

National Philoptochos Society

2014-2016 Committee Report



Social Services Committee

Co-Chairs: Eftalia Katos & Stella Pantelidis

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Each of you has in your packets the statistical overview of services provided by National Philoptochos' Department of Social Services between January 1, 2014 and May 31, 2016. All services are provided by Paulette Geanacopoulos, LMSW, a New York State licensed social worker, with regular oversight by the Social Services Committee Co-Chairs – Eftalia Katos and Stella Pantelidis – who are members of the National Philoptochos Board, along with members of the Executive Board.

Between January 1, 2014 and May 31, 2016, your kindness and support enabled us to help 467 Orthodox Christian individuals and families, regardless of their immigration status, who are in the United States. That translates to an average of 200 cases per year - more than one new case per day. Because of your generosity, we awarded nearly \$500,000 in financial assistance grants on behalf of 126 of our 467 cases. On average, 27% of our clients require or request financial assistance.

Our cases come to us from many sources – some from within our Church and Chapter community, yet others from organizations throughout the country with whom we network including hospital and hospice social workers, nonprofit and public social service agencies, funeral homes and morgues, as well as family members, neighbors and friends.

Our client population primarily comprises people who are Greek, Greek/Cypriot American and Orthodox Christian. They are people who turn to us for help with the same problems faced by the general American population: poverty and child poverty, hunger, homelessness, life-threatening illnesses and more. Over 20% of American children live in families with incomes below the poverty level¹ – in 2016 this is \$24,300 for a family of four. It is significant to note that many of these children have parents who work, but low wages and unstable employment leave families struggling to make ends meet.²

Today, poverty in America no longer is just about “them”, it also is about “us.” It is about our middle class Greek Americans – or at least those who thought they were middle class – finding they must rely on credit cards or borrow from family and friends to keep the lights on, pay rent and put food on the table. It is about our fellow parishioners who have health insurance but are approaching bankruptcy because of the cost of premiums, co-payments, deductibles and uncovered medical expenses. It is about our neighbors who lost good jobs during the economic downturn, and have only been able to find low-paying part-time work since. And it is about the “American dream” becoming increasingly unattainable for millions of people, who by all accounts, did everything they were supposed to do to “make it.”

While some members of our community may think that those who seek our help should have “saved more” or “worked harder”, this is not always possible. The resources, services and supports are not there to the extent they should or could – sometimes because of ideological debates, other times because of funding shortfalls caused by the numbers of people who need public benefits. The bottom line is that we simply do not have a sufficient supply of decent, affordable housing for low- and moderate-income families and older adults. Single mothers are hard-pressed to find safe and reasonable childcare so they can work. Those with mental illness have difficulty accessing the services they need to keep them from sliding into homelessness. Victims of domestic violence are often forced to choose between abusive relationships and homelessness. Health insurances continue to deny coverage for many conditions, many of which are life-threatening. And dead-beat parents continue to ignore the financial, physical and emotional needs of their own children.

By this point at similar presentations, we find that some of the audience are thinking that these statements are generalities that do not accurately represent our community. Should anyone in today's audience be in this “doubting Thomas” camp, we share with you some case anecdotes. These examples are not ‘hand selected’ cases – they represent what we do each day, why and how.

¹ Families USA

² National Center for Children in Poverty (Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University)

Case #1:

43 year old single mother of five children ages 7, 10, 12, 14 and 16, one of whom is on the autism spectrum, whose husband abandoned the family after cleaning out their savings. The mom, who works two part-time jobs and home-schooled her developmentally disabled child until he began to understand language and communicate, was able to obtain Food Stamps and Medicaid for her children; however, the state in which she lives does not provide health insurance for her. The children's father, who has remarried, began paying a minimal amount in child support – not by virtue of his sense of parental responsibility, but because a court order garnished his salary. In the midst of the mom's "unending nightmare" including recently being diagnosed with a pre-cancerous condition, she maintains her faith and spirituality and continues to provide a stable home for her children.

