

# NATIONAL PHILOPTOCHOS SOCIETY

## DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES REPORT 2016 – 2018



### SOCIAL SERVICE COMMITTEE:

CO-CHAIRS: EFTHALIA KATOS AND STELLA PANTELIDIS  
 NATIONAL LIAISON: EVAN MEKRAS SCURTIS

COMMITTEE MEMBERS: Eleni Constantinides, Lekita Essa, Stella Fiorentino\*, Alexis Limberakis, Nellie Logothetides, Aspasia Melis, Helen Psaras, Maria Skiadas, Joanne Stavrakas, Maria Tamvakologos, Kalli Tsitsipas, Margaret Yates, Billie Zumo

\*Deceased

### METROPOLIS PHILOPTOCHOS COLLABORATORS:

<u>METROPOLIS</u>	<u>PRESIDENT</u>	<u>METROPOLIS SOCIAL SERVICE LIAISONS:</u>
ATLANTA	Irene Politis	Presvytera Evi Kaplanis, Tina Chagaris
ARCHDIOCESAN DISTRICT	Jennifer Constantin	Georgeann Papadakis, Esq.
BOSTON	Elaine Zetes	Georgia Lagadinos
CHICAGO	Pam Argyris	Helen Theodosakis
DENVER	Barbara Vittas	
DETROIT	Theone Dickos	Margaret Yates
NEW JERSEY	Anastasia Michals	Eleni Constantinides
PITTSBURGH	Crystal Thomas	
SAN FRANCISCO	Jeannie Ranglas	Lisa Xanthos

Director of Social Work Services: Paulette Geanacopoulos, LMSW

### NATIONAL PHILOPTOCHOS SOCIAL SERVICES HIGHLIGHTS:

#### PROGRAM FACTS-AT-A GLANCE:

- **Our Services**
  - Clients are asked to complete and sign our Application for Assistance and Consent for Release of Information forms, and to submit a recent photo, and documentation of their situation to help us determine the most effective way to assist them.
  - We provide information, referral and advocacy services, short-term interventions, supportive counseling and, per Philoptochos Guidelines, financial assistance.
  - With the client's permission, we collaborate with the appropriate Metropolis Philoptochos to supplement what each of us can do.
  - To educate our community about the human service challenges faced by Orthodox Christians, we develop resources, informational fact sheets (bilingual), and hold live presentations and webinars as requested.
- **More than half of our clients live in poverty or near poverty, many of whom are women in single-parent headed households.**
  - A large number of our clients who live in poverty are employed, but do not earn enough to support themselves or their families.
  - Medical debt – even among those with health insurance – continues to be a major cause of poverty.
  - Those with long-term financial needs are screened for eligibility for public benefits and are helped to apply for such entitlements.
  - For clients needing debt management, credit counseling or budget management, we refer them to the nonprofit National Foundation for Credit Counseling (NFCC) whose member agencies, nationwide, provide free and affordable services.
- **We address about one domestic violence case per month.**
  - We provide direct services including supportive counseling, housing relocation and financial assistance, as well as referrals for other social services; however, we cannot assist with or make referrals for their legal service needs.
  - We conduct DV programs, live and via webinars, and develop literature and fact sheets to educate members of our community and our clergy about how we can assist intimate partner abuse victims, survivors and thrivers in helpful, not hurtful ways.
- **Requests for contributions towards funeral and burial arrangements come to us from all over the United States with referrals from local chapters, family members, hospital social workers, medical examiners, funeral homes and more.**
- **A significant number of our clients suffer from serious and chronic mental illnesses, oftentimes untreated.**
- **An increasing number of persons seeking our help are homeless individuals living on the street, in subways or other public transportation hubs, or are in government or nonprofit shelters.**
  - A large number of women (with or without children) are homeless because of past domestic abuse relationships.
  - Some of our clients are doubled- and tripled-up with family members of friends. Because they are 'indoors', they no longer are considered "homeless", thus they do not qualify for many services and benefit programs.
  - Many of the homeless people we see at Philoptochos, are employed - some full-time, others part-time; however, their incomes are insufficient to enable them to rent a place to live.
- **We receive requests for referrals to subsidized housing from low- and moderate-income persons, many of whom are senior citizens. Because housing options are few and waiting lists are long, we are hard-pressed to assist.**
  - A significant number comprises undocumented older men who have been in the US for 25+ years. Being without 'papers', they do not qualify for benefits, and it is unrealistic for them to return to Greece as they have nothing and no one to return to.
- **Most of our clients thought they had done everything right to prepare for the future, but because of a quirk of fate, a life-threatening illness, a disaster, or another situation that either catapults or slides them into difficulties, they face financial and emotional challenges requiring our intervention and assistance.**
- **While some of our clients may be perceived as having 'caused' their predicament because of poor judgment, we recognize that the path to good judgment frequently is paved by a series of poor ones.**

