

# Doylestown Area FISH

Providing emergency help for the needy  
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## **REPORT FOR 2016**

This year FISH set a record for the amount of money it disbursed to assist the needy of the Doylestown area – a total of \$120,465. This amount went to help 1,408 people who were in dire need of help to provide the basic necessities of living – food, shelter, rent, pharmaceuticals, gas for a car, electricity, etc.

FISH has a limit of \$400 it will spend in response to any one request. (Although in lean times that sometimes drops to \$300 or even to \$200.) That entire amount is frequently used in situations like the payment of rent to avoid an eviction or assistance in stopping a shut-off of electricity. But usually grants are made in smaller amounts, like \$90 for a motel room or \$40 for a tankful of gas.

FISH has no office or paid staff. Its 15 or so volunteers must exercise their spirit of Christian generosity, filtered by their common sense, in determining whether a caller's request should be granted. Of the 1,382 requests received in 2016 (an average of 3.7 a day), approximately two-thirds were granted. The remaining third were denied for a variety of possible reasons - the FISH worker may have determined that the caller did not have a real emergency, or that family members or others could help, or that FISH had provided as much assistance as it could, or that the caller is not telling the truth. In making these decisions our workers have the benefit of a data base which provides an index to the reports filed by the worker on duty each day. The worker may also get confirmation of the facts from other parties like PECO or the caller's landlord or estranged parent. The following cases handled during 2016 illustrate the many ways in which FISH is able to help.

- A man called saying his family is about to be evicted by their landlord because they owe \$1,400 rent. His wife is ill and they have three children. He works at a seasonal job and he has had no income for several weeks. The FISH worker contacted the landlord who agreed to hold up the eviction proceeding if he received half the amount of the arrearage. FISH arranged with the St. Vincent de Paul Society of St. Robert Bellarmine Parish in Warrington to split that amount, and the family was assured that it would have a reasonable time to save enough money to catch up on the rent.
- A woman and her four children under the age of 7 live with her mother. The woman is physically unable to hold a job, and the father of the children contributes little. Their only income at this moment is the mother's social security. They are out of just about everything. FISH got her a tankful of gas for her ancient car and a supermarket order to include diapers, baby food and paper products along with food.
- The Case Management Department of Doylestown Hospital called. A patient is ready to be discharged but has nowhere to go. They need about three days to make plans for her and asked FISH to provide a motel room in the meantime, which we did.

- A counselor from Aldie called about a man with an alcohol problem who had just been released from a recovery house. She planned to admit him to Aldie's long-term residential program but there would be no space open there for two days. FISH got him a room in a motel so that he would not have to sleep outside for the intervening days and risk a recurrence of his addiction.
- A woman living in a trailer park called to request food. She receives Social Security Disability payments because of a spinal problem incurred in her work as a nursing aide, but that is not sufficient to keep up with her bills. The FISH worker got her a supermarket order and gave her the phone numbers for the free pantries in the area.
- A woman's doctor has given her two prescriptions but she has no money to pay for them. She applied to the Ann Silverman Clinic at Doylestown Hospital for free pharmaceuticals. Because of a technicality they could not help her, but they gave her information about FISH. FISH used its credit line with a local pharmacy to pay for the medications.
- A couple lives with her mother and their four children. The father broke his back at work and receives Social Security Disability but they are behind on all their bills and are just about out of food. The volunteer on duty that day got them a supermarket order and a tankful of gas for their car.
- The finance company was about to repossess a couple's car because they owed three monthly payments on it. The FISH volunteer on duty worked out an arrangement under which FISH paid one installment, Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church paid one, and the couple scraped together enough to pay the third.
- A counselor at the Lenape Valley Foundation called about a client whose electricity was about to be cut off. Our worker called PECO and got an agreement that it would not be cut off if a smaller amount was paid immediately. The worker paid the smaller amount using her own credit card, thereby ensuring that the troubled person and her daughter would not be without power. The worker was then reimbursed from the FISH checking account.
- An elderly man living with his disabled son called. Recent expensive auto repairs have left them unable to pay for fuel oil for their house, and the tank is almost empty. The FISH worker arranged for a delivery of \$150 worth of oil to give them time to catch up.

These cases give good examples of the many poor people who live unnoticed in our affluent area and of the role FISH plays in providing them with emergency help. The volunteers of FISH hope that with the assistance of the generosity of the members of our community they will be able to continue with their works of mercy.

Frank Gallagher, President