

MORE ABOUT CHO

Meredith Smith sums up the mission and purpose of CHO as: *“to serve as the fulcrum by which Christians can display the love of Christ to those in our community who are in need, fulfilling the scriptural call to “feed the poor, clothe the needy, and heal the sick” (Matthew 25:35)”*.

CHO has a staff of ten, with an army of volunteers who serve on a weekly basis. Twelve to fifteen people help to serve at the food pantry on delivery and serving days. The medical clinic has twelve licensed medical providers along with fifteen nursing staff volunteers. The baby supply store has ten volunteers who support the store in sorting donations and assisting clients. CHO has volunteers who attend St. Peter’s, Grace, and St. Mark’s churches.

Meredith testifies to the diversity of people CHO reaches:

Our clients represent every people group that resides in Duval and Clay county region of West Jacksonville in various life circumstances. Some of our clients are temporarily unemployed needing additional assistance, while others are disabled veterans who rely on the consistent support of CHO. Our baby supply store helps pregnant mothers and families with young children with diapers, wipes, clothing, and large items such as strollers, carriers, and beds. Our dental clinic performs emergency tooth extractions, fillings, dentures and partials for those without insurance. Our medical clinic oversees the primary care needs for those who are low- or no-income without insurance coverage. We partner with We Care to refer any medical patients who need specialty care or surgery at no out-of-pocket cost.

I asked Meredith about her own calling to join with Virginia Pillsbury in agreeing to be an interim director of CHO:

Community Health Outreach is the culmination of my volunteer experience in other cities. I supervised overnight guests at a homeless shelter in New York City, distributed food to refugees at a food bank in Toronto, and triaged patients at a medical clinic in Nashville. I first began volunteering as a medical assistant at CHO’s clinic in October 2018. At that point I was transitioning into a career in healthcare. The month that Executive Director Lenora Gregory announced her resignation, I had joined the board and completed my clinical hours in the cardiovascular critical care unit at Baptist Health. It seemed natural that I assume the role as interim executive director to assist in the organization’s transition.

Because CHO has grown to be a multi-tiered service organization, it is funded from a combination of federal and state funding, foundation grants, corporate sponsorships, church pledges, and individual donations.

With all of these layers of funding, where does this leave the church’s financial support to CHO? Meredith persuades that the support of our churches and that of individual Christians is fundamental and much needed:

CHO needs monthly pledges from churches and individual donors to cover its operational costs. Like most nonprofits, CHO is known for doing a lot with a little. Two other critical needs are paper and plastic grocery bags for the food pantry. They purchase 1,000 plastic bags and 500 paper bags each week to distribute meats, produce, and dry goods to clients. These are a significant expense to the pantry's operating budget.

Another critical need is diapers. Right now donations allow us to give 10 to 15 diapers to each client per month. A baby goes through 8 diapers a day in its first twelve months. You can see that 10 to 15 diapers isn't enough for a low- or no-income single parent. Insufficient diaper supplies can lead to health issues for infants. If 200 people each gave \$450.00, it would give each of our clients enough diapers for an entire year.

In answer to whether there is a need for more volunteers from the Diocese and our churches to assist in the mission of CHO, Meredith replied:

Absolutely! The purpose of CHO is to be a source where our church can serve those with critical needs. It was founded as a ministry of the Episcopal Diocese, and it relies on members' contributions. CHO will host an informational breakfast event at your church to offer ways individuals or parishes can partner or volunteer. Visit www.chojax.org or email volunteer@chojax.org to book an event, schedule a campus tour, or learn more.

I had one last question for Meredith. If you were writing this article, what one word would you choose to describe CHO? She replied:

Transformational, for those who receive and those who serve.



A member of the CHO food pantry staff Charles Green, serving food.