

**GREEK ORTHODOX LADIES PHILOPTOCHOS SOCIETY, INC.**  
**NATIONAL COMMITTEE REPORT**  
**FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2023 – HOUSTON, TX**  
**NATIONAL PHILOPTOCHOS BOARD MEETING**



**Social Services Committee**

Eleni Constantinides, Co-Chair

Lisa Xanthos, Co-Chair

October 28, 2023

Your Grace Bishop Athenagoras of Nazianzos,  
Esteemed National Philoptochos President, Mrs. Arlene Siavelis Kehl,

Beloved sisters in Christ,

The co-chairs of the Social Services Committee, and all its members, greet you with love in the name of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The Committee met once since our last National Board meeting in May 2023 in Detroit, Michigan.

During this meeting we updated the committee members on the results of our Breakout sessions, which we found to be very well attended with National Board members asking questions and wanting to educate themselves and share the knowledge and information with their chapters. The one thing that we are all certain of is that we all believe firmly that Social Services is the heart and soul of Philoptochos.

We firmly believe that Breakout sessions are extremely important because they give all of us an opportunity to interact in person and to share our opinions, and sentiments, on important issues.

Homelessness was among the many issues identified as a major concern and we discussed how do we can get this information to the chapters and encourage them to “do” some of the projects, which were suggested at the National Board meeting.

It was a little disappointing to learn that many of our chapters are still unaware of basic social services procedures.

The Committee considered having an interactive zoom ‘training’ program on social services procedures for each Metropolis. The President of the Metropolis of Pittsburgh requested one such training session. The meeting was well attended, and we believe that the attendees gathered some valuable information which they will use as they go forward with their work on social services.

There are some other programs that the committee would still like to investigate further such as:

HOMELESSNESS, SUBSTANCE ABUSE/MENTAL HEALTH

BEREAVEMENT GROUPS

MENTAL HEALTH

We have a very eager group of women on our committee. These women recognize the need for social change, and we are looking forward to their support and cooperation.

**GREEK ORTHODOX LADIES PHILOPTOCHOS SOCIETY**

**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES | REPORT FOR PERIOD: JANUARY 1 - OCTOBER 31, 2023**

**Submitted by: Paulette Geanacopoulos, LMSW, Director, Department of Social Services**

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**National Board Social Services Committee:** Co-chairs: Eleni Constantinides (NJ) and Lisa Xanthos (SF)

**Members:** Stephanie Cha (Denver); Lekita Essa (ATL); Vasilianna Fakiris, Irene Hotzoglou (DAD); Aspasia Melis (NJ); Matina Pappas (Boston); Evangeline Mekras Scurtis (ATL); Katherine Siavelis (Chicago); Julie Vagelos (ATL); Anna Vedouras (Pittsburgh); Margaret Yates (Detroit).

**Metropolis Philoptochos Social Services Liaisons:** Presvytera Evi Kaplanis & Tina Chagaris (ATL); Georgia Lagadinos (Boston); Despina Kartson (DAD); Denise Poulos Cecchini & Tulla Sandilos & Dr. Yvonne Athanasaw (NJ)

<b>TOTAL # CLIENTS SERVED:</b>	<b>130</b>
Total # children under 21 all families....	61
Number new cases/month.....	13
<b>CLIENT AGES:</b>	<b>130</b>
0-9	05
10-19	02
20-29	03
30-39	12
40-49	22
50-59	32
60-69	13
70-79	23
80-89	05
90+	03
N/A	10

<b>CLIENTS BY METROPOLIS</b>	<b>130</b>
Archdiocesan District	56
Atlanta	12
Boston	06
Chicago	11
Denver	04
Detroit	03
New Jersey	15
Pittsburgh	02
San Francisco	12
Greece	02
Poland	01
Ukraine	01
Unknown	06

**OVERVIEW OF PRESENTING PROBLEMS**

*While most clients reach out to us for help with one issue, in the course of our evaluations, we find other issues that must be addressed in order to assist the individual or family as effectively as possible, with the hope they will be able to manage on their own in the future.*

Domestic Violence:	Relocation to safe environment, counseling/ referrals to local and broader resources, legal services (divorce proceedings, child support, child custody)
Final Arrangements:	Funeral/ burial
Housing:	Eviction prevention (mortgage/ rent arrears), utility shut-off
Homelessness:	Homeless/ near homeless, hunger
Insufficient income/ Poverty	Un/underemployment, denial/termination public benefits, uncovered medical bills
Medical / Mental illness:	Cancer, cardiac, quadriplegic, prosthetic limb, cerebral palsy, organ transplant chronic mental illness, substance abuse/ addiction
Older Adult Services:	Dementia/ Alzheimer's, nursing home/ assisted living, hospice, homecare aides, companionship, caregiver support, short-term counseling
Other:	Undocumented immigrants

**GRANTS AWARDED:**

**Total amount awarded: \$93,634.34**

**BY METROPOLIS:**

Archdiocesan District	\$45,161.88
New Jersey	\$17,500.00
Chicago	\$13,358.40
Boston	\$12,223.16
San Francisco	\$ 5,390.90

*Does not include financial assistance amounts provided by Metropolis and/or chapters, nor does it include social service cases where the Philoptochos Metropolis and/or chapter addressed client needs without National's assistance.*

