

TO LEND A HAND: A HISTORY AND ANALYSIS OF THE LEND-A-HAND CENTER  
IN THE STINKING CREEK COMMUNITY OF KNOX COUNTY, KENTUCKY

A Thesis  
by  
KATHRYN S. ENGLE

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APPROVED BY:

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Bradley Nash, Jr., Ph.D.  
Chairperson, Thesis Committee

---

Bruce Stewart, Ph.D.  
Member, Thesis Committee

---

Alan Banks, Ph.D.  
Member, Thesis Committee

---

Patricia Beaver, Ph.D.  
Chairperson, Department of Appalachian Studies

---

Edelma D. Huntley  
Dean, Cratis Williams Graduate School

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## **Abstract**

### **TO LEND-A-HAND: A HISTORY AND ANALYSIS OF THE LEND-A-HAND CENTER IN THE STINKING CREEK COMMUNITY OF KNOX COUNTY, KENTUCKY**

Kathryn S. Engle  
B.B.A., Eastern Kentucky University  
B.A., Eastern Kentucky University  
M.A., Appalachian State University

Chairperson: Bradley Nash, Jr., Ph.D.

This thesis documents the history of the Lend-A-Hand Center, Inc., a nonprofit community service provider in Knox County, Kentucky, that has served the Stinking Creek watershed since 1958. The brainchild and lifework of two women from the North, Irma Gall and Peggy Kemner, the Lend-A-Hand Center has become an influential organization in the region and has had a significant impact on the Stinking Creek community. Although the Center has been intertwined with many important movements, events, and organizations in Appalachia, it has not previously been the subject of any serious academic study.

This thesis explores the history of the organization through the viewpoints of its founders, Gall and Kemner. Based primarily on oral history interviews, this examination gives a firsthand account of the organization's philosophical underpinnings, programs, and changes over the years. Through formal interviews, informal interviews, participatory observation, and secondary research, this thesis considers the founders' views of their organization, as well as representations of the organization in the media. The experiences of

Gall and Kemner demonstrate their important leadership roles in the community and their continued commitment to the mission of their organization.

This thesis is organized as a linear history with different themes embedded throughout. This analysis presents four distinct eras in the history of the Lend-A-Hand Center from its inception in 1958 to the present. For decades the Lend-A-Hand Center has impacted thousands of people from Knox County and around the world cultivating social capital and providing a range of services to those in need. With an original mission “to lend a hand,” the Center’s medical programs, children’s programs, adult programs, agricultural programs, education programs, Sunday school, volunteer opportunities, and involvement with other organizations at work in the area, including the local Community Action Agency, the Knox County Economic Opportunity Council, evidence the possibilities for service providers in the region. The Center has made countless other contributions to the county and the lives of people through acts of service, leadership, education, and compassion. Through its innovative and pioneering programs and partnerships, Lend-A-Hand has not only provided much needed help, but also inspired and empowered people, teaching life skills and offering opportunities in a poor, underserved area. The organization’s fascinating history of changing programs through the decades illustrates its intersections with other organizations, social movements, and events in the region, as well as many themes within Appalachian Studies.

The Center has made an important contribution to the discourse on the history of nonprofits in eastern Kentucky. The rich history of the Center, its people, philosophy, programs, successes, failures, hardships, and influence on Stinking Creek demonstrates how service providers can make an impact on local communities. The exemplary work of the Center and its impact on the local community, the influence of a particular philosophy about

poverty and uplift work, the web of affiliations that affected the work of the Center, the central role of women and women's empowerment in the history of the organization, and the great potential for the future of the Center and organizations like it in Appalachia are explored through this analysis.

## **Acknowledgments**

Many people have contributed to the successful completion of this research project. I could have done very little without the support of many friends and family who have stuck with me through all the long hours of work that have gone into this history. I would like to thank my committee, Dr. Bradley Nash, Jr., Dr. Bruce Stewart, and Dr. Alan Banks for all their insights and encouragement. I would like to thank Appalachian State University and the ASU Center for Appalachian Studies which has been such a wonderful program to be a part of for the past two years. It has been a dream come true to consider, study, read, discuss, and teach about Appalachia for the past four semesters. Dr. Patricia Beaver and Dr. Katherine Ledford have been so supportive and encouraging. Debbie Bauer has been the most helpful person on campus and has always had the answers to my questions.

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My family has been very supportive throughout my academic career. My mom, dad, sister, and brother have helped me through this process and have many times served as sounding boards. They have suffered through my rants, stress, disorganization, and

meltdowns and have loved me through the process. Thanks to my granny and pappy and Uncle Daniel for letting me stay in their home while commuting to Stinking Creek and putting up with coming in with dirty boots and hay-covered clothes after working long days on the farm. Thanks also to my grandma and late grandpa who were always interested in my Knox County adventures. Thanks also to my friends who have suffered through my constant mentioning of Stinking Creek.

Thanks to all the Lend-A-Hand volunteers and family over the years who have made this such a great story. Thanks to the many friends and acquaintances I interviewed for this project. Your insights have been invaluable to the process.

Lastly, I would like to thank Peggy Kemner and Irma Gall for putting up with me all this time, answering my nagging questions, and opening up their lives and homes. Peggy and Irma are truly the most amazing people I have ever met and the greatest examples of Christian service, humility, perseverance, and unconditional love. It has been a joy to get to know them and work with them and I hope this little paper does some bit of justice to their amazing lives and legacy.



## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my late grandfather, Dr. Fred Allen Engle, Jr., who instilled in me a love of learning, local history, and Kentucky.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Since the early twentieth century, missions, settlement schools, colleges and universities, nonprofits, and community organizations have served impoverished rural communities in Appalachia. An array of service providers in the region have strived to meet the needs of people. Organizations have responded to poverty, healthcare issues, and education, while interacting at a personal level with individuals and the community.

The Lend-A-Hand Center, Inc., a “private, non-profit community service organization located on a farm in southeastern Kentucky in Knox County” (Gall, 2008, p. 4) has served the Stinking Creek watershed since 1958. The dream of two women from the North, Irma Gall and Peggy Kemner, the Center has provided a range of services to the surrounding community. Not only has it greatly impacted many individuals and families in Knox County, but also around the world with innovative and pioneering programs and partnerships. Lend-A-Hand has not only provided much needed help, but has also inspired and empowered people, teaching life skills and offering opportunities in a poor, underserved area. Through providing health services to a depressed and relatively isolated community and myriad other outreach activities, the Lend-A-Hand Center has promoted social justice and cultural understanding in an otherwise marginalized and misunderstood area.

With a 55-year history of health programs including nurse midwife services, a clinic, medical transportation, and home health services; youth programs; adult programs; agricultural programs; education programs; home improvement programs; 4H; volunteer opportunities; and Sunday School, the Center has made countless contributions to the county and the lives of people through acts of service, leadership, education, and compassion. The

Center directors, nurse midwife Peggy Kemner and schoolteacher and farmer Irma Gall founded and have dictated the direction of the Center. Their influence on the programs and motivations of the work of the Center is clearly evident. Their work as Christians, service providers, educators, and encouragers helped many individuals and families in the area and made a profound impact on the day-to-day life of struggling Knox Countians. Their legacy of service and leadership will have a lasting impression on the Stinking Creek watershed.

The subject of many newspaper features, magazine articles, short documentaries, and even a chapter in a well-known 1967 book, *Stinking Creek*, by journalist John Fetterman, the Lend-A-Hand Center has long been recognized for its contribution to the Knox County community. The rich history of the Center, its people, philosophy, programs, successes, failures, hardships, and influence on Stinking Creek, demonstrates how service providers can make an impact on local communities. Based on certain philosophical principles and a particular understanding of poverty and working within the context of larger state and national developments and discussions, the Center set out to simply “lend a hand,” but, in the process, has made a significant, far-reaching, and lasting contribution to the history of nonprofit work in Appalachia. The history of the Lend-A-Hand Center exemplifies the important role and capacities of service providers in impoverished areas in central Appalachia and the possibilities for addressing social problems in multiple ways. Though Gall and Kemner did not set out to address poverty, but rather deliver babies and teach school, the Center grew to address many poverty-related social problems and took on a number of roles in the community. It became a multifaceted organization with evolving programs and an integral part of the Stinking Creek watershed.

This thesis is organized into four primary chapters: a review of the literature in order to contextualize the philosophy, motivation, and effectiveness of the Center; a methodology section explaining the research process; a four-part history of the organization; and a concluding section summarizing the significance of the work of Lend-A-Hand. The review of the literature focuses on models of poverty as they have been applied to the Appalachian region. The literature situates the Lend-A-Hand Center within larger philosophies about Appalachian poverty and service delivery. It also contextualizes the work and history of the organization and explains how its founders' frameworks for understanding poverty exemplify culture-of-poverty-era understandings. The literatures on the Appalachian region, Appalachian poverty, and service providers allow for connections between prevailing ways of thinking about poverty and service delivery and on-the-ground operations at the Center. Exploring both individual and societal causes of poverty, this literature review shows a need for further understanding and research, and broader, more holistic perspectives on Appalachian poverty for the future of communities and service providers.

Based on personal interviews, this thesis will explore the philosophy, motivations, changes, and programs of the Center. The history of the Lend-A-Hand Center is largely the story of the lives of two women. This thesis chronicles the work of Irma Gall and Peggy Kemner, their motivations, experiences, hardships, and successes. The primary research methodology was personal interviews conducted over several months as well as participant observation. This examination is heavily reliant on oral history interviews with the directors, interspersed with secondary documents and contextual explanations.

This thesis will then examine the history of the Lend-A-Hand Center from its inception to the present. Divided into four eras: "The Early Years: 1958-1964," "The War on

Poverty: 1965-1967,” “The Home Health Years: 1967-1995,” and “The Later Years: 1995-Present,” the fourth chapter explores the 55-year history of the Center and its connections to other organizations and larger themes within Appalachian Studies. In many ways the history of the Center is a microcosm of issues within Appalachian Studies, with many connections to larger developments within the region. The history of the Lend-A-Hand Center may be viewed as a case study in service provision and uplift work in central Appalachia. The Lend-A-Hand Center has been enmeshed in many of the prominent organizations, events, and trends within the Appalachian region and this thesis explores the history of the organization within the context of these larger developments.

The last chapter addresses several themes which are present throughout the history of the Center. This thesis shows 1) that much can be learned from the work of the Lend-A-Hand Center and how it made an impact on the local community, 2) how the work of the Center was influenced by a certain understanding of poverty, 3) the importance of national and regional affiliations in nonprofit work in the region, 4) the role of women and feminism in the work of the Center, and 5) the future potential of the Center and organizations like it in Appalachia. These and other issues are explored while presenting the story of an influential nonprofit community service provider.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Methodology**

I first became aware of the Lend-A-Hand Center in the fall of 2010, hearing about the organization from a friend who had spent some time at the Center as a volunteer. Interested in the organization only forty minutes away from my grandparents' house in Knox County, Kentucky, I conducted an interview with Irma Gall in the spring of 2011 for a class project and was captivated by the Center and its founders.

I volunteered part time at the Center during the summer of 2011. During that time I learned more about the nature of the organization, its history, its current operations, and also became acquainted with the community and those at the Center. I built relationships with Gall and Kemner and learned about the inner workings of the Center.

Through participant observation, I continued my involvement with the Center. I volunteered sporadically from the summer of 2011 to the present. In the summer of 2012 I spent several weeks helping out at the Center. Through participatory research, working at the center, and talking to people, I got a better feel for the organization and began to form ideas about researching its history. Working alongside Gall putting up hay, cleaning hog stalls, milking cows, mending fences, and tutoring neighborhood kids; helping prepare food with Kemner; visiting community members eligible for home improvement projects with volunteer Steve Baltic; watching day camp activities with local kids; going to local festivals representing the Center; and interacting with members of the community, I learned firsthand the significance of the work of the Center, its rich history, and the amazing people that have committed their lives to serving others.

As mentioned, this examination of the history and significance of the Lend-A-Hand Center relies primarily on oral history interviews. Personal interviews were the primary source material in forming this account. Over a period of two years, I conducted dozens of interviews, both formal and informal with Gall and Kemner and others involved with the organization. Many interviews I conducted with volunteers and others knowledgeable about the work of the Center were not incorporated into this account, but would be useful in future examinations of the organization and its impact on the community. I conducted several interviews with Knox County Economic Opportunity Council (KCEOC) employees, both past and present, including James Kendrick, who helped shed light on the early days of the organization.

During formal interviews, I asked a set of questions or inquired about general topics, while taking notes and recording audio. During informal interviews while picking beans or eating lunch, I asked other questions which helped me conceptualize the work of the Center or form formal interview topics. I interviewed Gall and Kemner together in the winter of 2011 asking them to give their account of their history which became the framework for this account. I wanted to get the first-person explanation of the founders and let them tell their story. I then interviewed them separately with specific questions in order to add to the linear history they presented to me. I also incorporated some interviews with Gall and Kemner conducted by others. To be consistent, the Center directors are referred to in alphabetical order throughout as “Gall and Kemner.” Interviews and other informal communication are noted by “personal communication” along with the date of the communication.



From these interviews I constructed a historical narrative based on the story of these two women. The primary focus of this research is on the history of the organization from Gall and Kemner's perspectives. I tried to capture their stories, working with the pair in the formation of this account. I constructed a chronological storyline then contextualized and added connections to larger themes. Picking out subjects central to the history of the organization, I made connections with larger ideas within sociology and Appalachian Studies.

I also began reading and compiling secondary sources for my literature review to add depth to the story of the Center. I researched literatures exploring models for understanding poverty in Appalachia in order to better understand the philosophy and motivations of the Center and the context of the time period they have operated. I researched the history of the War on Poverty and a range of Appalachian Studies texts to help provide a framework for understanding uplift work in the region.

No academic history has been written on the Lend-A-Hand Center, so this account seeks to fill that void. Gall and Kemner have both written about their experiences which were incorporated into the research process. Kemner's (2000) *I Am with You Always: Experiences of a Nurse-Midwife in Appalachia* and Gall's (2008) *Walk with Me*, proved to be key sources in understanding their motivations and work over the years. John Fetterman's (1967) account, *Stinking Creek*, also proved to be an important source of information and point of comparison. Journalists' accounts from newspapers and magazines were also consulted to show how the organization has been portrayed in the media. I also gathered primary and secondary documents from Gall and Kemner's collections including newsletters, newspaper clippings, and organizational documents in order to gain a deeper understanding of the work

of the Center. Overall, this description of the work and history of the Lend-A-Hand Center is based on the first-hand accounts of its founders. This narrative seeks to preserve and share their side of the story.

Interviews with community members and others involved with the organization were beyond the scope of this examination, though broader research on the Center and its stakeholders would be beneficial to strengthening this research. To enhance an understanding of the Center and its philosophy, more interviews and a wider reach of interviews should be completed. A broader examination of the sentiments of different stakeholders would contribute to a better understanding of the organization, as would incorporation of more secondary source materials. A history of Knox County and the Stinking Creek watershed was also beyond the parameters of this thesis, though there lacks an adequate academic history of the area. More research is needed on the history of Knox County in order to fully understand the development of social conditions within the county and to situate the county within larger developments in the region. More thorough local history research, especially the history of the Stinking Creek community, would be beneficial in dispelling myths and stereotypes about the area. An academic community study, assessing the views, stories, and needs of residents in the Stinking Creek watershed would shed additional light on the area. A community study could also reveal how Lend-A-Hand is viewed by the community and possibilities for the future of Stinking Creek. In addition, little research has been done on other nonprofit organizational histories in the area. There is much more work to be done in assessing nonprofit organizations in Knox County and the Stinking Creek watershed. More research is needed on organizations like Lend-A-Hand and peripheral non-coal areas and their development over the second half of the 20th century.

This history of the Lend-A-Hand Center just touches on the meta-questions: What roles do service providers and community organizations play in the future of rural Appalachian communities? What is the place of organizations like Lend-A-Hand in the globalized 21st century? What is the place of rural Appalachian communities like the Stinking Creek watershed of Knox County, Kentucky, in the globalized, modern world system? This examination briefly considers past attempts and future possibilities for service providers in a particular area of the Appalachian region, as these and other questions continue to warrant the attention of researchers, service providers, and community members.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Introduction**

Different models have been used by academics, government officials, and antipoverty workers to try to explain the causes of Appalachian poverty and to help form strategies to alleviate poverty. This literature review will address these various models, based on both individual and societal causes, with an emphasis on how these models function and have been applied to Appalachian poverty. In order to bring insight and give context to the Lend-A-Hand Center and its philosophies and programs and to analyze how different theories of poverty have influenced and are evidenced through the organization, this literature review will explore causes of and solutions for Appalachian poverty found through these models.

Specifically, this review will address the popular, culture of poverty, situational, Wilson's "jobless ghettos," regional development, structural, internal colonialism, world systems, and postmodern models. This review also briefly discusses the philosophical underpinnings and formation of the Office of Economic Opportunity and its Community Action Program (CAP), with particular insights into the Knox County Economic Opportunity Council (KCEOC), the local Community Action Program the founders of the Lend-A-Hand Center helped create. The purpose of addressing these theories is to find similarities and differences in how the models understand the causes of poverty in order to compare and evaluate models. All theoretical models are based on a set of assumptions and each model has strengths and weaknesses. Looking broadly at poverty models helps provide a greater understanding of the complexity of poverty issues and the gaps in the current understanding of Appalachian poverty.

The extent to which an understanding of poverty influences antipoverty and service delivery methods must not be underestimated. It is important to know what kind of theories or models have guided and continue to guide organizations in order to assess their purposes and effectiveness. Through an analysis of the Lend-A-Hand Center this thesis will show how War-on-Poverty era understandings of poverty, particularly the culture of poverty model, worked in practice through a nonprofit community service provider in central Appalachia. Prevailing assumptions of the time in part influenced service delivery, the individual philosophy of the founders of the Center, and programs at the Lend-A-Hand Center during its early stages.

This review will conclude with how these models of poverty are still prevalent in discourse about the region and still lack a comprehensive understanding of the causes, solutions, and specific means to address persistent poverty in central Appalachian areas like Knox County. The following chapters will show how poverty models affected the Center throughout its history, what lessons can be learned from the history of the organization, and implications for future programs in the county and region.

In order to more completely comprehend poverty discourse, it is important to understand definitions of particular terms. The definition of the word “poverty” is not often discussed in the literature, but is understood as meaning economic deficiency or lack of a certain amount of money or material possessions. Poverty levels are measured and defined often by government agencies and a certain monetary threshold is established to distinguish those below and above the poverty line. These models discussed as well as the overall discourse on the region, focus primarily on this economic definition of poverty.

## **Individuals Causing Poverty**

When poverty is seen as an individual problem, focus is placed on an individual's circumstances, traits, behaviors, and mores as the cause of poverty. Solutions to poverty are based on changing the individual and integrating poor individuals into mainstream society. The idea of individuals being responsible for their poverty has been prevalent throughout the history of Appalachia and antipoverty efforts in the region. The popular model, culture of poverty model, and situational models of poverty all blame individuals rather than social structures as the cause of poverty.

### **Popular model.**

The popular model, meaning the one that is broadly accepted by the lay public, stems largely from the value that Americans place on individualism. Popular opinion blames the shortcomings of the poor themselves for their poverty, and asserts that people should be held individually responsible for their actions and stations in life (Kerbo, 2009, p. 227). Solutions to poverty that emanate from the popular model framework address personal characteristics of the poor in order to assimilate them into mainstream society. Providing material assistance, education, job training, and programs that address deficiencies such as drug rehabilitation programs are all solutions to poverty according to this model. The popular model, though prevalent in the general public, is generally not accepted among social scientists. It is flawed in that it does not take into account factors other than the life and choices of the individual (Kerbo, 2009, p. 277).

The popular model has been applied to Appalachian poverty in particular for decades. Ideas of Appalachian isolation, homogeneity, and backwardness influenced missionaries, educational institutions, and government agencies in relief efforts in the mountains starting in

the 19th century. Henry Shapiro (1978) analyzed these movements in his influential examination of the idea of Appalachia, *Appalachia on Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870-1920*. Well-known Appalachian sociologist Dwight Billings (2007) asserted, “Until the late 1960s, Appalachia’s poverty was considered to result from geographical and cultural isolation” (p. 390). Appalachians were thought to be a separate people with a common heritage that caused them to be different from mainstream society. Blaming poverty on individual choices, individual genetics, and/or geography failed to address causes of poverty beyond the individual.

### **Culture of poverty.**

The idea of cultural isolation led to a different individual theory of poverty in the 1960s: the culture of poverty model. Originally popularized by Oscar Lewis who studied Mexican and Puerto Rican families living in poverty, the culture of poverty theory posited that the poor develop unique values and characteristics because of the unique problems they face, which leads to the subsequent development of a subculture of poverty that is self-perpetuating in which traits are passed down generationally (Lewis, 1959, 1961, 1966; Kerbo, 2009, p. 281).

Lewis focused on the individual coping mechanisms of the poor in response to poverty and developed a set of traits to describe the subculture of the poor including fatalism and a present time orientation. The traits the poor develop were seen as the cause of poverty and societal forces as indirect causes. Though the culture of poverty theory acknowledged the role of broader societal forces in causing poverty, it focused on alleviating poverty by changing the personality traits and behaviors of the individual poor, rather than the social systems in which the poor lived. Specific solutions to poverty were centered on education

and social casework, with aims to change the individual. These solutions limit the effectiveness of the theory by not taking into account structural causes of poverty inherent in a capitalist economic system, political corruption, social conditions that foster inequality, and simplified understandings of cultural mechanisms and interactions.

Lewis' theory was broadly misapplied to the US and Appalachia in particular. Though Lewis warned his theory should not be used within the context of the US, it became a dominant paradigm for understanding Appalachian poverty in the twentieth century (Lewis, 1966, p. li). As use of the theory spread, the notion of social conditions impacting the characteristics of the poor was deemphasized and instead social scientists and government officials chose to focus on the individual traits of the poor and how they could be remediated.

Though this theory is based on many faulty assumptions, it is still helpful in explaining the effects of poverty on individuals. Unlike other theories, the culture of poverty model shows the importance of cultural traditions that have emerged and points out different coping mechanisms that have developed in certain populations. The model also emphasizes the importance of family ties and analyzes community dynamics to explain individual behavior relating to poverty.

