

Madison

Mom's example led her to volunteer

BY JENNIFER DEWITT

MADISONCHATHAM THIS WEEK

"Just start out small. Find an organization you like and ask them what help they need. People always need help," said Lucy Remus, a 36-year resident of Madison. For the last 16 years, she has been helping Homeless Solutions in Morristown.

Homeless Solutions provides shelter for men, women and families, as well as a safe haven shelter for homeless people who are mentally ill and transitional housing for those trying to move toward an independent life. Homeless Solutions also provides counseling, child care, transportation to work, money management training and independent living skills.

Remus learned about Homeless Solutions from one of her fellow teachers, Christine Shanley, at Oak Knoll School. Remus, along with her colleague, Sue Livera, takes seven sixth-grade students to Homeless Solutions 10 times a year to cook for 75 people.

"We make everything that night: salad, tuna noodle casserole, bread and brownies," Remus said. "We have to purchase the food and bring it there. So we try to raise the money through various means, including having denim days at school where the teachers pay to wear jeans. The children also contribute by bringing non-perishable ingredients. And Peter from Gargiulo Produce, whose children attended Oak Knoll School, continues to donate fresh fruit and vegetables even though his kids are grown. It's a collaborative and cooperative effort."

Although it's a big undertaking cooking dinner for so many people, Remus said they have a

good time working together and even share a few laughs.

"We begin the casserole recipe by first making a pot of cheddar soup, and then we add the noodles, peas and tuna fish. One time we burned the cheese, and when someone inquired if we had, we told them we were making Cajun seasoning for the casserole that night. Needless to say, we've been asked to make the regular casserole and not the Cajun seasoning anymore."

Remus, who is a French teacher, said she has always been community minded. It's something she learned while growing up in Pennsylvania from her mother, who continually helped others in need, from driving the elderly to doctor's appointments to collecting burial funds for the coal miners. Remus wanted to follow her example.

"The first time I visited Homeless Solutions I was stunned. There were 70 homeless people living in the building. Most of them were working poor. I cried all the way

home," she said. "But I knew I wanted to do something about it. So I decided to continue the tradition of cooking tuna noodle casserole. It makes you feel good to serve these guests the one meal they get a day and to serve them with dignity. It's heartwarming."

Remus had 10 families volunteering with her to plant mums and rake leaves on a very rainy Thanksgiving Day at the Homeless Solutions Transitional Housing complex.

Day of helping

She also got her school involved for "Make a Difference Day," which occurs on the fourth Saturday every October and is the largest national day of helping others. The school raised and donated \$1,200 to Homeless Solutions.

"It's a real eye-opener for the children to see people who are down on their luck. Last year the students bought, wrapped and delivered toys to 19 children at the shelter. It shows them that little things can help others in a big way and it can

snowball into good things."

Remus keeps in regular contact with Tamala Reynolds, the volunteer coordinator for Homeless Solutions, to find out what the current needs are at the shelter and then finds ways to meet those needs.

"I collect twin and full-sized bedding as well as towels," she said. "For anyone that wants to make a donation, I will pick them up and deliver them to the shelter."

Remus said what she takes away from volunteering is a sense of satisfaction from helping someone with dignity and making them feel better about themselves.

"I enjoy volunteering because I want to honor my mother, who did so much to assist others," she said. "I want to be remembered for what I did and not what I wore. If I have a legacy, I hope I am remembered as someone who helped many people."

For more information on Homeless Solutions, visit www.homelessolutions.org.



JENNIFER DEWITT / MADISONCHATHAM THIS WEEK

Lucy Remus, a 36-year resident of Madison, is a volunteer for Homeless Solutions in Morristown.