**Pending Grants / Awaiting additional information, documentation:**

Atlanta .....	1
Denver .....	1
Detroit (client withdrew request)	
Pittsburgh.....	1

### PUTTING A "FACE" TO THE WORK OF THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES:

1. Case of a 96-year-old woman referred to our office by her parish priest with the request we contribute to her in-patient stay at a rehabilitation facility after she exhausted her Medicare benefits due to several in-patient stays in the previous 18 months, five of which were since the beginning of the year.
  - **OUR HELP:** To ensure this client receives the care she needs, both in-home and in the periodic assisted living stays, our help was supplemented through financial assistance from her local chapter, the Metropolis Philoptochos and one other non-profit organization.
2. Case of a "30-something" physical education teacher who was in a serious automobile accident that caused a severe spinal injury rendering her paralyzed from the neck down. Because the driver of the car that caused the accident has minimal insurance, she will receive little help from the pending lawsuit. Referred to us by her parish priest, we were asked to assist this young woman with her many outstanding medical and ancillary bills – e.g., her health insurance only covers 30% of her homecare needs – but also to provide counseling and emotional support to her mother who left her employment to care for her daughter. (*Her mom joined our Caregiver Support Group*). The many surgeries, and nerve-regeneration procedures she has had, have not yielded good outcomes – nor has her ongoing PT and OT. Although her aunt and uncle began a GoFundMe account in her name, we recommended that the family be very conservative about how they expend these funds. We also recommended that they confer with an attorney to find out if the account can be earmarked for a Special Needs Trust to ensure this young woman is cared for once her parents pass away since it is likely she will need life-time care.
  - **OUR HELP:** Our office maxed out our financial assistance to this young woman by paying towards her neuro-physical therapies and training. We also partnered with a foundation that enabled her to purchase a specialized custom-made and lightweight wheelchair since she cannot sit upright on her own. This wheelchair provides her with some mobility so that she is not completely homebound. Along with our help, five local chapters have assisted the family through purchasing over-the-counter supplies including pull-ups, wipes, Colace and Senokot. The Metropolis Philoptochos has contributed towards out-of-pocket medical costs as well as other over-the-counter supplies such as bed pads. As no level of Philoptochos has the resources to respond to all her needs on an ongoing basis, we have referred her to other non-profit organizations with the hope that a long-term plan will fall into place to help this young woman with her many, many needs that conceivably – and very sadly – may continue over the next 50 years.
3. 36-year-old mother of two little girls, ages 4 and 1 who was diagnosed with a form of Stage IV metastatic breast cancer that puts her at extreme risk of infection. Because of her weekly chemotherapy and immune therapies, the family's financial challenges continue to grow due to their many uncovered medical expenses and their childcare costs, coupled with the parents' reduced work schedules resulting from attending treatments and appointments. One of this young woman's uncovered costs was the purchase of a wig at a cost of over \$3,000, and while readers of this document may think this is a 'frivolous' expense, we urge you to understand that this is a "dignity" expense. A wig helps empower cancer patients and helps them feel normal. While this woman – and no cancer patient – can control the loss of their hair, she could control how she looks during her cancer treatment, not only for her own self-esteem, but in the case of this young mom, how she appears to her toddler daughters.
  - **OUR HELP:** To free up this family's disposable income to enable them to pay for items we could not, we contributed towards the family's mortgage payments. The local chapter contributed gift cards towards out-of-pocket expenses, and perhaps most importantly, the Metropolis Philoptochos exceeded its normal financial assistance cap five times over by contributing towards the family's housing and other expenses.
4. Yet another example of "*It takes a village*" is the case of a 41-year-old victim of domestic violence with three children ages 9, 7 and 4. Because of collaborative efforts among her priest, several families in the parish, two Philoptochos chapters, the Metropolis and National Philoptochos, she was able to flee her abusive and violent partner. While her own family was of no help, her in-laws supported her rather than their son who is an addict, manipulative and violent. Through the efforts of a parishioner, she was able to flee the relationship and rebuild her life, first because of the kindness of this parishioner who temporarily placed her in a nearby hotel; as a result of that "breathing space" others were able to reach out to real estate contacts to help her secure housing. Parishioners also marshalled the resources needed regarding her children's education and health care, and knowing she had to support herself and her family, coincidentally (*I am a firm believer that "Coincidence is God's way of remaining anonymous"*), a position for which she was qualified had recently become available for which she was hired. Initially, (*and not surprisingly given our knowledge of domestic violence situations*) she had hoped to reconcile with her husband; however, several sources helped her sort through the "pros and cons" of doing so – ultimately, she chose not to.
  - **OUR HELP:** To help this family get on their feet (*this was not a case of getting "back" on her feet*), we maxed out our assistance through rent payments; the Metropolis Philoptochos paid several utility bills, gas and insurance costs, and two Philoptochos chapters provided her with gift cards for school supplies and school clothing for her children.

**OTHER:** • **Caregiver Support Groups** – nationwide reach as conducted over Zoom, compilation of secular resources for persons caring for loved ones; • **Domestic Violence** resources; • Collaborations with **GOA Center for Family Care**; • **Pan-Orthodox Network of Homeless Ministries:** contributor to its **HOMELESSNESS GUIDEBOOK FOR ORTHODOX PARISHES**.