### **The culture of poverty in Appalachia.**

The culture of poverty model helped provide a framework for understanding impoverished social conditions in the mountains during the 1960s. The influential 1962 report, *The Southern Appalachian Region: A Survey*, edited by Thomas Ford, was one of the first attempts to understand the problems of the Appalachian region through the culture of poverty model. Writers such as Michael Harrington (1962) furthered the idea of a culture of poverty in the US as social scientists, antipoverty organizations, government organizations,



and Christian service providers became increasingly concerned with social problems and poverty in the Appalachian region during the 1960s (Shapiro,1978; Eller, 2008; Whisnant, 1980).

Soon after, *Yesterday's People: Life in Contemporary Appalachia* by Jack Weller (1965) became the most infamous application of the theory to the region. Published in 1965, the book explored the ostensibly divergent cultural traits of Appalachian people opposite middle-class America. Rupert Vance wrote the “Introductory Note” to the book, wholly subscribing to the culture of poverty theory, describing the evolution of thinking about the traits of the region from physical isolation as the cause of poverty to “mental and cultural isolation” (Weller, 1965, p. xii). Vance proclaimed, “The effect of conditions thus becomes a new cause of conditions, but the cause is now an attitude, not a mountain” and, “To change the mountains is to change the mountain personality” (Weller, 1965, p. xii & xiii), emphasizing the characteristics of mountain people as obstacles to change.

Weller’s (1965) book hardly mentioned the word poverty or tackled any of the root causes of poverty, opting instead to describe the characteristics of Appalachian people and connecting their personality traits to broader outcomes. At the end of the book he provided ideas for outsiders who want to help the area and its “problems” by integrating Appalachians into mainstream society. His aim was understanding Appalachian people and their unique cultural traits in order to help them from the outside, rather than developing from within and from larger social structures. In the appendix, Weller (1965) provided a list of personal and family life characteristics of what he referred to throughout the book as “Southern mountaineers,” contrasting the “Southern Appalachian” with the “Middle Class American.”

His emphasis on individual traits ignored broader economic and political forces in the region, focusing instead on understanding and uplifting the “Mountaineer.”

Many other writers took up the culture of poverty model and applied it to Appalachia, including Richard Ball (1968, 1970), while subsequent Appalachian scholars have criticized its use (Lohmann, 1990; Billings, 2007; Eller, 2008). Harry Caudill (1962) in *Night Comes to the Cumberlands: A Biography of a Depressed Area* used many culture of poverty assumptions and generalizations. One particularly relevant application of the culture of poverty model to Appalachia was journalist John Fetterman’s 1967 community description, *Stinking Creek*. Taking a humanistic approach, Fetterman (1967) described the lives, struggles, opinions, and situations of individuals living in the Stinking Creek watershed of Knox County, Kentucky. Focusing on the attitudes and experiences of local residents, Fetterman (1967) explored people’s intersection with government programs including welfare, the War on Poverty, and the KCEOC, as well as their experiences with the Lend-A-Hand Center. He briefly addressed issues of the local social structure including the impact of the coal industry, religion, political systems, and educational systems, but failed to directly address or posit solutions to poverty in the Stinking Creek area. His reliance on personal stories and examination of kinship, religion, isolation, attitudes toward education, migration, opportunity, welfare, and the characteristics of the community implicitly followed the culture of poverty framework. His generalizations, journalistic lexicon, use of hyperbole, dramatic pictures of children so pervasive during that era of journalism, and emphasis on individual change did little to shed light on the real systemic issues at work in the Stinking Creek watershed.

In 1974, Billings (1974) conducted a study, “Culture and Poverty in Appalachia: A Theoretical Discussion and Empirical Analysis,” empirically disproving many of the culture of poverty assumptions regarding the Appalachians. The model was also deconstructed in *Colonialism in Modern America: The Appalachian Case* (1978) and again in “Appalachian Studies and the Sociology of Appalachia” in which Billings (2007) systematically critiqued the model and sociological understandings of the region. Yet, the culture of poverty model continues to be present in poverty discourse in the region from some academics, many antipoverty organizations, and the general public.

### **Situational.**

The situational model of poverty in many ways served as a critique and reaction to the culture of poverty model, yet continued to focus on the characteristics of the poor as the primary cause of poverty. According to Kerbo (2009) this model argues “that the poor may sometimes behave differently or have different lifestyles and preferences *because* they are poor, lack secure jobs, or simply lack opportunities to live up to values held by most in the society” (p. 284). Whereas the culture of poverty model blamed the individual traits of the poor for their continued problems, the situational model suggested that the poor are behaving more or less rationally given their situation.

Within the situational model, differences from middle class values reflect the social situation of the poor, not an inherent cultural deficiency (Kerbo, 2009, p. 285). This model suggests that changing the situation of the poor will enable them to take advantage of new opportunities, whereas the culture of poverty model suggests that the culture of poverty will prevent the poor from taking advantage of opportunities (Kerbo, 2009, p. 285).

These models which emphasize individual causes of poverty provide similar

solutions. Addressing individual needs and traits and integrating people into the presumably superior mainstream society is seen as the way to lift people out of poverty. By focusing on the individuals, these models leave out larger social, political, and economic structures as having a substantial effect on social problems in communities.

**Wilson’s jobless ghettos: the intersection of individual and societal causes.**

Preeminent sociologist William Julius Wilson (1996) bridged individual and societal causes of poverty through his work analyzing what he labeled “jobless ghettos” in inner-city Chicago neighborhoods. In *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor*, Wilson (1996) focused on how people in these “jobless ghettos,” or poor, segregated neighborhoods with high levels of unemployment, developed certain traits and cultural adaptations including less discipline due to irregular routines, idleness, eye contact aversion, and certain family dynamics. He showed how these adaptations are tied to structural causes, focusing less on the cultural adaptations of the poor, as Weller (1965) did in *Yesterday’s People*, and more on the reasons for cultural adaptations.

By looking at poverty from the perspective of structural unemployment, Wilson (2007) argued that “problems in the inner-city ghetto neighborhoods—crime, family dissolution, welfare, low levels of social organization, and so on—are fundamentally a consequence of the disappearance of work” (Wilson, p. 143). He argued,

We need to understand [the jobless’] behaviors that have evolved into cultural patterns. The social actions of the jobless—including their behavior, habits, skills, styles, orientations, attitudes—ought not to be analyzed as if they are unrelated to the broader structure of their opportunities and constraints that have evolved over time. (Wilson, 2007, p. 145)

Wilson identified economic and social reasons for the decreasing demand for unskilled labor and how these forces affect the behavior and attitudes of people in “jobless ghettos” (Wilson, 2007, p. 145). He further demonstrated how structural causes of poverty cause situational poverty, mentioning a lack of “structural and cultural resources” (Wilson, 2007, p. 147) in these neighborhoods and the implications of cultural adaptations. He discussed how low-skilled workers in these areas are often the first to face the brunt of the many negative consequences of structural changes in the economy.

Wilson (2007) advocated government employment programs to fill the void in these “jobless ghettos.” He viewed employment by the government as a way for people to develop skills and build employment history, when the private sector is unable to provide jobs. Wilson’s solution, jobs, in this case, addresses both individual and societal causes of poverty. Government jobs fill the void left by the structure of the capitalist system and also give opportunities and possibilities for changes of behaviors for individuals struggling with jobless poverty.

There are striking similarities between the urban areas described by Wilson and poor, rural areas in Appalachia where there are limited opportunities for public employment, education, transportation, and strong community institutions. Many of the economic realities such as informal economies, as well as cultural adaptations of poor people described by Wilson, may be applied to Appalachian poverty. Many jobs in poverty-stricken central Appalachia are low-skill jobs and unemployment is steadily increasing in many areas. A unique Appalachian culture in what could be called “jobless hollows” scattered across the region also parallels the inner-city culture described by Wilson.

## **Society Causing Poverty**

Several models of poverty focus primarily on social structures rather than individuals as the causes of poverty. These models provide a broader view of poverty and examine more complex social patterns rather than blaming individuals and individual characteristics of poor people. The regional development model, general structural model, internal colonialism model, the world systems model, and postmodernism all go beyond individual causes of poverty, considering historical, social, political, economic, and even philosophic forces that have had an impact on poverty.

### **Regional development.**

One widely applied model for understanding Appalachian poverty in the 20th century has been the regional development model. This model views the lack of physical infrastructure for economic development as the cause of poverty rather than individuals' traits, yet does not directly address structural inequalities in the social, political, and economic system. Underdevelopment and not realizing full potentials for economic growth and prosperity as other regions have are seen as reasons why Appalachia, especially central Appalachia, is a poor area. In particular, geographical isolation and a lack of access to modern amenities are seen as major roadblocks to economic development, which could be presumably eliminated through government intervention in the region. Walls and Billings (2002) wrote that the model "is concerned with providing economic and social overhead capital, training people for skills for new industrial and service jobs, facilitating migration, and promoting the establishment or relocation of privately owned industries through a growth center" (p. 17). Building physical infrastructure such as roads, water systems, and dams, as

well as courting industry, are seen as solutions to poverty and underdevelopment according to this model.

The Area Redevelopment Administration and the Tennessee Valley Authority reflected the regional development philosophy in the region. The regional development model was wholly adopted by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), the joint federal-state partnership begun in 1965 and still in existence today designed to promote economic development in the region. Many writers have examined the work of the ARC, its formation, programs, and controversial “growth center” strategy which focused funds and programs on areas with the most potential for growth (Eller, 2008; Whisnant, 1980). Certain programs under the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) which began in 1964 to combat poverty nationwide also used regional development model solutions to combat poverty, even Community Action Programs which worked on improving physical infrastructure conditions in local communities (Whisnant, 1980; Eller, 2008).

Eller (2008) critiqued the regional development model, as well as the culture of poverty model, in his influential book *Uneven Ground: Appalachia Since 1945*, stating, “Both tended to define Appalachia’s problems as a lack of resources for development, either physical or cultural, rather than as the result of structural inequalities and the politics of development itself” (p. 41). The Appalachian Regional Development Act and the Economic Opportunity Act set up government programs in the region that had the “best intentions” (Eller, 2008, p. 87). Walls and Billings (2002) also asserted that the regional development model “is an effective means of providing additional resources to the region without affecting the existing structure of resource control” (p. 17). In this way, agencies could help

meet people's needs without criticizing power structures or the unequal distribution of wealth.

While these organizations combated poverty with investments in infrastructure and attracting industry based on the regional development model, structural inequalities were ignored as modernity, growth, and further integration into the broader economic system were given priority, often at the expense of local businesses and community initiatives.

Unintended consequences of the regional development model such as uneven growth and “growth without development” were discussed at length in Eller's (2008) history. The regional development model also failed to take into account the potential in the community for alternative development strategies and antipoverty efforts, instead focusing more on outside corporate and governmental investment as the best means to develop an area and pull people out of poverty.

### **The culture of poverty, regional development, and the War on Poverty.**

The War on Poverty and President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society programs during the 1960s were rooted in contemporary theories explaining poverty. The culture of poverty model and the regional development model were the basis of many antipoverty efforts through the Office of Economic Opportunity, which began with the signing of the Economic Opportunity Act on August 20, 1964, to coordinate War on Poverty efforts.

Eller (2008) and Whisnant (1980) thoroughly discussed the theoretical underpinnings of OEO programs and how they did not address systemic, structural causes of poverty in Appalachia. Relatively few writings specifically address Appalachia during the War on Poverty years, compared to other areas of the country and the nation as a whole. Glen (1989) and Kiffmeyer (2008) examined programs from the OEO and their theoretical underpinnings.



Kiffmeyer (2008) in *Reformers to Radicals: The Appalachian Volunteers and the War on Poverty*, examined the impact of the culture of poverty model on the Council of the Southern Mountains (CSM) and its Appalachian Volunteers program under the OEO's Community Action Program, of which the Lend-A-Hand Center was a member and was impacted by their ideas and philosophy.

In *Uneven Ground: Appalachia Since 1945*, Eller (2008) was similarly critical of the OEO and other top-down government programs which sought to address poverty and economic development. Eller (2008) echoed Whisnant's sentiment writing, "Economic growth theory and human capital theory—would come together in the design of the War on Poverty and provide a conceptual framework for government intervention strategies toward Appalachia" and eliminate otherness "through development and assimilation into the mainstream" (p. 93). Eller (2008) called the War on Poverty "a position narrowed by politics, conflicting strategies, and misguided assumptions" (102-103).

Billings (2007) also critiqued the philosophy of the War on Poverty era writing, "The representations of Appalachian culture of the 1960s are now understood as having been fueled by stereotypes, overlooking diversity and complexity in the history of the region, and being used to blame poverty on the Appalachian poor in ways that overlooked institutionalized power and economic exploitation in the region" (p. 393). Eller (2008) made the connection between OEO programs and the culture of poverty and regional development models, writing that the theory "played a powerful role in shaping many of the antipoverty programs of the late twentieth century" (p. 101). He noted, "Almost every program administered by the OEO reflected the theory" and "change[d] the behaviors of families, raise[d] the expectations of youth, and prepare[d] adults for jobs in the new economy" (Eller,

2008, p. 101). According to Eller (2008), participation in Community Action Programs was to “acculturate the poor into the value systems and behaviors of the middle class” (p. 101).

The OEO programs that were designed provided “no serious attempts at structural reform” and “the aim was to channel poor people into a structurally unaltered mainstream” (Whisnant, 1980, p. 100). The OEO “opted for a normalization and extension of their own middle-class values, life-styles and assumptions about the social order. Having done so, they foreclosed the possibility of dealing constructively with the structural and systemic basis of poverty in Appalachia” (Whisnant, 1980, p. 118-119). Whisnant (1980) outlined five major problems: “insufficient money to do the job,” “administrative splitting and fragmentation,” “OEO and regional politics,” “two titles out of six” (community action and VISTA), and “increasing congressional constraints” (p. 102-108). He noted that “OEO never knew from one year to the next how much money it would have, when it would be available, or how it could be spent” (Whisnant, 1980, p. 103). Whisnant (1980) also mentioned that the OEO programs were not tailored to meet the needs of the Appalachian people and that much of the thrust of the program was to address blacks in urban areas (p. 95-96). Whisnant (1980) discussed the ARC and OEO:

The two bureaucracies were uncoordinated, and even their basic approaches were antagonistic in both theory and practice. ARC’s ‘growth center’ strategy concentrated on getting people out of small communities in the hollows into ‘urban service centers,’ but OEO stressed community action to make such small communities more viable. (p. 104)

The Community Action Program is particularly interesting because of its emphasis on the involvement of the poor in solving their own problems. Yet, even though the Community

Action Program had the possibility of promoting structural change, it was most often a service delivery organization that focused on education, roads, and individual uplift and empowerment, all ideas rooted in the regional development and culture of poverty models. Eller (2008) wrote that the idea behind the CAP was that poverty “could be conquered by government investments in public infrastructure...and by the extension of opportunities for the poor to join the cultural mainstream (p. 89), both basic tenets of the regional development and culture of poverty models.

The controversial Community Action Program was the cornerstone of the War on Poverty. According to Eller (2008), “CAAs [Community Action Agencies—synonymous with Community Action Programs] were intended to serve as the vehicles for quickly and directly channeling federal funds into local neighborhoods across the country. These nonprofit agencies would prioritize community needs and receive grants for a wide range of education and cultural enrichment programs” (p. 95). These organizations were able to make some strides in confronting power structures and in providing real assistance to people, yet they largely fell short of their aims at eradicating poverty and empowering individuals, often creating another level of local elite. Eller (2008) summarized the sentiment of the times by writing,

For some, poverty was the result of individual character weaknesses that could be alleviated through technical education, job training, and cultural adjustment to modern values. For others, poverty was the consequence of governmental neglect of the basic public infrastructure that moved societies through the stages of development and capitalist expansion—roads, water systems, and public facilities. Most assumed that raising the expectations of poor people and providing the goods of industrial

production—that is, modernization—would bring poor regions into the mainstream. Few questioned the benefits of growth or associated poverty with systemic inequalities in political or economic structures. (p. 63)

This shortsighted application of poverty models by the federal government in Appalachia has had lasting effects on poverty and antipoverty organizations in the region. The faith in these models as ways to move people out of poverty still exists through the Community Action Program and other antipoverty organizations, and in academic discourse, although these models have been in many ways unsuccessfully applied to the region for decades. Persistent pockets of poverty still exist in areas heavily invested in through culture of poverty and regional development model solutions as policymakers and academics continue to look for different ways to combat social problems in the region. As recently as 2012, the same development strategies to address poverty that came into vogue in the 1960s have been promoted in scholarly discourse. For example, Ziliak (2012) in *Appalachian Legacy: Economic Opportunity After the War on Poverty* suggested that human capital investments, health capital investments, physical infrastructure improvements, and possible government intervention may help areas of the region still struggling with economic decline and poverty.

#### **The KCEOC during the War on Poverty.**

At the county level, Eller (2008) and Whisnant (1980) also discussed the early history of the Knox County Economic Opportunity Council and its programs and controversies (Eller, p. 107; Whisnant, p. 111-113). They agreed that KCEOC programs were not focused on true structural change, but instead focused on “programs of personal empowerment” (Eller, 2008, p. 107) and service delivery. A thorough undergraduate thesis on CAPs in the

Cumberlands also discussed the KCEOC, coming to many of the same conclusions (Bollier, 2009).

The KCEOC was also subject to a study in the mid-1960s conducted by the University of Kentucky, showing that the organization had done little to promote structural change in the county (Street, 1965). The report provides valuable insight on the everyday workings of a CAP and its ideological struggles and shows how the KCEOC focused on human capital development and physical infrastructure programs including courting industry, improving transportation, training workers, and providing education.

### **Structural models.**

Structural models provide a more holistic way of understanding society causing poverty. Structural models for understanding poverty broadly involve examining political and economic forces operating within a society as the primary causes of poverty. Kerbo (2009) examined how the occupational structure, property structure, and authority structures impact poverty (p. 286-291). Questions about the relationship between capitalism, politics, and power are raised within the structural model.

Structural models look historically at the impact of capitalist industrialization, government policies, and other changes in society to explain poverty. The models analyze inherent flaws and internal contradictions of capital accumulation and the effects of modernity. Solutions to poverty according to structural understandings involve changing systems. Tax reform, ending political corruption, redistributing power and resources, promoting democratic institutions, ending discrimination and inequality, and reevaluating the effects of capitalism are ways to combat poverty using a structural analysis. Structural

models have been explored within the region in recent decades by academics, community organizations, and some government programs.

Eller (2008) advocated using a more structural model to understand Appalachian development and questioned the American values of modernity and growth, and the definition of progress in *Uneven Ground: Appalachia Since 1945*. Historians and sociologists including Ronald Lewis (1998), Ronald Eller (1982), David Corbin (1981), Alan Banks (1980), and David Walls (1976, 1978a) have used historical studies of industries to examine the impact of outside industry such as coal mining on the region. John Gaventa (1980) analyzed power and control of a company and quiescence in a Tennessee Valley. Paul Salstrom (1994) analyzed the historical development of economic dependency in the region exacerbated by changes in agriculture, government policy, and the region's dependence on outside capital for development. Though using different interpretations, these scholars address the structural causes of poverty and economic conditions in the region and contend "that Appalachia is poor because of the nature of its integration with—not isolation from—the American corporate economy" (Billings, 2007, p. 395).

Though the general structural model is a promising way to theoretically understand complex problems that cause poverty, its solutions to poverty are difficult to implement. Solutions according to the structural model are more involved than simply building roads, offering job training, or providing material assistance for people. Structural models see institutionalized social patterns causing poverty and therefore society must be changed in order to alleviate social ills.

### **Internal colonialism.**

From the study of outside capital emerged the internal colonialism model to explain poverty in Appalachia. The model was originally applied to other situations in other parts of the nation and the world and was then commandeered by Appalachian scholars and activists as they began to see outside industry as the cause of poverty in Appalachia, with industries, particularly the coal industry, setting up an internal colony in which outsiders controlled resources and labor. Internal colonialism focused on exploitation of land and labor resources in Appalachia by outside interests and arose in part as a response to the culture of poverty model which scholars and activists deemed inadequate for describing and combating the region's problems.

Harry Caudill (1962), in his widely influential examination of eastern Kentucky, *Night Comes to the Cumberlands: A Biography of a Depressed Area*, hinted at the idea of Appalachia being an internal colony and later elaborated on it in his other works. Walls (1978b), Billings (2002, 2007), and Lohmann (1990) also discuss this model in detail as applied to Appalachia.

The idea was wholly adopted by several scholars, most notably by the contributors to *Colonialism in Modern America: The Appalachian Case* (1978). This collection of essays edited by Helen Matthews Lewis, Linda Johnson, and Donald Askins articulated the internal colonialism model as applied to Appalachia, including its scope, aims, and limits. The volume discussed exploitation and political domination and its effects on the region. Lewis (1970) had previously used the internal colonialism model in her article, "Fatalism or the Coal Industry? Contrasting Views of Appalachian Problems" which appeared in *Mountain Life and Work*, the magazine of the Council of the Southern Mountains.

The influence of outside capital on the industrialization of Appalachia has been well documented. Eller's (1982) *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization in the Appalachian South, 1880-1930* examined the period from roughly 1880 to 1930 and explained "the Appalachian South had become the economic colony of the urban northeast" (p. 85). An entire canon of literature on the coal industry in Appalachia exists showing the hegemony, power, and control of land and labor in certain areas in the coalfields, examining absentee land ownership, political coercion, union suppression, and labor abuse, which have led to economic distress and poverty.

The Appalachian Land Ownership Study and subsequent publication of *Who Owns Appalachia?* (1983), by the Appalachian Land Ownership Taskforce, documented exploitation of the region's mineral resources and the effects of an inadequate tax base and was to some extent based on the internal colony model. Discussion within the Appalachian Studies Association exists today for performing a new land ownership study, presumably to find if many of the same problems persist in the region.

The internal colonialism model has not been immune to criticism. Focusing on resource extraction and assigning blame largely at the coal industry in the region, omits or overlooks other factors that influence poverty. Billings (2007) pointed out the dualism of insiders versus outsiders inherent in this model and the tendency to portray Appalachians as victims (p. 395). The internal colonialism model is narrower in scope than other structural models of poverty and is best applied to coal producing areas of central Appalachia. The model is not as easily applied to poor, rural areas of the region marginally affected by coal production, and has not been fully examined in the context of the continued decline of coal production in central Appalachia, yet is still frequently used in the language of activists



fighting the coal industry in the region. The model is still pervasive in the rhetoric, programs, scholarship, and conferences within the field of Appalachian Studies.

