

The Power of Hope

*With Support from a Mount Holly Ministry and an Assist from FBSJ,
Pemberton Couple Perseveres Through Struggles*

"If we can just get one more leg up, we can get off the system. We can achieve the things we need to achieve."

The tone in Olesa Ullrich's voice is a mix of pleading and determination, exactly what you would expect from the daughter of a career military man. She looks over at fiancé Jerry Hall, and then adds: "We're not going to be in this situation forever."

The couple, who met in 2013, is in the middle of a significant struggle. Last July, Olesa lost her full-time job as a medical technician and soon after, learned she was pregnant. Her salary had been the primary income for a family that already included four boys – three from Jerry's previous marriage.

Budgeting is tight. Jerry receives \$400 of monthly public assistance through the Community Work Experience Program (CWEP) and \$400 in food stamp benefits. Temporary rental assistance has been supporting their Pemberton, NJ residence, but that expires shortly.

"It has been extremely difficult these last seven months, without income, to provide our boys with what they need," states Olesa. "And we'll be a family of seven very soon."

Jerry, 35, has been scrambling for steady income since 2007, when he was let go from his security position with a South Jersey school system. The layoff came just weeks before job tenure kicked in. He has bounced between construction jobs and placements with temporary agencies since then, never regaining solid footing.



Jerry Hall and Olesa Ullrich, outside Beacon of Hope in Mount Holly

Jerry acknowledges that he did not handle disappointment well as a younger man. Losing the security job in the way that he did angered him. The deaths of his best friend and several family members in quick succession embittered him. He says he became isolated, turning to life on the street.

"My interests were really just self-interests back then. It was not a path that leads to peace," he notes.

Jerry has that peace now. In part, it comes through Olesa's strength and steadfastness. And in part, it comes from his association with *Beacon of Hope* (BOH), a ministry affiliated with *New Beginnings Christian Center* in Mount Holly.

Jerry came to *Beacon of Hope* – one of FBSJ's partner agencies – through CWEP, which requires that beneficiaries work 20 hours weekly at approved facilities. For the last 18 months, Jerry has helped BOH Director Darlene Trappier with weekly food and clothing distributions that benefit nearly 1,000 Burlington County residents who come each month to her tiny BOH storefront on Mill Street for assistance.

"I help manage the office for Darlene, make food pick-ups during the week from organizations like the Food Bank of South Jersey, and do whatever is necessary to keep things running," states Jerry. "Sensing the relief that people experience when they come to BOH for help, to see that weight lifted from them, it's one of the best feelings in the world."

Olesa and Jerry are among those who receive clothing and food assistance through BOH, and so much more. The couple has received personal and relationship counseling from Darlene, attended church services at *New Beginnings*, benefitted from financial classes, and even participated in FBSJ's *Cooking Matters* classes held at BOH.



Jerry Hall, greeting and assisting shoppers

"Darlene does a really good job of procuring scratch food instead of ready-made," says Olesa, who has a culinary degree from Le Cordon Blue College in Las Vegas. "So the cooking classes are a big help to those who want to learn how to stretch food budgets creatively."

Both Jerry and Olesa describe Darlene as "momma" and refer to her staff – mostly CWEP workers – as family.



Director Darlene Trappier (seated) with Beacon of Hope staff

"Regardless of your day, when you walk into BOH, you experience hope," Jerry explains. "Whatever problem you're having, you won't be judged. This is a safe zone. There's genuine love here, and it doesn't cost a thing."

The couple believes that better days are near. Jerry is waiting on an answer to a recent job application with a Millville warehouse; it is a salaried supervisor's position that includes benefits. And Olesa knows she can return to being a medical technician, when the timing is practical.

In the meantime, they are rooted in a loving ministry, rooted in hope, lifted by the help they are able to give others.