest, Spring Lake Park High School. She has an eye for fashion and enjoys volunteer work with the organization MN Fashion. ■

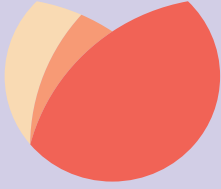
Alison Hruby

Employment & Career Services Case Manager



She brings experience as a private consultant providing sub-consultant services for state and federal agencies and various private firms. Alison has also worked for Century College as an Administrative Program Assistant in their Access Disabilities Office. And she has been a Senior Project Manager/Business Development Advisor for both Anderson Engineering of Minnesota and Bolton & Menk, Inc.

Alison has B.A. Degrees in Anthropology & History from St. Cloud University and a M.S. Degree in Anthropology from Minnesota State University – Mankato. In her free time Alison loves to go antiquing and search for deals at local flea markets all summer long. She also enjoys volunteering for a variety of environmental and nature organizations around the Twin Cities. ■



MERRICK
Community Services

Growing. Stronger. Together.

The Employment Services Team Needs You!

We are seeking volunteers for our Career Services Computer Lab. Duties include the following: Assist people who wish to use the computer lab for job hunting, research, or personal business. Participants may need help with the use of some basic computer programs (Word, Excel and accessing the Internet)

Volunteers are needed during any of our open lab times: Mondays and Wednesdays, 2:00 pm - 4:00 pm and/ or Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:00 am - 11:00 am. Contact **Alison Hruby** for more information: **651-243-6725 • ahruby@merrickcs.org**



Merrick Community Services receives \$50k grant to support financial stability

Merrick is proud to receive an investment from **Allianz Life Insurance Company** of North America (Allianz Life) to support financial stability in the Twin Cities. Allianz Life grants provide charitable donations to nonprofit organizations that help people in the community achieve financial stability, sustainability, and security throughout their lifetime.

MCS will receive **\$50,000** over one year. This investment will support individuals and families to navigate life transitions, find health and stability, and promote independence. We believe that by working together we can transform our community into a better place to live, work and raise a family.

"We are thankful to Allianz Life for making this generous commitment to Merrick and serving the needs of the East Side of Saint Paul. We look forward to our renewed partnership with this exceptional organization," said Kate Kelly, Director of Fundraising and Resource Development.

MCS also received new grants from **CHS Backyard, Xcel Energy, Andersen Corporate Foundation, Fred C. and Catherine B. Andersen, Richard M. Schulze Family Foundation and Ramsey County FHPAP**. Thanks to all of our grant partners! ■



March Food Drive

During our March Food Drive, five food donation barrels and several boxes were placed throughout Regions Hospital and Health Partner clinics around the East Side Saint Paul community. Having HealthPartners support our food drive really was a game-changer for us in the food shelf. During this annual drive, thanks to your generosity we received **28,636 pounds of food** and over **\$12,000 in contributions** from community partners, donors, and volunteers.

MCS Food Shelf Manager Joshua Bau has seen a significant increase in the number of families seeking nutritional support. Since the beginning of this year, there has been a 20% increase in the number of people who utilize the food shelf. Food insecurity is still a prominent challenge in our East Side community. We would like to thank all those who participated in our March Food Drive. We could not help our East Side neighbors without your support. ■



Elbin, Food Shelf Program Assistant, and MCS Food Shelf Volunteers

Spring Clean-Up

Merrick's Senior Spring Clean-Up was held the week of May 15th, with two groups tackling the yards of some very grateful Seniors on the East Side, Ramsey County, and Washington County. Teams went out in small groups, raking leaves, picking up branches, cutting lawns, pulling down overgrown vines, and clearing out flower beds. We worked at a total of eight participant houses. The Spring Clean-Up goes a long way in supporting the continued independence of Seniors and other homebound individuals.

Thank you to 3M, the Twin Cities Illini Club, and community members for your service! ■



Twin Cities Illini Club and Community Members

UpLift

UpLift, MCS' primary fundraiser, was held on Tuesday, May 2nd, 2023 at the JX Venue in Stillwater. This year's event was themed around the Kentucky Derby and our guests went all out on their hats, spirit and generosity. Daniel Ritch, CEO of SunStream Business Services was our Emcee, and Stacey McCurnin of Fladeboe Advancement led the fund-a-need. The attendee's broke records for donations on both the auction and the fund-a-need! Over 80% of attendees contributed to raise over \$125,000 for the East Side. Merrick also held its first raffle under our new gaming license.

Thanks to the Richard M. Schulze Family Foundation for their continued support with a matching gift of \$75,000. And thanks again to all of our sponsors.

Thank you for helping us Uplift the lives of the people we serve. ■



SunStream Business Services

Merrick Community Services Upcoming Volunteer Opportunities:

Meals on Wheels

We are seeking volunteers to deliver lunchtime meals to Seniors and other homebound individuals on the East Side of Saint Paul and South Washington County.

