



Network News

Interfaith Hospitality Network

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www.homelessfamilies.org



WINTER 2009

A Very Special Family by: Holly Schultz

We want to share a story about a very special family in IHN right now. What makes them special is their positive attitude despite their hardships, as well as the way they care for one another.

Rhonda, her daughter Mari and husband Steve, and their four year-old Paige came into the Network at the end of September. At the time, they were living in an apartment in West Homestead. Their apartment was infested with cockroaches, so they stayed away for one week while an exterminator tried to eliminate them. Unfortunately, something went terribly wrong and they multiplied. When the landlord refused to help, the family left. For the first time in their lives, they were homeless.

Financially, that was a devastating blow. Mari cares for her mother, Rhonda, full-time. Rhonda has a brain aneurysm, for which she has had 2 surgeries so far. Doctors have removed one half of Rhonda's skull in order to access and repair her brain. Steve, the only member of the family able to work outside the home, was earning very little as a handyman.

Since it was during the summer, the family camped in the Laurel Highlands. For Paige, it seemed like a long vacation. When it became too cold, they found some inexpensive motels. But the reality of being without a home set in when there was a mere \$10 left. Mari remembers calling homeless shelters. All of them were full, or were for people in different circumstances than their own. Finally, someone gave them the number for IHN.

“I really thought it would be much different than it is. People don't realize there are wonderful, generous, kind people out there. You don't come across people in everyday life like you do in IHN,” says Mari. “The program is awesome. Everyone's needs are being met. We set goals every week – and we try to accomplish them every week. They are willing to help us get there, but they are not going to do it for us.”

“Our daughter Paige loves this program. For being 4, she's adapted very well. She likes everyone at the churches, loves to greet the van drivers, and has befriended the staff at the Family Center,” shares Mari.

In addition, Mari, Rhonda, Steve and Paige want to thank all of the volunteers they have met at the churches who are in IHN. Mary says, “When we walk into a church, they greet us with open arms. They don't look down on us.”

With help from IHN, things are looking up for this family – just in time for the holidays. Steve starts a job the week before Thanksgiving. Wish him luck if you see him. They look forward to getting a place that's clean and safe – a place to call their own. Once settled, Rhonda can think about scheduling her next surgery. Until then, please keep this family in your thoughts and prayers this holiday season.

Part 2 of this story is on Page 3...
“A Team of Churches... A Wonderful Mission”

IHN volunteer Jan Shaughnessy with Paige at First Methodist Church in Washington



CARS

A special way to help families succeed

Currently, one of our guests spends 2 hours a day on public transit to reach his job. Not having a car is a major problem that limits his independence and delays his family's move from IHN into a new home.

Why donate a car?

- Helps IHN families get back on their feet.
- Is a tax benefit to donors. Donors receive full "Blue Book" value for vehicle. When a car is donated to other nonprofits who sell their donated vehicles, the donor only receives tax credit for the sales price of the vehicle.
- Donated vehicles should be in good condition since we cannot afford major repairs.

How is it done?

Simple:

- Meet an IHN staff person at West Penn AAA. The title is transferred to IHN and the donor receives documentation that the vehicle was donated to IHN for use, not to be sold. The donor, of course, keeps or destroys the license plate.
- The car is stored in a secure location until the title is sent back from the state.
- The vehicle is given to a qualified family at IHN and the title is transferred, registered with a new license plate, and moved to the Family Day Center or to the family's new home.

Family Update

April and Neal were in the network 2 years ago with their two children, Mona and Christopher.

April and Neal stopped by the Family Center recently to visit and gave us their update:

Neal's heart condition, which was discovered while they were here, is under control with medication. He is working 2 jobs and was one of the workers who repaired the walls at the Family Center.

The family is living in a mobile home in a good community. They have found a church home and are expecting a baby in the spring.

Neal credits the Interfaith Hospitality Network with giving them the tools and confidence they needed to get where they are today.

IN MEMORY OF Janet Gabrielson

Everyone at Interfaith Hospitality Network was deeply saddened by the loss of Janet Gabrielson, who passed away in October. A respected and dedicated board member and volunteer, Janet worked with IHN for **over 12 years**. She also served on the Washington County FEMA review board. Janet's insight was valued, and her personality and sense of humor were treasured.



AmeriCorps

Your Chance to Make It Better

**Serve your community through outreach.
Change your life and others!**

Looking for a way to serve?

We've learned there is a shortage of positions for the many people who want to serve in the PeaceCorps and AmeriCorps. But there are wonderful opportunities in a very special AmeriCorps program called **FaithSERVE**.