### **World systems analysis.**

The world systems model, first developed by Immanuel Wallerstein (1974), and elaborated throughout his subsequent works (see Wallerstein, 2000, for an overview), is another structural model of poverty which considers societal rather than individual causes. The world systems theory advocates the idea of a modern world system in which there is a core, semi-periphery, and periphery transcending national boundaries. Relationships of power, capital, labor, and consumption are explained through the modern world system. The model focuses on the results of modern capitalism, resource extraction, processing, and consumption and its effects in different parts of the world.

David Walls' (1978b) article featured in the "Rethinking the Model" section of *Colonialism in Modern America: The Appalachian Case* posited the application of the world systems model to Appalachia. He asserted, "Central Appalachia is best characterized as a peripheral region within an advanced capitalist society" (Walls, 1978b, p. 319). Plaut (1978) then responded to and expanded upon Walls' (1978b) discussion to more fully consider the role of culture in the Appalachian region. Wilma Dunaway (1996) used world systems theory to explain industrial development in antebellum Appalachia in *The First American Frontier: Transition to Capitalism in Southern Appalachia, 1700-1860*. Her approach has been criticized for her "assessment of the extent of commerce and the proletarianization in the antebellum era (Billings, 2007, p. 395). Lewis (1998) also espoused the theory in considering the timber industry in West Virginia during industrialization.

Dwight Billings and Kathleen Blee (2000) in *The Road to Poverty: The Making of Wealth and Hardship in Appalachia* also used a world systems approach in explaining poverty in Clay County, Kentucky. They explored historical structural causes of poverty in Clay County and “Appalachia’s incorporation into and peripheralization into the world capitalist system” finding that “Appalachia cannot be studied in isolation” (Billings & Blee, 2000, p. 15). Their analysis showed that the “transition to modern corporate capitalism in Appalachian Kentucky was embedded in prior agrarian social structures” (Billings & Blee, 2000, p. 319). In concluding, the authors discussed four implications for policymakers (not communities) based on their study of eastern Kentucky, yet did not posit any real solutions to poverty for rural, peripheral areas such as Clay County, and next-door Knox County and their marginalized place in the modern world system.

The world systems model does have its problems. The solutions to poverty based on the model have not been thoroughly explored in the literature or implemented on a large scale in Appalachia. Systemic changes to the modern world system have yet to be experimented with and there is little written on how exactly to enact such changes, nor is there much indication of how changes would affect the entire system.

### **Postmodernism.**

Postmodernism has also been applied to ideas about Appalachian poverty. Postmodernism involves looking at the construction of the idea of “Appalachia” and Appalachian poverty, not making wide sweeping assertions or broad generalizations, and taking each situation as unique in itself. This would imply that large-scale policy projects to address poverty are misguided and would not adequately reflect the needs of individual

situations. Solutions to poverty from a postmodern perspective would be to examine poverty on a case-by-case basis, deconstructing different levels of individual and societal causes.

Shapiro (1978) and Batteau (1990) used postmodernism to consider the formation and importance of the idea of Appalachia. Shapiro (1978) discussed the role of the conception of Appalachia in the motivation and effectiveness of early poverty and uplift work in the region. The article “Appalachian Studies, Resistance, and Postmodernism” by Alan Banks, Dwight Billings, and Karen Tice (1993) examined the political implications of postmodernism in Appalachian Studies. The authors noted postmodernism as a way of providing insights that “can guide our efforts in making sure that Appalachian Studies continues to be one of the region’s voices of dissent” (Banks, Billings, & Tice, 1993, p. 30). The article discussed postmodern rejection of metanarratives; careful analysis of truth and reason; avoidance of universalistic and essentialistic thinking; and encouragement of multiplicity and diversity, while highlighting the linkages between activists and academics in the field of Appalachian Studies and how academic disciplines can be blurred in postmodern discourse.

Though the article cautioned against misuse of postmodern concepts, the authors saw postmodernism as a way “Appalachian scholars can learn to write about the region without succumbing to the temptation of speaking like the invisible, know-it-all ‘over-voice’ that is a commonplace in television advertising and mass media broadcasting” (Banks et al, 1993, p. 34). The article referenced new ways of discussing the complexity of the region used by Appalachian scholars and mentioned how ideas about colonialization and cultural essentialism have been present in Appalachian Studies discourse. The article cautioned against such assertions, which can be seen in the context of the other theories of poverty

discussed above, yet did not give specific solutions to poverty based on the postmodern perspective.

These models that see society as the cause of poverty are more complex than models that focus on individual causes. These models take into account many factors and, therefore, have varied solutions to poverty that are more difficult to implement and are not thoroughly discussed in the literature. They provide a more holistic view of poverty, yet a holistic set of solutions to poverty in Appalachia and their successful application is still lacking, as evidenced by persistently high concentrations of poverty and other social problems still present in the region.

### **The Need for a New Understanding**

The models examined above, especially the culture of poverty model, have been used by many service providers in the Appalachian region to understand and try to alleviate poverty conditions and are still prevalent in the general consciousness of the American people and in antipoverty programs in Appalachia. Their use and misuse in the region has had a great impact on economic development and the persistence of poverty. Causes and possible solutions of poverty are evident in these models, as are their weaknesses. Yet, these models lack one thing: successful application. The failure of these models is evident in the fact that since the 1960s and the concerted effort to alleviate conditions in the mountains, there still is persistent poverty throughout Appalachia, particularly areas like Knox County, Kentucky. Antipoverty organizations, service providers, and development programs have failed to address systemic, persistent poverty as indicated by the socioeconomic measurements in the region over the past five decades. Governmental organizations, nonprofit organizations, academic institutions, religious organizations, and other associations

have been working in the region for decades to address poverty, but usually end up addressing symptoms rather than structural causes. These models discussed only start at causes then provide possible solutions, which have yet to be successful on a region-wide scale.

These literatures inform this research on the Lend-A-Hand Center and provide a way to conceptualize and understand the organization's philosophy and possible alternatives for understanding poverty in order to better serve impoverished areas. An understanding of these conceptualizations of poverty is helpful in evaluating motivations and frameworks of organizations like the Lend-A-Hand Center. These models bring to light how the Center has operated based on certain assumptions and showcases possible other means for service providers like Lend-A-Hand to make an impact in communities. It is important to consider the experiences of the Lend-A-Hand Center and organizations like it and the failure of the culture of poverty and regional development models in service provision in the region.

All of these models discussed have valid points that can be helpful in certain situations, as well as their own set of problems and shortcomings. Most existing models take too narrow a view or are in many cases misapplied to central Appalachia. Some elements of each, both individual and societal models, are useful in fully understanding the complexities of Appalachian social problems. Poverty cannot be considered in isolation from other issues facing the region as some of these models do address larger economic and social issues.

The literature shows a lack of a holistic and integrated model that takes into account multiple definitions, causes, and solutions to poverty in central Appalachia for antipoverty organizations, nonprofit service providers, and communities to use. In the introduction to *Colonialism in Modern America: The Appalachian Case*, Helen Lewis (1978) noted, "The

way we define problems determines how we think about solutions” (p. 4). Such critical thinking and self-conscious inquiry is important in the ongoing discussion of Appalachian poverty. Scholars and activists are still struggling with this concept as more research is needed on Appalachian poverty causes and conditions. Further assessment of theoretical frameworks in place and how these work in community organizations is critical to the continued discussion.

Much of the discourse on poverty in Appalachia does not examine who leads the discussion on defining poverty or what is the true definition of poverty, beyond economic indicators and modern definitions of standard of living. There has been little discussion of the whole definition of poverty, including the economic, political, health, mental, and social aspects of poverty. Furthermore, specific solutions with attainable goals for the region have yet to be posited within the sociological literature of the region within the structural framework. The current models propose causes of and solutions to poverty without delving adequately into the complex, multifaceted definitions of poverty in Appalachia. When looking at a certain situation, individual circumstances; cultural norms; reactions to situations; adaptations to structures; a lack of resources for development; economic, social, and political realities of capitalism; power relations and resource control; relationships within the modern world system; and diverse representations of experience must be taken into account. It is through understanding these models of poverty that progress can be made toward a more holistic, effective understanding of poverty in Appalachia, enabling communities, nonprofit organizations, and service providers to understand and confront poverty and other social ills.

There is a need for a new theoretical framework to address issues including: who defines poverty; what is the definition of poverty; how poverty is viewed as an individual or societal problem; the causes of poverty; how antipoverty programs are formed based on the perceived causes; what the desired end result of antipoverty programs are; whether antipoverty programs address causes, effects, or symptoms; and how to interpret the results of antipoverty programs. Though much has been written on the failures of various poverty models as applied to central Appalachia, and many calls for a more historical and structural understanding of poverty in the region have been made, just how to address the structural causes of poverty in central Appalachia has yet to be adequately addressed within the academic literature, especially in the 20th century. There is a need for viable and attainable goals and solutions to poverty in rural Appalachia in the modern world system, taking into account diverse issues such as culture and social capital and incorporating alternatives modes of development, not just service delivery, individual uplift, or government intervention. Using communities and community resilience as units of analysis rather than monetary or income measurements of prosperity, and building ground up capacities and localized economies rather than making quick fixes and addressing symptoms and not causes of poverty and inequality are important steps in considering future models and initiatives.

The realities of those in poverty in Appalachia are intertwined with larger global forces. The full impact of neoliberal policy on peripheral, rural areas like Knox County has not fully been explored, nor has the place of communities like Stinking Creek and organizations like Lend-A-Hand been explored in the modern world system. The intersections of culture, globalization, and individual agency in creating poverty conditions is lacking in critical insights in the region. Further research on organizations like Lend-A-Hand,

their philosophical underpinnings, and more thorough and innovative conceptualizations of poverty in Appalachia will help nonprofit organizations and communities evaluate their work and future.



## **Chapter 4**

### **To Lend A Hand**

#### **1st Era: The Early Years: 1958-1964**

##### **Pre-Lend-A-Hand**

Born on May 26, 1930, in Norristown, Pennsylvania, Hannah Margaret (Peggy) Kemner grew up on a dairy farm with several siblings, including a sister with cerebral palsy. Kemner helped her mother with the garden and in the kitchen. She was raised in the Eastern Pennsylvania Church of the Nazarene and attended Eastern Nazarene College in Quincy, Massachusetts, graduating in 1952 with a biology degree. She then attended three years of nursing school at Johns Hopkins School of Nursing in Baltimore, Maryland. The year before she was set to graduate, Kemner heard Mary C. Breckenridge, founder of the Frontier Nursing Service (FNS), a nurse midwife training program and healthcare provider in eastern Kentucky, speak on campus and decided she wanted to become a nurse midwife. Kemner recalled of Breckenridge, “She told about her story about midwives and after that I was hooked on coming down and so I did all my reports and read all the things I could about the Frontier Nursing Service” (personal communication, January 14, 2012). Kemner’s ultimate goal was to become a doctor, but she was unable to afford the program costs, so she chose to enroll in the Frontier Nursing Service which allowed her an opportunity to work her way through school.

There are many accounts of Mary Breckenridge’s organization and the impact it has had on the region and women’s lives. Begun in 1925 as the Kentucky Committee for Mothers and Babies, the Frontier Nursing Service has had a rich history of improving access to healthcare in eastern Kentucky. The organization set up outpost nursing centers in rural

areas, founded a hospital in Hyden, the county seat of Leslie County, and formed a nursing school to train and provide experience to nurse midwives. FNS nurses became known for traveling on horseback, then later Jeeps with saddlebags full of supplies, delivering babies in Leslie and surrounding counties. Mary Breckenridge, who continued as director of the organization until her death in 1965, detailed her experience in her 1952 autobiography, *Wide Neighborhoods: A Story of the Frontier Nursing Service*. Several other accounts chronicle nurses' experiences in the area, the international attention garnered by FNS, and its impact on the community.

The organization's long evolving history and wide range of services left a legacy of healthcare professionals and improved health conditions in the mountains. From her earliest encounter with Mary Breckenridge, through her midwifery training, career as a nurse midwife, and work at the Lend-A-Hand Center, the work of the Frontier Nursing Service had a great impact on Kemner's life. For the next five decades she continued to be associated with the organization, going to reunions, participating in events, and networking with other nurses and healthcare professionals. For Kemner, FNS proved to be a resource and a connection to the wider association of healthcare providers in the mountains. Currently operating as the Frontier Nursing University, the school continues to train nurse midwives and preserve the history of the work of FNS.

Upon graduating from Johns Hopkins in 1955 with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing, and becoming an Registered Nurse, Kemner moved to the county seat of Hyden in Leslie County, Kentucky, in September to study midwifery at the Frontier Nursing Service. She had to work for six months at the little hospital in Hyden before she could begin classes in the midwifery school. She attended midwifery school for six months and then had to work for

the organization as a nurse for a year and a half at the outpost at Beech Fork in Leslie County to pay for her schooling. Upon finishing at FNS she was a certified Nurse Practitioner in midwifery.

Kemner worked at a Frontier Nursing Service outpost at Flat Creek in Clay County near the Flat Creek Mission, where Irma Gall was living with the nurse stationed there. FNS had a series of outposts emanating from Hyden which worked like satellite branches that provided services in remote communities. At this outpost, Kemner “carried on the work of the FNS” (P. Kemner, personal communication, November 30, 2012). She “did midwifery, gave immunizations, held a clinic once a week, took care of emergencies, and [provided] newborn baby care” (P. Kemner, personal communication, November 30, 2012). Kemner explained of the FNS outposts, “There were about six of them [in three counties] and a nurse midwife was placed out there. And she delivered the babies in the area and did well baby clinics, gave them their shots, and some of them rode horseback to get to their patients... They took care of patients like we do [at Lend-A-Hand], or did when we first came here. That’s where I sort of learned to go in the homes and do it” (personal communication, February 15, 2013).

While attending church at Flat Creek Church of the Brethren, Gall and Kemner crossed paths. Kemner later worked at an outpost at Stinnett at Beech Fork in Leslie County, where she and Gall both went to the Beech Fork Methodist Church, a part of Red Bird Mission. Red Bird Mission is a Methodist service organization begun in 1921 by the Woman’s Home and Foreign Missionary Society of the former United Evangelical Church. The Rev. John J. DeWall and his wife Nettie and missionary teachers started a mission school in Beverly, Kentucky, fulfilling the prayers of local women Aunt Carrie Knuckles and

Zelphia Roberts (Wood, 1996, p. 30-31). They began a campus with several buildings and worked in “education, healing, and evangelization” (Wood, 1996, p. 31). Red Bird has provided a hospital and school on its campus which has expanded into Clay County and Bell County. Focusing on providing healthcare, education, and Christian services, the organization has a rich history of programs “concerned with the well-being of the whole person” (Wood, 1996, p. 31). John Bischoff was the superintendent of Red Bird from 1946 to 1977 and worked closely with Gall and Kemner. The Red Bird School was a settlement school until 1988 when it became an independent Christian institution. The Red Bird Missionary Conference now oversees the work of the Mission.

Born on July 16, 1932, in a log cabin near Syracuse, Indiana, Irma Caemena Gall was raised on a multipurpose farm and brought up in the Church of the Brethren. At a young age, Gall developed a strong work ethic on the farm and a commitment to service. She attended Manchester College, a Church of the Brethren school where she was roommates with Jean Childs who later married civil rights leader Andrew Young. After her freshman year, Gall worked at a mental hospital in Durham, North Carolina, and later took a year off in 1952-53 as an exchange student and lived in Germany, working with an emergency team on flood relief and postwar rebuilding. Gall graduated in May 1955 with a degree in Peace Studies. Her father was a conscientious objector during World War II, and she was highly influenced by her family and religious background which promoted service and peace. Two of her siblings had served in the Brethren Volunteer Service, a service organization begun in 1948 by the Church of the Brethren to provide community service and alternative service opportunities to people. She had also worked on developing the program in high school, working with Dan West and other youth.

Wanting to serve, volunteer, help people, and strongly motivated by the service-driven doctrine of the Church of the Brethren, Gall looked into going to Africa to work with Albert Schweitzer or to India to work with Sister (later Mother) Teresa. After those plans fell through, she wanted to go to Lybrook, New Mexico, to work with Native Americans, but instead went to Kentucky where her sister had served at a Church of the Brethren mission in Clay County in 1952 as a part of the Brethren Volunteer Service program. Gall (2008) recounted in her self-published book *Walk With Me*, “I thought of becoming a self-supporting missionary. I thought of living near a mission, finding a paying job in the community, and working at the mission” (p. 4). She imagined she would be in the area for a short term and teach a year or two in Kentucky becoming involved in the work of the mission, still hoping to get to New Mexico.

In September 1955, Gall arrived at the Flat Creek Mission in rural Clay County, Kentucky, which was operated by the Church of the Brethren, and is still in existence today. The campus had a church, a parsonage where the minister and his wife lived, a dorcas house which housed a food and clothing pantry, a barn, a playground, and a three-room cottage for BVS volunteers. Volunteers at the mission visited in the community, went into the schools, and hosted programs such as youth meetings and ladies sewing, cooking, and canning programs. The mission had four outpost Sunday schools in the surrounding area, as well as having church services at the mission. The volunteers lived and worked in the community and the mission operated like many of the other Christian uplift organizations in the region.

Gall attended church there and helped with work at the mission. She was hired to teach grades one through eight, about 22 children, in a local one-room school at Elisha’s Creek across the county line in Leslie County where she taught for two school terms, from

1955 to 1957. Gall first lodged at a Frontier Nursing Service outpost with an FNS nurse at Flat Creek just behind the Flat Creek Mission. It was there, in August of 1956, that a local man shot into her bedroom window, jealous because another man accompanied her to church. She then stayed with a local family in Clay County, and later moved to Leslie County and lived with an older couple on the Middle Fork of the Kentucky River. She taught one school term from 1957 to 1958 at Camp Creek school near Wendover, also in Leslie County. There, Gall attended church at Beech Fork with Kemner, a part of Red Bird Mission, and helped out at the Beech Fork United Methodist Mission.

Without a background in education, but seeming to have a natural gift for teaching, Gall taught her students about nature, socialization skills, and worthwhile living. She enjoyed riding a horse she had borrowed to and from school, eventually investing in one of her own. Her experiences as a teacher in rural one-room schools were featured in William Lynwood Montell's compilation *Tales From Kentucky One-Room School Teachers*. In total Gall, "taught in one-room schools for 10 years riding to and from schools as much as eight miles for seven years in five different remote schools" (I. Gall, personal communication, November 30, 2012).

Gall and Kemner met and became acquainted through an FNS nurse around December 1955 and got to know each other through attending church together at the Flat Creek Mission and later Beech Fork. They lived together at one time at the FNS outpost and naturally became friends, and found they had much in common being two women in their twenties from the North serving in eastern Kentucky. They soon decided that their shared interests in helping people could be put to work in a different way.

## **Formation**

In the spring of 1958, Kemner, having finished her schooling and work obligations at FNS, was facing a decision. She knew her calling was to deliver babies in the home, but only three states recognized her nurse midwifery certification, thereby limiting her options. While Kemner was still employed by FNS, Gall formed the idea to start their own organization where she could teach school and Kemner could deliver babies and provide health services. Gall recollected,

Why don't we set up our own center, community center, in which she could be a midwife and do home deliveries, I teach school and support us... Once we got that idea we went with that idea and there were all kinds of stumbling blocks in front of us. We didn't have any money number one—we had a horse—Peggy had a car—we had a dog, and we believed we could do it. (personal communication, January 14, 2012)

The mission of the Center would be to “lend a hand” (I. Gall, personal communication, January 15, 2012).

With many uncertainties and unanswered questions, the pair began to seek help from the network of service providers active in eastern Kentucky. After speaking with a midwife stationed in Knott County near Alice Lloyd College, the two were referred to Berea College to consult with Perley Ayer, executive director of the Council of the Southern Mountains (CSM), which was headquartered in Berea, Kentucky. In the spring of 1958 they visited Ayer to seek advice while they were still formulating their plans and trying to find a place to set up their program.

Berea College, located in southern Madison County, was founded by abolitionist John G. Fee in 1855 as a Christian school promoting interracial education. Berea College has a long history of educational and uplift work in Appalachian Kentucky. President William Goodell Frost sought to focus on the Appalachian region and wrote widely about the people and culture of eastern Kentucky in the early decades of the 20th century (Shapiro, 1978). The liberal arts school has focused on serving Appalachian Kentucky, targeting students from the area, promoting Appalachian culture, and leading uplift work in the region.

Begun in 1913 by John C. Campbell of the Russell Sage Foundation, the Council of the Southern Mountain Workers brought together “representatives from schools, missions, and community centers” (Alvic, 2006, p. 1552). This highly influential body organized uplift efforts in the mountains for decades. The organization “met yearly to share ideas, study common problems, and reinforce their objectives” (Alvic, 2006, p. 1552). David Whisnant (1980) wrote about the early history and philosophy of the organization in *Modernizing the Mountaineer*. In 1925 the Council opened an office at Berea College and began publishing *Mountain Life and Work*, a magazine that chronicled the work of the Council, its organizations, local events, and developments in the region (Glen, 1992, p. 229).

Perley F. Ayer became executive secretary in 1951. In 1954, the name of the organization was shortened to the Council of the Southern Mountains and in the 1960s the Council became very active in the War on Poverty with its Appalachian Volunteers and coordination efforts in the region. The Council worked through committees and “became the most well-known and influential voice in southern Appalachia. Ayer believed that the council should pursue a ‘partnership’ ideal, encouraging various interests to develop a reform strategy based upon a consensus of regional opinion” (Glen, 1992, p. 229). The Council



would present a “unified program to ameliorate Appalachia’s ills” (Glen, 1992, p. 229). Further, the philosophy of the organization was cooperative rather than confrontational and in many ways subscribed to the culture of poverty theory, though disagreements about philosophy led to schisms within the organization in the 1960s. These ideas of “partnership” and cooperation were influential on Gall, Kemner, and the work of Lend-A-Hand.

Gall described the Council as “a loose federation of all the missions and social workers in southeastern Kentucky with the offices in Berea” (personal communication, January 20, 2012) and recalled that the Lend-A-Hand Center later hosted Council of the Southern Mountains meetings. Gall also served as president of the organization in the mid-1970s. The Council went through many changes and was eventually dissolved in 1989. From the beginning, this consortium of uplift organizations was supportive to the work of Lend-A-Hand and was essential to its success.

