

Survival Center brings families together in time of need

By Ty Peake

Blue and orange signs surround the building directing you to the door. Each sign depicts a line of people holding hands in front of a blue sun over the words "Survival Center." Leaves are sprinkled across the ground and a light breeze rolls around the building.

After three turns around several corners, stairs slope downwards into a cozy clothing alcove where bustles of active people search for garments.

An employee desk is stationed directly to the right, where part-time workers take refuge. I saunter through the doorway, feeling a little disoriented, and a short, exuberant woman spots me. She kindly directs me to Tracey Levy, the program director.

"I really wanted to work at a vibrant, community-based organization that did something I believed in and could get excited about," said Ms. Levy.

On an average day, about 150 clients come in to the Survival Center to get food or clothing. "I probably know about 90 percent of the regulars, those who come more than once a week," said Ms. Levy. "I know a lot of the others as well, but probably not all of them."

For Ms. Levy, the best part

of working at the Survival Center is the people. "They are so wonderful and interesting and generous," she said.

The Survival Center has aided many people get back on their feet when they needed it most. According to its website, the Survival Center helped Carla, a single mother of three young children, feed and clothe her family while receiving support with her resume and job search.

Another woman, Doreen, came to the Survival Center after attending UMass and spending some time as a librarian in Florida. "The food is delicious and the support is wonderful," said Doreen. "I feel really safe, and I benefit a lot."

The center, founded in 1976, is located at 1200 North Pleasant St. in North Amherst, MA. They only have two full time workers and five part time workers, but they get over 500 volunteers per year.

The Survival Center serves Amherst, Pelham, Belchertown, Shutesbury, Deerfield, South Deerfield, Granby, South Hadley, Hadley, Sunderland, Leverett, and Whately.

The Amherst Survival Center incorporates food distribution, daily hot lunches, a food pantry, a free health clinic, a free store,



The Survival Center, located on North Pleasant Street.

Courtesy of the Daily Hampshire Gazette

and a community center.

"Everything is free," said Ms. Levy. "We're also a place where people can hang out." On Thursday evenings people get together to watch movies and once a month people can listen to live music.

In addition to entertainment, over 3,000 people received services in 2010, over 1,200 of which were children. About 400 to 500 new families registered for the food pantries in 2010 as well.

The health clinic treated over 550 clients in 2010. Over 11,000 hot lunches were served over the year with an additional 4,922 boxes of food distributed, at an estimated cost of \$400,000.

The unemployment rate in Massachusetts alone was at 7.3 percent in September of 2011. Over 250,000 people are jobless in Massachusetts, about two and half times as many people as there were ten years ago.

"The economy has been failing since 2008 and we've seen a huge change since then," said Levy.

This year is the Survival Center's busiest yet and there have been many additional challenges including space, funding to some of their partner agencies, financial support for Food Stamps and Fuel Assistance for clients.

To help, people can donate to the Survival Center. Among the most common donations are canned goods,

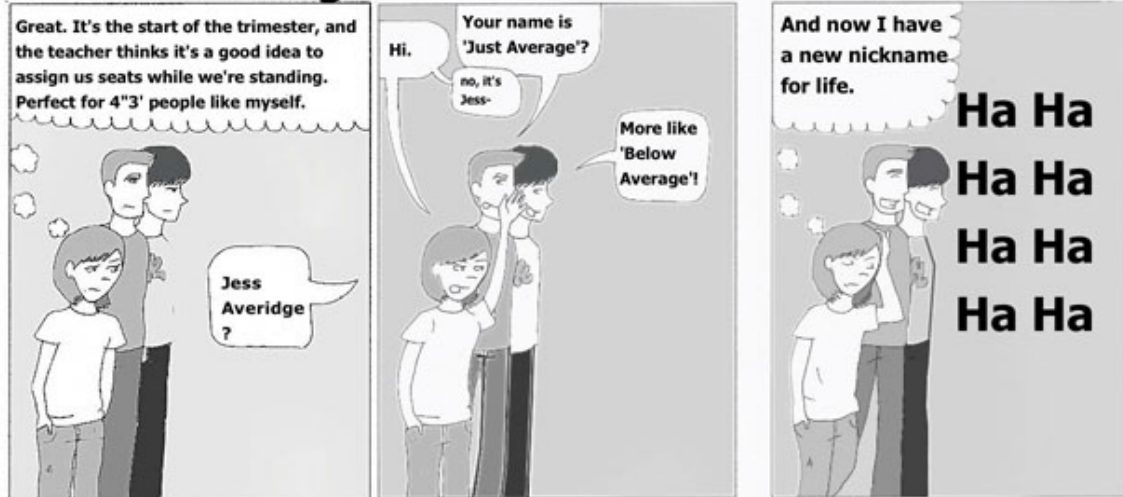
boxes of pasta, side dishes, cereal and baking items, clothing (in season and in good shape) and household items such as pots, pans, and linens.

Ms. Levy is always looking for ways to improve the Survival Center. "Improvements can come from our space, mostly," said Ms. Levy. She also wants to incorporate a process in which the people that go there can get politically educated, interested, and involved. "It doesn't happen enough," said Ms. Levy.

The Survival Center has been helping individuals and families for over thirty years. It difficult work, and they rely almost completely on donations. Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA), a club at ARHS, is working on establishing a fundraiser for the Survival Center. The main idea as of now is an athletic fundraiser that "will not only promote spirit, but hopefully raise money for a good cause as well," said James Kirwan, '13, a leader of the club.

Students interested in volunteering can contact Kirwan or stop by the Survival Center.

Above Average



By Sophia Berger