

## NCOC needs donations to stay afloat

Written by Administrator

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The North Clark Outreach Center (NCOC) has been a lifeline to thousands of families in need over the years, but sometimes it needs help, too.

The food bank, at 240 Harrison Street in Charlestown, is struggling to pay its bills.

Charlestown Mayor Bob Hall points to the economy as the main reason for the shortage in funds. "We've seen a lot of non-profits hit hard by the economic downturn," he said.

The NCOC is behind on its rent and needs to increase monthly giving to stay open long term.

Ruthie Jackson, director of the center, says it's important for the people of Charlestown to remember the history of the NCOC and to consider the good it has done for the community.

In 2000, the seeds for the center were planted when Hall and Jackson began brainstorming about starting a food bank in Charlestown.

Jackson's desire to help provide food for families in need can be traced to her childhood in Charlestown.

"Growing up, I knew what it was like to go without," she said. "Our family really struggled and we worried at times about having enough for the essentials, including food and electricity.

Through the center, Jackson now helps about 500 people a month, many of whom are in a situation similar to the one she grew up in.

"We've heard stories of children going to school hungry because they didn't have enough food to eat during the weekend," she said. "The NCOC has been able to step in and help those families."

As the national and local economy continues to sputter, Jackson said the center has seen a 20 to 25 percent increase in the number of first-time people seeking assistance.

"A lot of these people have been laid off and have only been able to find a part-time job," she said. "It's a situation that more and more hard-working people find themselves in."

Jackson said she's also gotten calls letting her know of high school students who are living on their own and they need food.

But while the need for the center increases, it struggles to meet its monthly bills, which are about \$1,100 a month.

Jackson said having enough to pay the center's bills has been a problem throughout the years. She laughs as she remembers an NCOC volunteer locking out the gas man so he couldn't shut off the heat.

But in the past, Hall said that Jackson had the time to "beat the bushes," to raise the money that the center needed. "But, because her own family was struggling in this economy, Ruthie had to take on a full-time job and she doesn't have as much time to fund raise."

A few local churches and individuals give monthly but the contributions aren't keeping pace with the expenses.

Hall said the NCOC really needs more people and organizations that are willing to give on a monthly or annual basis. And while the situation appears dire, Hall said he's not worried.

"I believe the NCOC is going to be just fine because the people of Charlestown are very generous," he stated. Hall proves his claim by pointing out that Charlestown raises more money for The Crusade for Children than most surrounding communities that are much larger in

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population.

"I think most of the people of Charlestown are givers because many of us have had hard times ourselves," he said.

Jackson sees Charlestown's generosity every day. It's this generosity that helps keep the shelves of the NCOC stocked with food and it's also how the center will provide gifts for about 160 children this Christmas through its Elf Tree program.

Like Hall, Jackson also believes the people of Charlestown will come through for the NCOC as it has so many times in the past.

"Our people care for each other," she said. "I've seen it so many times."

Jackson said the center has been in a lot of jams before and that the money always comes through.

"One time we needed money to pay for some work that we'd had done on the floor. I went home on Friday not knowing how we'd get the money," she said. "On Monday, I came to the center and was handed a \$2,000 check, the exact amount we needed."

Jackson also has seen heart-moving examples of compassion at the center.

For instance, when the mother of an infant came to NCOC looking for basics like diapers and formula, she was about to be turned away because the center had run out of those items.

"But a woman who was at the center to drop off a food donation from her church overheard the mother's need and said to her, 'You wait here. I'll be right back.' The woman returned with all of the things the baby needed," Jackson said.

Hall also cites the generosity of those who volunteer at the NCOC. "Nobody at the center gets paid," he said. "They give their time because they care for people."

Jackson said she wishes people could see firsthand the impact the center has on families.

"We've heard a 4-year-old so excited about being able to eat that night," Jackson said. "And we've helped a child who had cut out the top of his shoes because his foot wouldn't fit in them."

Jackson said one year, the NCOC received a letter from a child who asked the center to buy his mom a pair of pants for Christmas because she only had one pair.

"That mother was going through a very hard time but is doing much better and now she helps buy Christmas gifts for children in need," Jackson added.

In addition to being a food bank and providing Christmas gifts, the center also gives away about 500 backpacks, 70 bikes and 200 coats, hats and gloves every year.

"These are all things this community needs," Jackson said. "And the NCOC needs your help to provide them."

To donate to the NCOC, call Jackson at 502-773-7474 or send a check to the North Clark Outreach Center, P.O. Box 56, Charlestown, IN, 47111.