

2011: ECHO Continues to Respond to the County's Financial Crisis

While the county continued to experience a significant economic slowdown, donations to ECHO from individuals and congregations remained stable. With an increase in Fairfax County's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families - Emergency Funds (TANF-EF) program funding from \$25,000 to \$75,000 and an increase in Fairfax County's Consolidated Community Funding Pool (CCFP) grant from \$35,000 to \$50,000, ECHO was able to increase its financial assistance to needy families from \$251,000 to \$318,000--the largest amount ever.

ECHO's 28 counselors and three trainees, eight of whom were fluent in Spanish, assisted 1,472 families during the year. The Board of Directors authorized counselors to modify the assistance guidelines to recognize that families needed assistance for housing, food and financial stability for longer periods than they had before. They referred clients to other entities where their needs could be met when ECHO couldn't provide the help or services they needed.

Recognizing the transient nature of many ECHO clients, counselors now required all persons coming for appointments to show a current proof of address and photo ID. Family counselors are asked to commit to at least one three-hour shift per week dealing directly with clients. Duties also include attending counselor meetings, county regional meetings, and ECHO Board of Directors and Executive Committee meetings. To keep current on what other community groups are doing, counselors attend meetings with speakers from these other groups. Counselors also compile data and forms for the county's Housing Authority and write checks. Eight Office Angels assist counselors by answering phones, packing food for clients, and scheduling clothing appointments.

Over 360 volunteers make up ECHO's workforce. On any given day, 30-40 volunteers assist clients, accept and sort donations, acknowledge donations, orient and schedule volunteers, write and distribute newsletters, create and maintain electronic programs and equipment, and make presentations about ECHO to government groups, local businesses, faith groups, and schools.

Recognizing that volunteers are the lifeblood of the organization, at the end of the year ECHO recognized five truly special volunteers who together totaled 192 years of service. The "Fab Five" were Pat Gauthier, Janet Phillips, Barbara McDonnell, Fran Eck, and Judy Riekse.

When ECHO purchased the land at 7209 Old Keene Mill Road for \$275,000, it procured a mortgage of \$200,000. A year later, only \$48,730 remained to be paid thanks to the use of cash reserves in excess of client needs and the proceeds from sale of unusable donations. The initial use of the land was to be for overflow parking. ECHO obtained cost proposals for the work but then had to wait for legal work to be done. In the interim, a church group and Ryan's Landscaping cleared debris scattered about the property and Bill Minton kept the weeds and grass under control.

Meanwhile, the Vision Committee authorized in July 2010 now consisted of twenty-five ECHO officers, congregation representatives, and other volunteers. Its mission was to determine how to:

- Continue to improve ECHO's services to the needy in our community
- Ensure ECHO's long-term viability assisting the needy in the Springfield and Burke areas
- Explore potential new services to address the needs of ECHO's clients and the community
- Expand the ECHO new facility as needed to address improved and potential new services

To accomplish these goals, the committee conducted an ambitious outreach effort to obtain input from ECHO stakeholders: Fairfax County government agencies, community service providers, member churches/congregations/faith communities, family counselors, and clients.

ECHO volunteers distributed 181,000 pounds of food, valued at \$312,200 to clients and agencies. In addition, ECHO provided 4,181 bags of clothing. Both totals were slightly down from the year before. Community coat drives filled most of the need for coats, but ECHO volunteers bought underwear and socks and some men's and boy's jeans to augment the donations. ECHO provided a layette-filled basket to expectant parents one month before the birth date, and also for babies through the first six months.

Thanksgiving baskets were distributed to 240 families, and 241 families received Christmas food baskets. Supporting congregations, individuals, groups and businesses donated most of the baskets. The Holiday Gift Shop was open for twelve hours over a four-day period. Over 200 clients selected toys for 500 children. These gifts were worth about \$29,000, or about \$60 per child.

Volunteers prepared age-appropriate bags of donated small toys, games and books. Counselors gave these bags to clients when they came in for appointments. Clients received houseware items valued at \$136,391. Most of the items were donated, but volunteers purchased high demand items like queen size bedding and cookware.

ECHO purchased 25 licenses, valued at \$9,000, from Rosetta Stone for clients to improve their English skills through an on-line course. One of the licenses was used by family counselors and office angels to better understand client needs. The program began in November 2010.

The Enrichment Program for Children begun in 2010 involved preparation of about 40 bags per week. The bags included something educational (books), something to cuddle (stuffed animals), and something fun (doll, purse, jewelry, car, action figure, or building toy).

The School Supply Program distributed 997 backpacks for students in kindergarten through 12th grade. For students in kindergarten through fifth grade, the backpacks included two grade-appropriate books. Older students received a dictionary or thesaurus plus one book.

Teen volunteers working Wednesday evening during the summer did much of the work to prepare the backpacks.



Boy Scout food drive 2011

2012: An Apartment Fire Puts ECHO Volunteers in the Spotlight

On November 5, 2011 a fire broke out in the Springfield Gardens apartment complex on Commerce Street. No one was killed or injured but 54 adults and 22 children in 11 units were displaced. Fairfax County, the American Red Cross, and ECHO moved quickly to assist the families. In the first week, ECHO supported 63 of the victims with emergency food and clothing. Over the next several months, ECHO volunteers supported the families in their relocation efforts with household goods, food, school supplies, and rental assistance. ECHO received \$4,100 in donations specifically to support these families. In recognition of its contributions, in May 2012 ECHO was honored with Fairfax County's Distinguished Partner Award.

The property ECHO purchased in 2010 at 7209 Old Keene Mill Road was split by an easement the county had to provide for a pedestrian walkway across the property. The walkway easement had not been used but its existence prevented ECHO from building on the property. Another hurdle was a commonwealth ruling that prevented the county from conveying property to an organization controlled wholly or partially by a church. In August 2011 ECHO filed an abandonment and conveyance action with the county to remove the easement. While it was pending, ECHO had two large dead or dying trees removed and had a contractor begin to apply packed crushed stone to create a new 100' x 25' parking area with access from the existing parking lot. In April 2012 the final amount of the loan to purchase the property was paid off.

The Vision Committee established in 2010 after ECHO purchased the land presented its findings in November 2011. The major recommendations were:

- Pursue possible new program services to assist clients in finding jobs through additional English language training using the Rosetta Stone program and better coordination with existing job assistance resources;
- Improve ECHO's communication and outreach to community schools by forming partnerships with schools in areas such as mentoring, tutoring and developing a new weekend food pack program with participating congregations;
- Actively explore a full range of operational improvements including: assessing existing building space usage; pursuing consolidation and rezoning of the two land parcels for permanent parking and to position for possible expansion of the existing building as needed.

To manage the implementation of these recommendations, ECHO created a Planning Committee chaired by the ECHO President and including volunteers throughout ECHO's organization and member congregations.

ECHO renewed its licenses with Rosetta Stone but shifted the focus of the program to serve as a supplement to area English language instruction rather than use as a stand-alone tool. Students initially had exclusive use of a license but now could use the license only during scheduled time slots as part of their class instruction. This shift served to promote and encourage language instruction elsewhere in the area rather than compete with it.

