

Charity of the Quarter Interview

Angie Romagosa, President of The Sharing Center

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What is The Sharing Center?

The Sharing Center is a faith-based non-profit helping to ease the stress of poverty and prevent homelessness in Seminole County. Our mission is to share the reality of God's love with those in need by providing material assistance and promoting Christian generosity during times of personal emergencies. We strive to provide for needs of food, clothing, shelter and - just as important - compassion to children, the elderly, and families in financial distress. The churches that support us preach Christ to our families while we have the opportunity to show Christ to those in need.

What happens when a family is first referred to The Sharing Center?

When a family arrives at The Sharing Center, they will be met by a volunteer receptionist, who will help them to fill out paperwork that a caseworker will need to begin the interview. People are served on a walk-in basis and will have an opportunity to meet privately with a caseworker, either a specially-trained volunteer or one of the two caseworkers on our staff. The caseworker will help the family to identify needs and ways they can help themselves to gain a more stable financial footing, as well as ways The Sharing Center or other agencies may assist during this difficult time. Some of the cases are quite involved, especially if there are multiple problems, such as major health issues, that have caused an already struggling family to spiral down to a point where they are about to be living on the street and have no way to get back to normal, even though "normal" might not be a real stable place, either. Most do need food, and we have a grocery list where they are invited to check the food and toiletry items they need to guide our volunteer pantry workers in packing bags of groceries for them to take home and prepare for their families. I believe we are the only food pantry in our area doing this, and the list is in English and Spanish.

How big is this problem in Seminole County?

About 10% of Seminole County's population lives in poverty, which means a family of four is living on \$19,000 or less. It is projected that in two years, over 43,000 people here will be living in poverty. About 94% of the families seeking help at The Sharing Center actually struggle to live at the poverty level. Even though the established low-income figure for this family is about \$27,000, it will actually take them more than \$34,000 just to make ends meet based on the current cost of living in the County. The lack of affordable housing is a huge problem here; because when a family needs to adjust its spending, moving to a home with cheaper rent just isn't possible. We're seeing families now who have never come to us before; but their rent has skyrocketed so that when special needs arise, they have no money left to deal with these emergencies. Limited public transportation also is a problem because a family needs to maintain a car and pay insurance and all the expenses that go with that.

How many Central Florida Families were helped in 2005?

In 2005, The Sharing Center assisted 7,151 families (20,257 individuals). And nearly one-fourth of these families had never needed to ask for our help before. Most of our families are members of the "working poor" - households with one or two wage earners

who still don't make enough to support their family. Many are households touched by death, divorce, illness or recent job loss.

How can I help The Sharing Center?

Financial gifts help The Sharing Center to assist with basic and special needs for struggling families and individuals. Gifts may be mailed to The Sharing Center at 600 N. Hwy. 17-92, Suite 158, Longwood, FL 32750-3638. We are proud of the fact that we are able to contain our Administrative vs. Program costs to 10% vs. 90%; however, anyone wishing to make sure that 100% of their gift is spent on Program needs alone may designate this with their contribution. Gifts also may be made online at www.thesharingcenter.org, where Seminole Countians also can view our volunteer opportunities and other needs.

Is my gift to The Sharing Center tax-deductible?

Yes, all gifts to The Sharing Center are tax-deductible. We are a registered 501-C-3 nonprofit agency, and we are registered with GuideStar.

How is the money raised used?

We are proud to say that 90% of our income is used for client needs, such as food, clothing, and essential costs of utilities, rent/mortgage, transportation and prescriptions. Also, we are able to help with special needs specific to an individual that not all agencies are able to address. These may be as diverse as new shoes for a child going to school in plastic flip-flops in the winter; providing a room air purifier for a child with asthma; or a window air conditioner for an elderly gentleman suffering with emphysema in a hot Florida summer. We may provide new tires for an indigent family's old clunker of a car so Mom has a way to get to work after being off a few days with a sick child. Or it may be extra food and a utility payment for the family of a 33-year-old carpet layer out of work after a heart attack who sees nothing but a package of hotdogs in the freezer to feed his children and knows he won't be getting a paycheck again for a couple more months.