A Taste of TASK

Trenton Area Soup Kitchen Lays a Path Toward Self-Sufficiency

As a kid, Fletcher Turner wanted to be an archeologist. Unfortunately, a rough start in life took him far from that dream. So instead of uncovering ancient civilizations in some far off land, he is at home in Trenton watching others live his dream on the National Geographic Channel.

But the fact that Turner can enjoy his favorite show in a place of his own, is, in itself, a victory. Two years ago he was homeless, living on the city’s streets, in abandoned buildings and on occasion, a relative’s couch.

It’s been 30 years since Turner has heard the jingle of his own house keys. Holding the ones to the single-bedroom apartment he now shares with one gray and white tabby, Turner grins at his life today. Now 50, he is “very happy” to be off the streets he once thought would end him. And after years of depending on TASK for food, these days, Turner prepares his own meals.

“He doesn’t need me anymore...” says TASK’s Senior Case Manager Julie Janis. “But that’s the goal, isn’t it?”

Janis said she is by no means sad to know that Turner is on his own. In fact, she brags about his success like a proud mother; but her sentiment is understandable. After all, she worked with Turner for years, referring him to other social agencies while seeing him through sobriety, relapse, bouts of depression and suicide attempts. Janis admitted she had to literally walk him off a bridge. But her work at TASK is a labor of love and one she does well to hear Turner tell it.

“Without God and Miss Julie I’d still be out there,” he said. “She gets the job done because she really cares. She’s an angel.”

Janis hastily dismissed the angel moniker. But she knows she, and TASK, have a good reputation in the community.

“This is a place where someone can come and know we’ll listen,” Janis said. “We meet them wherever they are on the path to self-sufficiency, and essentially talk it through.”

In her five years at the soup kitchen, Janis has talked it through with more than 2,000 patrons. Up until last year when Whitney Hendrickson, the

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“If you don’t give up on that better life for yourself and have patience – TASK is number one to help you if you are willing.”—TASK Patron Fletcher Turner on working toward self-sufficiency.

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“I cleaned it; kept it neat as I could,” Turner said, recalling the vacant walk-up he once shared with 33 cats on North Clinton Street. “It was my home. I’m not proud of it, but that’s how I was living.”

See Turner, p.2
It’s been 30 years since Fletcher Turner, 50 (hands pictured above) has heard the jingle of his own house keys. With the help of TASK’s Case Managers, Julie Janis and Whitney Hendrickson, Fletcher now owns a single-bedroom apartment in Trenton, NJ.

“We were seeing more than 400 people in some months,” Janis said, pointing to a folder full of sign-in sheets, each listing the 20-plus names of patrons waiting to been helped. Ideally, Janis would like to hire another case manager, freeing her up to do more effective follow up, such as self-sufficiency action plans for patrons. She would also like to bring in more partners like New Eyes for the Needy which provides free eye-glass prescriptions for patrons. Furniture is another area of need—specifically for families placed in permanent housing. While TASK does not take furniture donations, it does purchase items for patrons. Janis would like to increase the budget—especially for mattresses which are a critical need for larger families.

“When I only have a budget for 10 mattresses, I can’t very well give four of them to one family, knowing others will need them too,” she explained. Fortunately, Turner didn’t need a mattress. However, the cookware and linen that came with the other items in his donated TASK move-in basket, have certainly kept him busy at home cooking, sober and reveling in the joys of archeology.

Food Transforms Lives

In 2020, TASK will launch Emilio’s Culinary Academy, a job training program that prepares and connects patrons to opportunities in the food and beverage business.

Named after the late Emilio Papa, a TASK board trustee and long-time volunteer and advocate for improving the quality of life through food, the academy will provide hands-on culinary training and coaching to help patrons find and maintain employment.

The program is a response to a need in the TASK community and industry trends. TASK Manager of Food Services and Facilities Paul Jensen points to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projections on the industry, indicating a 14-percent growth in food and beverage service jobs through 2024.