Under the guidance of a volunteer software engineer, ECHO created an electronic Community Resource Program to use in tandem with Fairfax County's Human Services Resource Guide. Counselors could download flyers about program offerings from the computer and hand them to clients during their appointments.

During the year Fairfax County changed ECHO's service area boundaries. The boundary now included all addresses in zip codes 22151, 22152, 22153, and 22015, with some addresses in 22150 and 22312. This change added eligible clients in 22015 but lost 65 clients, only 10 of whom were active.

In FY 2012 ECHO served 1,391 families, including 4,493 family members. As the economy rebounded, ECHO no longer received \$75,000 in emergency financial assistance from the county. The amount of assistance from ECHO's own funds also dropped, possibly due to a milder winter so that many clients could continue their seasonal jobs throughout the year. As a result, the financial assistance ECHO provided to clients dropped from \$318,000 the year before to \$223,614 in 2012. ECHO provided 181,965 pounds of food, 4,151 bags of clothing, and \$140,119 worth of household goods during the year. A group of lawyers in Washington provided 150 men's and boy's coats through their "Gifts for the Homeless" program. Thanksgiving food baskets went to 257 families, while 251 families received Christmas baskets. In the Holiday Gift shop, 206 clients selected toys for 495 children. Each child received \$65 worth of gifts totaling \$32,500.

ECHO distributed 1,000 backpacks for students in kindergarten through 12th grade. While most of the backpack work was done between June and September, the program expanded into a year-round effort. ECHO requested backpack donations throughout the year and filled backpacks were available at any time.



Christmas store December 2011

2013: A Year of New Program Initiatives

In FY 2013 ECHO initiated a number of new programs arising from the recommendations of the Vision Committee formed upon the completion of the sale of the adjacent property on Old Keene Mill Road.

ECHO partnered with SkillsSource, a nonprofit providing job searching assistance, to provide an on-site computer job search tool and counseling to clients in one-on-one hourly sessions. After a slow start late in 2012, by the end of the fiscal year 48 clients had attended a session. ECHO volunteers contacted clients after their sessions to learn the impact of the session. They found mixed success, with some clients' job search ending when they left ECHO's building. On the other hand, it appeared that a few found employment directly in response to ECHO's efforts.

ECHO initiated a School Partnership program to establish regular communication with school personnel. One component of the program was to familiarize school staff with the services ECHO provides to help them identify families who could benefit from ECHO's services. Another component was to provide weekend food packs (breakfast, lunch, and dinner items) to students participating in the Free and Reduced Lunch programs at the school. The weekend food pack program provided students with nutritional meals on weekends and holidays when they weren't in school. By the end of the year, ECHO had matched six of its congregations with nine schools to provide the food packs. Another major need that was identified was for mentors and tutors. By the end of the year 11 ECHO volunteers spent 22 hours each month mentoring 11 students at Lynbrook and Crestwood Elementary Schools, and 2 ECHO volunteers spent 16 hours each month tutoring 4 students.

On March 23, 2013 ECHO partnered with the Sathya Sai Baba Service Organization and Springfield Christian Church to hold a medical and dental screening camp for ECHO clients. Six doctors, three dentists, and 40 non-medical (including 15 bilingual) volunteers from the three organizations participated to screen 92 clients. Two outreach staff members from the Fairfax County Community Health Centers Network then scheduled 60 of the clients for free or reduced-cost follow-up care. During the camp 48 children received supervised care. All attendees received a light breakfast, a hot lunch and even containers to take food home to other family members.

Yet another initiative provided 44 families with \$20 coupons to use at El Grande International Supermarket to buy fresh fruits and vegetables.

ECHO upgraded its Rosetta Stone licenses to Rosetta Totale which allowed more student interaction. The licenses were now used in ESL classes in West Springfield High School, Washington Irving Middle School, and Saratoga Elementary School

with the goal of encouraging parents to improve their English proficiency. One hundred twenty students used the program for a total of 805 hours.

Over the year 24 counselors, supported by 10 Office Assistants, facilitated 4,386 visits: 822 financial visits that provided \$230,902 to pay housing, utility and prescription expenses (up from \$223,614 the year before); 1,008 food visits that distributed 205,499 pounds of food; and 1,305 clothing visits where clients received 4,403 bags of clothing and \$162,451 of household goods.

During the year ECHO provided 1,138 backpacks worth an estimated \$31,120 to clients. Four hundred seventy-four clients received either Thanksgiving or Christmas food baskets or food gift cards. Two hundred eleven clients chose gifts for their 500 children. ECHO had enough extra toys to give 100 to two partner organizations and 30 more to children in a homeless shelter. The Enrichment Program continued to provide packages for the newborn to fourteen-year-old children of clients when the clients came in for their appointments. ECHO distributed 1,737 packages during the year.

Because of concerns about incidents occurring outside the ECHO building when it was unoccupied, ECHO installed three cameras with a TV monitor and DVR to cover three outside doors and the parking lot.

ECHO had to wait for Verizon to provide information necessary to complete an easement survey of the new land purchased in 2010. Verizon provided the information in late 2012.

During the year ECHO launched a new website that is user-friendly and makes good use of graphics and photos.

The Board of Directors had been considering hiring a professional cleaning service to clean the building. They received an estimate of over \$1,000 just to do a onetime cleaning. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Rolling Valley Congregation then offered to do a monthly cleaning. The Springfield Merry Maids franchise offered a weekly two-woman crew to vacuum the floors, dust office areas, and clean bathrooms. The weekly surface cleaning and the in-depth monthly thorough cleaning by the two groups more than solved the problem.

2014: ECHO Adopts Modern, Efficient Technology

ECHO's leadership realized the need to purchase new hardware and software that was easy to maintain, user friendly, protected from internal and external threats, affordable, and in place before Microsoft stopped its support of Windows XP. To meet these goals, ECHO's volunteer IT team acquired 11 reconditioned Dell PCs, two laptops and new Microsoft software. They installed the new items with no impact to ECHO daily operations and minimal impact on individual volunteers. As part of the upgrade, they added a new workstation and PC for the Finance Team, replaced the old admin desks with new workstation countertops, migrated email accounts from the Verizon.net to the new echo-inc.org domain, and migrated the ECHO website to a new hosting arrangement providing improved security and stability. The conversion enabled ECHO volunteers to provide their services with maximum efficiency.

In FY 2013 ECHO partnered with Sathya Sai Baba to provide its first medical camp to 92 ECHO clients. After the success of that event ECHO and Sathya Sai Baba partnered with Springfield United Methodist Church and Grace Presbyterian Church to provide two more camps in FY 2014. In September 2013, seven internal medicine doctors; four dentists including one pediatric dentist; one ophthalmologist; two pediatricians; one psychiatrist; and 50 non-medical volunteers provided screening, a light breakfast, and hot lunch to 69 adults and 20 children. A second camp in April 2014 involved five internal medicine doctors, one dentist, two pediatricians, one ophthalmologist, one psychiatrist and 42 nonmedical volunteers providing screening and two meals to 32 adult clients and six children. At both camps county staff provided clients with free or reduced cost follow-up care information along with information about the Affordable Care Act since 60% of the clients would be eligible for coverage under the Act.

