

CAN Connection

FALL 2020

Message from Mitch

As we welcome the start of a new season in this most unusual year, maybe you're like me looking for glimmers of joy and hope in these trying times. If so, I encourage you to take a few minutes to read the stories below, including the first of our new "Together #WeCAN" series. These stories reflect the continuous, selfless hard work of the staff, volunteers, and clients themselves of [Community Assistance Network \(CAN\)](#) who have together faced down many new challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. What an honor it is to witness their strength and work alongside them!

This fight is not over. In fact, we expect the economic impacts of this pandemic to last for years to come. The lack of jobs and the childcare challenges are very real struggles for so many families. As more people get further behind in their rent, don't have enough food to put on the table, and look at utility bills increasing or needing a shelter bed in the colder months, there's an increasing need for our assistance.

Thank you for your continued support of our efforts to meet the growing needs right here in our Baltimore County neighborhoods. Because of our amazing community of staff, volunteers, donors, and other partners of CAN, we'll assist more families and individuals who need our help, now more than ever. Together #WeCAN keep helping people and changing lives for the better in Baltimore County.

Mitch Posner
CAN's Executive Director

Staff Spotlight: Meet April

"My job is to bring joy to people's hearts," said April Stevens, CAN's Volunteer Coordinator.

April started working for CAN in 2010, bringing not only her work experience from her years as a counselor in a detox facility in Baltimore, but also her personal experience with the courage it takes to ask for help.

"I was homeless at one time. People think that homelessness has a lot to do with addiction, but in the blink of an eye, it doesn't have to be," said April. "For me, my house caught on fire. I lost everything. At the time, my child was in school and all we had were the clothes on our back. So, yes, I know exactly what it feels like to have no home."

Once April received the help that she needed to get back on her feet, she had a desire to help others pick themselves up and encourage them to make a change. She has held several positions at CAN over the years, including working as a residential advocate, a shelter manager, and now as a volunteer coordinator. No matter what her title has been, April makes a difference in people's lives by building trust so that people will feel comfortable opening up to her and ready to partner together to make a life change.

"Trust is the main thing. If I hadn't trusted the people who helped me, I wouldn't be where I am today," said April. "My work keeps me grounded because it could have been me again and again. Homelessness doesn't have a label—it can impact anyone."

As one part of her job, April recruits college students to volunteer to help residents of CAN's homeless shelters work on skills like interviewing and using technology to find employment. April believes in the power of networking and speaking up in churches and other gathering places to ask for support from the community.

"I've seen doctors and lawyers as clients. Things happen in life, and we can give you a warm and comfortable place to stay. But we're different from other shelters—this isn't a resort. Homelessness is not just putting clothes on someone's back and food in their bellies. It's about making a change in their life."

One of the most shocking moments for April during her work with CAN came while passing out care packages to homeless neighbors when the cold weather hit. She found an entire family living in the woods, with little bedrooms set up for children who were 3 and 4 years old.

"That's something that I don't want a child to live with," said April. "Some people close their eyes and don't want to see homelessness. But if there's any way that I can help families like that get out of that situation, then I will just keep talking until somebody hears me."



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COVID-19 Hits Home in Baltimore County

For Erica, a Baltimore County resident, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought new challenges in taking care of her family. While her husband is away at a recovery facility, Erica is the sole caretaker for an 11-month-old, a 2-year-old, and a 6-year-old who has a rare genetic disorder. Caring for her daughter with special needs who hasn't been able to go to school or get the support that she would in normal

times has certainly changed their day-to-day lives. She worries about going to the grocery store and struggles with delays in scheduling necessary doctors' appointments.

"It's been very overwhelming with the responsibilities of caring for my children in our home," said Erica. "It all falls to me right now. I've been relying on food stamps and other financial assistance programs to keep us afloat."

"We can suffer from a lot of shame and guilt, so I hope my story can help even one person who is afraid to ask for help."

Erica turned to CAN for support when she needed financial support to get the power turned back on in her home. At the time, she also didn't have the money to pay her rent. CAN's Outreach Team helped Erica understand the process of receiving assistance for both, walking her through the options.

"It was a wake-up call for me," said Erica. "I reached out for assistance that really helped me take the threat and the burden away that my kids wouldn't have a home."

