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Ott 'made' for Warm Blessings role

ANDREW CRITCHELOW The News-Enterprise

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Submitted photos Candy Ott volunteers at Warm Blessings soup kitchen last summer with Melissa Reardon, left, and Barbara Jones. Ott served as a volunteer cook with Warm Blessings before taking on her role as a social worker with the organization.

When Candy Ott of Clarkson took on her new role as a social worker for Warm Blessings soup kitchen late last year, she felt she was “made for the job.”

Currently on contract with Warm Blessings through Community Development Block Grant funding from the city of Elizabethtown, Ott is the organization’s first staff social worker.

Warm Blessings Executive Director Dawn Cash said the opportunity to have a social worker at Warm Blessings has allowed the organization to provide more long-lasting solutions for underprivileged individuals in the area.

“While we were providing shelter and food for people, we weren’t doing anything to – if they wanted – move them out of the situation they were in or move them further along with whatever their goal was,” she said.

Before taking on her role as a social worker for Warm Blessings, Ott volunteered as a cook at the soup kitchen each week. Starting out last summer, Ott said she still continues to serve in this capacity as time allows.

Ott said when she learned of the job opening for a social worker, she immediately applied for the position. Through her job, Ott helps connect clients with resources for housing assistance, transportation, legal issues, medical assistance, mental health access and other services. She said she often provides referrals for clients and does a lot of follow-ups with those who have used Warm Blessings.

Ott said she often helps clients secure identification documents needed to apply for jobs and housing, a problem she learned is prevalent among underprivileged individuals in the community.

"A lot of people come from institutions, so when they were picked up or institutionalized, whatever they had on them is what they had on them and when they come to us. That's all they've got," she said.

Last week, Ott worked with the Lincoln Trail District Health Department to register Warm Blessings recipients for COVID-19 vaccinations.

Originally from Michigan, Ott moved to Kentucky in 1991 to be closer to her grandparents and moved to Elizabethtown in 1994. Going back to school when she was 35, Ott earned a master's degree in social work from Western Kentucky University in 2012.

Ott said she found her passion for social work while working as a service provider at Life Connection Inc. in Sonora, a child care institute that offers residential treatment services.

"I've always been a people-person," she said. "Social work, as opposed to other human service fields, fits my personal philosophy."

In an effort to manage college expenses, Ott operated a pet sitting business known as Candy's Critter Sitters for several years. She said by the time she stopped running the business in 2010, she maintained more than 100 regular clients.

Ott said because she would watch her clients' pets at their homes, quickly developing trust was a big factor in the business. She said this was a skill she has found useful in social work.

"That's what I picked up from pet sitting – the ability to connect with people pretty much instantaneously," she said.

Following her graduation from Western Kentucky University, Ott began working with adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities through her job as a behavior specialist, a role she continued until taking on her current responsibilities at Warm Blessings.

On top of providing crucial services, Ott said simply having someone to talk to makes a world of difference for many Warm Blessings clients.

"I always get touched by how grateful people are," she said. "...They're just grateful that you see them and recognize them as a human being."

Cash said Ott has a gift when it comes to interacting with clients.

"She's just added a whole new level of professionalism to our culture," she said.

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