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Local Non-profit Faces Decrease in Donations

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Our Daily Bread is in need of sponsors for their holiday program, which helps local families struggling to make ends meet.



Lisa Whetzel, executive director of Our Daily Bread, holds up an advertisement of the organization that encouraged donations. Photo by Janelle Germanos

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By Janelle Germanos

Thursday, December 5, 2013

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Our Daily Bread, a non-profit that provides assistance to low-income members of the community, has seen a decrease in donations since last year, making it difficult for them to meet the needs of their holiday program.

According to Lisa Whetzel, a Fairfax resident and the executive director of Our Daily Bread, individual donations have decreased from \$120,000 in 2012 to \$87,000 in 2013.

"This is the time of year when we do get the most donations in, just

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because people are in the season of giving," Whetzel said. "It's unusual though for us to be so behind. We're concerned about that."

Whetzel said that corporate donations have also decreased, something the organization is concerned with. "In 2012 we received about \$48,000 in donations. This year, it's about \$24,000," Whetzel said.

Whetzel said that the sequestration and the government shutdown may be the reason for the decrease in donations. "We are very concerned that people don't have the spending ability they had in years past. They're not sure about what is going to happen in the future. There is still the threat of a shutdown in January, and so people might be holding on to their income, that they might normally give, just in case," Whetzel said.

ON DEC. 3, Our Daily Bread took part in a global movement called Giving Tuesday that encourages donations to non-profit organizations.

"There was Black Friday, and then there was small-business Saturday, and then Cyber Monday, and then there is Giving Tuesday, which I think is the most important one. It is the reason for the season," Whetzel said.

Our Daily Bread is in need of assistance for their holiday program, which allows for a donor to sponsor a family by donating in the form of food, gifts, or a gift card that the family can use themselves.

"If we compare last year's number to this year's to date, we are about 100 short of what we had at this time last year," Whetzel said. "That means we are going to have to use more of the cash donations and dip into our general operating funds to be able to provide for the families that are on our list."

Whetzel said the list of families has been capped at 3,500. "Last year we serviced 3100 families. We increased it by 400 in hopes that the community would support the holiday program. We're just very concerned that we aren't going to meet that need," Whetzel said.

Heather Webb, a Fairfax County resident and the communications manager at Our Daily Bread, said that donors need to sign up to sponsor a family by Dec. 13.

"We have this tiny little window of opportunity because we need everybody to sign up by the 13th so we can figure out who is left and how we are going to give assistance to them. People need time to shop and contact their families," Webb said.

According to Webb, sponsoring a family can be a great group activity and can be done in a variety of ways.

"If you like to put a food basket together and buy the gifts and do that for a family, you can. If you would rather give them gift cards, you can do that. We have a virtual donor program where you can just give us money online and we'll give that to a family in the form of gift cards so they can go out and get their own gifts. There are just a lot of wonderful options," Webb said.

WHETZEL SAID that the clients that Our Daily Bread serves typically make about \$22,000 a year. "For a family of four, that is considered poverty," Whetzel said. "The pockets of poverty are sort of invisible. But they are out there and it's very real. Our clients are living on minimum wage incomes, or maybe just above, and more than half their income is going to rent, and it just doesn't leave a whole like that to buy food, pay bills, much less buy a holiday gift for their child."

Our Daily Bread's holiday program helps families accomplish this task.

"When you think of all the abundance we have around here, it must be so stressful for them to see their kids are at school and seeing what their friends are giving or hearing about their crazy wish list," Webb said.

"The parents just don't know if they're even going to have a nice meal, if there is going to be food on the table, and to think of what they can get their kids when there is just no money."

Donors can also give to Our Daily Bread throughout the year. According to Dawn Sykes of Alexandria, the seasonal programs manager, the organization provided school supplies for 1,400 children this year.

"We do a wish list on Amazon.com where donors and sponsors can go on and purchase backpacks and calculators," Sykes said.



Photo courtesy of Heather Webb

Steve Harris, President of American Legal Investigations & Support Services (ALIASS) presents a donation of \$1,000 to Our Daily Bread's Dawn Sykes, the seasonal programs manager, and Lisa Whetzel, the executive director. The donation will provide grocery and gift cards to families on the organization's holiday assistance list.

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