In this uncomfortable time that has had many negative impacts on Erica's family, she's grateful for the sound advice and comforting support that she received from CAN. She said she's never met people like CAN's staff members, especially when seeking help. She continues to navigate what's next for her family—the conflicting realities of needing to stay home with her kids and also needing to work to support them.

"It's okay to get help, especially when you need it," said Erica. "Not knowing what to do is the hardest part. When you're juggling so much and suffering, you're not seeing reality for what it is. We can suffer from a lot of shame and guilt, so I hope my story can help even one person who is afraid to ask for help."

Fontana Village Renovations

Fontana Village, home to CAN's summer camp and after school programs, received a major makeover thanks to a generous grant from the Hobbs Foundation! ([Find more pictures here](#) on CAN's Facebook page @canconnects) Roberta Mosby, CAN's Fontana Village Program Director who recently celebrated her 15-year work anniversary, described the renovation as drastic and wonderful.

"When you invite someone in your home, you always want it to look nice," said Roberta. "Now it looks so nice that we want everyone coming in. It's more inviting and the students feel better coming into the center. We always like to have that kind of home feeling."



Renovations included several important safety upgrades to ensure a safe and healthy environment during COVID-19, as well as colorful fresh paint, new carpet, and enhanced technology. CAN's staff have

enforced many new monitoring protocols to adhere to CDC guidelines and ease any of the parents' fears, as well as adapted to the changing virtual times for the entire family.

"One family had five children and only one laptop," said Roberta. "She was trying to figure out how she could meet the needs of all of her children with only one laptop." With the addition of laptops on site, Fontana Village now offers virtual learning support to help families like this with access to limited technology.

Adults can also use the laptops at designated times to help with their search for employment. Implementing the Aspen Institutes' 2Gen approach, CAN believes in caring for the whole family, working with all family members to develop and reach their fullest potential. This may involve working with Roberta and the CAN staff team for rent assistance to avoid eviction, applying for SNAP (formerly food stamps), and budget and employment counseling.

"Helping others is my favorite part of my job," said Roberta. "Just knowing that I've made an impact in someone's life for the good. I've been blessed to be here long enough to see the fruits of that. Children are our future—they need us to help them get there."

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Empower4Life Supports Students for a New School Year



A big THANK YOU to Empower4Life, a Baltimore-based nonprofit that has been a long-time partner with CAN, for the generous donation of school supplies to help children at our Eastside Family Shelter and Transitional Housing Shelter be prepared for the new school year! The 2020 school year has brought new challenges for everyone, but Empower4Life made sure that CAN's kids were prepared for virtual learning.

Students received a backpack, new "back to school" outfit, headphones, a mouse and mousepad, a lap desk, clipboards, and a pair

of protective eyeglasses for increased screen time. Throughout the year, Empower4Life partners with CAN for holiday and back-to-school drives and educational programming, as well as coordinating the weekly drop-off of fresh produce from a local grocery store to the Eastside Family Shelter.

“Our goal is to level the playing field for all kids,” said Jennifer Cox, Founder of Empower4Life. “We want to help kids to achieve and realize that they have the potential to succeed.”

To make projects like this a success, they involve more than 250 members of the community! Anything from volunteers helping to pack the bags, to local Girl Scout Troops using arts and craft skills to give each student a poem. We’re inspired by Empower4Life’s model to bring together the community to make an impact.



Together #WeCAN

When Jennifer Cox volunteered on her own at CAN’s Eastside Family Shelter, she saw a need to support the children living in the shelter even more with enriching and meaningful activities. She launched Empower4Life in 2015 and has continued to partner with CAN in big ways to help students thrive.

Jennifer Cox

CAN donor & volunteer, Empower4Life Founder

This is what we CAN do when we work together:

“We couldn’t pull off all of our projects to help kids to achieve without the contributions of hundreds of community members who make them a huge success. Never say no when someone wants to be part of a project. There’s always something that someone can do, whether it’s financially or someone’s time.”



Together #WeCAN



Community Assistance Network
Helping People. Changing Lives.

7900 E. Baltimore Street, Baltimore, MD 21224
info@canconnects.org | canconnects.org | 410-285-4674