Please refer to [www.philoptochos.org/socialservices](http://www.philoptochos.org/socialservices) for a full description of our social services and to download a copy of our Application for Assistance and our "Guide to Finding Local Programs and Services" – a tool to help chapters throughout the country refer parishioners for help.

**2016 - 2018 STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL SERVICES DELIVERED**  
**UNDUPLICATED COUNT OF CLIENTS SERVED: 385**  
**AMOUNT FINANCIAL GRANTS AWARDED: \$ 410,819.79**

<u>LOCATION BY METROPOLIS</u>	<u>385</u>
ARCHDIOCESAN DISTRICT .....	167
ATLANTA .....	39
BOSTON .....	14
CHICAGO .....	12
DENVER .....	11
DETROIT .....	05
NEW JERSEY .....	64
PITTSBURGH .....	14
SAN FRANCISCO .....	33
GREECE / CYPRUS .....	19
OTHER (Syria, UK, Uganda) .....	03
N/A .....	04

<u>AGE OF CLIENTS:</u>	<u>385</u>
0-10	18
11-20	16
21-30	24
31-40	52
41-50	63
51-60	61
61-70	63
71-80	41
81-90	28
N/A	19

*As most cases are multi-issue, the following represents the precipitating factor that brought the client to us.*

<u>PRESENTING PROBLEM:</u>	<u>385</u>
<b>HOUSING / HOMELESSNESS</b> .....	<b>97</b>
• Utility Shut-Off, RE Taxes, Water, Other fees etc. ....	40
• Eviction Prevention (Rent mortgage arrears) .....	31
• Homeless: Street/Shelter/Subway, Transportation hub/ Doubled-Tripled Up with others .....	26
<b>CANCER/ OTHER MAJOR MEDICAL</b> .....	<b>60</b>
• Cancer .....	39
• Other: Cardiac / Heart Transplant, MS, Kidney failure, TBI, Parkinson's disease, Prosthesis, Other ...	21
<b>INDIGENT / UNEMPLOYED / UNDEREMPLOYED</b> .....	<b>56</b>
<b>FUNERAL</b> .....	<b>51</b>
<b>MENTAL ILLNESS</b> .....	<b>47</b>
<b>INTIMATE PARTNER ABUSE / ELDER &amp; CHILD ABUSE</b> .....	<b>23</b>
<b>AGING SERVICES/ HOMECARE</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>ADDICTION/ SUBSTANCE ABUSE</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS</b> .....	<b>06</b>
<b>IMMIGRATION</b> .....	<b>03</b>
<b>ADOPTION INFORMATION</b> .....	<b>03</b>
<b>OTHER</b> .....	<b>07</b>

**FINANCIAL GRANTS ANALYSIS: 2016 - 2018**

<b>TOTAL AMOUNT AWARDED</b> .....	<b>\$ 410,819.79</b>
<b>TOTAL # GRANTS AWARDED</b> .....	<b>151</b>
<b>UNDUPLICATED COUNT OF CLIENTS AWARDED GRANTS</b> .....	<b>111</b>
<b>MONETARY RANGE OF GRANTS:</b>	<b>\$4.00 - \$7,500.00</b>

**DISTRIBUTION OF GRANTS BY METROPOLIS:**

<b>ARCHDIOCESAN DISTRICT</b>	<b>\$157,234.40</b>	<b>63 grants: Cancer/ Major Medical, Social Services, 75 Anniversary</b>
<b>ATLANTA</b>	<b>69,584.55</b>	<b>31 grants: Cancer/ Major Medical, Autism, Social Services</b>
<b>BOSTON</b>	<b>28,154.66</b>	<b>5 grants: Cancer/ Major Medical, Social Services</b>
<b>CHICAGO</b>	<b>37,118.70</b>	<b>8 grants: Cancer/ Major Medical, Social Services</b>
<b>DENVER</b>	<b>17,080.00</b>	<b>5 grants: Cancer/ Social Services</b>
<b>DETROIT</b>	<b>14,239.31</b>	<b>2 grants: Cancer/ Major Medical, Social Services</b>
<b>NEW JERSEY</b>	<b>44,222.82</b>	<b>20 grants: Cancer/ Major Medical, Social Services, 75 Anniversary</b>
<b>PITTSBURGH</b>	<b>24,045.00</b>	<b>9 grants: Autism, Social Services, 75 Anniversary</b>
<b>SAN FRANCISCO</b>	<b>19,140.35</b>	<b>8 grants: Cancer/ Major Medical, Social Services</b>