There is a rich body of literature on the mission, settlement, and collegiate religious schools and Christian uplift organizations established in the Appalachian region (Shapiro, 1978). In eastern Kentucky in particular, there have been a number of these missions and uplift organizations working in the region including Hindman Settlement School, Henderson Settlement School, Pine Mountain Settlement School, Union College, Clear Creek Baptist Bible College, Alice Lloyd College, University of the Cumberlands, University of Pikeville, Kentucky Christian University, Annville Institute, Oneida Baptist Institute, David School, Appalachian Christian Academy, Saint Theresa School, Saint Cecilia School of Music and Art, Christian Appalachian Project, and Laurel Mission. These organizations have worked for decades providing services, education, uplift, and outreach to many communities in eastern Kentucky. Settlement schools “believed in the power of progressive education, organized

collective action, recreation, modern hygiene, and preventative medicine—all cloaked in activist liberal Christianity” (Alvic, 2006, p. 1552) and have been a major part of the history of the Appalachian region. Other schools and organizations similarly sought to meet needs and provide services to the people of eastern Kentucky and have had an impressive impact on individuals and communities.

Gall and Kemner built upon the rich tradition of female workers in the region working on social welfare, especially in regard to education and health. By joining the existing networks and becoming knowledgeable about issues in the region, they built upon the work of these “fotched-on women.” “Fotched-on” (past tense of fetch) was a colloquial term for women from out of state who served in communities in health, education, and other social services. In Appalachia, “women who received advanced education during the early twentieth century were primarily educated for teaching and nursing, and both local women and philanthropists and missionaries from outside the region (“fotched-on” women) served as leaders and educators” (DeYoung, 2006, p. 1520-21). Gall recalled that they were even called “fotched-on” by the community (personal communication, April 1, 2013).

The work of the Center would be greatly impacted by these early organizations Gall and Kemner worked with: the Frontier Nursing Service, Red Bird Mission, Flat Creek Mission, Brethren Volunteer Service, Beech Fork Mission, Berea College, and the Council of the Southern Mountains. They were able to draw on their existing connections with other organizations as they formed their own organization. Gall and Kemner consulted the CSM not only during the founding of the Center, but also joined the Council, integrating into a network of central Appalachian service organizations, going to meetings, sharing ideas, and making connections with other service providers in the region.

From the beginning, the Center was influenced by the dialogue within the Council and impacted by the rhetoric of the Council's director, Perley Ayer. The theology of the Council was centered on empowerment and individual uplift, focusing on the culture of the mountaineers, rather than structural change (Kiffmeyer, 2008, p. 67). Gall recalled the influence of the CSM on the Lend-A-Hand Center referencing one of "Ayer's Laws" (Ayer, 1969, p. 6), his rules to live by when working in communities, which were published in a volume of his speeches:

If there's something needed to be done and it didn't get done and you didn't do it, you were as much at fault as anybody else. You don't ever blame anybody else, you go do it. [When] we came here there were no social workers, there were no halfway homes, there were no—there was nothing. (personal communication, January 15, 2012)

This sentiment was carried on as the Center met the needs of the people emphasizing cooperation and mutual responsibility, and stressing the idea of individual responsibility in helping others. The Center focused on individuals as the object of assistance, rather than unjust structures within society at large, much like the CSM.

The superintendent of missions at Red Bird Mission, John Bishoff, was also visiting Berea for a meeting in the spring of 1958 and shared that the Red Bird Hospital across the county line in Bell County would be moving, making it harder for the people of the Stinking Creek area of Knox County to get to the hospital. Gall was already familiar with the Red Bird staff and their work in the area and Bishoff and Dr. Everitt Schaeffer, the doctor at Red Bird, suggested the women locate on Stinking Creek. Kemner recalled, "He was very interested in getting us to come and so one Sunday afternoon Dr. Schaeffer brought us over the hill to show us the area" (personal communication, January 14, 2012). With the help of

Ayer, Bischoff, and Schaeffer, the women decided that they would start their own organization delivering babies and teaching school in Knox County.

The pair then needed to find a school to hire Gall and a doctor to support Kemner's nurse midwifery. Dr. Schaeffer agreed to supervise Kemner's health services and after some difficulty, because she was seen as an outsider to the county, Gall was hired by Knox County superintendent Jesse D. Lay to teach at Alex Creek for the 1958-59 school year, a remote one-room school near the head of a hollow up Stinking Creek near the Bell County line.

During the summer of 1958, Gall and Kemner painted barns in Indiana to make money to start their center. They returned to Kentucky and stayed at a Red Bird Mission outpost at Stoney Fork in Bell County for about a week, and set out to find a house within riding distance of the Alex Creek school.

In August 1958, the two women began their search, running into some difficulty as there seemed to be little enthusiasm from the locals about them coming into the area. Kemner recalled, "We'd see an empty house and go visit it and they wouldn't rent to us because we're outsiders" (personal communication, January 14, 2012). The couple continued to search up and down the Creek for a place for their program.

The women finally found a place to set up their dream, a dilapidated old farmhouse halfway up Stinking Creek. With flood damage, windows missing, swelled doors, the roof partially gone, and sand on the floor, the pair decided that although the 6-room, 2-story house could use some work, it would fit their needs. The house had no bathroom or running water. They discovered that the place belonged to Ed Kinningham and had been rented, then deserted after the 1957 flood. Flooding had always been an issue in Knox and surrounding counties due to the terrain of the mountain hollows and intensified by timber and mining

operations. Kinningham thought the house was not fit to live in, but agreed to let the women stay in the old Kinningham house and use the outbuildings and grounds rent free for fixing it up. It was an eight mile ride to Alex Creek from the house on Patterson Branch.

Within two weeks of moving into the house, Gall started teaching school up Alex Creek and, within two months, Kemner delivered her first baby on the Creek and the Lend-A-Hand Center was begun.

### **Beginning Philosophy**

After having been in Kentucky for a few years and working with other service organizations, Gall and Kemner were keenly aware of current uplift work in the area when they decided they wanted to live and work in the community, delivering babies, teaching school, and lending a hand. They were able to draw on their existing connections as they started their own organization. Gall recalled,

We had some ideas that we wanted to be a community center and not a mission—that we didn’t want to be a mission under some church. That we would be a community center—that we would be patterned somewhat after Red Bird and Frontier Nursing Service and all, and kind of put it all together. (personal communication, January 14, 2012)

Gall noted of the early years, “One of the things that Peggy and I did was go to all these different missions. That’s where we learned a lot of things” (personal communication, April 1, 2013). The women visited places including Pine Mountain Settlement School, Hindman, and the David School where they would “swap ideas” (I. Gall, personal communication, April 1, 2013).

The women wanted to start a Christian service organization, but felt that missions under certain denominations did not go over well in the communities. Kemner related, “We try to be very nondenominational and try to say it doesn’t matter what church you belong to, it’s what in your heart and if you believe what’s in the Bible” (personal communication, September 4, 2008). Gall noted, “One of the problems was Peggy...was brought up in one church, I was brought up in another church and here we were in a community that didn’t recognize either one” (personal communication, January 14, 2012). The nondenominational approach they chose to take tried to smooth doctrinal differences and facilitated their integration into the community.

The mission and work of the Center was highly influenced by religion. Gall (2008) related in her book, “The whole purpose of Lend-a-Hand was to be living examples of God’s love to us and to share with others how full and rich that can make our lives” (p. 91). Gall related that rather than starting a church, “we would just teach the Bible” (personal communication, April 3, 2011). Although Christianity has been central to all their work, the women never considered themselves missionaries, working to save souls, pushing their personal doctrine on others, or operating under specific denominational church support or guidance. They did not want to start their own church nor join the prominent denominations in the area, Baptist or Pentecostal, though they soon started holding Sunday school services for children and became involved in local churches.

Gall and Kemner also saw that paid missionaries under a church were frowned upon by communities and decided they wanted to be self-supporting while helping others. Kemner recalled, “We just wanted to live our life and make our own way” (personal communication, January 14, 2012). Gall added, “Just wanted to live our own lives quietly, but in a Christian

manner. It was very important to us and we agreed on that” (personal communication, January 14, 2012). Though Christian values were a major part of the dream of the organization, Gall and Kemner were careful to not be overzealous. Gall (2008) explained in her book,

Neither Peggy nor I have been ones to talk a lot about religious things. We are not ‘Praise the Lord’ types. But I think most people who are around us realize our religious beliefs are an active part of our lives. We might not be good evangelists, but LAH’s [Lend-A-Hand’s] mission is clearly based on Christianity. We hope we are evangelistic in our care for people, animals, and love for the land and its resources. We want to be an example of compassion and service – to put God’s love for us into our everyday living. (p. 102-103)

This somewhat understated, subtle, and independent approach set them apart from other service organizations in the region who were more motivated by doctrine and certain organizational goals. Gall and Kemner also decided that the organization would not give handouts. The women believed strongly in hard work and stressed empowerment. Gall recalled about providing services to people, “They’d either have to work it off, exchange something for it, or pay us” (personal communication, January 15, 2012). This ideology was very much in line with that of the Council of the Southern Mountains.

With a broadly defined mission to “lend a hand,” Gall and Kemner were driven in their work to deliver babies, teach school, and help others on the Creek. Gall remarked, “If we have a talent, a skill or the wherewithal then we lend a hand” (personal communication, January 15, 2012). Their philosophy became, “If we saw a problem, we just did it” (I. Gall,

personal communication, April 3, 2011). This open-ended mission enabled the women to be flexible and adapt to the changing needs of the community through the decades.

### **Poverty and Culture**

This broad mission did not set limitations on the pair, putting them in a box of being an antipoverty organization, community development association, or strictly a service provider. Their mission was not to eradicate poverty in their area or to promote structural change in the county. Instead the Center tried to work for and integrate into the community. The work of the Center may easily be seen through the lens of the culture of poverty model, as its founders were impacted by contemporary theories about poverty and service provision in Appalachia.

Gall and Kemner did not try to change the community through Lend-A-Hand, unlike their involvement with the KCEOC during the War on Poverty. The Center did not set out to be a community center with active participation from the community in planning and implementing programs, instead becoming a place where Gall and Kemner could lead by example, be available to help those in need, and adjust to changing needs of the area. Gall related, “Our goal was not to change the community” (personal communication, November 26, 2012), yet the women’s focus on the individual did indeed change the community and people’s cultural traits and norms. As Gall put it,

We didn’t come here to revolutionize Stinking Creek. We came here to deliver babies and teach school and live on a little farm and we never have had programs to help the community, although all of our programs were that way. (personal communication, April 3, 2011)



The women did not set out to address poverty, but in implementing their programs, getting to know the community, and working in an impoverished area, they confronted headfirst the realities of life in poverty. Gall and Kemner had to form a philosophy and strategy to deal with conditions of poverty in their community. Though the work of the Center did not intend to deal with poverty directly or to even have poverty as one of its main issues, through its programs and mission to “lend a hand,” it did address the social problems that come with adverse poverty conditions in the Stinking Creek watershed: poor health, poor sanitation, inadequate housing, lack of food, declining agricultural output, addiction, abuse, neglect, poor educational attainment, and a sense of hopelessness. By providing services, teaching, and promoting individual empowerment, Gall and Kemner addressed needs and helped people within their own conceptual framework. Much of their philosophy, which focused on individual uplift, and many of their programs which met needs in the community can be understood through the culture of poverty theory, as Vance in the introduction to *Yesterday's People* explained, “To change the mountains is to change the mountain personality” (Weller, 1965, p. xiii).

Gall and Kemner’s understanding of poverty aligned closely with conceptualizations that saw poverty being related to cultural attributes in some ways. Gall has characterized the people on the Creek as decision averse, with ambivalent attitudes who often give very little commitment. In what she calls her “well theory,” Gall believes people on the Creek say “well” and do not give a straight yes or no answer to questions. She related, “That was one of the characteristics of the community that promoted poverty,” (I. Gall, personal communication, April 9, 2013) along with teenage pregnancies.

Kemner attributed poverty in the area to not having enough money in the area, and noted that jobs were limited to cutting or hauling timber or subsistence farming (P. Kemner, personal communication, February 15, 2013). Kemner recalled,

There were a few big farms on the creek that would make some money but usually there wasn't much to do as far as, as an income. Now some people went away and worked in the coal mines at times but that's not a big paying job either. (personal communication, February 15, 2013)

She also related that she believes there is a lack of opportunity and inadequate education in the area with schools letting kids "slide by" (P. Kemner, personal communication, February 15, 2013). In her opinion,

The people who have any get up and go, they get up and go on, and are left here the ones who don't care and just live like their parents did. Just are willing to subsist on welfare or whatnot and don't care because that's the way they've always done it I guess. (P. Kemner, personal communication, September 4, 2008)

By citing education and cyclical, individual, or familial aspects of poverty rather than systemic inequality the women narrowed their focus and programs in the community.

In some ways, Gall and Kemner critiqued the way of life of the people on the Creek, not necessarily in a negative way, but a way that could be improved upon. Gall commented on their work with individuals in the community,

We didn't try to push even a religion. We didn't try to push education. We just gave them opportunities. I think that would probably be the whole key word, right there.

We gave them new opportunities for health programs, education programs, religious programs, farming programs. I think that would be the real key. We gave them

opportunities to do it and if you decided to do it ok, if you didn't, I accept that also. In fact, I learned very quickly that God didn't hold me responsible for you choosing a better way. God just holds me responsible that if I think there is a better way, to make an opportunity available and then let you do your own choosing, and accept your choice. That's very hard to do because we always want to make people over.

(personal communication, April 3, 2011)

These sentiments clearly reflected individual-based understandings of poverty and ways to combat poverty based on the culture of poverty model, namely through changing the individual through education and presenting opportunities and choices, which was a common theme within the Council of the Southern Mountains at the time. Prevailing ways of thinking about and addressing poverty influenced the organization's own philosophy and programs, as did the religious background of the directors. Throughout its history the Center has been cognizant of the realities of poverty and addressed many of the symptoms of poverty, but never directly confronted any structural issues contributing to poverty in the area, though the directors were keenly aware of the political, social, and economic inequalities in the community and region.

### **“Sparkle in the Eye”**

Gall's underlying philosophy has stressed personal empowerment, individual level uplift, and presenting choices to people. The women challenged residents they worked with and the culture of the area by trying to change people's attitudes, providing alternatives and possibilities for different ways of life, which aligns directly with addressing individual causes of poverty and the culture of poverty theory. Gall calls this having a “sparkle in your eye.” She explained,

My favorite saying is that we would teach, there is—can be a sparkle in your eye. Your eye can sparkle. If you have the kind of knowledge that your life is secure and is built on solid rock, then life is worthwhile and your eyes are going to sparkle and you're going to find joy in living even though you might not have much. So that's what we wanted to teach—that life could be full and rich, even if you didn't have money and even if it seemed like the world was falling down all over you. (I. Gall, personal communication, April 3, 2011)

She wanted to impress on people,

That they can do something—I can really solve this problem, and then they solve, learn how to solve that problem. It might not be at all like you would like to see it solved but they get the feeling, yes, I can do something about it. (I. Gall, personal communication, January 28, 2012)

Gall further related, “We wanted to teach people to use the Bible as a guide and find that it can make a sparkle in the eye. If your eyes shine you can find solutions to many challenges” (personal communication, November 30, 2012).

This “sparkle in the eye” can be seen as empowerment for the individual and the community, or as Gall labeled, “self-esteem” and “intrigue” and the sense that a person is a child of God and is walking close to God with a place to be and a purpose (personal communication, November 26, 2012). Fetterman (1967) quoted Gall remarking, ““The best thing for this part of the country would be something to give people a sense of dignity and a meaning to life”” including a job, pride in the home, and ““a real reason to live...security in what they are living for...a rediscovery of why they are living”” (qtd. in Fetterman, 1967, p. 174).

The Lend-A-Hand programs and philosophy went beyond just the culture of poverty ideals to include personal relationships, individual partnerships, and a personal level of empowerment. Gall (2008) realized,

We do find ourselves still seeking out those who could easily be overlooked and left out. We still feel the need to help them find the self esteem and love of God that can put a sparkle in their eye and life, that can help in all avenues of life. (p. 118)

The women did not fully blame the culture of the area, but did try to impress on the people a different value system and stressed many modern ways of life and ways of thinking. This idea of a “sparkle” is in a way paternalistic, with the women imposing their own values and personal opinions on the people of Stinking Creek, while living as examples and working within the community. Further, this idea of a “sparkle in the eye” dovetailed with the ideology of the War on Poverty of helping people help themselves. Personal empowerment was a major aspect of Gall and Kemner’s later work with the KCEOC as well as their mission to lend a hand while living out their lives on Stinking Creek.

The idea of individual empowerment and taking a stake in people has been central to the work of the Center, yet its philosophy invites multiple layers of analysis going beyond the traditional culture of poverty model to include issues such as social capital, culture, traditional versus modern lifestyles, community responsibility, and interpersonal relationships. The complex history and different philosophical underpinnings of the organization complicates a hard-and-fast assessment of the Center’s philosophy over the years.

Regardless of the underlying motivations and philosophical foundations surrounding the founding of the Center, Gall and Kemner were certain in their mission to lend a hand.

The nurses came up with the name of their organization from a phrase in a pamphlet that asked, “Would you lend a hand?” They set out to live their lives and run their programs by this calling. Gall (2008) reflected in her book,

Yes, Lend-a-Hand started out with two goals – home deliveries (midwifery) and teaching. Of course, we knew there would be home skills needed for living, but we did not know what challenges really lay ahead. Little did we realize that our dream would encompass such a wide range of services and activities. (p. 115)

### **The Early Years: 1958-1964**

In August 1958, Gall and Kemner, two women from the North in their mid-20s, set out to make their dream become a reality. They started renting the old Kinningham house, began teaching school and delivering babies, established a clinic, and began farming. They soon found themselves constructing buildings, assisting with veterinarian work in the community, and hosting youth and religious programs. With help from their family and neighbors, their work and services expanded, meeting the needs of the community as they became apparent. People began to stay at the Center as a place of help and refuge. Volunteers came to help fulfill the organization’s mission as the Center built relationships with other service organizations working in the region. They joined the Council of the Southern Mountains and went to meetings, sharing ideas and making connections.

Gall worked as a school teacher throughout the early years of Lend-A-Hand. She continued to provide an income as a one-room school teacher at Alex Creek for the 1959-60 school year. She then taught at Broughton for three school terms from 1960-63, then Shady for a term from 1963-64, and then Alex Creek again for the fall of 1964, all in the Stinking

Creek watershed, while at the same time helping Kemner deliver babies and provide health services in the area.

Many of the programs, services, and situations the women found themselves in were unexpected. They showed incredible flexibility as the scope of the organization broadened, meeting a variety of needs within a few years of arriving on the Creek. The pair was interested in health and education for all ages. They began to work with individuals and families along Stinking Creek while settling down into life in the area and integrating into the community. Gall and Kemner began building relationships, trust, and social capital by meeting needs and being open to providing help during difficult situations.

### **Barriers**

Gall and Kemner faced a variety of physical and cultural barriers when they first arrived on the Creek including perceptions of them as outsiders, religious differences, and rigid perceptions regarding proper roles for women. In what Gall referred to as a “closed community,” the women had to work to become integrated and taken seriously, building social capital, and getting to know local residents. They had several obstacles to overcome such as dealing with the rough terrain, relative isolation, and cultural differences in order to build relationships in the community and persist in their mission to help others.

The condition of roads on the Creek was an early physical barrier for the work of Gall and Kemner. Living in a world before there were phones in every house and well-paved roads, the women learned to adapt to the terrain. Kemner noted of coming into the area, “I was not prepared for the poverty or the winding mountain roads” (personal communication, August 13, 2008). In her book, *I Am with You Always: Experiences of A Nurse-Midwife in Appalachia*, Kemner (2000) recounted, “Not being used to mountains, streams and foot

bridges presented difficulties” (p. 16) and recalled walking on a wire fence during a flood to get back from a patient. Many of Kemner’s (2000) stories detailed the difficult traveling conditions. She noted,

Over the thirty-five years we have been at Lend-A-Hand, we have seen a gradual improvement in road conditions. At first the only blacktop road came within 1-and 2-tenths of a mile of our Center. All other roads were gravel or dirt paths. Main roads were fairly good gravel, but the hollows, the narrow part of the valley that winds around and between the mountains, were not so good—and this is putting it mildly! In the winter and the spring the roads often became rutty and impassable. We drove a Jeep or a four-wheel-drive vehicle. Log trucks would rut the roads so badly that I would have to drive with one wheel on the middle hump and the other in the rut to keep from getting stuck. My clearance was not as high as a log truck. (Kemner, 2000, p. 27)

For many years, the women had to drive their car to the Walker post office, closer to the main road, then take a four-wheel drive vehicle the rest of the way to the house. They traveled widely within the watershed and throughout the county and always had four-wheel drive vehicles. Gall rode to school on a horse, winding through creeks and up ridges, often with more success than vehicles. The Alex Creek school was hardly accessible without four-wheel drive and the children walked to school. The pair became very good at getting vehicles unstuck, helping repair roads, and helping others who were stranded either because of flooding, car problems, or bad roads.

The relative isolation and lack of modern communication amenities in the Stinking Creek watershed were not seen as problems to Gall and Kemner. When they would be called



to deliver a baby or visit someone in the community they would leave a note on the door to tell the other where they were going, and to come if they could. Forty minutes from the nearest town, the Lend-A-Hand Center and the Stinking Creek watershed were relatively more isolated than other areas of the county. In the days before the interstate system and the improvement of State Highway 25E, many areas in central Appalachia such as Knox County and especially the heads of the hollows up Stinking Creek at the edge of the county were relatively isolated. Yet, Stinking Creek had its own small communities including Messer, Dewitt, Mills, Scalf, Hammond, and Walker. It had stores, schools, and post offices and a sense of community, but areas were often difficult to get to, especially in bad weather. In the 1950s and 1960s the county was very rural and Gall and Kemner knew the challenges they would face in providing health and other services in the area.