At IHN, **FaithSERVE** members can gain professional work experience by dealing with the many components of a nonprofit organization. But most valuable of all is the personally enriching involvement and direct work with our families.

Participants make a one-year commitment to work for **8 hours per week** at either the Crafton or Washington Family Day Center. They receive a \$2,000 stipend, and a \$1,250 education award which can be used for:

- Education or enrichment classes.
- Tri-annual training programs relating to compassion/social justice ministry.
- Most importantly, an opportunity to put their faith into practice.

Participants must 18 years old (no maximum age!) with a high school diploma or GED.

Do you know a person who is interested?
Call Susan at **724-229-1129** or **412-921-2916**.

Open your doors and let the sunshine out!

By shining our light, others are drawn to God and the church
Matthew 5:16

IHN volunteers experience the joy of reflecting God's love, and each member church is warmed by welcoming displaced families.

Congregations can experience the joy of reflecting God's love by becoming part of the IHN mission team and helping homeless families. For information about becoming a host church or partnering with other churches, please call Chris Blackwood at 412-343-1033 or Susan Donnan at 724-229-1129.

Home for the Holidays

You make it possible

Your donations enable IHN and our army of volunteers to help homeless children and their families find safe, warm homes and reestablish stable lives in the community.

Please mail a donation in the enclosed envelope. Every dollar you give will be matched with \$3 worth of donated shelter facilities, food and volunteer hours.



Thank you and best wishes for a wonderful holiday!

A Meaningful Gift

Send a gift to IHN in honor of a special friend or relative. We'll send a beautiful holiday card acknowledging your gift to each honoree, and we can add a special note from you. Need it now? ASAP? Call 724-229-1129 to make immediate arrangements — we'll mail it within two days!

There are several ways to donate to IHN:

1. Mail a tax exempt donation to IHN today, using the enclosed envelope for your **personal check**.
2. Visit www.homelessfamilies.org and click on the "PayPal Donate" icon in the upper left corner of web pages after you enter the web site. Your **credit card** donation is **secure** through **PayPal**.
3. Designate Interfaith Hospitality Network as your charity of choice through the **United Way** by opting for **#10151**

A Team of Churches... A Wonderful Mission

by: Holly Schultz

The Interfaith Hospitality Network is made up of many diverse church congregations. What is important is their common goal – to help displaced families return to independence. Some churches have enough volunteer manpower to serve independently. Others ask neighboring churches to join with them in a common effort to provide food, shelter, and friendship to the IHN families.

Four churches in Washington, Pennsylvania have formed a unique arrangement to serve IHN. When the IHN Head Coordinator for **First Methodist Church** in Washington moved to California, **Kathy Leavitt** stepped in to fill the position. First Methodist of Washington, PA was one of the six founding IHN churches, fifteen years ago.

"First Presbyterian 1793 Church of Washington was considering getting involved in the project. But they weren't sure they had adequate space. We had the space, but knew we'd need more volunteers. So we joined together to sign up," explains Leavitt, who incidentally holds the record for the longest serving IHN head coordinator. Volunteers from both churches fill the slots. Two other churches from the Washington, PA community, Faith Presbyterian and Church of the Covenant, help out as support congregations by supplying all of the volunteers for one day of the week each.

"It works out so well. Our church, where the guests eat and sleep, is a block and a half from the IHN Family Center. So the guests walk. They don't have to wait for the van," explains Leavitt.

In addition, when several churches work together, one church doesn't have to drop out of the IHN if they undergo something disruptive, such as a building project or renovation. This was the case for First Methodist. During their building program, IHN was housed at First Presbyterian 1793 of Washington for one year.

If you are a church that is considering getting involved in IHN, it might be worthwhile to talk with other congregations in your community about partnering. By doing so, you not only have a broader base of volunteers, but you've fostered a rich opportunity for a true, *interfaith* experience.

Network News

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297 East Beau Street
Washington, PA 15301



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Interfaith Hospitality Network...

- **Who we help:** Homeless families
- **How we help:** IHN unites area churches and volunteers to provide emergency and short-term shelter
- **Why we help:** Because of the dedication of over 1,000 volunteers who not only feel compassion for families in crisis but who take action and make a difference
- **What is our goal?** To help displaced families return to independent lives in the community

***A volunteer described our mission concisely when he said
"IHN helps homeless families get back on their feet"***



***Holiday Greetings
from our families to yours!***