**Comments from a young single mom and her 6 year old son:**

*Each time we speak, you help me stay focused by helping me sort through the emotions that come with the dynamics of my life, which lately are compounded by my son's understanding of my unemployment and job search, my mother's emotional and physical absence, the harassment by my son's father and his family to relieve him from all financial obligations and court orders. There are days when I feel I will persevere and others when I question it. The days I feel overwhelmed, alone and defeated I remember your so welcoming words that help me stay strong and keep moving forward. I am so grateful for your caring enough to say them to me. Thank you so much for inspiring me, I hope one day with the grace of God that I too can have a positive impact on people's lives through the church and as a member of Philoptochos.*

## **SOCIAL SERVICES REPORT**

### **REPORT OF THE SOCIAL SERVICES TELEPHONE CANCER SUPPORT GROUP**

Submitted by Paulette Geanacopoulos, LMSW and Theodora Ziongas, M.A.

#### ***Prayer for Healing***

*Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior, You became man and died on the cross for our salvation. You healed people of sickness and affliction through Your love and compassion. Visit me, Lord and grant me strength to bear this sickness with which I am afflicted, with patience, submission to Your will and trust in Your loving care. I pray that You will bless the means used for my recovery and those who administer them. Grant that my sickness may be to my spiritual benefit and that I may live the rest of my life more faithfully according to Your will. For You are the source of life and healing and to You I give praise and glory, now and forever. Amen.*

For six consecutive Thursday evenings beginning January 11, 2018 the National Philoptochos Social Services Department conducted a **Cancer Support Group** for Orthodox Christians undergoing cancer treatment. As the group “met” over the telephone via conference call, it was accessible to members of the Greek Orthodox community nationwide.

The group was facilitated by **Theodora Ziongas, M.A.** whose strong background in cancer patient services through positions she has held at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, American Cancer Society and CancerCare, created the ideal environment for participants to speak freely and willingly. **Paulette Geanacopoulos, LMSW**, National Philoptochos’ Director of Social Services, served as co-facilitator.

#### **RATIONALE FOR PROGRAM:**

Evidence-based research, anecdotal information and practical experiences have shown that support groups improve a patient’s quality of life and survival outcomes, and enable participants to connect with others facing similar experiences. Support groups help participants feel better, more hopeful, and not so alone. They provide patients with the opportunity to speak about and work through their feelings in a safe and non-judgmental setting, and they enable members to share information about how to communicate with those around them about their illness. Group members discuss treatments and side-effects, unintended consequences of medications and therapies, and share ways each person has handled them. Finally, they provide local referrals for requested services – financial, housing, food/ meals, transportation, counseling, caregiver resources and more.

#### **UNIQUE ASPECT OF THE PHILOPTOCHOS PROGRAM:**

In response to those who asked why there was a need for a Philoptochos support group considering the number of other organizations that sponsor them, our program was unique in that it highlighted the cultural, religious and spiritual issues and challenges distinctive to Greek Orthodox Christians that can impede their willingness and/or ability to access mainstream services.

#### **OUTREACH/REGISTRATION:**

Through notices sent to Hierarchs, Metropolis Philoptochos Presidents and Parish Priests, internal and external news outlets, Philoptochos invited Orthodox Christians, 21+ who currently are undergoing cancer treatment to register via a discrete email address used only for this program – a feature employed to maintain confidentiality, the core foundation for all of our social services. Each caller was screened by Ms. Ziongas to ensure their appropriateness and understanding that all discussions and revelations would remain confidential.

Eight women registered for the support group, of whom seven remained engaged throughout its course. They hailed from various parts of North America and ranged in age from early 50’s to mid-70’s. Only one member reported that she had participated in a cancer support group previously. All said they joined ours because Philoptochos was its sponsor.