The other new programs from 2013 also continued. Fifty-four clients participated in the Jobs Assistance Program. The clients were appreciative of ECHO's support; a number of them obtained job interviews and at least two of them found jobs. In the School Partnership program, 11 volunteers mentored 11 students for about 28 hours per month, and two volunteers tutored three students for 24 hours per month. In the Weekend Food Pack program eight congregations partnered with nine schools to provide breakfast, lunch, and dinner items on weekends and holidays for students participating in the school Free and Reduced Lunch program. The Fresh Produce program was fully implemented in 2014 with families of six or more receiving two \$20 certificates to El Grande International Supermarket to purchase fresh fruit and vegetables. The Rosetta Stone program continued for another year

as a school-based program as ECHO looked for a partner to share the cost beyond 2014.

Meanwhile, ECHO continued its main mission to provide financial assistance, food, and clothing to 1,534 clients with a total of 5,120 family members. ECHO's 430 volunteers disbursed \$259,991 in direct financial assistance, 211,666 pounds of food, 4,512 bags of clothing, and housewares (including refurbished computers) worth \$154,020. The levels of financial assistance, food and clothing were the highest ECHO had ever recorded.

During the year ECHO provided 1,131 backpacks with an estimated value of \$30,000 to school-age children. Four hundred forty ECHO clients received either a Thanksgiving or Christmas food basket and/or a grocery gift card. In the Holiday Gift Shop, 250 clients chose gifts for their 550 children. Age-appropriate enrichment packages for children newborn to fourteen contained at least two books, a stuffed animal, and educational games. ECHO volunteers provided 1,693 of these packages to clients when they came in for their appointments.

The Fairfax County Board of Supervisors held a Public Hearing on January 14, 2014 to consider ECHO's request to abandon the old condemned Lyles Road roadbed on the newly acquired property but maintain the pedestrian trail easement and utility right-of-way. The Board approved the request unanimously. In March 2014 the county completed all titling and conveyance actions. Now ECHO could begin the process of consolidating and rezoning the two parcels to R-3. Only when the rezoning was completed could ECHO develop the property. Until the land was developed, ECHO needed to pay \$3,000 per year in real estate taxes. To pay this and other expenses related to the land acquisition, ECHO dedicated yard sale and online sale proceeds to pay these expenses. In the meantime, the back of the new lot accommodated overflow parking.

For his Eagle Scout project, one of ECHO's teen volunteers led an effort in December 2013 to install an illuminated flagpole with an American flag in front of the ECHO building. The light was solar-powered. ECHO paid \$3,000 to build a 10' x 10' storage shed behind the ECHO parking lot to store tables and other items for ECHO's semi-annual yard sales.

2015: Good-Bye to ECHO's First Champion

On May 17, 2015 Pastor Duane Carlson passed away peacefully. It was Pastor Carlson who, in 1968, invited local clergy to his home to discuss what could be done to help people in need to the community. That meeting led to the founding of ECHO. Pastor Carlson had a vision that the ecumenical effort should result in a strong organization staffed entirely by volunteers. He served as a guiding presence for ECHO for the rest of his life.

The year saw a record number of volunteers (430), and distribution of bags of clothing (4660) and value of household goods (\$182,675). The amount of financial assistance dropped from nearly \$260,000 in FY 2014 to \$245,000 in FY 2015 due to more clients being able to find jobs.

Three recently initiated programs were discontinued. The Rosetta Stone licenses were not renewed since ECHO believed that other programs in the area better served their clients and the \$10,000 in licensing cost wasn't warranted. The medical camps ECHO sponsored with Sathya Sai Baba were no longer needed once George Mason University faculty and nursing staff started a free walk-in clinic at the Family Resource Center on Commerce Street. The clinic did not offer dental assessments but did provide referrals to low-cost care. The Jobs program ended in April 2015 due to client non-participation. The number of clients signing up for appointments had dropped each year of the program, and by FY 2015 one-half of those registered didn't show up for their appointment. Clients could still use the program at the County Center on Route 1 after the program was no longer available to ECHO.

There were two remaining new initiatives: the Fresh Produce program and the School Partnership Program. The Fresh Produce program continued to grow. ECHO gave out \$13,640 in certificates compared to \$8,220 the year before, primarily because large families now received three \$20 certificates rather than just two. In the School Partnership Program, seven congregations continued to supply nine schools with Weekend Food Packs, five volunteers mentored five students for 12 hours per month, and two volunteers tutored five students for 16 hours per month.

The Food program gave out 208,352 pounds of food, including over 24,000 pounds from a Boy Scout food drive and over 26,000 pounds from a Postal Service one. Five hundred sixty-five families received either a Thanksgiving or Christmas food basket and/or grocery store gift card. Holiday program donations did not cover all of the need so ECHO used \$10,270 of its own funds to purchase gift cards. In the Holiday Gift Shop, 249 clients selected gifts for their 598 children, and an additional 25 gifts were given to the VFW.

Volunteers provided 1,258 backpacks to school-age children, including 27 to college students for the first time. The total distribution was 127 more backpacks than the

previous year. The value of the backpacks was estimated at \$34,000. The Enrichment Program, providing age-appropriate books and educational games to children of clients coming to ECHO for their appointments, gave out 1,475 enrichment packages.

The BB&T Bank on Commerce Street selected ECHO to receive their annual Lighthouse Project Charitable donation. The donation included \$7,500 which ECHO used to purchase a Dell server to enable it to start the transition to a fully networked environment, a defibrillator, overhead awnings for the donation and volunteer doors, 20 queen size blankets, 20 large covered stock pots, 45 pairs of boys' jeans and 26 pairs of children's sneakers. The project also included the volunteer time of four or five BB&T employees who helped unload food drive trucks and other helpful tasks.

As it did in 2012, ECHO received another Fairfax County's Distinguished Partner Award in May 2015 for "going above and beyond expectations for a traditional partner in bringing people in need and resources together to strengthen the wellbeing of individuals and communities." ECHO also received the Springfield Rotary Club's first-ever Ethics Award.



Food Room

2016: ECHO Recognizes Business Partners and Volunteers

In FY16 ECHO began to issue certificates of recognition and window decals to its business partners. Volunteers hand delivered the certificates and provided decals for display on the business's window. During the year the following businesses were recognized: Aldi, Sheehy VW, Shopper's Food, Cardinal Forest Giant, Bimbo Bakery, Curves, and Springfield Lorton Dental Group.

To recognize volunteers, ECHO erected a "Wall of Honor" plaque on the brick wall inside the volunteer entrance. The first person to be honored was Pastor Duane Carlson.