In order to get acquainted with the community, the women quickly became friends with their elderly neighbors, Charlie and Lucy Kinningham, who helped with their transition into the watershed. Gall (2008) recounted, “They took us in and eased us over some of the rough spots we outsiders created in the Stinking Creek life” (p. 81). Gall recalled,

It certainly was God’s leading that gave us Charlie and Lucy Kinningham as our nearest neighbors. They had worked and lived at Red Bird Mission for several years so they were open for foreigners. Stinking Creek people as a whole were quite suspicious of foreigners working in a closed community. (personal communication, November 30, 2012)

Early on, Gall and Kemner found that they were seen as “foreigners”: “A ‘foreigner’ on Stinking Creek was anybody who wasn’t born and raised on the Creek, especially those from ‘foreign’ lands like Ohio and Indiana” (Gall, 2008, p.22). Gall had difficulty finding a

place to teach because she was unknown in the local community. She believed they were at first viewed with suspicion because many people were engaging in illegal activities such as making moonshine. Kemner recalled,

We were outsiders and like when we went up to see this one house, it was a three-room house and the lady said I wouldn't rent to you if you were the last person on earth. And that's what we were considered—outsiders. (personal communication, February 15, 2013)

The experiences of Gall and Kemner exemplify the insider-outsider dichotomy so prevalent in the history of the Appalachian region. Many works have examined the culture of mountain communities and have explored reasons for reservations about outsiders. Cultural attributes and norms in certain areas contributed to views of outsiders. Gall remembered that this insider-outsider situation impacted her experience in the classroom. She recalled of her students,

They also got the feeling that teacher can do anything and everything. Just had that feeling of awe about them that the teacher can do anything. You can do it because, well I guess because you're not from here. Well oh, that's not true. You can do it too. And that was one of the things I tried to teaching to the kids. You remember the '60s was a great out migration. That's when people were going to Michigan and Ohio, and one of my objects in teaching was, you can be a good person, fit into any society anywhere, on Stinking Creek, way up this hollow, down in Barbourville, in Ohio, or Michigan. That's the kind of attitude you have to have, that wherever you go, there's good life waiting for you and you have to have your eyes open and see it and fit into it, but it's there. (I. Gall, personal communication, April 3, 2011)

With her students, Gall continued this idea of empowerment and possibility, trying to change her students' perceptions of local people, their community, and other places. From the perspective of a "foreigner," she provided a wider outlook than what the kids were used to being exposed to.

The community's wariness of Gall and Kemner as outsiders was short lived: "At first, about everything that we did that was different was because we were foreigners and they threw that up at us many times. Within 10 years though, they were saying, 'Now what creek were you born on?'" (I. Gall, personal communication, April 3, 2011). The pair soon adjusted to life on the Creek as their ability to provide services, meet needs, and be available at any time to serve broke through many barriers. Gall explained, "If people had a need like in nursing, home deliveries, transportation, farming, tractor work, and you can help them find answers for their needs, friendships and trust comes more quickly than just talk" (personal communication, November, 30, 2012).

The women worked on building social capital when they came into the area. They found that Bryce Walker, the postmaster at Walker, was the local grapevine. They used the Walker post office to spread the word about their services. Gall made friends in each of the communities on the Creek she taught in, creating a network of families that knew and trusted her. The women often visited local stores, built relationships with patients, and got to know the families of Gall's schoolchildren. Gall made connections with people as she rode her horse to teach school and the women formed local alliances with respected people in the community like Charlie and Lucy Kinningham as well as other neighbors, businesspeople, and local officials.

Many writers have emphasized the importance of social capital in working in Appalachian communities. Susan Keefe (2009) and Helen Lewis (2009) described how social capital is integral to participatory research and community development. Keefe (2009) noted, “Regular interaction over a long period of time is required of individuals in order to prove their loyalty and to become integrated into the community” (p. 23). Many of the tactics employed by the Lend-A-Hand Center exemplify Keefe’s (2009) and Lewis’ (2009) ideas about working in communities. The women cultivated both bonding and bridging capital, building relationships with county government officials, leaders of regional organizations, families whose babies they delivered, and farmers whose corn they helped plant. Through the years the women became involved with different organizations such as the Stinking Creek Teacher’s Association, the Dewitt Parent Teacher’s Association, the local agricultural extension office, the health department, and Union College. Within a decade or so they became well known on the Creek and benefitted from a network of local, state, and regional alliances.

Cultural differences in the community were usually overcome with a little understanding and compromise. Kemner remembered having some trouble with the dialect in the area. She recalled misunderstanding the meaning of the phrase “I don’t care to” and remembered how people said “nary a one” (P. Kemner, personal communication, August 13, 2008). She also did not know what a “gaum” was and remembered that people said, “My head ’ris” when they were suffering from an earache (P. Kemner, personal communication, August 13, 2008). Gall noted of the local dialect,

It always has been kind of interesting because neither Peggy nor I ever took up the brogue, the accent. I was a teacher so I wanted a much more pure English—you know

who's got a pure English, I don't know—I remember one time in school I was giving out spelling words and I said, 'Wahr,' and the kids sat there. I said, 'Wire.' 'Oh yes whar,' they said. (personal communication, April 3, 2011)

The women soon adapted to these differences in dialect, as well as other colloquialisms, local traditions, and idiosyncrasies. Some ways of life were different than what the women were used to. Kemner remembered a few myths surrounding childbirth that she learned about upon coming to the area. Gall and Kemner were careful not to belittle local culture and participated in local events, festivals, and music shows. Both liked bluegrass music and used common interests to integrate into the local culture.

When the two first arrived on the Creek they started going to Sunday School with Charlie and Lucy Kinningham at Walker Baptist Church which met at the Carnes School just a mile away. Gall was soon leading singing and teaching classes, but could no longer do so when she and Kemner would not join the church and when the congregation found out they were not Baptists. Coming from Church of the Brethren and Church of the Nazarene backgrounds, Gall and Kemner had to adjust to the religious traditions prevalent in the area and be culturally sensitive to religious differences. Though they were from different denominations, religion proved to be a common ground with people in the area who often held strong fundamentalist beliefs. The women's emphasis on Christian living and service opened doors for them in the community in getting to know people and providing services.

### **Health Services**

Providing health services was the cornerstone of the Lend-A-Hand Center during its early years. Nurse midwifery, a clinic, a Planned Parenthood program, health services in the home, emergency services, and working in the local schools addressed a range of health

issues on the Creek and delivered much needed care for a relatively isolated and underserved area.

Kemner began delivering babies up and down the Creek and providing pre- and post-natal care for mothers, drawing from her training and experience at the Frontier Nursing Service. Because there was no Medicaid at the time, many people who did not have enough money to go to the hospital stayed home to have their babies. Kemner recalled, “People had their babies at home because unless you had money, you couldn’t go to the hospital. Even though hospital rates were nothing, compared to what they are now” (personal communication, August 13, 2008). A hospital visit could cost \$300 to \$500, which was nearly impossible for many families struggling financially in the watershed. Furthermore, the nearest hospital was over an hour away in Pineville.

There were four granny midwives with little or no training working in the area when Kemner arrived. Kemner (2000) wrote of the granny midwives, “They made their patients push from the time they went into labor... These ‘granny midwives’ were untrained and learned what they knew from another midwife. Their methods were heartfelt but crude” (p. 7). Gall (2008) recalled, “There were several ‘grannies’ on the Creek but most of them were getting old. Pre-natal and post-natal care were not familiar words but were soon noted, accepted, and appreciated. We soon were busy in the farm cabins, coal and lumber camps” (p. 63). Kemner recalled of the mothers on Stinking Creek, “It took them a little while to remember that they had to come for prenatal care because they weren’t used to coming. They weren’t used to prenatal care” (personal communication, February 15, 2013). The granny midwives just said they were “specting” on the babies and did not provide any services beyond the delivery (P. Kemner, personal communication, February 15, 2013).

Kemner provided a range of prenatal care although not all mothers came for prenatal visits and on occasion she was called on to deliver babies without having cared for the mother. She shared her adventures delivering babies in her book, *I Am with You Always* (2000), recounting specific births and hardships during her time on Stinking Creek, and her trouble with her first delivery in the area. Kemner recounted difficult deliveries, delivering twins, premature babies, lost babies, birth defects, unwed teenage mothers, babies that were born before her arrival, and mothers that had to be taken to the hospital for delivery. She described living conditions and poverty in the homes she visited, describing shacks and one-room houses with outdoor toilets, no indoor plumbing, unclean conditions, few clothes or possessions, smoke filled rooms, and multiple children running around the house. She described one house: “A table, three chairs, a picture of the Beatles and two winter coats were hanging on the wall...this made up the furniture and décor of the home...Parents and three boys were in one small room, 12 by 16 feet” (Kemner, 2000, p.18).

Kemner (2000) detailed treacherous trips, visiting people with Gall and student nurses, spending the night at patients’ houses waiting for babies, taking a baby home to care for it while the mother was in the hospital, parents being unprepared with no baby clothes, issues with mental illness in the community, and people living on welfare. She also began to expand her midwifery services beyond Stinking Creek, branching out and delivering for mothers in surrounding counties.

During visits, Kemner remembered, “I had a hemoglobinometer so I checked their hemoglobin and gave them iron pills and vitamins which they paid a little bit for....Then I examined them, of course, and listened to their heart” (personal communication, February 15, 2013). Kemner delivered three or four babies a month during their early years on the Creek,

charging \$25 to deliver a baby to cover costs, soon finding that people often wanted to pay by other means such as commodity food, livestock, or labor. Kemner remembered, “I started out with \$25 when I first came here because, see that was before Medicaid came in... so they didn’t have much money and some people paid us—the first two goats we got—somebody paid us in goats” (personal communication, February 15, 2013). *I Am With You Always* detailed other examples of not getting paid or being paid in goods or labor.

Many scholars of Appalachia have written about the persistence of alternative economies in the region. The experience of Gall and Kemner evidence these traditional lifestyles and economic systems, as well as kinship networks at work in the area. Paul Salstrom (1994) analyzed the persistence of barter economies in *Appalachia’s Path to Dependency: Rethinking a Region’s Economic History 1730-1940*. Rhoda Halperin (1990) wrote of multiple livelihood strategies in *The Livelihood of Kin: Making Ends Meet “The Kentucky Way.”* Through Gall and Kemner’s experience on the Creek, they have witnessed and participated in the persistence of alternative economies including subsistence, barter, and borrow economies in healthcare, farming, and other services. They also dealt with the consequences of underground economies and the prevalence of illegal activities as economic drivers on the Creek. Gall observed prostitution and moonshining as economic opportunities in the area, giving people an avenue to make money, but also causing a lot of problems in the family including domestic violence. She recalled,

The first three years I taught school, more than half the families were involved in making moonshine and they had regular routes. When I was over there in Leslie County, they had routes to Lexington, Richmond, and Lexington....It was the men



that drank and beat up their families, regularly. (I. Gall, personal communication, April 3, 2011)

From early on, people were also selling prescription drugs and marijuana in the area to supplement incomes. The women saw the negative effects of illegal economies, though never became directly involved in combating drug abuse or prostitution. They dealt with the consequences, working with other social problems including health issues, poverty, and dysfunctional families and children.

The news of Kemner's work in the area spread through word of mouth and she began holding clinic hours in a room in the old farmhouse on Tuesdays before noon and Thursday evenings. Patients registered at the clinic and came for maternity care and other healthcare. She charged around \$1 for a trip to the clinic, plus medicine, much of which was provided by the doctor at Red Bird Mission. Kemner recalled, "I had a group of standing orders—certain things I could do" (personal communication, February 15, 2013). Kemner gave medicine, examinations, baby checkups, and referred patients. Once a month starting in the early 1960s, the health department also came to the Center and did a multiphasic clinic which involved blood pressure checks, pap smears, blood checks, and other tests. These clinics met the needs of people who would not normally go to the health department.

One of the focal points of the health work of Kemner and the Center was addressing reproductive issues, specifically pregnancies, through healthcare and education. At the clinic and with women in the community, Gall and Kemner advocated family planning. From the beginning, preventing pregnancies was one of Kemner's goals. She partnered with the Mountain Maternal Health League, an organization that promoted birth control and women's reproductive health, headquartered at Berea College. Gall and Kemner were put in touch with

Dr. Louise Hutchins, the college president's wife, who headed the program, through Loyal Jones, Perley Ayer's assistant at the Council of the Southern Mountains. Kemner recalled that if mothers in the community "wanted birth control I worked with the Mountain Maternal Health League in Berea and they gave me supplies and birth control pills and we did some IUDs for a while. So we did try to prevent more pregnancies" (personal communication, February 15, 2013).

Gall and Kemner worked through the Planned Parenthood program and focused on educating girls and young women about reproductive health. They advocated a variety of methods for birth control including vaginal foam, sponges, pills, IUDs, adoption, even sterilization and abortions. Kemner recalled, "We didn't have very many people that asked for abortions or anything. It was something that was not discussed, usually, unless somebody asked me and then...I'd tell them where they could get one" (personal communication, February 15, 2013). Gall remembered working with Planned Parenthood "to try to educate people that they didn't have to have baby after baby after baby" (personal communication, April 3, 2011).

The women saw the relationship between pregnancy and poverty in an area where many women had as many as a dozen pregnancies. Kemner (2000) noted, "Large families of nine, ten, and even twelve children were not uncommon when I first came to Kentucky" (p. 102). Gall (2008) recounted, "Another health problem, as we saw it, was the number of pregnancies women had. The old saying 'keep them barefoot and pregnant' was a real situation that seemed to keep so many women in bondage" (p. 65). Gall (2008) related, "It was easier to understand why young teenage girls quit [school] so early, but that didn't help them buck the cycle of poverty. Early pregnancies seemed to be one of the roots of poverty"

(p. 38). She continued, “It was under Peggy’s leadership that health, self-esteem and poverty were tied together; so, she tackled all three problems (Gall, 2008, p. 57). Kemner (2000) observed, “Marrying young has been typical of many girls in the mountains. They look for a better life, thinking marriage will give it to them, only to find themselves trapped in the same kind of life they tried to get away from” (p. 42).

This kind of sentiment and explanation of the Center’s programs evidence the prevalence of the idea that poverty is cyclical and tied to culture and that preventing pregnancy was an individual means of addressing poverty. By viewing teen and multiple pregnancies as an individual problem instead of focusing on societal causes, reasons why people would have so many children such as lack of education, jobs, sexism, and other structural factors, shows the culture of poverty approach advocated by Gall and Kemner. Though they attempted educating and empowering women, their service delivery approach did not do as much as a community-based social movement might have done to address these same types of issues.

Family planning issues got at cultural norms and gender dynamics in the community. Kemner (2000) noted, “Men did not want to be around when women had their babies” (p. 43). The attitudes in the community toward birth control were mixed. According to Kemner,

Some of [the women] were very glad for it...Some of them it was just the opposite. I couldn’t talk about it when their husbands were in the room because, you know, here, in the mountains, however many children you have, that’s how big a man you are.

(personal communication, February 15, 2013)

Kemner (2000) recalled of one woman in the community, “I talked to her about birth control, but she was not receptive. She said, ‘A woman is to have as many children as God gives

her”” (p. 74). Kemner (2000) then explained that the same women later got an IUD after a difficult birth (p. 74).

Large families were common on the Creek and Gall and Kemner believed it was part of the culture to have many children. Gall admitted the Planned Parenthood program was not extremely successful in the beginning, but it eventually caught on as women had fewer children over the years. The pair battled these kinds of reservations and cultural barriers in a variety of ways. Sometimes, rather than being forthright, Gall and Kemner would talk to each other about family planning in front of women in the community, piquing interest and leading to questions and health services.

Kemner also went out into the community to help those with health problems. She visited patients in their homes and she and Gall were often called for emergencies. Kemner recalled, “When I found out somebody was sick, I would come take care of them” (personal communication, February 15, 2013). When people in the community discovered she was a nurse, they would call on her. She made house calls, giving shots for the flu or infections, or delivering other needed healthcare. The Lend-A-Hand Center provided a precursor to home health services to the people of Stinking Creek. The women also began taking people with health problems to the doctor and to hospitals and specialists as far away as Lexington and Louisville.

In the local schools, Kemner provided shots, vitamins, worm medication, and health education for children. Starting shortly after arriving, around 1959, Kemner visited the one nurse at the Knox County health department and offered to “do the schools for her on Stinking Creek and give them their shots” (P. Kemner, personal communication, February 15, 2013). Kemner recalled, “I also took movies around to the schools, health movies, and

weighed and measured them and did little things for them so that they weren't afraid of me when I came and brought the shots...At least once a month I would take them a different movie...and we had a projector and a screen that we set up" (personal communication, February 15, 2013). Kemner worked in eleven schools in the Stinking Creek watershed, all of which were one-room schools except for one which boasted two rooms. Working with the schools helped Kemner become active in the community and get to know children and families.

By meeting the health needs of the area, the women became integrated into the community. Gall recalled, "Between her work and my work, we visited almost every branch and hollow on above Dewitt, above 25 E" (personal communication, January 15, 2012). They got to know patients and families and often found themselves in uncomfortable situations, but their perseverance and commitment to their mission kept them going. Gall recounted of the era,

Now people did not call us Lend-A-Hand Center. We were trying to emphasize that we were here to lend a hand. But they just called us 'the nurses' and then we became 'the nurses.' In that span of time [1958-1964] we became 'the nurses.' And between the term 'the nurses' and the bridge, those were the important words that we earned by building the bridge, by changing the creek, and by going up anywhere, everywhere. Set legs, set broken legs...put them in splints so they could get out. Carry people off the mountains if they were shot, picked out bullets. (personal communication, January 15, 2012)

The pair's fearlessness and willingness to go anywhere at any time spread their reputation. Gall added, "And anytime of the day and night to see, to deliver babies or help

somebody that was hurt, that we didn't have no idea who they were. They just called us and we went, unafraid" (personal communication, January 15, 2012). Sometimes they did not even know the people they were helping. They would go in vehicles with men they did not know to go help wives in labor and "didn't have any problem with that. The wives did" (I. Gall, personal communication, January 15, 2012).

The health services the women provided to the community early in the history of the Lend-A-Hand Center aided many individuals and enabled the women to become known and respected in the Stinking Creek watershed. They met very real needs and made important connections with families in the area and organizations throughout the region. Their service delivery and focus were based on a certain understanding of the needs of the community and cultural factors involving poverty, yet the midwifery program, clinic, and other services provided by "the nurses" served as a figurative bridge between the women and the community.

### **Women's Roles**

Female leadership has played a key role in the history and evolution of the Center from its beginnings. Working in a rural, traditionally male-dominated community, the Center has been largely led and staffed by women and has used a variety of tactics to help and empower women in Knox County. Through engaging in and teaching traditionally male occupations and skills, providing women's health services, providing other services for women such as childcare and housing, and through working with individuals for personal empowerment, the Center has made a major impact on women in the community. In the face of prejudice, misconceptions, and even violence, the Center has worked to overcome barriers

and has witnessed changes in attitude and culture in its 55-year history, giving opportunities and options for women and working to promote social change.

Two women in their mid-20s starting a community service center was not a normal occurrence on Stinking Creek. Gall and Kemner faced a culture different than their own, that stressed many traditional values and ways of life, especially in regards to gender roles.

Kemner noted, “We were women who were doing something different than they did in this community” (personal communication, February 15, 2013). Gall recalled,

One of our biggest drawbacks was that we were two women and there was not much understanding in this community about two women trying to work, do all this kind of work, live by themselves in a house without a man around was completely anti-culture. I would say there were very few widows who lived alone; they usually had a man—or that’s one reason there were so many second and third marriages I think. This was not understood, one, that we would do that, the other, that we were self-sufficient—that we cut our own wood and built our own buildings and did our own carpentry work. This was not understood. Then the other thing that wasn’t understood was that men were not to work with women. (personal communication, January 15, 2012)

Gall and Kemner recalled that many women in the area thought they were there to steal their husbands. Gall commented, “Most of the women did not trust us at all” (personal communication, January 15, 2012). As a farmer, a traditionally male occupation on the Creek, Gall had to deal with some unwanted situations. She recalled,

The women did not trust me out there in the field with their husbands. And rightly so. We had some men that thought that there was—uh huh—this was the time to do some

hanky-panky. We really had. More than once we had to slap hands and put them in their place I guess. Whoa, woops, I'm here to plant your corn, now get off. (personal communication, January 15, 2012)

The nurses' fearlessness and persistence ensured they would be successful in their mission to lend a hand in the face of obstacles. Gall recalled there were "people who thought that if two women were down there [living by themselves] they surely needed men to come and see them at certain times of night" (personal communication, December 29, 2011). The women dealt with drunks, people who came to entertain them, terrorist threats, a barn burning, and people constantly coming and asking for help. Gall remembered,

We were all up and down this Creek after night, all hours of the night, walking to deliver babies, maybe a man would come and get us and if we'd take the Jeep as far as we could go and then we'd have to walk and a lot of times a man would come and meet us there...or we knew where the house was and we just went. All hours of the night and day all by ourselves. (personal communication, December 29, 2011)

Kemner sometimes went out in the community to provide healthcare alone, when Gall was at school or otherwise unavailable. According to Gall, the pair would "stay all night in a home [with people] we never met in order to deliver a baby" (personal communication, December 29, 2011). This confidence and boldness won over many men and women in the community and showed the ability of the nurses to perform their duties and handle difficult situations.

Often working in traditionally male-dominated roles, Gall and Kemner were outliers who challenged the patriarchal structure of the area. By participating in activities including healthcare, agriculture, veterinary medicine, building, electrical work, stonemasonry,



carpentry, and sports, Gall and Kemner defied traditional gender roles on the Creek. They confronted oppressive structures in the community which subjugated women to second-class status.

Teaching female volunteers and women in Stinking Creek, the pair passed on their skills, knowledge, and do-it-yourself attitude. Many volunteers who have worked at the Center over the decades have been women, especially the long-term volunteers and people who have been involved with the organization for decades. Several women who came to the Center to volunteer even married and stayed in the area. This female leadership within the organization has been a driving factor as Gall and Kemner have encouraged young female volunteers and community members to defy gender stereotypes, take leadership roles, and live up to their potential.

Gall recalled how women and girls under their tutelage finished high school, went to college, learned how to change tires, change oil, work with their animals, and work together on canning or gardening (personal communication, December 29, 2011). Gall and Kemner's independent examples of strong, self-sufficient women challenged volunteers and community members. Kemner recalled of people in the community,

They couldn't understand why we would—two single women—would come and do this kind of thing especially when Irma drove a tractor and all the things that she did. And the women just mainly they were either pregnant or carrying a baby... Very few of them drove in those days. They had to wait for their husbands to take them. And they were pretty much homebodys.... They expected to keep the house clean and cook the meals. (personal communication, February 15, 2013)

The women confronted many stereotypes and sexism. Gender roles were rigid and supported by fundamentalist Christian beliefs. Strictly defined gender roles in the community stemmed partly from the prevalence of strong Baptist and Pentecostal beliefs according to Gall. Gall and Kemner worked to overcome these cultural norms as they interacted with women and girls in the community, providing services and empowerment. The nurses saw changes in gender roles over the years with women moving from what Gall has labeled a “servitude role,” to increasingly working outside the home and more fully participating in society. The women tried to facilitate that transition, serving as examples of strong female leadership and giving help and encouragement. Gall related of the 1960s on Stinking Creek,

A lot of women had never been anywhere except to church and the post office... Women were not allowed to ride with a man in the car without being two or three women at least... No man ... would allow his woman to sit in a car with another man unless there were other people with her. (personal communication, December 29, 2011)

Kemner recalled that women “didn’t have much chance to get out and do anything else” (personal communication, February 15, 2013) besides stay home, keep house, and have babies.

