New Beginnings

Last December we looked forward to 2015 with anticipation and eagerness. There was a sense of expectation, yet there is one proverb that has repeated in my thoughts over and over:

“A man’s mind plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps and makes them sure.”
Proverbs 16:9.

February brought the culmination of many efforts as we were able to hire Dino Biaggi, a perfect fit as our Sustainable Families Program Manager. You’ll read more about Dino, but this step has accentuated and elevated the BCS program to a higher level of accountability, and has enabled us to provide greater help to our families through one-on-one counseling and a new mentoring program. Hiring Dino has been monumental in the growth of our organization, and has greatly increased our ability to truly serve the working poor.

However, by mid-month we began an intense battle, and a redirection of my plans, as my wonderful husband and co-founder, Barry, became unexpectedly ill. When Bear passed away at the end of March, everyone at BCS was heartbroken. His warmth filled the room, and we still miss his loving kindness and encouragement. His presence will always be felt through the lasting impression he made on the lives of all those he encountered.

Bear would be delighted to know that although he’s gone, the mission continues! Many heard him say from his heart, “BCS is 10% about the food, and 90% about the people.” We have been abundantly blessed by over 9 million pounds of food and household goods that came into our warehouse in the 2015 fiscal year. This is a record for us! Our generous donors provided staggering quantities of goods that kept not only almost 1000 BCS families well-fed and clothed this year, but provided food for thousands of other people through multiple other nonprofits that received about 30% of that 9 million pounds.

Joyful Endings

Merry Christmas from the BCS Staff Family!
I’m absolutely delighted. With blessing, And, as ever, I am so thankful.

Beloved Bear. But the Lord directs my steps and makes them sure. It will be a good year.

2016 brings new goals and challenges.

We need to hire a new Development and Communications Manager to replace Ray Keen, who left us in September.

We hope to add another few board members who have a passion for the work of BCS.

Our refrigeration and freezer need some extensive upgrades.

Our hard-working trucks will need maintenance and tires to remain safe on the road.

We could really use a new truck with a liftgate.

We replaced our old shopping carts with newer ones.

Mission Statement
The mission of Birch Community Services, Inc. is to provide a community where people can be responsible and accountable for meeting their basic needs, and to equip them with tools to overcome financial difficulty.

Blessed are those that can give without remembering and receive without forgetting. – Elizabeth Bibesco
2015 has been a year of extraordinary community support and KeHE’s bountiful giving has helped lead the way. In 2015 KeHE donated 84,271 lbs. of wholesome, natural foods to Birch Community Services, profoundly helping families in need. Providing specialty foods such as multigrain cereals, artisan cheeses and ingredients for gluten-free recipes, KeHE’s donations help us bridge the gap between nutritious food and struggling families.

Using just the basement of his home as a warehouse, Art Kehe founded KeHE Foods in 1968. Forty-two years later the organization had grown to serve customers all across North America from twelve different food distribution warehouses, including one in Clackamas Oregon. In 2010 KeHE finalized the purchase of Tree of Life, an organization that locally has supported Birch families for several years, further diversifying the variety of wholesome foods donated. Soon after, due to the recession, business slowed dramatically.

Yet, the overwhelming support of the KeHE staff is responsible for continuing donations flowing through our doors. Today KeHE is rapidly expanding and with it their continued generosity. KeHE’s Care Program illustrates their motivation best, “KeHE cares… and [our] goal is to help the people we serve in moving them from dependence to dignity.”

KeHE is a national leader in the distribution of natural and specialty foods, but most importantly a leader in changing lives. The families Birch serves are truly grateful for the tremendous support of KeHE and their staff.

HOW TO GIVE PRODUCT

1. Contact us 24/7 at 503.251.8860 or email us: donate@BirchCommunityServices.org
2. We will schedule a pickup at your convenience.
3. We show up at the scheduled time.

**BCS accepts:**
- Near and past expiration date food fit for human consumption
- New or like-new clothing and footwear
- New or like-new household items

(Contributions are tax deductible.)
What we accomplished with your help in Fiscal Year 2015

200 families graduating annually
7,064,175 lbs. food
453,199 lbs. household goods
31,410 lbs. boots
623,263 lbs. clothing
36 months average on program
1,000% increase in family emergency savings
28% reduction in monthly debt payments

What we will accomplish with your help by Fiscal Year 2020

500 families graduating annually
10,600,000 lbs. food
530,000 lbs. household goods
50,000 lbs. boots
890,000 lbs. clothing
24 months average on program
50% increase in family emergency savings
50% reduction in monthly debt payments

Thankful 2015

36 months average on program
200 families graduating annually
7,064,175 lbs. food
453,199 lbs. household goods
31,410 lbs. boots
623,263 lbs. clothing
3 Replication Seminar attendees trained
1 new additional site launched
260 product donors annually

Thankful for Dino Biaggii
Sustainable Families Program Manager

"Hey Dino, do you have a moment? I want to run something past you." That’s how it started, my window of opportunity and journey with BCS as both a former participant, and now an employee. When Suzanne approached me about the SFP position and described it in detail I could hardly wait for the interview. It just seemed to fit me. Then on New Year’s Eve it became official; I was now in the service of Birch Community Services.

With the New Year and a new position I was thankful. Now almost a year later, I am increasing in my gratefulness to BCS for reaching out. When I meet with families on our program, the question Suzanne asked me is the exact same one I use when I want to propose a recommendation to a family. I know it takes immense effort and patience in creating financial margin. However, our families are working at it each week as they shop and participate in the process, and we are seeing families make tremendous forward movement in their financial plans.

I am extremely grateful to be a part of this great work. We have trained 21 mentors (with more interested) to work one-on-one with our families, and seven new classes were created: Going to College Debt-Free, Dental Hygiene for Kids, Optimal Health, Hula, and several new gardening classes. We also presented five finance classes and started a partnership with the Mt. Hood Community College Business Development Center, which offers coaching for small business owners.

I was walking through the warehouse one afternoon and noticed someone who was in a finance class the night before, speaking on the phone. As I walked past and nodded to him, he proceeded to say with a big smile on his face, and in a not-so-quiet voice, “Hey Dino, I’m saving money as I speak!” I responded, in also a not-so-quiet voice, “Right on!” What I loved about that was twofold. One, he was taking action with what he had just learned the night before, and two, at least ten other families just heard one of their own succeed.

As I look to the next year I see more classes on family finances, career development, and healthy living. I see more families receiving small business coaching, 100 of our families being mentored, continued decreasing of debts, and increase of savings. Ultimately, I see each and every family growing and living in fiscal and relational health.

I was meeting recently with a new family and it was apparent they were in a very tough space, yet they showed me they were extremely teachable. It struck me that these people, who have a great attitude and an immense need, will have success. After some time together describing what they had access to through the SFP, they leaned forward in their seats and said with expectant and hope-filled smiles, “That’s exactly what we need.”