The need for ECHO's services continued to grow. There were more households (1,542) and individuals (5,144) served than ever before. Volunteers distributed a record number of pounds of food (226,151) and bags of clothing (4,778). Included in the clothing total was 1,360 coats, about 1,000 of which were for children. Children received a new coat every year, while adults received one every two years. The Fresh Produce program expanded to include using certificates to buy milk. The certificates were valued at \$18,040. Clients also received \$181,839 worth of housewares. School-age students, including 57 in college, received school supplies and 1,244 backpacks worth \$55,980. Financial assistance continued at roughly the same level as previous years at \$242,740.

At Thanksgiving 316 families received baskets: 196 from donors, 12 from ECHO, and 108 ECHO gift cards. At Christmas 289 clients received baskets: 123 from donors, 13 from ECHO, and 153 ECHO gift cards. In the Holiday Gift Shop 250 clients selected gifts for 594 children. There were enough toys left over for ECHO to deliver three big boxes of toys to SOME.

The Enrichment Program for Children distributed 1,845 packages of age-appropriate books, toys, and educational games to parents when they came in for an appointment. In the School Partnership Program eight congregations continued to provide nine schools with Weekend Food Packs, 6 volunteers mentored ten students for 24 hours per month, and six volunteers tutored five students for 16 hours per month.

After BB&T Bank had donated \$7,000 to ECHO in FY 2015 through their Lighthouse Project, in FY 2016 the bank again supported ECHO. It gave ECHO \$3,500 worth of client goods: large 8-quart pots, 20 queen bed sheet sets and bedspreads, 20 pillows, 111 pairs of children's tennis shoes, and 29 pairs of jeans for teens

ECHO's Business Relations Committee members identified unique ways for business to assist with ECHO's mission, such as a moving company transporting food donations, a hotel providing excess linens, and various businesses providing empty

boxes for the food room. A business highlight occurred in November 2015 when the Springfield Lorton Dental Clinic hosted a day of free treatment for ECHO clients. They took X-rays, cleaned teeth, filled or extracted teeth, and provided instruction in oral hygiene and nutrition. While 64 clients signed up for the service, only 42 showed up on the appointed day. Those 42 were very appreciative, but the noshows were a concern.

Modernizing technology continued to be a focus. ECHO installed a new JIVE phone system, including installation of new telecommunications equipment and a complete replacement of all network wiring in the office area. JIVE donated 11 phones to ECHO. With the new system, 569-9160 was now the client number which could be answered at any counselor desk, 569-7972 was the new administrative number, and 569-7973 was for the Director's incoming calls. The office computers were upgraded to Windows 10.

ECHO hired an engineering consulting firm to develop several designs for a parking lot on the new property. The firm developed three options from 49 parking spaces to 34 parking spaces depending on the storm water management solution. After selecting a preferred design, volunteers met with county staff and the district supervisor to discuss the design and elicit suggestions to help ensure a favorable review by the county's Planning Commission. A stumbling block that held up the process for much of the year was the need to incorporate a storm water management easement into the design. Finally, ECHO obtained permission from the homeowner on Lee Valley Drive directly behind the property to tie in to an existing storm drain on his property for storm water runoff from the parking lot. During the meetings with county staff, ECHO learned the good news that the county would not require ECHO to get the new property rezoned to R-3 since the new lot is contingent with ECHO's current zoning exemption.

2017: ECHO's Donations and Assistance Drop Slightly

Financial support for housing and utilities (\$223,327) and food (215,642 pounds) and clothing (4,551 bags) assistance all dropped slightly during the year, but volunteers could see no pattern or trend. Because the number of clients requesting food dropped more than the donations, clients were given additional food, including meat. While total clothing was down, ECHO provided clients with 1,377 winter coats, a steep increase from the 577 coats distributed ten years before. Donation receipts reached an all-time high at 6,651, although total revenue was also down a bit. Donations included an envelope from a young girl containing \$2.26. It was marked "for a poor person."

Other programs supporting clients continued to grow or remain at the same level. The Fresh Produce and Milk Certificate program issued certificates worth \$19,700 compared to \$18,040 the year before. The Thanksgiving food program served 374 clients, compared to 316 in FY 2016. Donors sponsored only about half of the clients, so ECHO provided baskets for 31 clients and gift cards for 148 more. ECHO's baskets included turkey or chicken, dry goods appropriate for the holiday meal, a disposable roasting pan, fresh rolls, apple pie, eggs, margarine and a \$20 certificate for fresh produce and milk. The Christmas food program served 236 families, only half of whom were adopted by donors. ECHO provided 30 baskets and 88 gift cards to the other half.

The Holiday Shop served 544 children from 233 families. The children received an average of \$64 worth of gifts, for a total value of \$34,816. An additional 50 toys and gifts went to the Lorton Community Action Center. The backpack program distributed 1,230 filled backpacks with a value of \$55,350. The Enrichment Program gave out 1,872 toy packages, although inadequate supplies of items for the 8-14 age group reduced the number of packages that could have been distributed. Nine congregations partnered with 11 schools to provide Weekend Food Packs. Four volunteers mentored eight students and five volunteers tutored six students in six schools.

Outreach to local businesses continued. Homewood Suites offered ECHO meeting space and Embassy Suites offered to help with the holiday program. The Springfield Lorton Dental Group again offered a free clinic to ECHO clients. Once more, 66 clients registered but only 42 came. Volunteers followed up with the 24 who didn't come and found that it was due to work commitments, health reasons, or the thought that they could reschedule for another day.

A new program began in January 2017 when 12 clients were invited to an ECHO Computer Repair Clinic. Perhaps due to short notice about the clinic and poor weather that day, only three of the four clients who registered attended the clinic.

Six volunteers were able to diagnose and fix their computers so the program was considered a success.

Internal management saw three initiatives during the year. Volunteers designed and implemented a new client database to capture more information about clients and the assistance they received and to reduce data entry effort and errors. It was now easier to generate statistical reports without extensive manual effort. The second initiative was to reorganize the management structure to create three operational areas with a director for each: Client Services, Communications and Outreach, and Support Operations. The third initiative was to number the doors to the building: #2 is the Client door, #4 is the Volunteer/Visitor entrance, and #6 is the Donation door.

The owners of the property behind the new lot signed an easement agreement on January 3, 2017 to allow ECHO to construct the parking lot storm water drain across their property. Engineering consultants from Christopher Consultants then prepared a Special Exception Amendment while attorneys from Venable LLP prepared a Proffer Condition Amendment. The new application package was submitted to the county on April 25.



Clothing Room Volunteers

2018: ECHO Serves the Springfield/Burke Community for 50 Years

To mark its 50-year birthday, ECHO displayed large banners on the fence in front of its building facing Old Keene Mill Road. Fairfax County acknowledged the milestone by presenting ECHO with its Volunteer Program Award at a ceremony in April 2018.