Much has been written about the idea of Appalachian isolation and the culture of poverty during the 1960s. As evidenced from Gall and Kemner’s experiences many of these conditions were realities for women up Stinking Creek. Rather than challenging injustices within the patriarchal system, the nurses focused on helping individual women, changing the individual’s behaviors and circumstances. According to the pair’s experiences, the culture of the area proved difficult for many women. Though gender dynamics in any community are

complex, Gall and Kemner have witnessed many changes in conditions and attitudes over their decades on the Creek. Although many ideas about isolation and culture prevalent in the 1960s are now seen as dated or essentialist, some of Gall and Kemner's experiences suggest the patriarchal culture and relative isolation of the area did have an impact on many women's lives.

Gall summed up the gender dynamics of the community by stating, "Women did all the work and the men did all the ruling" (personal communication, April 1, 2013). Gall and Kemner set out to change these roles by example, education, and empowerment. The programs of the Lend-A-Hand Center addressed the second-class citizen status of women in the community. Gall noted that she and Kemner, "Just kind of broke open the stereotype that women were supposed to stay home and cook and have baby after baby after baby and look after the man" (personal communication, April 2011).

Due to the fact that providing health services was the cornerstone of the Lend-A-Hand Center during its early years, many of its programs targeted women, addressing women's health issues, as well as their roles in the community. As discussed, the programs of the Center addressed women's reproductive health and provided alternatives for local women. The Lend-A-Hand Center further empowered women in the community by serving as a place of shelter for people, often women, who were dealing with domestic violence, drug abuse, poverty, legal troubles, or bad luck in a time before there were adequate social services in the area.

Gall and Kemner took a personal interest in many women in the community, working with the same person or family for decades. Serving as examples to women in the community and the dozens of volunteers that worked at the Center over the years, the pair

inspired countless people to become nurses, social workers, and teachers and to make a better life for themselves. Although Gall and Kemner never married nor had biological children, they have served in mothering roles, helping raise dozens of children from the Creek. Countless people have had the women serve as parenting figures. Amber Gruner, who was a volunteer at the Center and one of the many people Gall and Kemner call family, has been one of the many people who have written about Gall as a role model who has confronted gender stereotypes, and served as an inspiration for young women (A. Gruner, personal communication, July 16, 2012).

The Lend-A-Hand Center may be considered a feminist organization, though not overtly or intentionally so. Neither Gall nor Kemner identify as feminists. Gall replied when asked about being a feminist, “I’m a people liber” (personal communication, November 26, 2012). She believes in “people developing God-given talents” and says she is a “peopleist” (I. Gall, personal communication, November 26, 2012). Kemner answered, “No, not really. I guess I could be considered one” (personal communication, February 15, 2013). Though they do not identify as feminists, the history of their lives and the organization they built from the beginning has stressed women’s equality and empowerment.

The Center’s history and involvement with women’s issues in the Stinking Creek watershed, especially regarding reproductive issues, shows the progressive, multilayered character of the Center and its founders. A strong feminist thread exists through the work of the organization. Throughout their lives and work with women in the community, Gall and Kemner have undermined patriarchal structures and engaged in different forms of protest as service providers in central Appalachia. They have promoted social justice by focusing on

the needs of women in the Stinking Creek community leading by example leaving a legacy of women's empowerment and resistance to oppressive forces.

### **The Bridge**

One of the first major building undertakings at the Center was constructing a bridge and controlling Patterson Branch and Stinking Creek to make the Center more accessible and less susceptible to flooding. The Center was on the wrong side of the creek which had to be forded and the back road to the house was in very bad condition from logging operations.

There was a flood in early 1959. After the women had to leave the house for the night because of the high water, they talked it over and decided to buy the farm instead of rent it so they could try to do something about the flooding. On March 31, 1959, they bought the house and buildings plus 50 acres (10 bottom and 40 hillside) for \$2,400 along with three acres between the Creek and the road (Gall, 2008, p.12).

Shortly thereafter, they began a yearlong project that consisted of building a bridge, moving and straightening the Creek so it flowed under the bridge, and setting up a dike. In college, Gall had spent some time in the Netherlands, while working in Germany, where she learned about dikes and flood control methods. She started working with different agencies seeking help and advice about building a bridge over the Creek high enough for log trucks to go under. They hired a well driller to put in pipes for the bridge and Gall filled the pipes with cement and acquired old rails from coal mines to make the x-frame bracing. They cut 25-foot-long oak logs from the hillside, using mules to drag them out with help from Charlie Kinningham. After the logs were debarked, readied, and painted with creosote, Gall and Kemner hired a man with a boom to hoist the logs up onto the bridge. Gall set the logs up on

the bridge and covered them with planks. People from all up and down the Creek watched as the bridge was being built and came to see if the bridge would wash out during hard rains.

This large task, which took several months, showed the resourcefulness of the women. They used what was available to them by utilizing local material and mostly their own labor. When asked about how she knew how to build a bridge, Gall replied, “I don’t know. Just read, studied, talked, and I seem to have an inner sense for that” (personal communication, January 15, 2012). The bridge was finally finished in 1961.

After the bridge’s construction they hired someone to help drag and straighten the Creek and set up a dike. Gall helped operate bulldozers after she returned home from school, working with a local man to move the dirt and reroute the Creek. They even had to dynamite a tree out of the bottom and bulldoze the field, flattening it and burying trees and underbrush. They gathered gravel, ashes, and red dog (a byproduct of coal mining) to build up the dike and created a dead water pond that would slow down the runoff, beginning their conservation work to control flood waters.

Their purchase of the land, the finished bridge, and the new path of the Creek were symbolic of the pair’s investment in the area and commitment to the community. From the early 1960s on, the bridge has shown the Lend-A-Hand Center’s connection with the people of Stinking Creek. The women were quoted in a magazine article remarking, ““When everything held fast, it kind of symbolized the beginning of our acceptance into the community”” (qtd. in Morath-Magnum, 1965, p. 11). A noticeable feature of the landscape, the bridge became a talking point within the community and a symbol of the Center’s work and permanence.

## **Agriculture & Conservation Work**

Farming has been a part of the work of Lend-A-Hand from its beginning. Gall and Kemner, both coming from agricultural backgrounds, were comfortable with the rural, subsistence living on Stinking Creek. According to Gall (2008), when they first came, “There were very few tractors on all of Stinking Creek; the mule was the animal everyone used. Most families had a mule, a cow, a pig or two, and some chickens” (p. 46).

The pair planted vegetable gardens when they first arrived. Gall recalled, “The fall of 1958 we planted a garden...and from then on we’ve been planting gardens” (personal communication, January 15, 2012). When they bought the land up Patterson Branch, they started farming acres of corn and hay. As the pair soon found they were being paid in livestock for health services, their farm work expanded. In an area with limited income for many, including themselves, they engaged in the alternative barter economy, exchanging goods and labor for services.

Farming was not part of the original plan for the Center, though Gall was “always interested in farming” (I. Gall, personal communication, January 15, 2012). As farming developed and broadened over the years, the Lend-A-Hand Center grew into a diversified operation, with vegetables and fruits for home consumption, cash crops, and forest products. Lend-A-Hand also raised livestock to sell, and for meat, milk, cheese, butter, hides, wool, and breeding. The Center has used the products of the land for income and to feed workers, volunteers, and others who stayed at the Center. Lend-A-Hand is also known for doing its own butchering and value-added processing and has taught countless people about food preservation including canning, drying, curing, and freezing, as well as cooking. Early on, Gall’s father helped with the butchering and tasks on the farm, teaching techniques to his

daughter and volunteers. Over the years, through practice and trial and error, farm practices at the Center evolved and expanded.

As a multiuse, nonindustrial, farming operation, Lend-A-Hand has emphasized hard work on the farm and valuing the land. According to Gall (2008), “The love of the soil and the care of the animals has been a consistent part of our work” (p. 45). Gall related, “I did not want to be a scientific farmer, I just wanted to be a love your land farmer... Love your animals and love your land and really want the best so that your land is in better shape after you’ve used it than before” (personal communication, April 3, 2011). Using many traditional techniques, though not being strictly organic, the work at the Center has been successful in using the land in a responsible way. The land has also been used to teach volunteers, family members, and the community about farming. Based on Christian principles of stewardship, agricultural work at the Center has emphasized sustainability and utility. Farming operations taught hard skills to volunteers and community members. Using traditional methods including animal traction and manual labor for many tasks that could be done with machines, farming at the Center has balanced stewardship with production. The women have kept subsistence skills and used all their land from bottomland to forest, conserving and utilizing water resources and a range of forest products.

The Center has been open to new ideas, incorporating new techniques and crops, working with the county agricultural extension office, and serving as an example to many in the community. According to Gall, in the 1950s and 1960s, people were not used to using a corn planter, planting hay seed, using yellow corn instead of white corn, spraying, or fertilizing with new kinds of amendments. Farming at the Center experimented with new technologies as Gall used and tried to introduce higher quality seed and livestock in the



community. Gall practiced animal husbandry and kept male pigs, cows, and goats for local people, trying to keep good breeding stock to improve the livestock in the community. Again these agricultural programs in some ways evidenced paternalistic methods of improving the area and addressing local traditions, changing the way individuals farm and introducing more modern ways of life. This leadership in the agricultural sector again evidences culture of poverty methods of addressing social problems and improving communities.

In addition to building projects and teaching school, Gall was the primary manager of the farm. In the spring of 1959, she bought a tractor in Indiana with a corn planter, mower, plow, and disc and brought it to Lend-A-Hand. Tractors were not as common in those days as people still plowed with mules. Soon after, she started doing “custom work” for local people to supplement income and help her neighbors, which she continued doing until the 1990s (I. Gall, personal communication, January 15, 2012). She would plant or mow fields for people, especially widows and the elderly, and receive a portion of the profits.

As a female farmer, it took some time for Gall to become fully respected in the community. Because the women provided services people needed, their ability to help people, come in times of need, and follow through overcame differences and prejudice. Gall’s farming skills helped the pair further integrate into the community, and also allowed them to learn from and get to know local farmers. Gall related,

The real thing we had in favor of us is that we had the skills or the talent that they needed....Peggy was a skilled nurse and it didn’t take them very long to say, ‘We got as good a nurse here as you can find in a hospital. Right here! And she takes care of us. She sits right beside us. She doesn’t go anywhere else. She stays right there and takes care of us.’ So the women who were in labor were very glad for Peggy. The

men were very glad to have her come and take care of their wives. The skill I had was that I was a farmer and this was not admired at first, but I had a tractor and I could mow their hay and I could plant their corn. (personal communication, January 15, 2012)

Gall also did veterinary work in the community. Within a year, she began helping farmers with their livestock including cows, pigs, horses, mules, chickens, goats, sheep, and dogs. She dealt with birthing (including cesarean sections), shoeing horses, sewing up injuries, suturing, castrating, dehorning, butchering, and giving shots, medicine, and treating other ailments. Gall recalled working with horses and mules that were injured in logging operations, and noted that families during that time period needed a milk cow, a horse, and a mule (I. Gall, personal communication, April 4, 2013). Gall had no formal training in veterinary medicine, but seemed to have a natural talent. She often called and consulted with a veterinarian in Corbin who would sometimes walk her through what to do. She read about livestock care and learned by experience.

Another farming program which worked within the community early on was the Lend-An-Animal Program. Patterned after Dan West's animal giving program established in 1944 which evolved into the well-known international organization Heifer International, Lend-A-Hand began giving out livestock and having recipients pay it forward, sharing animals and creating higher quality livestock in the community. Gall knew West and his family personally. They were neighbors in Indiana. He was also in the Church of the Brethren and from nearby Goshen, Indiana, and had a farm near her house. He visited her peace studies classes and group organization meetings when she was in college and was in some ways her mentor (I. Gall, personal communication, November 26, 2012). In the 1950s,

her community in Indiana donated heifers which were shipped to Germany to help people recover from the War and she had been in Germany in 1952 and helped deliver a cow through the program.

Gall took these ideas and applied them to Stinking Creek recalling that she “brought that theme with me to Kentucky” (personal communication, November 26, 2012) and taught CSM affiliates the concepts and it spread in the region. The community was, “swapping around without money” (I. Gall, personal communication, November 26, 2012) and the program included pigs, chickens, and cows. This was another way in which the Center utilized alternative economic systems. A precursor to programs today such as Grow Appalachia, which began in 2009 and is administered through Berea College, the Lend-An-Animal Program lasted in the community through the 1980s.

In order to do more conservation work on the farm, Gall and Kemner bought 500 acres up the hollow and some additional bottomland in September 1961. Gall recounted,

We realized that we still had not solved the water problem, that Patterson [Branch] was still washing us all up so we thought if we could buy all of the top of Patterson Branch and do real conservation up there, maybe that would help us out. We had a chance to buy it at almost no money at all. The heirs wanted to sell it out. It had been logged out, burned out, so it wasn't worth hardly anything so we got it for a song.  
(personal communication, January 15, 2012)

They constructed brush dams in the gullies formed by the former logging operations to slow the water coming off the mountain and leveled off a field and planted it with fescue to spread the water over the pasture. Gall remembered,

We cut that [intensity of the water] off so efficiently after a year and a half of our work up there whenever we had a flood you could stand down here on the dike and watch the muddy water from Stinking Creek and the almost clear water from Patterson Branch. (personal communication, January 15, 2012)

Gall worked on forest management and became the first female American Tree Farmer in Knox County within the first few years on the Creek. Gall has also worked on the county agricultural extension board through 1985, and as a forest warden from the early 1960s through the late 1970s. She was also a “timber cruiser,” working in the community estimating board feet of lumber in stands of timber and their values. The Center worked with the agriculture stabilizing committee and planted 25,000 trees on the property from roughly 1959 through 1965. The women harvested timber off the mountainside during the process of runoff management, partnering with the forestry department. It was during the construction of the brush dams in April 1962 that Gall broke her leg when a tree fell on her. She was cutting down trees to sell and was doing her own logging at that time, hiring a truck to haul the logs out. She was in a cast for around six months and went back to school that summer to Union College to work on her teaching certificate, which she received in the fall of 1964. Gall, not letting the injury keep her from working, broke her ankle while she was still in the cast by getting it caught in the wheel of her tractor.

Even with all their efforts at conservation and flood management, the Center still had high water problems. The bridge partially washed away in 1963 and the end had to be redone, making it 20 feet longer. The bridge warranted a series of repairs for the next five decades, but water problems were considerably lessened by the women’s efforts. From their first few years on the Creek, they learned what to do during a flood, moving their belongings

to higher ground, watching the water, and being prepared. Forest, water, and land management continued to be major aspects of the work of the Center.

### **Youth Programs**

Besides working on health issues and agriculture, the Lend-A-Hand Center almost immediately became a place for community activities. Youth meetings, Sunday school, Bible school camps, 4-H, after school programs, and a Little Children's Program developed at the Center. Through their programs, the women focused on addressing educational attainment and attitudes toward education in the community. Furthermore, Christian living played an important role in the programs at the Center as Gall and Kemner's involvement with the people of Stinking Creek, especially the youth, grew.

The first year the women arrived on the Creek, before they had anything ready for their community center, they started hosting local families for activities. Young people came to the women and asked if they could meet in the old store building on the property to play games and socialize. Gall remembered,

Some of the young people, two or three families of young people right here in the back road learned about us being here and they knew we had that store building and they came and asked us if they could use that as a meeting place for young people. If they'd help us clean it up would we have youth meetings in that old store building?  
(personal communication, January 14, 2012)

Soon, several family groups began coming to the old building to play games and also have devotions led by Gall and Kemner. The old store building was changed into a youth center with meetings on Friday nights, parties, and different events (I. Gall, personal communication, January 15, 2012). The youth meetings filled a void in a rural community

where few institutions other than churches existed. The women remembered, “Just, there was nothing for the young people to do” (I. Gall, personal communication, January 14, 2012).

Kemner explained,

Nothing, absolutely nothing. The other thing was that the Baptist Church down here, something was wrong with the stove and Lucy and Charlie, or Lucy especially, she went there one Sunday and they were not having church so she just brought the children on up here, and they were sitting on our porch waiting for us. And she said, ‘I know who will have Sunday school for you,’ because it was a month at least before they got whatever it was fixed. (personal communication, January 14, 2012)

The women began hosting Sunday school in the fall of 1959. The women’s neighbors, Charlie and Lucy Kinningham, were extremely helpful in assisting them in becoming established in the community and hosting community programs. They believed in what the women were trying to accomplish and soon became close friends. The Kinnings went out into the community soliciting participation and spreading the word about Lend-A-Hand’s programs. The couple was familiar with Red Bird Mission and “they knew about youth meetings and all this kind of thing and so they went down the road and said, ‘We’ve got Red Bird over here, come!’” (I. Gall, personal communication, January 14, 2012).

After the Kinnings first brought kids to their porch in 1959, Gall and Kemner continued to host Sunday school until 2011. Sunday school has been an important part of the Center’s work in fulfilling its mission as countless volunteers helped with Sunday school programs and activities. The Center bussed children in from different parts of the Creek to have Bible stories, singing, crafts, and activities starting at 10 a.m. Gall and Kemner wrote their own programs and curriculum. Around 50 to 60 kids participated in Sunday school

during the early years in the chapel, although the numbers decreased over the decades as churches began to have their own Sunday school services for children. There were three to four classes according to age and Gall, Kemner, Lucy Kinningham, and different volunteers oversaw each individual class.

The Center also began holding Bible school camps for children in the summer of 1959. Gall taught Bible school in her schools in the summer of 1959, and later in three different areas on the Creek. The women then began holding Bible School at the Center in 1963, picking up kids and bringing them to the campus. The women wrote their own program, created their own curriculum, and connected stories from the Bible to things kids on the Creek could relate to until around 1978 when outside materials became widely accessible. Bible school camps would meet for a week in the summer every afternoon for a couple of hours, and kids would sing songs, have a Bible lesson, make crafts, and play outside. The Center also hosted other religious activities for kids. For several years in the early 1960s, Reverend Art Russell and his wife Ester, ministers at Red Bird, whom Gall and Kemner had met at Beech Fork, sometimes held services in the chapel.

4-H programs were an early outgrowth of youth meetings at the Center. Beginning in 1959, Gall and Kemner hosted 4-H group as well as individual programs for area youth, which met two days a week. Kids signed up for individual projects with four to six people on a project and two projects going on at a time, in addition to activities for the whole group. The 4-H club as a whole met once a month. Gall and Kemner hosted 30 to 40 4-H students who competed in local and state competitions and developed skills in diverse activities including cooking, carpentry, sewing, electrical work, woodworking, crafts, food preservation, flower arrangement, and health topics. The programs were dependent on the

children's interests and the volunteers' skills and strengths. Gall also served on the local 4-H board and on the regional board, keeping up with developments within the organization.

From the very beginning, circa 1960, the children participated in talent shows and made floats for local festivals. They took part in county and state fairs, May Fest, the Daniel Boone Festival, and a 4-H fair held at Red Bird. The Lend-A-Hand floats, which were constructed with regularity throughout the decades, helped increase awareness of the organization and built social capital. Activities in the community helped Gall and Kemner integrate and facilitated relationship building and connections with other groups. Helen Lewis (2009) referenced the importance of community activities such as festivals in building and celebrating community, working towards community based development, and strengthening community organizations.

The women purposefully hosted 4-H rather than Boy or Girl Scout activities. Gall remembered, "We decided to go 4-H because the boys and girls worked together" (personal communication, November 26, 2012). The 4-H program taught the same things to girls and boys and allowed young girls a chance to socialize and learn skills they may not have been able to learn otherwise.

After-school programs including tutoring also developed early in the Center's history. Local children who needed help in school or with their homework or needed a place closer to the mouth of the hollow to catch the bus would stay on the Lend-A-Hand campus with the women. Gall again produced programs and volunteers assisted with helping kids with their homework. Tutoring programs and other after school activities continued throughout the history of the organization in different forms through the years.



The Little Children's Program (LCP) at Lend-A-Hand developed around 1960 and ran through 1977. Gall and Kemner and Lend-A-Hand volunteers visited homes with small children in the Stinking Creek watershed, adopting families and children to participate in the program. Volunteers read to kids and brought reading and writing materials to local households. The program targeted preschool age kids during a time before Head Start or other activities outside the home for young children were available. Gall explained the program,

We discovered that there were many homes that did not have a pencil or paper of any kind, no magazines, no books, no nothing, no coloring books for their little kids, so that we got the idea that we'd take coloring books, colors, read stories to them and each of our volunteers had about four or five families that they go once a month, or twice a month...and read, have them color in the books...This was also time to see the needs of the family, or the neighbors even of that family. It was usually one hollow or something so they got really well acquainted. (personal communication, January 20, 2012)

Kemner noted that the idea of working with very young children probably came from a Council of the Southern Mountains meeting or from Gall's imagination and her attention to the needs of the community (personal communication, January 20, 2012). Gall recalled,

One of the things I would do when we were sitting waiting for a baby is to draw a picture. I'd take paper and pencil, draw pictures of the house or of things and then leave it there and we'd also leave the pencil and some of the paper and stuff at that house...It's hard now to think how many homes there were in those days that did not have pencils and papers or have any way that the kids—because there wasn't TV—so

that there wasn't any way that a child had any appreciation for the written word or pictures. You know you think of grandma or grandpa always sits down and reads stories to the kids, you know, and here we were, had many, many children who had parents and grandparents who could not read or write and did not have an appreciation or did not have the materials even at hand. (personal communication, January 20, 2012)

The Little Children's Program not only helped the children, but also their parents. It facilitated intergenerational learning and encouraged parents and grandparents to be involved in their children's education. Gall called the program "grandmotherly," (personal communication, January 3, 2012) stressing that the LCP did more than give an early start on reading. The program allowed for socialization and provided kids a chance to get to know people outside of the family.