#### **TOPICS OF DISCUSSION:**

Each session focused on a different topic that collectively addressed the physical, emotional, practical and spiritual challenges cancer patients face to enable them to discuss and share how they reframed their lives. The women discussed roller-coaster feelings of anger, denial and bargaining, ways they developed coping skills to deal with their “new normal” and the loss of control of their lives - frequently for the first time, and, the importance of becoming their own advocates.

Group members discussed techniques they have incorporated into their lives to manage their illness and treatments such as strength training and exercise, although even among those who exercised most of their lives, they had to rethink what they could do safely and clear even light workouts with their doctors. They discussed learning how to focus on themselves - one woman spoke of seeking out movies and TV shows that made her laugh, another discussed the importance of caring for one’s self through scheduling “me-times”, yet another said she joined a book club comprising people who knew nothing

about her or her illness – “*all we do is talk about the book*” - and still another said she had eliminated people from her life who drained her energies because of their own neediness.

Nutrition - the importance of and challenges to maintaining good nutrition during and after treatment - was explored. Participants shared strategies to mitigate treatment side effects such as loss of appetite, fatigue, mouth sores, and concomitant physical and stress-related changes. Because treatments can compromise a patient’s immune system, food safety and food prep were discussed, as was being aware of ingredients in products used in the home or directly on the skin – soap, makeup, deodorant, moisturizer, cleaning supplies and more, some of which is contraindicated depending on a patient’s medication, hormone or immunotherapy treatments. To supplement discussions held in session, we researched and distributed resource materials on nutrition and cancer developed by the Cleveland Clinic, National Cancer Institute and Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center.

In keeping with Philoptochos sponsorship of this support group, the women discussed how culture and traditional gender/ family roles impacted their approach to their illness and families. Up until the time they became ill, most said they were the primary caregivers in their families, but as the effects of their illness and treatments took hold, they increasingly were unable to continue in such capacities, and struggled with how to ask for help from their intimate partners, adult children or parents. In some cases, they had to encourage their partners to actively listen to what they were going through.

As agreed to by the group members and as stated by one of the group members, “*to help me understand how my spiritual beliefs and religious teachings impact how I approach my illness*”, we invited a member of the clergy to participate in the last session to lead a discussion that examined spiritual healing from an Orthodox Christian perspective: Rev. Dr. Harry Pappas, Proistamenos, Church of the Archangels in Stamford, CT.

Fr. Harry has been a priest for 32 years. He holds a M.Div. from Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, a Th.M. from Harvard Divinity School, and three degrees from Yale University: M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. While none of us has a magic wand to cure whatever illness or challenges we may face, Fr. Harry affirmed that “*it is through God’s grace, our teachings and traditions, that we recognize that God has not abandoned us, that we learn to deal with illness and adversity and that we appreciate the presence of Jesus in our lives.*”

As a follow-up to his participation in session and at the request of the group members, Fr. Harry prepared a handout that we distributed to group members entitled “*Spiritual Resources for Healing*” in which he recommended readings associated with healing including “*My Orthodox Prayer Book*” by Fr. Theodore Stylianopoulos, “*The Theology of Illness*” by Jean-Claude Larchet, Psalms that teach us how to pray through all circumstances of life and Psalms for thanksgiving that come from healing, Scriptures, and Saints.

Along with reading sections from the Bible, he recommended that those afflicted by illness listen to recorded passages through the YouVersion Bible App ([www.youversion.com/the-bible-app/](http://www.youversion.com/the-bible-app/)) which offers a free (and without advertising) Bible experience in 50 different languages for smartphones, tablets, and online at Bible.com. Fr. Harry invited group members to contact him individually, should they so choose, after the support group ended.

#### **PROGRAM EVALUATION:**

Utilizing “*Survey Monkey*” we designed an instrument through which group members anonymously evaluated the content of the support group sessions and their experiences. Because of the positive feedback we received, we would consider holding another – and perhaps longer than 6 session cycle - in the future. If requested and based on a further assessment of need, we also would consider expanding this program to conduct additional support groups that reach cancer survivors, caregivers and those whose primary language is Greek.

*Psalm 23: The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures.  
He leads me beside still waters; He restores my soul. He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.  
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for Thou art with me.  
Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies.  
Thou anointest my head with oil, my cup overflows.  
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

For more information, contact Paulette Geanacopoulos, LMSW, Director,  
National Philoptochos Department of Social Work at 212.977.7782 or [PauletteG@philoptochos.org](mailto:PauletteG@philoptochos.org).