



United Community Ministries, Inc.  
Building Strong Families, Strong Communities

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### UCM's Back Porch

A great place to find hidden treasures and to donate your gently used clothing, household items and furniture. Stop in today!

10 am - 6:30 pm Mon.-Sat.  
Noon - 6:30 pm Sunday

Donation Drop Off: 10 am - 5 pm Mon. - Sat.

7838 Richmond Hwy., Alexandria  
www.backporchthrift.com

Shop. Donate. Recycle. Repeat.



Donate now!



CFC #37839



United Way #8199

Your generosity helps community members in need build brighter futures. Thank you!

## Save These Dates!



### Capitol Steps Performance to Benefit UCM

Hosted by The Friends of UCM  
Sunday, January 26, 2014

Poverty is no laughing matter, but the Capitol Steps and their political satire have been helping UCM to provide a helping hand to people in need for more than a decade. Join us for this popular benefit concert. Always a sell out crowd at the Knights of Columbus Hall! Sponsorship opportunities are available.

### UCM's 45th Anniversary Gala

Hosted by The Friends of UCM  
Saturday, March 29, 2014

We'll celebrate this special milestone with an elegant evening at the US Patent and Trademark Office building, that will include a great dinner, dancing and live and silent auctions. Sponsorship opportunities are available.



Friends of UCM at the 2013 Spring Gala — don't miss out on this year's fun!



# United Community Ministries

Building Strong Families, Strong Communities

Fall 2013

## Community Connections

News for Supporters of United Community Ministries

### Back Porch Suit Helps Change A Life

Fifteen years ago, Michael was released after serving 2 years in prison. It was just before Thanksgiving, he was 28 years old and he had no place to turn. Under the rules of his parole, he was not allowed to move out of state to live with his parents. With no place to live, Michael was given \$25 and sent to a homeless shelter.

"I had made a lot of bad decisions—that's how I had gotten to be where I was—but I was determined to improve my life," Michael recalls. Within a week of being released, he found a job at a fast food restaurant. Unfortunately, he was fired a week later when his application was re-reviewed and it was noticed that he had disclosed a felony conviction. Shortly after that, he was hired to work in retail sales. While Michael felt fortunate to have found a job at all, he knew that there was no long-term future for him in retail sales. It was not until an acquaintance of Michael's helped him get an interview in his field of expertise — Information Technology — that his luck began to turn.

Michael was nervous about the interview — after years out of an office he didn't know if he could fit in. Educated and intelligent, he knew that he had the knowledge, skills and ability to succeed in the position — but could he convince the person interviewing him? He went to UCM's Back Porch Thrift Store looking for some clothes that would help him look the part and that he could afford. "I found a suit at the Back Porch that didn't fit me well, but it did help me fit in," he says.

Michael walked into that interview with his head held high and landed himself a new job. He hands much of the credit for his success to the suit, "It was like that suit covered my shame for just long enough to persuade the HR manager that I was a 'normal' person; you know - with a house, a car...clothes..someone you wouldn't think twice about hiring for an office job."



Shortly after taking the job, Michael was able to move out of the homeless shelter and began rebuilding his life. He has been with that same company for nearly 15 years and he has a life that he can be very proud of, "I have a home; a wife and kids; a good job and I can afford my own suits now. I pay taxes. I give to my church. And yes, I donate to UCM. After all - you could say it all started with their suit. God bless you, UCM."



### From Shirley

A year ago, a woman got help from us, but left UCM frustrated and angry because she was mad at the world and at her personal situation. She called me today, out of the blue, to tell me that she was doing better. She's gotten help with controlling her anger. She's stabilized her situation. She doesn't want her children to see the world the way she did for so many years. And so she called to say: thank you, I know you were helping me.

Fall is coming and going so quickly – almost as fast as the weather changes! With Thanksgiving and the winter holidays around the corner, it's easy to get caught up in the busy-ness of the season, but there are so many reasons to celebrate and be thankful.

I am so grateful for the caring community that created, nurtured, and continues to grow UCM; the staff and volunteers that provide daily service; our clients who are willing to come forward and ask for help; and the leaders who create vision and who bring others along with them: thank you.

Together, we are the UCM family: supporters, volunteers, Board, staff, clients. Working together, we are creating a safe, stable, and successful community. In this special season of giving, I thank you for ensuring that people in need always have a caring, compassionate, and safe place to turn for help.

Shirley

Shirley M. Marshall  
Executive Director

## There's Still Time! Support UCM's 2013 Help the Homeless Campaign Today

*Donna and her 60-year-old diabetic mother were living paycheck to paycheck -- but making ends meet -- until her mom was injured on the job and couldn't work. Then Donna was laid off from her accounting job. "My mom even went without her medicine to save money... It's really scary," she told us recently. But our UCM counselor was caring and encouraging.... She listened -- and helped us with groceries... plus medical prescriptions [for my mom], and utilities and rental assistance. If not for that we would lose our home. It was a real lifesaver to discover UCM."*

No family should experience the fear and anxiety of losing their home, without a place to turn for help. **Last year, UCM was able to provide rental and utilities assistance to more than 1,400 people in crisis -- more than 500 families right here in Alexandria -- so that they could avoid eviction and stay safe in their own homes.**

While it is too late to participate in a Help the Homeless event this fall, **it is not too late to make a contribution to the campaign! If UCM collects \$50,000 in checks, we are eligible for a 15% match from Fannie Mae.** Your donation will have 15% added to it to directly support UCM! Checks must be received by November 20, 2013 and should be made out to "CFNCR/Help the Homeless."