Through working in the local schools, Gall further promoted educational achievement and valuing education with local children. She advanced her idea of a "sparkle in the eye" in her classrooms. She remarked, "In a one-room school you don't have anybody that makes kids come to school and the parents didn't make kids come to school, so you had to make school so enjoyable that they wanted to come" (personal communication, April 3, 2011). Kemner (2000) noted of Gall's schoolchildren, "They came when their parents didn't have work for them to do" (p. 1). Gall worked to make school fun, relatable, and intriguing, reaching out to kids who were struggling.

Educational attainment in the area was not very high at the time. Education was not valued as much in the community as other places and there were high rates of illiteracy and

few college graduates. Addressing educational deficiencies in a variety of ways has always been a major aspect of Lend-A-Hand programs. Gall reflected,

There was a division of those who valued education and those who had no value for education at all... Well if a young man married a young woman very young and neither one of them could read or write and especially when they—we had young boys, men, who thought it wasn't smart to be able to read and write. You could make a living out here without having to read and write. And then they sort of looked down on people who had education because if you went to college, you know, then all you did was get smart without being smart. (personal communication, January 20, 2012)

The women dealt with a culture that was in some ways ambivalent or confrontational to education, in addition to situations that inhibited children from learning and reaching their full potentials. Gall remembered working with a family whose father, a holiness preacher, wouldn't let his daughter go to high school because they wore shorts (personal communication, January 28, 2012). Other families similarly did not value education, and other impediments including funds, transportation, and negative attitudes made the women's tasks difficult. Gall and Kemner set out to address this deficiency, starting with young children through adults. Lend-A-Hand programs have promoted literacy, skills, job training, compassion, respect, stewardship, and critical thinking.

Viewing little value in education as a cultural attribute and attitudes being cyclical in nature again reflects culture of poverty understandings and solutions to poverty. Individual education is one way to address social issues based on a culture of poverty understanding of social problems. Many of Lend-A-Hand's programs involved changing individual attitudes, the local culture, and the community through education. Although Lend-A-Hand's stress on

education may seem paternalistic, many of Lend-A-Hand's educational programs were successful in providing opportunities to people and filling a void in services that were not readily available in the area. Education addresses a range of social problems from health to employment and in many ways transcends the different models of addressing poverty. Education is hard to fit into one category or the other as it affects individuals and society at large, though the experience of Lend-A-Hand shows there are definite limits to education in addressing social problems like poverty and health.

The Center's youth and educational programs reached many children throughout the Stinking Creek watershed. Christian living, religious programs, and children's recreational activities enabled Gall and Kemner to get to know families in the area and cultivate lifelong relationships. Education remained an integral part of the mission of the organization and has been in some way a part of every program at the Center.

### **Family**

Both Gall and Kemner enjoyed support from their families at home as they pursued their dream of living their lives serving on Stinking Creek. Their families supported them financially and visited often to help with projects on the farm. Gall remembered, "My mother did not like me being here, did not want me to be here, did not approve of my work, scared to death for me, but supported me all the way. You would not have known it if you hadn't talked to her some" (personal communication, January 15, 2012). Kemner recalled, "And my mother, when she graduated from high school she wanted to go to what was called Normal School then and her aunt wouldn't let her go. One of her teachers would have paid her way and her aunt wouldn't let her go and so she always said that if I wanted to do something she wouldn't stand in my way" (personal communication, January 15, 2012). Kemner related that

her mother “would come for weeks at a time” (personal communication, September 4, 2008) and go on nursing visits with her. The love and support from their own families encouraged the women to provide for those who did not have a stable home life.

The nurses soon saw there were many broken homes in the community dealing with abuse, neglect, violence, divorce, and other problems. They saw children who needed a safe place to stay, encouragement, and help getting to school. The Center became an informal shelter for people and they began taking in children to live at the Center to provide a stable home environment, to help with homework, and to offer easier access to school. The openness of the Center continued through the history of the organization as the women took in countless individuals and families in times of need, and operated a halfway house for people on Stinking Creek.

Over the years Gall and Kemner helped raise many children as their own family members. Gall (2008) remembered, “Although family living was important to us, it was not part of the original plan. We sort of backed into it. God does work in wondrous ways” (p. 21). They saw a need for helping kids, assisting with education, and especially addressing the needs of young women on the Creek, and stepped in to fill the void. The Center became a place where people could go if they needed help or a place to stay. Gall remembered, “We wanted to have a family atmosphere. We ate our meals together. We cried and laughed together. We went to basketball games together” (personal communication, January 15, 2012). The Center provided a safe place for kids and families, with activities, socialization time, and opportunities to work on individual relationships.

Many children and families in the area faced difficult situations. Knox County in the 1950s and 1960s was a severely economically depressed area and the Stinking Creek

watershed, located at the periphery of the county, was especially distressed. Many families struggled to make ends meet, to put food on the table, and to afford adequate housing, heating, and healthcare. A variety of social problems plagued the area including joblessness, domestic abuse, prostitution, moonshining, feuding, crime, and violence. Growing up on Stinking Creek proved challenging for many as Gall and Kemner opened their home to those who were struggling.

Gall (2008) related in her book some of the family situations she and Kemner encountered that occurred all too often in the community:

There were the six month old twins who had not regained their birth weight and who were found with sour milk in the bottles next to them while the mother lay drunk in the bed with some man. There was the old mother lying in a bed on a urine soaked mattress which had leaked through to a puddle on the floor; there was a family using their four children for sexual income; there was a step-mother who loved one son but could not stand the other; there was a 13 year old girl not allowed to go to high school because the kids wore shorts in phys ed classes; there was a mother and four children whose husband shot up the house in a drunken rage; there was a mother with two grown daughters whose five babies were put out on a cold winter's night so the women could make money on their sexual activities; there was a young man of 15 that had averaged at least two different homes each year; there was a girl who got in with the wrong crowd her freshman year in high school and spent time visiting hotel rooms during school time; there was a young mother with six small children and nowhere to go, etc. We tried to provide stability, order and discipline, understanding, good nourishment, and fun. (p. 23)

The two women found that social services were lacking in the community and the Lend-A-Hand Center stepped in to address needs in this marginalized and underserved area. Gall recalled,

They didn't have women's or children's jail at that time so we worked it out with the jailer and the county sheriff and the county judge that if they picked up women or children, especially over the weekend, they could bring them to our house until the court could decide what to do with them. (personal communication, January 15, 2012)

Early on, the Center became a place for people dealing with legal issues or hard economic times. Gall frequently provided legal counsel and often had to engage in conflict resolution within the community. Operating within existing power structures, Gall and Kemner worked with families and the legal system, taking in people if they were found to be homeless and providing encouragement and legal assistance. Gall recalled, "We worked with the child welfare workers; we worked with the county judge; we worked with the county extension office; we worked with the health department. We knew them. We called on them" (personal communication, January 15, 2012). The women's connections in the community helped smooth over many difficult situations and provide solutions for those in need. Gall and Kemner assisted many people who had been abused. Gall reflected, "I was advocating that if a man abused you, get away, don't stay there. There was a good life out there besides that. If parents abused children, we had the law after them as much as possible. If children abused elderly parents—that was another real big problem here—we went to bat for them" (personal communication, April 3, 2011). Over the years, Gall and Kemner aided countless people helping them with legal issues and in dealing with the local court system.

According to Gall, many young girls in the community “had very little guidance” (personal communication, January 15, 2012). Girls who came to stay at Lend-A-Hand came from difficult home situations and Gall and Kemner provided help with things such as socialization skills and personal hygiene, working with children who often had hardly traveled outside of the local neighborhood. The women remembered that some kids during the 1960s had very little experience interacting outside the home and did not know how to properly operate an indoor toilet.

For many Stinking Creek families it was difficult to get to the bus and to the consolidated Knox Central High School in Barbourville, so the women’s role as parents took on a practical application as they were much closer to the mouth of the Creek than many households. Gall (2008) recalled,

It was very difficult in the 50’s and 60’s to get to high schools, a bus ride of about an hour each way. Besides that, the bus only drove part way up the Creek; so, if the children could live at LAH [Lend-A-Hand] during the week, they not only could ‘catch the bus,’ they could have help with their homework. It became part of our lives to send them off with a good breakfast, welcome them home in the evenings, and help them with their homework. (p. 22)

The women also promoted education for local kids through their accessibility, help, encouragement, and partnership with the Red Bird School. Gall remembered,

Through our work with the young people in 4-H and in youth meetings, is when we became interested, really became interested in people going on to school and staying in school. That was one of our intrigues. Very few kids left, went to high school even, in those days. They went to the 8th grade then they quit school. Even if they were



only fourteen they quit. That became a real rallying cry for us to try to keep these kids, boys and girls, in school. We worked with Red Bird Mission. They had a Red Bird School. The kids could go to Red Bird School and with very, very little money, almost no money, they worked their way through. (personal communication, January 15, 2012)

From the beginning, promoting education was a cornerstone of the Center's work on Stinking Creek. Gall recalled, "We either took children here to live with us or we sponsored children in college, worked [to] get kids in college and keep them in college" (personal communication, January 15, 2012). Gall and Kemner paved the way for many people in the community they took in as family to receive advanced degrees and succeed in academics. Gall recalled of the locals who became their children, "The idea was to educate them to live in the world. Not just on Stinking Creek. Both of us have nothing against living on Stinking Creek, you know, but if God gives you talents then you should use them besides just having babies" (personal communication, April 3, 2011).

Judy Warren was the first girl to live with Gall and Kemner at Lend-A-Hand, beginning around 1960. Her story was featured in *Stinking Creek*. She had been involved with youth meetings, 4-H, and Sunday school at the Center. Warren suffered from appendicitis and was in the hospital for an extended period of time. As her mother was going to pull her out of school for the year, Gall and Kemner offered for her to stay with them so she could easily catch the bus and go to school. Warren stayed at Lend-A-Hand for several years until she finished school, eventually earned an associate's degree, and then got married. Gall and Kemner consider her one of their children, along with her brother who also stayed with them for a period of time.

Several other children stayed at the Center to get to high school during the women's first few years on the Creek. A local girl named Judy Lowe moved in several years later. The Felde family began bringing their children to visit and stay at Lend-A-Hand for weeklong periods in the summer and on weekends in the winter. Children stayed for different lengths of time, some for weeks, and others for months or years, based on their needs and home situations. Gall remembered a boy whom local teachers did not know what class to put him in because he so seldom went to school. He had to take care of his mother who was schizophrenic and bipolar and had a dad who was an alcoholic and physically abused her. His sister became involved in prostitution, and Gall and Kemner worked with both of them to go to school. They worked with the family and had many disappointments, but according to Gall, "All of them have made something of themselves, and we had a small part in that, but the main part was we said you can do it" (personal communication, January 28, 2012). These individuals were just the beginning in a long line of children whose lives were changed by staying with Gall and Kemner and volunteers at Lend-A-Hand.

Gall and Kemner made an incredible impact on the community by taking in children as well as adults, providing for them, helping them with their education, and inspiring them to live up to their potential. Gall (2008) recalled in her book, "We often say we 'raised' or helped raise 65 children" (p. 24). Though providing a "family-type home to come to" (Gall, 2008, p. 22) was not part of the original plan of the Center, it became an enduring aspect of the services provided at Lend-A-Hand. The openness and versatility of the organization built trust and social capital within the community as Gall and Kemner began building relationships with generations of families on Stinking Creek.

Unlike many other service providers, the Lend-A-Hand Center became family to many people on the Creek, fully investing in the lives of individuals and cultivating lifelong friendships. Gall noted, “It is a long slow process working with one person, one family or one group at a time, but can be not only life changing for that individual but have a rippling effect” (personal communication November 30, 2012). This “rippling effect,” the cumulative relationships, help, and trust between the Center and the community, became one of Lend-A-Hand’s greatest assets and successes. Although their work provided an enormous service to the community in addressing individual immediate needs, the Center focused on individual causes of poverty and related social problems, rather than broader systemic issues. The Center’s philosophy of meeting needs as they arose and the Center’s tactics of individualized attention that addressed issues such as material need, lack of education, family problems, health problems, lack of socialization, and other social ills, evidenced its individual-uptift oriented mission.

### **Volunteers**

Volunteers were a vital part of the Lend-A-Hand model from early on in the history of the organization. Gall and Kemner knew that they would need help setting up their Center, building and expanding the farm, and working in the community. Volunteers helped with all aspects of the Center including daily chores, health programs, building projects, farm work, 4-H, Sunday School, Friday night youth programs, the Little Children’s Program, and transportation duties. Gall (2008) admitted, “One thing in our lives that did not begin with a dream but sort of sneaked in was our volunteer program” (p. 22). She recalled in her book, “From the very beginning of LAH [Lend-A-Hand] there were friends, family members, and interested people who came to help a day or two” (Gall, 2008, p. 73). Individual long- and

short-term volunteers, work groups, other organizations, and “interested people” from the community became an important part of the work of the Center and integral to the growth and success of the organization.

The women pulled from their existing volunteer networks and their connections at home to find volunteers. According to Gall,

We had volunteers from my church right away. First year, [they] came down, helped us move; helped us renovate the house... We were very associated with Red Bird so we had people coming from Red Bird to help in the summertime.... Also Perley Ayer and the Council of the Southern Mountains was sending volunteers, sending people to help out. (personal communication, January 15, 2012)

These existing social networks greatly helped the women’s transition in the beginning, especially with building projects. Gall and Kemner were able to capitalize on connections made through Red Bird or the Council of the Southern Mountains with individuals and groups of volunteers which soon became aware of the work of Lend-A-Hand. In the early 1960s, a Union College sociology professor, Hugh Gormley, also sent students to help at the Center, including Jack Rivel who went on to work in the region during the War on Poverty (I. Gall, personal communication, January 15, 2012). This was one of the earliest partnerships between Union and Lend-A-Hand, which would expand over the years.

Individuals that stayed at the Center for weeks, months, or years assisted Gall and Kemner with setting up and implementing their programs. Short- and long-term volunteers began working at the Center early on and there has been a steady stream of volunteers ever since. Ranging from one to five or six people of different ages at a time, volunteers came to live, work, and serve at the Center with the two women. Volunteers as well as work groups

came from different denominations and different areas of the country. In the early 1960s, Gall and Kemner hosted a female volunteer and a nurse from Indiana (Gall, 2008, p. 29). A small group of boys from Rockford, Illinois, helped with the construction of the pump house in the early 1960s. Many of the early volunteers were from the Church of the Brethren. Through the years, Lend-A-Hand would also sometimes receive “walk-ons,” people who would find out about the Center and show up to help or people who came to visit the Center, curious about its programs. Several students from the Red Bird School also worked at Lend-A-Hand to work off their time at the school. Over the years people also volunteered to work off debts or through welfare or other volunteer programs.

Work groups consisted of a group of people, ranging from a few to two dozen or more. Groups volunteered at the Center for a short time, usually a week, often during spring break or in the summer. These groups followed a set schedule and worked on the campus and in the community. Activities included fellowshiping, cleaning, painting, building, devotions, helping with youth activities, helping with health programs, and working in the community. In the early 1960s, the women hosted a group from Wilmet, Illinois, referred to them by Red Bird. Gall remembered, “It was a... Methodist church who used to go to Red Bird and Red Bird couldn’t take them and so Red Bird sent them our way. And that was the beginning of work groups” (personal communication, January 15, 2012). Work groups were financed by home churches, paying a certain amount to the Center to cover food and lodging. Gall recalled,

A lot of them brought extra to pay for materials and a lot of them either brought extra to pay Lend-A-Hand, or then went home and told their church and the church—some

churches are still sending money—one group is still sending money that was here 35 years ago I think. (personal communication, January 20, 2012)

The women began to make long-term connections with work groups and churches all over the country. Many returned every year for decades and sent monetary support and supplies, enabling the continued operations of the Center.

Volunteers at Lend-A-Hand were kept busy with a variety of activities. They did more than just work out their time, deliver services, and carry out the daily operations of the Center; they built relationships with people in the area and contributed to the mission of the organization. Becoming involved with the lives of families in the community and other people staying at Lend-A-Hand, volunteers developed long-term friendships and became accepted into the community. Volunteers developed a wide range of skills from working with children to hard skills such as building, electrical work, subsistence farming, food preservation, carpentry, livestock management, and healthcare services. Volunteers often received a Foxfire-like education, learning by doing and experiencing many things they had never done before, especially people from urban areas. Butchering, milking cows, laying rock, and chopping firewood were all a part of the education volunteers received at the Center.

Experiences at Lend-A-Hand made lasting impressions on volunteers as many volunteers continued to come back year after year or ended up staying in the area. Gall (2008) noted, “We came to realize the importance of the two ways of using our name. We actually could lend a hand more often with those who came to ‘lend a hand’” (p. 32). The Center began to build a network of people around the country who believed in its mission, philosophy, and work in the area. Through the years volunteers continued to visit the Center

and volunteers' families and home churches often became involved, as the volunteer program became a cornerstone of the work of the Lend-A-Hand Center.

Through a variety of means, the founders of the Center and volunteers soon became involved and integrated into the community. Through Center programs, community events, seeing people in their homes, meeting needs, taking care of kids, and being available to the community, the women were able to gain access to social networks and develop social capital while making larger connections with volunteers and organizations all over the country.

### **Building the Center**

Building projects were always a part of the work at the Center from the beginning when Gall and Kemner had to make repairs on the old house and barn. Buildings that were already on the property included a 6-room house, an old store building located right on the Creek which the women used as a chapel, an old corn crib, a grist mill, a wash house, and an outhouse. Constant building projects characterized the early years on Stinking Creek including building a pump house, outbuildings, and repairing and building barns. The pump house was the first building they constructed on the property, beginning around 1962. They drilled a well and built a two-story, rock pump house over the well at the bottom of the hillside. From this well they pumped water to the old house to have running water and ran electricity to the building. The women then built a garage by the old house and worked on improving the roads on the property and often throughout the community.

In 1960, Gall began digging out a section of the hillside with a tractor to lay the foundation for a new Center building. Gall made the plans for the house which would serve as the clinic, kitchen, storage area, volunteer quarters, living quarters, garage, and common

area. The three-story, 11-room building, with a large basement/garage area, was built largely by hand using local materials including rocks salvaged from old chimneys in the area over seven years. Gall learned rock laying, her favorite hobby, from a local African American man. Having a knack for kinesthetic projects, Gall taught countless people building skills as the campus at Lend-A-Hand grew and the new Center building became the hub of the Lend-A-Hand grounds.

### **Funding**

Gall and Kemner worked with very limited funds during the formative years of the Center. They used a variety of sources including personal income working different jobs, family support, church and individual support from friends and acquaintances, organizational backing, and special foundation funds to make their dream come true. From early on the women sent out newsletters to a mailing list of friends and supporters to keep people and organizations informed about their work and progress on the Creek.

Gall's work as a schoolteacher was the chief source of income and supported the formation of the Center for the first several years, and Kemner's small income from her midwifery activities kept services going. The pair would also pick up odd jobs through the years to help with finances. Their parents contributed to their funds and they did much of their own repair work, raised their own food, and provided their own labor for building projects to cut down on costs. The women did hire people to help build the house and do other major tasks over the years, often using friendships and acquaintances to benefit from reduced rates. Churches and work groups also provided another source of income for the Center. Gall explained, "The work group people represented churches and a lot of the churches gave us money" (personal communication, January 20, 2012).



The Council of the Southern Mountains was also a source of sponsorship. Kemner remembered, “We’d go to those meetings. That would give us support and friendship with other people who were doing similar things” (personal communication, January 14, 2012). This support system provided not only help with funding for projects, but also larger institutional backing and a network of other service providers and organizations working in the region to collaborate with.

One of the earliest funds that supported the work of the two women was the Appalachian Fund. The Appalachian Fund was established from a donation to Berea College to help support service work in Appalachian Kentucky. Gall (2008) described the Fund, “The Fund has supported non-profit organizations to improve the general education, health, and physical well-being of people living in the Appalachian Mountains and surrounding areas” (p. 66). The Appalachian Fund, from the beginning, was integral to the monetary support of the Center. The Fund helped with medical activities at Lend-A-Hand, as Gall recalled,

By 1960 we got a grant from the Appalachian Fund and they wanted to make sure we had a vehicle and the money to get medicines and be able to give anybody any kind of care so even though we charged \$25 a baby, Peggy could just go anywhere anyway because she was sure that we’d have the money, funds. And we have been on a continuous grant funding from Appalachian Fund ever since. (personal communication, January 15, 2012)

The Center also received funding from the Save the Children Foundation. The women worked with Planned Parenthood which gave materials, as well as the Robinson Foundation which paid for the Jeep and vehicles through the years. The Steele Reese Foundation helped pay for conservation and flood control work.

The women were careful about the separation of personal finances and Center finances. As trustees of the organization, Gall and Kemner were responsible for all the finances and making sure the different programs had enough funding. The organization has never taken big government grants and Gall and Kemner never borrowed money from a bank to finance the Center except for building the house. Gall commented, “We would have been bankrupt a long time ago if we had borrowed money to keep going” (personal communication, January 29, 2012). Oftentimes, the women borrowed from their own personal finances, filling in gaps and budget shortfalls. Over the years, the nurses put their own salaries into the Center as donations. The women made sacrifices and lived simply in order to keep their organization alive. Gall (2008) noted, “We were under the poverty level most of our fifty years” (p. 106). The pair recalled that most years, while Lend-A-Hand was really in the red, on the books, it showed in the black because of their personal level of commitment and service.

### **Rediscovery**

It was during the formative years of the Lend-A-Hand Center that Appalachia and eastern Kentucky found renewed attention in the national consciousness. Much has been written about the “rediscovery of Appalachia” in the 1960s, bringing national spotlight to issues such as poverty, health, education, unemployment, political corruption, and environmental conditions by journalists, academics, and government and nonprofit agencies (Eller, 2008).

During the media discovery of eastern Kentucky in the 1960s, the Lend-A-Hand Center was featured in several pieces highlighting its work in the Stinking Creek watershed. The early history of the Lend-A-Hand Center was intertwined with this resurgence of

thinking about and serving the Appalachian region and the organizations at work in the area. Organizations such as Berea College and the Council of the Southern Mountains brought groups together that were working on similar issues. Service providers like the Lend-A-Hand Center multiplied in eastern Kentucky as adverse social conditions and poverty became critical issues in the region.

Media portrayals and government attention to depressed areas in the mountains increased throughout the 1960s. The 1962 publication of Harry Caudill's polemic *Night Comes to the Cumberlands* and his call for the creation of a Southern Mountain Authority brought conditions in eastern Kentucky to the forefront. Publications such as the Ford Survey (1962) called attention to conditions in the mountains. Events during this era of the early 1960s led to the "War on Poverty" and the creation of the Appalachian Regional Commission. The Center's philosophy, foundational work, and local and national affiliations set the stage for its involvement in the larger brewing War on Poverty.