We have a variety of delivery routes available. Our MOW Volunteers comment on how much they enjoy socializing with our participants, who greatly appreciate their service and dedication. Volunteers must have a valid driver's license, have their own transportation, and must pass a background check. Contact **Maria Molina** to volunteer: **651-219-5531** • mmolina@merrickcs.org



Food Shelf – Accompany clients as they shop in the Food Shelf. Must be able to lift up to 20 pounds. Open shifts are Wednesdays & Thursdays 10:00 am-2:00 pm. Stock shelves as needed. Unload and organize boxed and packaged food. Must be able to lift at least 30 pounds. Shifts are open anytime during Food Shelf hours. Contact **Joshua Bau**, Manager of Nutrition & Senior Services with any questions: **651-219-5535** • jbau@merrickcs.org

Fall Clean Up – Dates to be determined (typically early/mid-October). This opportunity involves small volunteer groups that will help do Fall clean up at various homes around the East Side and Woodbury. Tasks include raking, trimming and general clean up on the outside of the participant's home. Contact **Amy Votel**, Development Manager & Event Coordinator to volunteer: **651-348-6568** • avotel@merrickcs.org



Back to School Backpack Distribution Event – On Saturday, August 19, 2023 from 9:00 am-2:00 pm MCS will hold the annual Back to School Backpack Distribution event! Our goal this year is to provide over 750 Backpacks to East Metro kids and families. We are looking for volunteers to support this Event and for contributions. And, thanks to Greater Twin Cities United Way, Special Teams Charities and Simon Says for their support in collecting Backpacks for the event!

If you would like to donate a backpack or school supplies, you can drop these off at the front desk at Merrick Community Services. Or, if you would like to volunteer, we need help on Thursday, August 10th, to help prepare for the Event. This involves helping to stuff backpacks and organize these for the distribution on Saturday, August 19th. In addition, on the 19th, we need to staff two shifts of volunteers (AM & PM), to help set-up and tear-down, distribute backpacks, etc. Sign up now at merrickcs.org/2023backpack. Or contact **Amy Votel**, Development Manager & Event Coordinator to volunteer: **651-348-6568** • avotel@merrickcs.org





Holiday Share

Holiday Share – Merrick Community Services will be hosting its annual Holiday Share Toy Distribution Event on Saturday, December 16th and Monday, December 18th. Toys, food, and holiday goods will be distributed to families and participants.

Prep volunteers are needed the week of December 11-14, 2023 and on the event dates December 16 and 18. More information on registration and volunteerism to come this Fall.

If you are interested in any or all of these opportunities to serve the East Side contact **Amy Votel**, Development Manager & Event Coordinator at **651-348-6568** or email **avotel@merrickcs.org**

Participant stories...

Employment Services Makes Strides

In December, **Sylvia** came to Merrick for some employment support. Immediately after she came to us she was diagnosed with COVID. The COVID worsened and ended up causing major health issues for her. The job she had at that time was a very active job, where she totaled upwards of 25,000 steps a day. Because of COVID, she had to be placed on leave and subsequently work restrictions. During all of this, she had to negotiate the workers' compensation process and work with the HR department to document all of her progress, doctors' appointments and treatments. **Turi Svennevig-Brosi**, Merrick's Manager of Employment & Career Services, stood by her side, providing support at each step. We were able to assist with some bills to carry her through this period of reduced work. Sylvia managed all of this successfully while continuing to work shorter shifts when she could – however, the physical challenges of the work were mounting. Turi continued to work with Sylvia to explore other, more suitable work opportunities. With MCS support, she landed a full-time position at the **University of St. Thomas** and increased her salary considerably. She now has a career pathway in front of her, including abundant opportunities for advanced education, taking advantage of the employee tuition programs at St. Thomas. ■

Family Services: Jaima's Story

Jaima was facing eviction and possible homelessness. Merrick Case Manager, **Felicia Marsh**, began the process to help her find emergency shelter accommodations. She continued to work with Merrick to find permanent housing with additional help from Ramsey County Rapid re-housing and stabilization program. Felicia also guided Jaima in the process of applying for SNAP benefits online and she was thrilled to be accepted in the program.

While waiting for approval from Section 8, Felicia assisted Jaima with a referral to Affordable Mattress. She was able to obtain mattresses for herself and children. That allowed her to move into a 3-bedroom apartment on the East Side of Saint Paul. Jaima has remained gainfully employed full-time and is doing much better. She is amazing, motivated, and resourceful. Her hard work and initiative paid off, and she has been able to seek out additional community resources to meet her needs.

We are so proud to be providing these and many services to our participants, it is amazing to see their success! ■



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LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/company/merrick-community-services

Stay up to date on our website: www.Merrickcs.org

Merrick Community Services is very grateful to the Richard M. Schulze Family Foundation for a continuing Challenge Match, contributing dollar-for-dollar, \$75,000 to match other Merrick donors. This incentive has helped us with individual and organizational funding for multiple years now.



**RICHARD M.
SCHULZE**
FAMILY FOUNDATION