- *National Philoptochos, in collaboration with the Metropolis Philoptochos, helped cover their housing costs while the mom seeks full-time employment to prevent their eviction.*

Case #2:

31 year old single mother of two children, ages 9 and 12, who had been known to our office for five years and who recently succumbed to Ovarian Cancer after a long and protracted battle. As the children's father is a drug addict and has been in and out of prison, the grandmother took the children in and is seeking full custody of them.

- *National Philoptochos, in cooperation with the Metropolis Philoptochos, helped the grandmother purchase furniture and make modifications to her home to enable her to appropriately house her late daughter's children.*

Case #3:

7 year old child was diagnosed with a serious form of pediatric cancer three years ago. Although the dad works and they have health insurance, the monthly uncovered medical expenses have exhausted all of their savings, their retirement plans and funds donated to them from friends and family. When they reached out to us, they were covering overages through their credit cards – a common occurrence among many of our clients.

- *National Philoptochos, at the dad's request, and to supplement help provided by the Metropolis Philoptochos, contributed to the family's housing costs to enable the family to focus on their daughter's health rather than worry about losing their home.*

Case #4:

49 year old single, indigent man on SSI who succumbed to cancer and whose low-income brother and sister needed help with his funeral and burial arrangements. He had been helped by our office three years previously, when following a stem cell transplant, he required financial assistance while he recuperated to cover homecare costs beyond the 1 ½ hours/ day that was covered by Medicaid.

- *National Philoptochos contributed to the man's funeral and burial arrangements.*

Case #5:

Orthodox Christian family with four children, ages 12, 9, 6 and 2, who were displaced from their homeland because of the Middle East Wars. Immigration gave permission to the mom to work; however, they delayed the dad's work authorization until recently.

- *Through support from National and the Metropolis Philoptochos, their priest's personal donations, fundraising and contributions from their church family and local Philoptochos chapter, the family was provided help with their daily living costs while establishing themselves. They now are managing on their own.*

Case #6:

39 year old Greek National who came to the United States to correct three unsuccessful surgeries that had been performed in Greece. Unfortunately, because of unforeseen complications, she passed away unexpectedly.

- *National Philoptochos, along with the local chapter, initially contributed to her housing costs that were not covered by her Greek health insurance. After she succumbed to cardiac failure, National Philoptochos helped cover the funeral home's services required by law and airline regulations to prepare her remains for transport back to Greece.*

These case anecdotes, along with the 200 more per year, demonstrate that our work saves lives, builds and rebuilds futures and gives people breathing space so that together, we and they can figure out what their next steps will be. Perhaps most importantly, our work helps our clients understand that they are not alone, that God has not abandoned them, and that He is not punishing them.

Whenever possible, and with the client's permission we collaborate with respective Metropolis Philoptochos social services liaisons – our partners who help us evaluate local cases by serving as our "eyes and ears". They are **MARTY DRISCOLL** and **PRESBYTERA EVI KAPLANIS** in Atlanta, **GEORGIA LAGADINOS** in Boston, **HELEN THEODOSAKIS** in Chicago, **GEORGEANN PAPADAKOS** in the Direct Archdiocesan District, **ELENI CONSTANTINIDES** in New Jersey, and **LISA XANTHOS** in San Francisco. In these Metropolises as well as in those that have yet to designate a social services point person, we work closely with the Metropolis Philoptochos Presidents to effectively serve our clients.

An article published about ten years ago by the University of Chicago Press spoke of “*Maternalism*” in social work, referring to the role of women and women’s issues in the formulation of social policy. When one drills down to its implications, it is a term translatable to Philoptochos. Yes, we are women and yes, we are mothers, grandmothers and godmothers. But to us, the second largest Christian women’s organization in the United States, it also means that women listen better than men, women think differently than men, women communicate differently than men, and women lead differently than men. Philoptochos’ *maternalism* means that we are attentive to those who come to us so that we can help them establish their own goals and their own futures. And, it means that the person in need knows that none of us has given up on them or their loved ones - not them, not us, not their Church and not God.

