

The History of Share

In the late 1960's McLean Baptist Church parishioner and visiting teacher Irene Jones learned that because two children in one family had to share one pair of shoes, only one child could go to school at a time. Mrs. Jones enlightened church laypersons around McLean on the number of people in the McLean community who were in need or who were falling between the cracks. Those involved began to realize that they could work more effectively and efficiently by organizing an ecumenical program of community ministry than by continuing to work separately. On March 10, 1969 laypersons from area churches met to consider forming an organization to respond to the social needs of the McLean community. Attendees decided to establish an organization for interfaith cooperation to respond to needs both of an emergency nature and those requiring a longer range approach but still fundamental to citizen welfare. Membership in the corporation would be comprised of two representatives from each of 16 participating churches and "other individuals who volunteer their services or resources." Share was incorporated in September 1969. In its early years, Share initiated a long list of programs:

- Family Assistance – to provide food, clothing, furniture and financial assistance. McLean Baptist Church offered space for the food and clothing items. In its first year Share provided Thanksgiving turkeys to 12 families visited by home teacher Irene Jones. Sixteen Christmas baskets were distributed the next month.

The food and clothing rooms were open Wednesday morning and the first Saturday morning of the month. In 1989 the third Saturday morning of the month was added and, beginning in 2005, the rooms were open every Saturday morning. In 2002 the board decided to issue Safeway or giant certificates in amounts appropriate to the family size at Christmas, rather than provide food baskets. In 2004 the Thanksgiving basket program began to rely on gift certificates in lieu of perishable foods. By 2006 gift cards replaced the distribution of staples as well.

The furniture pickup and delivery program used a succession of temporary storage facilities until 2008 when space at the Chesterbrook United Methodist Church became available. Share received its first donated pickup truck in 1984. In January 1988 it acquired another truck funded largely by a \$5,000 grant from the McLean Citizens Foundation. Over the next 20 years the Foundation provided three more grants for used trucks so that Share eventually had two trucks for furniture delivery and one for food drives.

In 1972 Share began sponsoring the Meals on Wheels program in the greater McLean area. It served two routes in McLean and one in the Tysons Tower apartments. By 1984 it was delivering 240 meals every day. In 1996 Meals on Wheels spun off as a separate organization.

In 1974 the Telephone Reassurance program began. The purpose was to raise spirits and “add happiness” to caller recipients. Between six and eight senior citizens received a daily phone call to check on their safety and well-being. That program ended in 1977 when the American Red Cross took it over.

- Transportation

The transportation program provided rides to medical appointments. It continued even through the worst of the gasoline shortage in the mid-1970’s and provided between 200 and 400 rides a year until 2014 when Share merged its program with that of the Shepherd’s Center of McLean/Arlington/Falls Church. The Shepherd’s Center program was larger than Share’s and had an automated scheduling system to match drivers and riders, in contrast to Share’s paper scheduling and record-keeping system

While some components of the Family Assistance program were dropped or taken over by others, the emergency assistance, food and clothing and furniture programs continue today. Other early programs included:

- Youth Programs

Share sponsored Psychodrama, a role play program designed to help teens and adults work together to deal constructively with problems of stress and alienation. Share also sponsored Freedom House, established to help McLean teenagers find creative involvement in community activities. Both programs closed in 1972. In 1971 Share began to fund two graduate students at American University’s Wesley Seminary to spend 25 hours a week each working with young people in McLean. Share continued to support youth ministers until 1979. One of the youth ministers revived McLean Day in 1973. McLean Day was taken over by the McLean Community Center when it opened in 1975.

In 1972 a group of volunteers on the Youth Committee started laying the groundwork for an “alternative” or runaway house where teens could “cool off” for a few days when family situations became explosive. Their effort resulted in Alternative House, which is still operational on Gallows Road. Share also sponsored a course in Parent Effectiveness Training which later was sponsored by the Safe Community Coalition. In 1974 Share joined with the Rotary Club of McLean to open a foster home in Lewinsville Park on Chain Bridge Road for four to six boys aged 11 to 14. Share was responsible for home operations and obtaining resident foster parents. The home operated until 1978 when state funding support ceased. From 1978 to 2010 Share continued to provide financial support to Alternative House and the Falls Church-McLean Children’s Center, which had opened in 1967, but no longer ran any youth programs of its own.

- Inner City

Share's initial efforts to help the Inner City focused on one man: James (Jabbo) Kenner, a McLean resident. Kenner had built up numerous inner city contacts through his 41 years as a professional fighter and Northwest Washington's Boys' Club No. 2 organizer. He took the \$150 a month provided by Share and did the most he could with it. Typically the funds went to furnish food, clothing, furniture, and utility payments. After Kenner retired in 1979, inner city efforts were conducted by Carver Leach under the Roving Leader program. Support to inner city programs ended in 1991.