ECHO's income for the year was \$398,00 and its expenses were \$365,000. ECHO provided assistance to 1,433 families, with almost 5,000 members. The assistance included \$217,576 in direct financial assistance, \$322,000 worth of food, \$347,000 worth of clothing (including 1,360 winter coats), and \$190,000 worth of household items. One hundred forty-two clients received 216 \$20 fresh food and milk coupons. Volunteers distributed 1,252 backpacks, valued at \$40,908. Since including college students in the backpack program in 2014, the number of college students receiving backpacks climbed from 27 that year to 74 in 2017, perhaps providing hope that the children of ECHO's families were finding a way out of poverty.

Donations to ECHO include laptop and desktop computers. ECHO volunteers completely erase the hard drive, add memory, install Microsoft Windows and some free software, and prepare the computer for a client family. ECHO distributed 38 computers to client families in 2018.

ECHO donors provided Thanksgiving meals to 248 families. ECHO volunteers served another 102 families with 32 food baskets and 70 gift cards. At Christmas ECHO donors provided meals to 197 families. In the Christmas Holiday Store 251 families selected gifts, including 18 bicycles, for 625 children.



Participating congregations provided Weekend Food Packs to students in the Free and Reduced Lunch program in 12 elementary schools and one middle school. Five

volunteers mentored nine students and five volunteers tutored 13 students in six county schools.

Local businesses continued to be generous. For the third year in a row, Sheehy Volkswagen contributed \$5,000 and the Springfield Lorton Dental Group offered a one-day dental clinic. Merchants in the Springfield Chamber of Commerce and merchants on Burke Center Parkway sponsored coat drives. A lawyer group in DC called Gifts for the Homeless continued to donate many large boxes of new clothing. In appreciation, ECHO continued its annual practice of sponsoring one of the Chamber of Commerce breakfasts.

ECHO responded to the devastating hurricanes in Texas and Florida by providing four truckloads of clothing and household items to Medical Missionaries to distribute to the victims.

In FY 2017 ECHO redesigned and implemented a new client database. In FY 2018 the volunteer and Holiday Store databases were upgraded. Data cleanup found that about 90 names on the volunteer list were either retired or inactive so that the 430 volunteers reported in earlier years was an overstatement. Nevertheless, the 350 active volunteers contributed 44,000 hours of service and were the lifeblood of the organization. The number of volunteers included about 26 counselors with another two or three typically in training.

Significant progress was made during the year to develop the new lot adjacent to the building which ECHO purchased in 2010. On February 22, 2018 ECHO met with the County's Planning Commission staff and received their support for a Special Exception Amendment and Proffered Condition Amendment. On April 10 the county's Board of Supervisors accepted their recommendation and approved ECHO's request to move ahead with planning for a parking lot on the property. The ECHO Board recognized that the work to improve the property was going to cost more than originally thought and authorized an additional \$100,000 from the Land Expenses account to pay for engineering design work needed for the construction of the parking lot.



2019: Recognition Awards Flow In

ECHO's good deeds received recognition from several sources during the year. On February 5, 2019 the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors recognized ECHO for "50 years of noteworthy and outstanding service to the Greater Springfield community." Three weeks later, on February 25, Virginia Delegates Vivian Watts and Kathy Tran attended an ECHO board meeting to present a citation from the Virginia General Assembly expressing their "admiration for the organization's noble work to help low-income families and individuals." Then, on April 24, 2019 ECHO received Fairfax County's Volunteer Program Award for the second year in a row.

On Monday afternoon, February 18 ECHO held a party to celebrate its 50th birthday. It was a time to remember and honor ECHO, its supporters and volunteers. A number of congregational



representatives, some clergy, many volunteers, and a business representative from Andrews Federal Credit Union attended the party and received a tour of the facility.

ECHO's 360 volunteers helped almost 1,400 families with \$205,000 in direct financial assistance, \$322,00 worth of food, \$15,800 in fresh food and milk certificates, \$347,000 worth of clothing (including 1,448 winter coats), and \$190,000 worth of household items.

In November 325 families received Thanksgiving food; about 200 of the families were sponsored by local religious organizations. The following month 184 families received food for Christmas. In the Holiday Shop 240 clients selected gifts for 605 children. While that was a good turnout, 39 clients with 77 children failed to keep their appointment—a higher level of no-shows than ECHO had seen before. Volunteers were able to share excess toys with the Franconia/Springfield Resource Center and Toys for Tots.

ECHO volunteers distributed 1,226 backpacks, including 92 to college students, valued at \$42,470. For the first time, children were allowed to select their own backpacks. Members of the Lake Braddock High School Computer Science Honor Society refurbished 48 computers for ECHO client families.

Working with five public schools, two volunteers mentored seven students during their lunch periods and five volunteers tutored nine students after school.

Efforts to engage the business community continued to grow. Sheehy Volkswagen gave their annual \$5,000 check, Cardinal Plaza Shell sponsored a coat drive, Metro Run and Walk provided tennis shoes, and Millers Office Supplies donated \$750. TGX (Marshalls) found the ECHO website, was impressed with the organization, and gave it a \$10,00 grant. ECHO again sponsored a Chamber of Commerce breakfast.

The Springfield Lorton Dental Group offered a one-day dental clinic to 44 client families with 83 members. County social workers attended the clinic and made referrals for clients needing additional procedures.

Recognizing that client families often had minimal financial management and budgeting skills, ECHO partnered with Britepaths and the Financial Empowerment Center to offer money management classes in the ECHO building one evening a month. Classes alternated being offered in English and Spanish. The first class was offered on May 18, 2019.

A retired Fairfax County employee received permission from ECHO to come into the clothing room one night per week to sort through excess clothing that ECHO was already planning on passing on to others. She found clothes and other articles that would be of use in her home country of Sierra Leone. That summer she filled boxes in a shipping container with the clothes, as well as nonperishable food, shoes and toys she collected from other organizations, and brought it to Freetown, Sierra Leone, where she distributed it to needy families. ECHO also supported another program that sent surplus clothes to the Philippines.



Clothing Distribution in Sierra Leone

ECHO's clothing room needed to have the carpeting replaced after its twelve years of use. Volunteers took advantage of the occasion to thoroughly clean, sanitize, spackle and paint the room. After the carpeting was installed, 16 players and four coaches from the South County High School football team helped move shelves, racks and bins back into the room.

ECHO's website, redesigned in 2017, saw continually increasing usage. From 118 visits per day in 2016, usage climbed to 152 visits per day in 2018.

ECHO signed an agreement with B-Thrifty to pick up 40 bags of surplus clothing every week, for which ECHO received five cents per pound. In its first year, the arrangement yielded ECHO over \$600 per month.

For the first time ECHO was included in the Washington Post Charitable Choices Booklet that the paper published once a year. Charities whose income was below \$500,000 did not have to pay for inclusion in the booklet.

On April 2, 2019 Fairfax County's Land Development Services division approved the minor site plan for the parking lot expansion. The county informed ECHO that it needed to put \$105,000 in escrow to assure completion of required storm water management site improvements. After obtaining approval of a blacktop design, ECHO requested approval of an alternate design using pavers with grass in between that would save \$100,000. ECHO's next steps were to get final cost estimates for the 42-space lot and obtain financing for a project that now was estimated to cost about \$550,000. ECHO's annual budget had been setting aside about \$60,000 a year from proceeds from yard sales, online sales and consignment sales to fund the project.