UCM is grateful to all our generous donors who have taken place in events or donated to support this year's campaign. We would also like to extend a special thanks to all the volunteer walk coordinators giving of their time and energy at the following organizations that have set up events to support UCM: Aquinas Montessori School, Browne Academy Friends of UCM, Heritage Presbyterian Church, Montessori School of Alexandria, Mount Vernon AAUW Friends of UCM, Mount Vernon Bluestockings Book Club, Saint Aidan's Day School, Saint Louis Catholic School, and Waynewood Elementary School.

And special thanks to Julie & Katy Dunn, and Hunter & Maddie Maples for hosting a very special bake sale for us!



**There are too many families like Donna's who are struggling to stay in their homes. Help them by giving to UCM's 2013 Help the Homeless Campaign.**

## Brighten the Holidays for Families in Need

The holiday season is just around the corner! Based on past years, UCM expects to provide hundreds of families with special holiday food for Thanksgiving and in December -- as well as gifts for children ages infant to 14. We rely on your generosity to make the season special for families in Alexandria who are struggling to make ends meet.



Help fill UCM's Holiday Room with joy this winter!

### Important dates:

- **November 15:** Final day to donate Thanksgiving Holiday Food
- **December 12:** Final day to donate December Holiday Food
- **December 13:** Final day to donate Holiday Gifts

If you'd like to organize a holiday food drive, toy drive, or giving tree at your group, school, or organization, email Marcos at [marcos.castillo@ucmagency.org](mailto:marcos.castillo@ucmagency.org). We can provide flyers, donation boxes, and giving tree ornaments or stickers. And we'd love to help publicize your holiday gift drive to others in our community!

## Scouting For Food

On Saturday, November 9, area Boy Scouts will gather thousands of pounds for UCM's food pantry. Thanks to the Scouts and scores of volunteers, this is UCM's largest single-day annual food drive. Last year we received a whopping 14,000 pounds of food!

On that Saturday morning, place food pantry donations by your front door, in the bag provided by the Scouts in advance. They pick up and deliver the food to UCM -- it doesn't get any easier than that!



Boy Scouts pose with food collected by the Scouts last year - more than 14,000 lbs!

## School Supplies Program: A Tremendous Success!

With your help, over 1,000 children received backpacks this Fall through UCM! You helped us surpass our goal this year to raise \$10,000 and collect 1,000 backpacks. Thank you for your support!

In mid-August, volunteers helped those 1,000 eager students select their backpacks full of supplies, so they can start the new school year ready to learn and succeed.

Thanks to each of you who participated with financial gifts, in-kind donations, and precious volunteer time to ensure our students are ready for school. We extend a special thanks to the many faith communities, businesses, families and other groups who conducted backpack and school supplies collection drives. And to our many dedicated Back to School volunteers, especially those who keep us organized every year! We appreciate your commitment to help our families.



## Frank Gets His Dream Job

After twenty years of working at a grocery store, Frank was laid off earlier this year. He was in disbelief, and felt hopeless. He was hired at a restaurant as a full-time employee, but the salary was not enough to pay his rent. It was urgent for him to find an additional job, or a better paying job.

Frank registered as a Job Seeker at UCM's Work Center and completed the Job Readiness training program. Then, he was paired with a counselor to start looking for jobs. During the next five months he received emotional support, transportation assistance, training, and assistance with job applications.

With the help of the Work Center staff, Frank was able to get an interview with the new Mount Vernon Costco to work in the deli department. Today, Frank is proud and happy to be a Costco employee and very thankful for all of the help he received from UCM.



**It takes all of us to help our neighbors in need... Volunteer at UCM!**

## UCM's Bryant Early Learning Center: A Wonderful Place to Learn and Grow

UCM's Bryant Early Learning (BEL) Center provides expert early care and learning in a safe, affordable environment for children ages 6 weeks through 5 years old. Through a curriculum from the Portage Project, children are guided through age appropriate developmental areas such as communication/language/literacy, social emotional development, and purposeful motor activity. Each child's progress is tracked, and parents are encouraged to contribute to their child's learning from their first day at BEL and consistently thereafter. Teachers view parents as partners, and the Center offers a variety of activities and informational events to foster this partnership.

When Ian began coming to the BEL Center he was a sweet little toddler with a friendly, outgoing personality. But at 24 months, Ian was not speaking and his lack of ability to communicate was frustrating him, leading to violent temper tantrums. Ian's mother was worried that her son might have a speech and language delay and decided to meet with the BEL Center's Child Development Specialist. Together, they filled out a request for the Infant & Toddler Connection of Virginia to send a specialist to complete screening with Ian.

After a screening and later a full evaluation, Ian was diagnosed with a speech and language delay. The specialists created a plan for helping Ian move beyond his delay. Together with his mother, Ian began meeting with a speech therapist twice a month to help him improve his skills. Today, Ian has made significant progress and has begun to use some words. His classroom behavior has improved significantly, and his tantrums have subsided as he has begun to be able to express himself with words. Ian's mother is thankful for the outstanding care and support that Ian has received at the Center.

Do you or someone you know need quality, affordable early care and learning for ages 6 weeks to Pre-K? The Center has current openings for: Infants (6 wks-15 mo), Transitional Toddlers (24 mo-36 mo), Preschool (age 3-4 yrs), Pre-K (age 4-5 yrs) For more information, visit [www.bryantearlylearning.org](http://www.bryantearlylearning.org) or call 703-765-0909.