- Low Cost Housing

In 1969 Share volunteers intended to provide low-income or moderate-income housing in McLean. They first focused on purchasing a 1¾ acre tract on Kirby Road in order to build 16 moderate income townhouses. Then they set their sights on a five-acre parcel on Cottonwood Street behind Linway Park. The plan was to obtain HUD funding, have a private builder construct 50 townhouses, and sell most of the homes to moderate income families. These efforts ended in 1973. By that time, building costs had risen too high to provide moderate income housing even if Share had been able to purchase the land for nothing, and HUD had frozen funding of such projects. In 1976 the housing committee worked to establish a home to provide short-term housing for people released from mental institutions. Share volunteers later deferred to other groups around the county competing for the same funds. Instead, Share began to donate funds to a number of shelters: Bethany House, Shelter House, Bailey's Crossroads, and Embry Rucker. Later it funded Homestretch. Funding for all these organizations ended in 2010.

- Community Counseling Service

Initially Share subsidized a psychological and psychiatric counseling service to low income families and individuals. Funding ended in 1975 when the service became self-sustaining.

While a number of initiatives ended, a few began. For Christmas 1982, Share tried an experiment in the form of a Christmas "store" from which people could shop for family gifts. More than 400 gifts were chosen and volunteers thought the experiment was a success. The idea for the store came from a conversation in the food room when a young woman was picking up her food. A volunteer wished her a Merry Christmas and the woman started to cry, explaining that she didn't have any Christmas gifts for her family. By 2014 the store, now called a Holiday Celebration and distributing gift certificates rather than food or gifts, was serving 220 families.

In 2010 Share entered into agreement with Family Preservation and Strengthening Services (FamilyPASS) for it to provide services for two Share clients. Share recognized that

those services were beyond those that Share could provide and that FamilyPASS could probably not accept these clients into its program without Share financial support.

Share's income and expenditures have grown greatly over the years. Share's programs were greatly impacted by the recession as the number of clients requesting assistance more than doubled. Thanks to the generosity of our benefactors, their increased donations enabled us to maintain historic levels of services to an increasing number of clients. Most recently – the last two years – demand for services seems to be leveling off, likely reflecting the current economic recovery. Share's current leadership believes our success in expanding resources to keep pace with the demand for services is related to our growing reputation in our community as an all-volunteer institution providing vital services to the poor. This is quite remarkable in that we are wholly dependent on private donations, as we receive no governmental funding.

As described in detail in our full history document, Share's primary focus has evolved over the years. During the 1970's and 1980's our active volunteers and limited resources were largely devoted to the contemporary social problems of the day including programs for alienated youth, dealing with runaways, inner city problems, concerns with the limited availability of affordable housing and the special needs of the aging senior population. During this same period we began core programs for the poor including our crisis intervention program, free food pantry and used clothing rooms, furniture exchange service, free transportation for seniors and special distributions to clients at Thanksgiving and Christmas. In the 1990's and beyond, Share's focus gradually shifted toward these core programs for the working poor – that is, those families and individuals who have some incomes but basically lived from payday to payday with little capacity to absorb economic dislocations such as job loss, reduced working hours or medical problems. For them, even minor income losses could result in potential homelessness, mortgage foreclosures or bankruptcy.

During the late 1990's and into the early 2000's, Share also launched new initiatives after some of our startup and earlier activities led to the establishment of independent institutions that provided specialized services – such as Meals on Wheels, Alternative House, and McLean Day. In addition, other new institutions took the lead in dealing with youth problems and other initiatives that proved to be beyond the capabilities of all-volunteer organizations like Share – *e.g.*, promoting affordable housing in our area. During the first decade of the 21st century, Share launched programs to provide school supplies; refurbished computers; and fresh fruit, vegetables, and herbs (grown by local gardeners) to Share clients. We also expanded our cooperative activities with other non-profit groups serving special needs populations such as the victims of spousal abuse, formerly homeless families and individuals re-entering society. We also increased our cooperative efforts with Fairfax and Arlington Counties social services programs to help identify and support needy clients.

Share's ability to manage our programs was greatly enhanced through the application of modern management techniques and information technology opportunities. These steps included automating our financial management procedures, initiating an automated system to track customer services, and upgrading our ability to collect meaningful performance metrics and provide detailed annual accomplishment reports on services to clients. As we look to the future we will continue to look for program initiatives that deliver real services to our clients and lie within the capabilities of our all- volunteer personnel.

On Saturday, October 10, 2009 from 11 AM to 2 PM, Share celebrated its 40th anniversary with a reception at the McLean Community Center attended by 50 past and present Share volunteers. Rev. Michael Catlett of McLean Baptist Church gave the keynote address:

“Share cannot be described with words or with numbers, no matter how lovely the vocabulary or impressive the figures. Statistics can paint a picture, but it's a paint-by-number canvas devoid of depth and feeling....Knowing how many cans of food the scouts delivered is far different from watching the scouts collect and deliver that food to Share....Knowing Share delivered furniture to a house is far different from seeing an empty home transformed by a sofa, chairs and tables. Learning Share sometimes helps clients with utilities isn't the same as seeing the light reflected in the eyes of a man who lived far too long in darkness....Behind every number there's a face; behind every word there's a story. Share is about people.

“...Some of us need to give; some of us need to receive. Some of us walk into Share and are changed; some of us walk out of Share and are changed. All of us are needy, and all of us have needs met through Share....we are community....When kindness and compassion are exchanged each person is strengthened. When goodness is our currency, everyone is rich.”

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