SOCIAL SERVICES RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT & PRESENTATION HIGHLIGHTS 2014 – 2016:

By listening, the social services department uses what we hear to mount efforts to expand our community’s knowledge base and skills. Some of these efforts help to develop a better understanding of the problems members of our community face. Others initiate actions to improve people’s lives, and yet others, help create a blueprint for action to enable us – regardless the level of the Society - to respond to our community’s social services needs with understanding, compassion and hope. We accomplish this through education, information and resource development.

- **Following the 2014 social services program on mental illness**, we published a summary of each presenter’s remarks and responded to all of the questions that were asked by members of our audience. Because of the personal nature of many of these questions it was clear to us that this topic resonated with our community.
 - A copy of the report is available on our website at: <http://www.philoptochos.org/socialservices/mi/>
- **“A Brief Guide to Finding Local Resources, Programs and Services”** was researched and posted on our website. Updated periodically, it provides nationwide information and referrals for issues including substance abuse disorders; mental health services; programs and services for older adults; resources for cancer patients; information about autism spectrum disorders; domestic violence and intimate partner abuse; protective services for children, adults and older adults; homelessness and food insecurity (hunger); and burial benefits for veterans of the American armed forces.
 - http://www.philoptochos.org/assets/files/socialservices/GUIDE%20TO%20FINDING%20LOCAL%20PROGRAMS%20&%20SERVICES_01.28.2016.pdf
- **In January 2015**, we distributed one-page posters and ‘*palm cards*’ about domestic violence to all of our chapters. We asked that they be placed in the women’s rooms of churches so that those impacted can take one safely and anonymously.
- **In February 2015**, Paulette Geanacopoulos and Rev. Fr. Chrysostomos Gilbert, Proistamenos of Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church in New York City presented an interactive webinar for the Archdiocesan Center for Family Care on “**Identifying and Responding to Domestic Violence in the Orthodox Christian Community.**”
 - View the webinar at <https://youtu.be/EFel0-2Piy4>
 - Download the accompanying PowerPoint presentation at http://www.philoptochos.org/assets/files/socialservices/2016/DV_PPT_PRESENTATION.pdf
- **In April 2016**, Paulette Geanacopoulos gave a presentation to the graduating class of Holy Cross Seminary, Brookline, MA about Philoptochos and its social services.
- **On April 22 and May 23, 2016**, Paulette Geanacopoulos and Eleni Constantinides, Social Services Liaison for the New Jersey Metropolis Philoptochos, presented a two-part interactive social services training webinar to inform chapters about the social problems faced by members of our community, and to help chapters improve their abilities to provide local social services assistance, with the goal of ensuring consistency, accountability and transparency.
 - Part One: <https://youtu.be/akMO4W2VhK4>
 - Part Two: <https://youtu.be/UXO3aVw93kl>
 - Download the accompanying PowerPoint presentation at: http://www.philoptochos.org/assets/files/socialservices/PPT_SocialServicesTraining%20Webinar_Parts%20I%20&%20II%29.pdf
- **On June 9, 2016**, Paulette Geanacopoulos was interviewed by Rev. Dr. Christopher Metropulos for “*Come Receive the Light*”, the OCN: **Orthodox Christian Network’s** radio program.
 - Listen at: <http://myocn.net/pentecost-philanthropy-and-philoptochos/>
- **Fact Sheets:** We constantly update the fact sheets posted on our website and invite you to recommend issues you wish included: <http://www.philoptochos.org/socialservices/factsheetsresources/>

Our goal with each of the above efforts is to educate our community and promote actions – locally and globally.

To encourage this process, we pose the following questions: What will Philoptochos do about these issues and what can it do? We are an organization that raises money to give money, but should we be satisfied solely with monetary donations? How can we act and react in a way that enables us to provide and expand our services, and thus grow our membership? What programs can we develop to attract new members – with consideration of their interests, their time availability, their work and family responsibilities, and their talents? What actions can we take as a faith-based women’s organization to ensure we treat our brothers and sisters – regardless how different we may consider them to be – with respect, love, kindness and hope?

We leave you to answer these questions.

For more information, please call 212.977.7782, email PauletteG@philoptochos.org or go to www.philoptochos.org/socialservices/