2020: COVID Changes Everything

In March 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Many families in the community lost their jobs as businesses shut down or cut back on the number of low-skilled employees. The need to protect volunteers and socially distance people in the building required ECHO to revise its procedures to provide contact-less assistance and acceptance of donations. As many older volunteers stayed home to protect their health, younger volunteers and new volunteers stepped up to keep the programs running.

As the need for assistance increased, the level of donations surged as donors responded to the need. While individual donors remained the largest source of revenue, social groups, congregations, and organizations raised funds and held donation drives to support ECHO. Income for the year was \$687,523, up by \$294,890 from FY 2019. Expenses were \$389,590 (excluding \$103,264 in CARES income), up by \$41,572 from FY 2019.

Financial assistance and food were the two biggest needs. In May 2020 ECHO signed an agreement with Fairfax County to disburse federal funding through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act for housing and utility payments. During the fiscal year ECHO spent \$248,000 of its own funds to pay landlords and utility companies on behalf of clients. From June to December 2020 ECHO disbursed \$1 million in CARES funds for that purpose. Financial assistance was handled over the telephone with confirmation documents received electronically or in the drop box.

In the first eight months of the fiscal year ECHO provided over 14,500 bags of food plus \$12,700 in fresh produce and milk coupons. In the four months after the pandemic hit, ECHO distributed 16,600 bags of food and \$22,700 in fresh food coupons. During the pandemic, when clients arrived for food appointments, ECHO staff brought the food cart and fresh food coupons out to them and the client packed the food into their car and returned the cart.

While the Postal Carriers canceled their annual food drive, other groups filled the gap. The County's Stuff the Bus food drive yielded 9,800 pounds of food and one by the Chamber of Commerce brought in 375 pounds of food. Many other groups also stepped up. Wawa donated \$1,000 to support food assistance. Sheehy Volkswagen again donated \$5,000. Yard House provided an opportunity for donors to buy a meal for an ECHO client, resulting in \$250 in \$25 Yard House gift cards for clients. Bonfish Grill provided 50 hot, take-out meals, each for a family of four. The meals were delivered to ECHO for pick-up by clients or delivered by ECHO volunteers to families who could not make the pick-up. The Bangladeshi Community donated over

\$7,000 and 150 pounds of food. Interstate Van Lines donated 30 boxes to replace worn out boxes in the food room.

After initially focusing on food and financial assistance, ECHO realized that children's clothing would no longer fit and parents didn't have the funds to buy new clothes for them. For safety reasons and to conform with Fairfax County restrictions, ECHO shifted from a procedure of having clients visit the clothing room to select items. ECHO now got size information for each child and volunteers selected and prepacked the items for delivery to clients outside the building.

Another need of client families was medical care. The Springfield Lorton Dental Group continued to support a one-day clinic offering 79 members of 54 client families with free exams, cleanings, fillings, and extractions. The Sathya Sai Baba Service Organization once again hosted a one-day medical clinic involving seven doctors, ten ECHO volunteers, and nine volunteers from Westwood Baptist Church. Twenty-four clients received a basic checkup and a hot lunch. For both programs, county social workers provided referrals to free or low-cost follow-up care.



Prior to the pandemic, ECHO's Holiday Program provided 220 Thanksgiving and 271 Christmas meals. The donors for the Holiday Food Program included 17 churches, 5 businesses, 30 ECHO volunteers, and 60 community members. The Holiday Shop allowed 256 families to select gifts for their 639 children. An additional 255 gifts were sent to the Springfield/Franconia Family Resource Center, Koinonia, the Lorton Community Action Center and the American Legion. ECHO also provided backpacks to 1,175 students, and provided 45 refurbished computers to client families. Volunteers also started a new program to give sewing machines to clients so they could make their own clothes for their families. In the first year ECHO gave away 21 sewing machines.

ECHO continued to partner with Britepaths and the Financial Empowerment Center to offer money management classes. They were held on the first Saturday of five months prior to the pandemic and alternated being offered in English and Spanish.

When it was realized that 19 of the 128 fluorescent light fixtures in the building were dark due to bad ballasts, ECHO decided to upgrade the fixtures to LED tubes with no ballast. It cost \$5,400 to rewire the current fixtures to use LED bulbs without ballast, but the changeover was expected to save approximately \$600 per year in electricity bills.

The new parking lot design was estimated to cost about \$550,000. If ECHO financed the entire amount in a five-year loan, the monthly cost would be \$9,436. Burke & Herbert Bank was willing to provide a loan of only \$250,000. ECHO's treasurer reported that the organization currently had \$327,000 in cash on hand. ECHO needed a six-month operating reserve of \$90,000 and a capital improvement reserve of \$70,000, leaving \$167,000 available for the parking lot. The Board decided to delay beginning construction until ECHO raised more money for a down payment. One fundraising focus was to ask current volunteers to contribute since they were most impacted by the lack of parking space.

2021: The Community Responds to the Coronavirus Crisis

ECHO volunteers and many in the community rallied to help low-income families respond to the COVID-19 crisis. The Capital Area Food Bank estimated that 72,460 food-insecure people lived in Fairfax County, meaning that due to Covid-19, almost twice as many people in general and more than 2-1/2 times more Fairfax County children were experiencing food insecurity than in 2018.

By December 2020 ECHO completed disbursing the \$1 million allocated to it through the CARES Act. 252 families were helped with an average assistance per family of about \$4,000. 22 families received their assistance at two different times. About 63% of clients helped were existing ECHO clients; 71% of the assistance was rent related (which sometimes included utility help), 24% was for utilities only and 5% was for mortgage assistance. The CARES Act program was followed by CARES 2, a Fairfax County program intended to fill the gap once the original CARES funding expired. Through that program ECHO disbursed \$100,000 to cover mortgages. Then ECHO received almost \$1.3 million under the federal Emergency Rental Assistance Act (ERA) to pay rent and utilities. Under the ERA program, clients could receive up to 15 months of assistance (12 back and three forward). Landlords could request ERA funds on behalf of tenants, with their agreement.

To reflect the additional financial assistance available, counselor approval levels were raised from \$500 to \$750 for a single assistance and from \$800 to \$1,000 in a rolling 12-month period. With the higher-level approvals, counselors could provide assistance of up to \$3,000 in a rolling 12-month period. Rental assistance could be given up to three times in a 12-month period, as long as 12-month limits were not exceeded. ECHO could now also help with late fees. ECHO maintained this heavy workload despite losing 11 counselors, or more than a third of its staff, as many volunteers focused on their own families during the pandemic.

The outpouring from the community was tremendous:

- An 8-year-old girl sold lemonade and lunch and donated the proceeds of \$700 to ECHO.
- A Lake Braddock Secondary School student organized and created an inventory of lost and found items after the school closed last spring and then bagged and donated to ECHO 160 pairs of shoes and school supplies that went unclaimed.
- Two women in the Donovan's Ridge Community organized three food drives and donated a \$700 Target gift card for new children's clothing and tennis shoes.
- The Northern Virginia Bridge Associations published a cookbook with all proceeds (approximately \$2,000) going to ECHO.

