



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA  
GREEK ORTHODOX LADIES PHILOPTOCHOS SOCIETY, INC.  
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DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK

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## AN OVERVIEW OF NATIONAL PHILOPTOCHOS' DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK

### WHO WE ARE:

Since 1987, the national office of the Greek Orthodox Ladies Philoptochos Society, Inc., based in New York City, has operated a social work services department staffed by New York State licensed bilingual (English / Greek) social workers – the state in which Philoptochos is incorporated.

### WHO WE HELP:

We assist Greek Orthodox and Orthodox Christian individuals and families throughout the United States of America, as well as Greek and Cypriot nationals, regardless of their immigration status, who are in the United States.

Because the sources of funding for this department are completely private and entirely obtained from Philoptochos Chapters and members of our community, and as we strive to allocate our limited resources as best as possible, our services primarily target members of our own community.

Those seeking our help who are not Orthodox Christians are provided information and referrals to other appropriate organizations and agencies

### CULTURAL SENSITIVITY / CULTURAL COMPETENCE:

Understanding the role that language and culture play in the helping process, we are sensitive to the characteristics unique to our community.

We identify and support the attributes embedded in our clients including the strengths and barriers that stem from our values, customs and traditions; gender roles; environmental, behavioral and psychological factors; family, social and community supports; decision-making processes; goals and expectations; and, perspectives of religion, faith and spirituality.

### ISSUES ADDRESSED:

Persons assisted through National's social work office face issues of poverty and income inadequacies – more so than ever before as a result of the economic recession; health and mental health including life threatening illnesses, chronic and debilitating diseases and conditions, uncovered medical and prescription costs; substance use, abuse, addictions and co-dependency; hunger and nutritional deficiencies; housing and homelessness; aging, youth and family services; and domestic violence including partner, elder and child abuse.

### SOURCE OF REFERRALS:

Outreach is conducted nationwide throughout the Greek Orthodox network and nonprofit service systems to inform members of our community and the public at large of the scope and limitations of our work.

As a result, clients are referred to us through many sources and in no particular order including the National and Metropolis Boards, local Chapters and parishioners, hierarchs and clergy, social service agencies, nonprofit advocacy organizations, hospital social workers and medical personnel, schools and institutions, family, friends and self.

### **WHAT WE DO:**

Based on information provided by clients on our “Application for Assistance” (Attachment A), an assessment of the person’s history and issues leading to their current situation, we help our clients address and resolve, as best as possible, the problems and concerns they face.

Through supportive counseling and short-term interventions, we provide information about and referrals to local and broader resources such as nonprofit organizations and government agencies, as well as advocacy assistance to ensure they access the benefits and services to which they are entitled. When warranted and properly documented, we provide financial assistance, per the guidelines established by the Society (see below). As needed, and with clients’ permission, we may refer individuals and families to their home communities and/or Metropolis to supplement that which we can do.

### **HOW WE DO OUR WORK - DEVELOPMENT OF A “PLAN OF ACTION”**

Each case that comes before us is thoroughly evaluated to determine the best way to help. Interviews are conducted with those seeking assistance and other relevant parties to identify how clients define and perceive their problems and causal factors, to ascertain their readiness and willingness to address needs and accept help, and to learn what assistance, if any, has been or is being sought from / provided by other resources both within and outside the Church community.

Based on the information obtained from these interviews, we establish a plan of action that encourages self-determination by ensuring clients participate in its development so that they make informed decisions. For many, especially those with cultural or language barriers, negotiating and navigating complex service systems can be intimidating. Consequently, we help clients through this process.

Confidentiality prohibits us from contacting organizations and providers of service unless so authorized by the client. Accordingly, we may ask clients to sign a “Consent for Release of Information” (Attachment B) to enable us, as needed, to verify information provided. This waiver specifies the information to be disclosed, to whom, why and in within what time frame.

### **FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE:**

Financial assistance is awarded to some clients regardless of their immigration / citizenship status and as long as the services rendered – medical care, housing, etc. – are provided in the United States.

Our financial grants help prevent evictions, foreclosures, and utility shut-offs; assist victims of domestic violence to relocate to a safe environment; contribute to uncovered medical costs including meeting health insurance premiums and co-payments; authorize oil deliveries for those who have exhausted low income heating assistance through government and nonprofit resources; assist with daily living costs such as food and clothing, frequently through awarding supermarket or department store gift cards; and, contribute to funerals of indigent members of our community.

During the interview process, clients are informed that grants are limited in scope and nature, that we do not have the capacity to provide ongoing assistance, that documentation must be submitted, that payments are generally made to providers of service (landlord, utility company, health provider or other vendor), and that National’s approval process can take between 2 - 4 weeks before a bill can be paid.

Documentation requested may include recent paystubs or tax returns; government benefit award or denial letter; copy of a lease or mortgage bill; notice of court-ordered eviction or utility shut-off; and unpaid or partially paid bill(s) from a hospital, medical clinic, or funeral home.

All requests for financial assistance, including submitted financial documents, must be reviewed and approved by no less than two members of National’s Social Services Committee. The social workers complete a Check Request Form and summary statement that outlines the compelling nature of the case and to whom payment is to be made.

The Social Services Committee chairs approve or deny the request, or ask for more information. If approval is granted, the check request and case materials are submitted to National's Bookkeeper who certifies that the stated materials and approvals are present.

The Bookkeeper then generates the check and submits it for signature to National's president and treasurer (or their designees), who review each case. Prior to signing the checks, they, too, may request additional information, or deny assistance.

Upon return of the signed check to the social work office, we mail it to the provider of service along with an explanatory cover letter. Clients are sent a copy of the letter along with a copy of the check(s) for their records.

#### **OTHER SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK:**

##### **RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT**

In addition to the services outlined above, the Social Work office develops resources, linkages and collaborations with appropriate organizations and institutions to expand our reach and thus better serve our community. Recent resources available include "Domestic Violence Awareness Manual - A Greek Orthodox Perspective", "Directory of Services for Older Adults", "Fact Sheet on Elder Abuse" and "Fact Sheet on Breast Cancer."

##### **PRESENTATIONS / SEMINARS:**

The Social Work Office organizes seminars, workshops and informational materials on a variety of relevant topics and issues. Such presentations and materials, including their content, generally are at the request of local Chapters and Metropolises.

#### **FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO REFER A PERSON IN NEED, CONTACT:**

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