“This creates a lot of opportunities for TASK’s patrons as they work toward self-sufficiency,” Jensen said. “Because, at the end of the day, this is about more than helping someone get a job — it’s about setting them up for success, giving them skills and getting them the support needed to start and maintain a career in the industry. It’s providing a gateway to stability.”
Anyone Can Be a Philanthropist

What comes to mind when you hear the word philanthropist?
For many, it’s generous people like Bill Gates, Oprah, Warren Buffet, or at the very least, more established professionals who can afford to cut a check for $10,000 or more. But to be honest, anyone can become a philanthropist.

In 2018, charities across the country received more than $400 billion in donations. With an average contribution of about $100, nearly three quarters of those dollars came from people like you. It’s a notion that one person cannot do it all, but together we can do plenty.

Charities are important. They meet the needs of individuals who fall through the cracks of public and private social programs. Despite their relevance to overall community wellness, charities - especially those that receive little or no government aid - struggle to meet fund-raising goals and depend on the generosity of individuals.

TASK is one of those many charities.

For more than 35 years, TASK has relied on a range of monetary gifts to cover the cost of food and sustain programs and other initiatives that help folks get back on their feet. When TASK was just starting out and needed a permanent location to serve meals, individuals stepped up and paid for the brick and mortar to build our home site. When we expanded our meal service to reach more food-insecure neighbors outside Trenton, individual gifts helped paved the way for our success. And last year, when TASK ran out of space to adequately serve its growing patron base, individual donors answered our call for help and contributed generously to a building campaign that transformed our headquarters into a better place for patrons, volunteers, and staff. We would be remiss if we didn’t say thank you — we couldn’t have done it without you. So, the next time you hear the word philanthropist, take a look in the mirror.

If you haven’t had a chance to make your annual donation to TASK, it’s never too late or too little. Please consider making a gift today.

Hunger Action Month
The Numbers Are In...

In September, we asked you to act with TASK to alleviate hunger in our community. You did it!

10,247 Meals served at TASK’s main headquarters on Escher Street
9,700+ Pounds of food donated by supporters
9,497 Meals distributed at TASK’s satellite meal locations
7,500+ Flatware wrapped to be used during meal service
4,370 Emergency meals provided to patrons
4,340 Cash donations made throughout the month
1,680 Weekend meal packages delivered to local school children

Thanks to you and other volunteers, donors and community partners, TASK logged more than 30,000 actions.

Turning Hunger into Hope
This year TASK served nearly 400,000 MEALS
Letter from TASK’s Executive Director

Dear Friends of TASK,

It is hard to believe that we are coming to the end of another year. Year-end is a time for reflection for me, as I’m sure it is for many of you.

For TASK, 2019 was a year of dreams coming true! Among them is the completed renovation and addition to our existing building. I can’t tell you how many rave reviews I’ve heard about it. Not only has our new space allowed us to expand programs and invite in more front-line community service providers to assist our patrons and their diverse needs, it has been transformative in other intangible ways. Extra space, bright colors and contemporary furniture all contribute to the positivity you feel when visiting TASK, and that’s exactly what we intended. The importance of using design to speak to people should not be minimized. Everything from the walls, the floors and the furnishing are manifestations of our core belief in treating people with dignity and respect. I have, indeed, seen it make a difference for our patrons, volunteers, and staff. Everyone’s walking a little taller and smiling a bit more.

This year also marked change on the food line at TASK. We added a new salad bar that diversifies our already health-conscious menu; but it is so much more. The salad bar gives our patrons the dignity that comes with making choices - something poverty so often robs people of in their everyday lives. This offering allows them to choose the food they want and be active partners in a healthier lifestyle.

I know that all of you are reminded of the work we do and the impact you have when you choose to invest in TASK with your contributions. We could not provide the services in the way that we do without your support. Collective support from individuals, private corporations and foundations allows us to continue serving those in need, no questions asked, with dignity and respect.

May this coming holiday season be filled with peace, dignity and respect for you and your loved ones.

Joyce E. Campbell