- Cardinal Plaza Shell held a clothing drive and donated \$5,000 to ECHO to buy coats.
- Mighty Meals, a company in Burke, delivered 200 meals a week to ECHO and provided a 28 x 28 inch refrigerator to store them in.
- Great Harvest donated bread and pastries.
- The county's "Stuff the Bus" campaigns in January and February netted ECHO almost 15,000 pounds of food, Boy Scout drives in November and December brought in close to 25,000 pounds of food, and the generosity of individuals and groups allowed the food room to meet the higher demand of groceries brought on by the pandemic.
- The TJX corporation gave ECHO \$10,000 to celebrate the opening of their new store, Homesense, in Kingstowne.
- Sheehy Volkswagen continued its annual donation to ECHO but raised it to \$7,000.
- Gifts for the Homeless, a group of Lawyers in DC, continued to donate boxes of new men's and boy's clothing, including coats, sweatshirts, hats, and gloves.
- ECHO received three grants;
 - \$5,000 from a Dominion Guild Grant for feminine hygiene products and support for supplemental fresh food.
 - An unsolicited \$2,500 from the Philip L. Graham Fund
 - A \$10,000 donation from the Clark Winchcole Foundation to benefit the school backpack project.

With so much support, ECHO started to provide a family of four approximately 230 pounds of food, excluding detergents, personal care items and other extras. Clients had been limited to a week's supply of diapers but now could receive a month's supply and make monthly appointments to receive more. ECHO also provided families with \$9 coupons to purchase a large pizza at Malek's Pizza.

The number of families participating in the holiday meals programs jumped significantly from 490 in 2019 to 650 in 2020: 292 families received a Thanksgiving meal and 358 families received a Christmas meal. The programs were supported by 14 congregations, 40 ECHO volunteers, 38 community members and five businesses/organizations. In the Holiday Gift Shop, 258 families received gifts for 585 children. ECHO received more donated gifts than it could use and extras were contributed to the Springfield Family Resource Center and FACETS. ECHO also distributed over 1,100 backpacks to students in kindergarten through college.

As part of the CARES Act, ECHO received a \$25,000 grant from Fairfax County.

ECHO used the funds to purchase a network printer, new laptop/software, the ZOOM account, Personal Protective Equipment, air purifiers, sturdier carts, a commercial refrigerator, and a new circuit for the volunteer area. The remainder was used to pay \$6,500 in utility bills.

ECHO partnered with First Baptist Church on their Baby Formula program which provided about 50 mothers with formula on a monthly basis. ECHO provided \$1,200 a month to the church to support the program.

Car repair was often mentioned as a client need in ECHO's 2019 survey of member congregations. Repaired cars provided needed transportation and helped clients remain self-sufficient. ECHO partnered with Cardinal Forest Shell on a car repair initiative. If a client was accepted in the program, ECHO paid any towing charges and repairs needed to get the car running and pass safety inspections. The client paid \$100. Shell agreed to give ECHO a 25% discount on parts and labor. ECHO estimated the average cost of repairs would be \$800 before the discounts. The first two cars accepted in the program both had over 200,000 miles on them. After that, ECHO focused on cars with fewer miles and set a cap on how much ECHO would pay.

Throughout the year volunteers, although in reduced numbers, kept most of the programs running. A group of Latter Day Saints installed pavers under a new outdoor canopy, filled pot holes, raked and removed leaves, cut back vegetation from property fences, picked up trash, cut back growth in the dry pond area, organized the shed and moved the concrete parking barriers to protect the canopy posts. In April ECHO had its first positive test among its volunteers, a person who was vaccinated and was asymptomatic--a break-through case. ECHO consulted with the Health Department to ensure its procedures were working and was told that they were.

As the year ended, ECHO thought about updating its procedures. The predominant language of clients is no longer English, ECHO's hours may not fit the needs of its clients and its definition of "emergency food" (literally no food in the house or a result of short-term hardship such as job loss or home catastrophe) may no longer be relevant. The Board formed a Strategic Planning Committee to consider whether changes were needed.

2022: Not Quite Normal Yet

Everyone hoped that, by July 2021 there would be no more precautions necessitated by the coronavirus pandemic. That was not to be. While ECHO reopened the building to clients on August 30, 2021 for all types of appointments, all clients and volunteers entering the building were required to be vaccinated and to wear masks.

Residual employment effects of the pandemic, combined with rising inflation and an influx of Afghan and Ukrainian refugees, put continued pressure on the need for services. During the year ECHO served 4,553 clients, about ten percent of whom were new. Rent, housing, fuel, and utility assistance was up significantly: \$255,578, compared to \$174,481 the year before. While donations started dropping toward pre-pandemic levels, net revenue still exceeded expenses: \$665,689 compared to \$468,165.

A major initiative in FY22 was the conversion of the food room from pre-packaged food items to a client choice version where clients selected food on their own. The changeover occurred on February 16, 2022. Now clients could select food their family eats and reflects their culture. Another major change in the food program was the partnership with Wegmans in Kingstowne. Starting on March 28, 2022 ECHO volunteers picked up from the store an average of 750 pounds of food a week: perishable meat, produce, bakery items, prepared meals and salads. The



volume was large enough that food was shared not only with clients who came in for food but also with those coming in for other appointments such as clothing and financials. That which was not taken by clients was given to volunteers so none of it was wasted. For the ninth consecutive year, St. Christopher Episcopal church in Springfield provided home-grown vegetables to provide healthy food choices for ECHO clients.

Ten US Army recruiters from the Armed Forces Career Center near ECHO started volunteering in the food room and sponsoring food drives in the area.

ECHO began a new financial need scholarship program for students living in the Burke/Springfield area and attending Northern Virginia Community College. The

NOVA Foundation administered the program. Twelve \$500 scholarships were available each semester for tuition, books, supplies, or emergency needs. Over 200 students applied each semester. Recipients did not need to be ECHO clients but about half of them were.

ECHO's core programs continued to be strong. The clothing room distributed 3,386 bags of clothing—about 30% more than the year before. The housewares group processed 3,826 requests for items. Over 1,000 backpacks were stuffed with school supplies and distributed to client families. Volunteers provided 271 Thanksgiving meals and 260 Christmas meals, while almost 600 children received gifts from the Christmas store. Over 1,100 clients received a month's supply of diapers at each visit. ECHO paid an average of \$30 a month to provide taxi service to clients who otherwise could not get to ECHO's building.

ECHO continued to work with Fairfax County to remove the easement for a pedestrian walkway through the property acquired next door at 7209 Old Keene Mill Road. While ECHO waited for approval to build the parking lot and expand the building, it made improvements to the current building. Improvements included a new blue canopy over the client entrance and installation of 65 metal snow guards



to replace plastic ones over doors 4, 5, and 6 on the west side of the building. The donation doors were replaced and other doors were maintained to ensure proper operation. A mega scale was installed inside the donation door so that now all food donations could be weighed. The Burke, Rolling Valley, and Springfield wards of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints took responsibility for mowing around the building as well as doing some landscaping.

For many years ECHO received about \$50,000 per year from Fairfax County's Consolidated Community Funding (CCFP) pool. In FY 22 it applied for and received two other Fairfax County grants: a \$10,000 Active and Thriving grant to provide food coupons to clients and a \$41,400 Food Access Program grant to purchase a cargo van.

Encouraged by the Catalogue for Philanthropy, ECHO launched its first online fundraising appeal the Tuesday following Thanksgiving. For the #Giving Tuesday effort, non-profit organizations were encouraged to seek a challenge match to provide a strong incentive for donors and to double the impact of their gifts. Sheehy Volkswagen/Subaru pledged a gift of \$5,000 that allowed ECHO to set a

fundraising goal of \$10,000 for the purchase of food coupons to give to clients. Thanks to the Sheehy challenge, ECHO exceeded its Giving Tuesday goal with gifts totaling \$13,500. In December, Sheehy contributed \$8,000, an increase of \$3,000 above its matching grant pledge.

Other volunteer organizations were also generous. The Exxon/Mobile Spouses Club donated \$12,585 plus food. In May Wahed Hossaini, a member of the Bangladeshi community of greater Washington, presented President Bob Vitter with a check for over \$8,000. The funds were the result of his eleventh annual End of Ramadan Food Drive that he has conducted to support ECHO.

The Strategic Planning committee, formed the previous year, continued its deliberations and, by year's end, was close to issuing its final report.

2023: Passing the Baton -- Again

In December 2022 Anita King, Executive Director since 2017, said farewell to ECHO as she moved to Germany to be with her husband. Anita, who had spent 21 years in the US Air Force, volunteered with ECHO from 2006 to 2012 as a family counselor before moving to Germany. She returned to the US in 2017 and very soon replaced retiring Executive Director Meg Brantley. Anita brought her can-do spirit, positive outlook, Spanish-English language skills, and visionary thinking to the position. All were put to the test when the pandemic began in March 2020. Anita, Charles McClelland, Lucinda Marvin, and a few other volunteers kept the Food Room and the Donation Door open to provide basic services during this difficult time. Anita is proud that ECHO implemented new ideas such as Yard Sale coupons for clients and food choices for clients in the Food Room. She encouraged chairs to determine what clients really needed rather than relying on tradition to dictate ECHO offerings.

The new, and only fifth ever, Executive Director is Mike Baier, another retired military serviceman. He brings a background of career achievements and vast experience with people of diverse languages, ethnicities and cultures. He has volunteered since 2017 at ECHO managing the Donation Door, working in the Food Room, and serving on the Strategic Planning Committee.



Four directors: Meg Brantley, Anita King, Pat Gauthier, and Mike Baier

For financial assistance ECHO's grant from Fairfax County's Consolidated Community Funding Pool (CCFP) was increased from an annual \$50,000 to

\$150,000. The funds assisted in transitioning from pandemic-era federal CARES Act funding. The increase enabled ECHO to provide clients with over \$313,000 in financial assistance, over a 20% increase from the previous year, even though the number of families served dropped 9% to 1,345. Family counselors updated their procedures manual, "ECHO Counselor's Training Guidelines for Providing Client Services," with the intent to keep it updated.

The conversion to a client choice Food Room, begun in February 2022 as a hybrid transitional model, became fully operational in the Fall. The conversion necessitated changes throughout the building. The Food Room storage and sorting areas moved to the former Yard Sale area while the Yard Sale items moved to the conference room. Most meetings are held in the warehouse space or in the old conference room.

The client choice Food Room proved very popular with clients. It generated less waste and greater accommodation for health, religious and cultural needs, as well as giving clients more dignity to choose food they prepare and serve their families. Volunteers learned more about foods clients prefer, such as mayonnaise is the favorite condiment and instant coffee is more popular than regular coffee. In addition to listing most needed food and personal hygiene items on the website, volunteers also posted them on the sign in front of the building. Local retailers continued to be generous: Wegmans donated 800-900 pounds of food a week and Mighty Meals donated 120-170 individual meals a week. In total, ECHO provided almost one-quarter of a million pounds of food to its clients.

In September 2022 Mike Reidy, Chair of the Strategic Planning Team, presented the results of the team's 16-month review. The priorities identified by the team were: 1) Improved client service through enhanced communication with clients, expanded hours of operation, and food assistance tailored to client needs 2) Upgraded infrastructure to better serve clients through expansion of the parking lot to provide more secure all-weather parking for volunteers and expansion of the building to support expanded client services, and 3) Implemented self-assessment process to periodically review client services through assessment of local economic conditions and client feedback and corresponding changes in client services needed to respond to the assessment.

On a sunny Sunday in September 2022 ECHO held its first annual picnic for volunteers at Burke Lake Park. The picnic was intended to celebrate the achievements of this all-volunteer organization and to enable more volunteers to get to know each other.

Improvements to the building included a new air conditioning unit and a new shed to provide flexible storage for short-term needs. The phone system was modified to

enable callers to listen to the message in either Spanish or English and to be able to leave a message about canceling an appointment.

ECHO continued its efforts to reduce its environmental footprint by recycling paper, plastic, and cans. In addition, it has relationships with organizations like B-Thrifty to take donated items which ECHO clients can't use, and thus decrease the amount of material headed to a landfill. It converted its lighting fixtures from fluorescents to low emission LED bulbs. The heating and air conditioning in the building are controlled by a programmable timer to reflect the times when volunteers are in the building.

In December 2022 ECHO entered into a formal agreement with Bringing Resources to Aid Women's Shelters (BRAWS), a nonprofit based in Vienna. BRAWS provides ECHO's clients feminine hygiene products, bras, and women's/girls' underwear. In the first six months of the partnership, BRAWS had donated to ECHO 370 packages of sanitary pads, 338 bras, 401 pairs of women's underwear, and 71 pairs of girls' underwear.

In an effort to streamline how it records donations, ECHO volunteers mailed an ECHO business card to recent repeat donors. The card has the donor's name, address and bar code on it. Door volunteers can scan the barcode and record the donation in less than a minute. Another major improvement in the donation arena was the substantially discounted purchase of a cargo van from Sheehy Ford of Springfield using a \$41,400 Food Access Program grant. The van is used to pick up donations from food drives and grocery stores, move items to and from the yard sale, and to transport large quantities of purchased food items or housewares. The van is also essential for biweekly runs to ECHO's partner, Medical Missionaries in Manassas, which takes medical items (wheelchairs, crutches, etc.) for delivery to its missions in Africa, and excess food items (those not popular with our clients like canned green beans) for delivery to Southwest Virginia (Appalachia) where those items are very welcome. Decals on the van help to announce ECHO's presence in the community.

By the spring of 2023, ECHO was close to receiving a permit from Fairfax County to start construction of the long-awaited parking lot.