## **2nd Era: The War on Poverty: 1965-1967**

After working in the Stinking Creek watershed for several years, Gall and Kemner transitioned to a new era in the history of their organization with the advent of the national War on Poverty. Both Gall and Kemner became involved in the local War on Poverty Community Action Program, the Knox County Economic Opportunity Council, Inc. (KCEOC), while continuing operations at the Center. The women helped in the formation of the organization which is still an important feature of the county today. This Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) program helped to provide income to run the Center through the women's salaries and further integrated the women into the Knox County community. In addition, Gall's community center program within the KCEOC was significant in the history of the War on Poverty in Appalachia and gained national attention.

Overall, the next three years would prove extremely important for the Center and its directors. Several developments changed the organization in many ways and increased publicity through newspaper and magazine columns, and the 1967 publication of John Fetterman's *Stinking Creek* brought national spotlight to the Center and the county. Programs at Lend-A-Hand expanded through the mid-1960s as Gall and Kemner's involvement in the KCEOC made a lasting impression on them and the work of the Center.

### **Developments**

In November 1965, Gall, Kemner, and the work of the Center were featured in a pictorial article in *The Johns Hopkins Magazine* by Inge Morath-Magnum entitled, "A Nurse's Challenge: To Lend a Hand." According to Gall, Morath-Magnum was the playwright Arthur Miller's wife and their daughter also came to the Center becoming very curious about one of the pigs whose name was Marilyn Monroe. The article showed many

photos of Gall and Kemner at work at the Center and in the community along with quotes from the women. It focused on the “loneliness and isolation of mountain life” (Morath-Magnum, 1965, p. 10) and how the people “needed help, but they needed hope even more” (Morath-Magnum, 1965, p. 10). The article did not specify which of the nurses remarked, ““The resigned and fatalistic outlook people have on life is often pretty frustrating. The rundown land, for example, is seen as a fact of life—to be accepted, not overcome. Of course, this attitude traps people to the past of the land, not its future”” (qtd. in Morath-Magnum, 1965, p. 13). The article was very much a product of the 1960s and the culture of poverty thesis. This journalistic exposé focused on isolation, the Planned Parenthood program at Lend-A-Hand, living conditions, superstitious religion in the area, unsupervised children, and critiqued ways of life on the Creek with a paternalistic tone. One of the women was cited as remarking that their work hoped,

“To show that being a Christian extends throughout your everyday life. Taking time for each other’s welfare, sharing your home, working to create a land for tomorrow—these are all ways of making Christian living a daily thing. In addition it can create a sense of community, and this is something that this part of the country needs badly—there is no community life here to speak of.” (qtd. in Morath-Magnum, 1965, p. 16)

Along with Gall and Kemner, John Fetterman (1967) saw Stinking Creek as something other than a community. Fetterman (1967) asserted,

Stinking Creek is not a community. It is an area of steep slopes and narrow bottoms sprinkled with homes that range from neat painted clapboard houses—some of them even boasting an inside bathroom—to tottering, sagging little shacks. Each home is a little society unto itself, and many families find they have little in common with their

neighbors. They differ in their religion, morals, ethics, and their attitudes toward the welfare program. Family bloodlines are complicated; and although there is a deep feeling of attachment to one's 'kin,' there is little sense of community unity. (p. 32)

Gall labeled the area "a sprawled out creek" (personal communication, November 26, 2012) and noted there was nothing that really made Stinking Creek into a community with feud factions, isolated schools, and family clans. Kemner also disagreed that Stinking Creek is a community. She remarked,

Well, it is a community in some ways, but now, it was more a community when the War on Poverty was going on because there was so many little places where they could come and meet and do things, something like the clinics that we held and so they were eager to get something, I guess, free, if you want to say it. They could get free services...Some people, you know they go out of there every day and they pass their neighbors, but I don't think they really bond with their neighbors. (P. Kemner, personal communication, February 15, 2013)

The limited understanding of community shown in the article, along with Fetterman, Gall, and Kemner's explanations do not take into account the complex nature of rural Appalachian communities. Specifically, this narrow understanding of community is based on middle-class values and assumptions about what makes up a community. The nature of Appalachian communities has been debated for decades. Shapiro (1978) explained that in the early 1900s Appalachian "otherness" was characterized by the perceived "absence of community in Appalachia" (p. 215). He examined uplift workers in the early 1900s that set out to address these deficiencies:

The complaint of benevolent workers for more than a decade had been that the mountaineers lacked a sense of community because in their isolation from each other they did not share a common culture, or else that the culture of Appalachia was a culture of anarchy, and hence not culture at all. (Shapiro, 1978, p. 216)

Shapiro discussed the work of settlement schools, missionary uplift efforts, and the folk music revival in working to develop local community and culture.

During the height of Gall and Kemner's involvement in the War on Poverty, in 1965, minister Jack Weller published *Yesterday's People*. This highly influential book also analyzed the idea of Appalachian communities and discussed what he labeled as "reference groups." Weller (1965) observed of the mountaineer,

Reference-group activity satisfies the need for action, fellowship, and purpose. Thus the community is actually unnecessary to his life except on a very impersonal level; he uses what he needs from the community, ignores the rest, and finds no reason for further community support—unlike the middle class person, who participates in the community and its activities because he shares its values and goals and finds that the organizations of the community further his own purposes. (p. 87-88)

This dated explanation of communities and group interaction in the mountains simplified complex social conditions and culture in Appalachian communities and used an undeveloped understanding of what makes a community. Gall noted that this book was used by the Council of the Southern Mountains in their work in the region and had an impact on the work of the Center. *Yesterday's People* influenced uplift programs and popular sentiment about the Appalachian region and made a lasting impact on notions about the nature of Appalachian people.

In a similar vein, Eller (1982) referenced writer Emma Belle Miles who argued there was no such thing as a community of mountaineers due to an absence of “formal relationships and institutions” (p. 33). Eller (1982) astutely observed, “Scarcity of those types of formal relationships that gave structure to other American neighborhoods does not imply the absence of shared interests, common traditions, or a sense of community in the region.” (p. 33). He pointed out the existence of “an informal network of communications and social activities that operated through the kinship system to provide fellowship, association, and community life” (Eller, 1982, p. 33). Keefe (2009) likewise discussed the supposed absence of community and the “mainstream cultural definition of community that envisions densely clustered housing and neighborhoods, the presence of formal institutions and markets, formal leadership and political organization, and so forth” (p. 15). Keefe (2009) referenced Sonya Salamon’s research which defined community “as a sense of social relationships attached to place” (p. 22).

Other examinations of Appalachian communities including Patricia Beaver’s (1986) *Rural Community in the Appalachian South* have analyzed definitions of community and cultural aspects of mountain localities. Beaver explained community as ““overlapping informal and flexible social networks serving a range of purposes”” (qtd. in Keefe, 2009, p.15). Appalachian communities are largely defined by “social relations and local association in families, churches, and neighborhoods” (Keefe, 2009, p. 15), as well as kinship networks. Anne Kingsolver (2011) similarly stated, “Community is made from the telling and retelling of stories about who we are, where we are, how we are or are not connected, and what has happened in the past or might happen in the future” (p. 113).



Social relationships, intricate kinship networks, cultural norms, informal associations, and place-based connections rather than rigid, mainstream middle-class definitions of communities, are important to take into account when considering rural Appalachian localities. Due to the complex nature of communities and community integration, it is difficult to assert that Stinking Creek is not a community. The Stinking Creek watershed with its long history of family interaction and social connections, though spread out over a large portion of Knox County, has the many social ties, kinship networks, associations, and stories necessary to form a community. Though there may be smaller communities within the watershed, there is certainly not an absence of community. These conflicting ideas about what constitutes a community as evidenced by Gall and Kemner's assertions and the work of Appalachian writers show that communities are layered. Communities are defined in different ways by different people and have different levels and types of associations, both formal and informal.

Besides being featured in magazine articles, another very important development during this period and one of the greatest changes and blessings in both Gall and Kemner's lives was Kemner's adoption of a baby girl she delivered. Melody Rose Stewart was born on July 28, 1966. Kemner recounted her experience with the birth in *I Am with You Always*. She recalled,

Many times I have suggested, to a mother, that I could take a baby home with me... In this area, the stork does not bring babies; children are told 'Peggy brings them in her brown bag.' Many times I was serious because it appeared, to me, this baby was another burden to the family. (Kemner, 2000, p. 7)

In the summer of 1966, Kemner was delivering a friend and local woman's sixth child. She remembered,

When I got there it was obvious that there wasn't going to be long before the baby was born and so I asked her if she was going to let me have that baby and she said, 'Do you want it?' And I said, 'Yes, I want it'...Of course I waited till after it was born and then I think I said to her, 'Are you really going to let me have this baby?' And she said, 'Yes,' and so I looked at her mother, and said, 'Do you have a box with a blanket in it?' And I took the baby home. An hour and a half old. (P. Kemner, personal communication, January 20, 2012)

Kemner had always wanted a child and had experience bringing up children. Melody was shortly thereafter legally adopted and became a part of the Lend-A-Hand family. Although Kemner was the one who legally adopted Melody, Gall also served as a mother to the child. Melody calls both Gall and Kemner "Mom." She grew up at the Center while continuing contact with her biological family, interacting with people in the community, and living with dozens of volunteers and local people.

Another major milestone in the history of the Lend-A-Hand Center was the completion of the new Center building in the mid-1960s. The new Center, designed and built specifically for the purposes of the work of Lend-A-Hand, allowed for more room for the women to take in people, house the clinic, and host children's activities. Gall and Kemner moved into the unfinished house around January 1965 and continued completing the building for a few more years.

## **Programs**

The Lend-A-Hand Center continued and expanded its health services, agriculture, conservation work, youth programs, family living, building, and work with local families through the mid-1960s. The Center continued its involvement with the Council of the Southern Mountains (CSM) and Gall remembered hosting a CSM meeting in the beginning of October 1967 or 1968. At the meeting the group convened at the chapel with invited Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) officials and discussed the role of the newly created federal-state partnership which would work on improving water, roads, and bridges throughout the region. Gall remembered advocating a rail system for the region during the meeting. Further, Gall served as the CSM president around 1966 through 1968 for two years. She called organizational meetings two times a year, which were opportunities for sharing projects and swapping ideas.

By the mid-1960s, the Center was holding two day camps every summer for older and younger children to help them get ready for school (I. Gall, personal communication, November 26, 2012). Day camp was an expanded version of Bible school camp. Two sets of children came for three to four hours a day for a week, receiving a meal and a snack and participating in 4-H type activities including swimming under the bridge, playing games, taking hikes, and making crafts. Bible school activities were also part of the day camps. These camps continued throughout the history of the organization and became an important part of summer activities at the Center.

Lend-A-Hand also participated in cash crop programs in the mid-1960s which were promoted by the county agricultural extension office as alternatives to raising tobacco. They raised a variety of crops for the market and served as an experimental station for the

community. Gall recalled, “At one time the extension office was trying cucumbers, peppers, and even Grade C milk as an alternative to tobacco farming” (personal communication, November 30, 2012). These programs provided extra income for the Center and allowed the Center’s agricultural programs to expand.

Constant building projects have characterized the history of the Center. During the mid-1960s the women continued improving the grounds, adding different outbuildings, and working on the Center building. The women moved the chapel building around 1967 and kept up with repairs on the bridge.

### **Volunteers**

The Center continued to host Lend-A-Hand volunteers during the mid-1960s, expanding its volunteer program and even branching out to help train “poverty warriors,” people that enlisted in Johnson’s War on Poverty. The Center became a place to train Volunteers In Service To America (VISTA) volunteers in addition to hosting local children and adults in need.

In 1965, the Center hosted its first Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS) volunteer. Volunteers began coming under the program sponsored by the Church of the Brethren, which Gall had worked with in the 1940s and 1950s. The BVS program became an important aspect of the volunteer program at the Center. According to Gall, BVS:

Started in the late [19]40s for a way to serve our nation in a peaceful way other than going into the armed services. This was the time of the draft. It was an alternate service recognized by some draft boards. The draft was for males, but BVS was for all people to serve a year or two. (personal communication, November 20, 2012)

Volunteers were given a small stipend from BVS and were charged with working at the Center full time for the duration of their service. Until the 1980s, the Center usually hosted one to three BVSers who stayed for a year term. Many of the early volunteers were women who were from the Midwest. Few volunteers came with full support and the Center had to manage running programs in the community and sponsoring volunteers, providing food, housing, and living expenses.

In the summer of 1966 Gall and Kemner lived with baby Melody, two local kids, and four BVS volunteers: three women and an alternative service worker including Molly Tucker, later Molly Hubbard, who came in 1966 as a summer volunteer and ended up staying in the area and marrying a local man. The group had family devotions almost every morning and a family atmosphere, eating, working, and serving in the community together. This was a typical family at Lend-A-Hand and as people came and went through the years the Lend-A-Hand family grew.

### **Local Culture**

Although teaching local culture or cultural heritage preservation were never explicit goals of the Lend-A-Hand Center, it was incorporated into the organization in some ways. The Center was unlike settlement schools in teaching culture, but did have some elements of music, religion, and crafts built into its programs. The culture of the area was different than what Gall and Kemner had been raised in. Kemner (2000) observed, “In the mountains of southeastern Kentucky, we have little social life and few opportunities to attend cultural programs” (p. 60). Though this opinion is based on her personal perceptions of what constitutes cultural programs, presumably more formal events like operas, plays, or formal

arts programs, the area did provide some cultural opportunities for the women and for Lend-A-Hand volunteers.

Both Gall and Kemner enjoyed and appreciated traditional music from the area. Gall noted, “Music was a very important part of the mountains” (personal communication, April 1, 2013). Her school children would make up songs about everything. Many Center programs incorporated local culture, especially music. Bible school and later day camp featured music and Gall even took up the autoharp. Gall and Kemner took 4-H and Sunday school children to festivals to see people like the McClain Family Band. Folksinger Jean Ritchie came and played at the Center more than once during the War on Poverty. Gall recalled, “Jean Ritchie was here, sat here in our [room], right here and played and sang with our groups, our young people” (personal communication, January 20, 2012). Although the work at the Center did not focus much on traditional crafts, Gall and Kemner’s craftsmanship in making textiles, quilts, furniture, decorations, and other items has been impressive over the years. The women learned from people in the community and taught countless kids and volunteers, especially in 4-H, a variety of handicraft skills. Their handiwork and do-it-yourself projects have contributed to the cultural heritage of the Center.

Though teaching local culture was never a major part of the programs of the Center, Gall and Kemner did expose volunteers to local traditions. They made a point to show volunteers different churches in the area. Kemner recalled, “Just to give our volunteers a flavor of some of the churches in the area, on Sunday nights we would go, take the group and go to some different churches” (personal communication, September 4, 2008). One Sunday night a month the Lend-A-Hand family would meet at a local family’s home during the 1960s and 1970s and sing traditional hymns and songs. The Center later hosted folk dances

in the barn in the mid-1970s for volunteers, with locals participating and providing music. People often came to sing for work groups and to share local culture including groups from Union College. Billy Edd Wheeler also came to the Center to visit. Through these activities and some short lessons from the directors about the local community, volunteers learned about traditions in the area and were exposed to a culture that was often different from their own.

### **The War on Poverty in Appalachia**

While Gall and Kemner were setting up the Lend-A-Hand Center, national attention was mounting regarding poverty and the Appalachian region. Organizations, state governments, and even the federal government were considering programs to address poverty and help distressed areas like central Appalachia. President John F. Kennedy became concerned with poverty conditions in the mountains during his famous presidential primary visit in West Virginia in 1960. Calls for antipoverty programs had been brewing in the region for several years and came to a head during the War on Poverty.

Several works have examined the precursors leading up to the passage of the Economic Opportunity Act (EOA), the War on Poverty's formation, complex history, philosophical underpinnings, and effects in Appalachia, as well as events leading up to the passage of the Appalachian Regional Development Act (ARDA) (Glen, 1989; Whisnant, 1980; Eller, 2008; Kiffmeyer, 2008; Kiffmeyer, 2011). The War on Poverty was intertwined with the work of the Council of the Southern Mountains in Appalachia and used many of the same tactics as Council affiliates and uplift programs in the region including the Lend-A-Hand Center, providing interesting points of comparison.

Developed initially from ideas under the Kennedy administration about tackling poverty in the inner city and rural areas like Appalachia and based largely on the Ford Foundation's "gray areas" program, the Office of Economic Opportunity's history is colorful and short. Formed through the struggle of competing ideologies, the organization incorporated diverse ideas and competing interests into the influential new legislation that would administer millions of dollars in communities throughout the nation. Saul Alinsky's community organizing tactics and Richard Boone's philosophical foundations and idea of "maximum feasible participation" of the poor were influential in the legislation's development. Alinsky and Boone's participatory ideas added another facet to the traditional development techniques called for by the legislation.

The OEO is an example of a national experiment which attempted to combine federal resources and power with grassroots change and "maximum feasible participation" of the poor. The idea to try to help people help themselves while not really enacting any system-wide change in addressing inequality contributed significantly to the organization's failure in truly addressing poverty in the country at large and especially the Appalachian region. The organization was based on certain underlying philosophical principles that guided its work at the top level through its on-the-ground operations. It focused on human capital development, integrating poor people into the mainstream and preparing them for jobs within the system. The OEO focused mainly on human development while the Appalachian Regional Commission focused its efforts on physical infrastructure development in a two-pronged approach to combating poverty in the region.

Much can be learned about the philosophical basis of the OEO legislation by evaluating a model used by the Council of Economic Advisors when formulating the



legislation: “Poverty leads to cultural and environmental obstacles to motivation which lead to poor health, inadequate education, and low mobility limiting earning potential which leads to limited income opportunity which lead to Poverty” (qtd. in Whisnant, 1980, p. 99). Many have argued that this basic understanding of poverty is why the OEO was so ineffective. Whisnant (1980) connected this philosophy with the culture of poverty thesis and noted that because of this design, the program had little hope to work for Appalachia (p. 99-100).

Like the Lend-A-Hand Center and the Council of the Southern Mountains, OEO programs were influenced by contemporary ideas about poverty in rural Appalachia. The OEO built upon the work of organizations such as the Council of the Southern Mountains and was influenced by social scientists and politicians who ascribed to many of these concepts that connected culture and poverty. The proliferation of writings during the 1960s that attributed poverty to culture had an impact on War on Poverty programs during this time. Books like *Night Comes to the Cumberlands*, *Yesterday's People*, and *Stinking Creek* shaped many people's views of Appalachian culture and government intervention in the region.

Continuing Kennedy's legislative agenda, President Lyndon B. Johnson announced a “War on Poverty” on January 8, 1964. The foundation of this “War” was the passage of the Economic Opportunity Act. The Office of Economic Opportunity was begun with the passage of the EOA, signed into law on August 20, 1964. This ambitious legislative agenda created several bureaucratic structures and started channeling funds to poor areas around the country. The OEO set out to address poverty through its five main components: the Community Action Program (CAP), Job Corps, Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), Head Start, and Neighborhood Youth Corps (NYC).

Title II of the Act, the most controversial part of the legislation, set up the Community Action Program to administer federal money at the local level to provide services for those in need. The Act also called for “maximum feasible participation” of the poor, in order to encourage poor people to work toward identifying and solving their own problems, rather than channeling additional funds through existing local government structures. Community Action was “the backbone of the Economic Opportunity Act and the central program of the OEO” (Whisnant, 1980, p. 109). The vision for the Community Action Program involved some aspects of participatory development, but was heavily influenced by the culture of poverty and regional development models, emphasizing education, infrastructure, job training, and providing services to communities.

As discussed in the review of the literature, the OEO and its philosophical foundations had their share of problems. The Community Action Program had an ambitious agenda and many shortcomings. Insufficiently funded and subscribing in many ways to the culture of poverty thesis, the nationwide War on Poverty fell short of its aims, while at the same time making some strides in areas like Knox County, enabling programs including the KCEOC to implement innovative programs in rural Appalachian communities. The War on Poverty facilitated changes within the Lend-A-Hand Center and gave meaningful experiences to Gall and Kemner and many Stinking Creek residents.

### **The KCEOC**

The passing of the EOA and the subsequent formation of Community Action Programs (CAPs) captured the attention of local leaders in Knox County. The Knox County Development Association (KCDA) was in existence since 1960. The KCDA, a loosely organized group led by community leaders and businessmen was only periodically active, but

became interested in the possibility of OEO programs in their county. Robert Hall, current KCEOC employee and unofficial organizational historian, compiled a history of the early days of the organization. According to Hall, on September 21, 1964, they came together to try to secure funding for a local Community Action Program (R. Hall, personal communication, “History of KCEOC Community Action Partnership, Inc.”).

Dr. John Dotson, Dean of the Graduate School at Union College, was influential in the formation of the Knox County Economic Opportunity Council, the local countywide Community Action Program. Dotson and Union College President, Mahlon Miller, approached Congressional Representative Carl Perkins for help and advice in securing funding. When the KCDA reformed in September 1964, the board consisted of Dr. Dotson, Mahlon Miller, Barbourville Mayor Paul Buchanan, Knox County Judge J.E. McDonald, Harry Viall, Coey Pritchard, Helene Perry, and Owen Cottrell (owner of the IGA), with County School Superintendent Jesse D. Lay as an ad hoc member (R. Hall, personal communication, “History of KCEOC Community Action Partnership, Inc.”). At the meeting, the group asked Lay and Buchanan to work with the Kentucky Area Program Office of the OEO to secure funding and prepare corporate papers (R. Hall, personal communication, “History of KCEOC Community Action Partnership, Inc.”).

Gall was involved with the formation and trajectory of the KCEOC from its beginning. She recalled that Lay brought Miller to the one-room school up Alex Creek in the Stinking Creek watershed where she taught in October or November 1964 (I. Gall, personal communication, December 28, 2011). The men were touring all the one-room schools and talking to teachers about the new EOA that had passed. They asked her if she thought this kind of program was something Knox County could use and she was very interested in the

idea “that Knox County people were supposed to look at their own problems and figure out ways to solve them and if we could figure out ways to solve them then the US government would pay us to solve them” (I. Gall, personal communication, December 28, 2011).

Gall remembered that Dotson then came out to her house a couple weeks later and they “sat on my couch and talked and wrote up a program that very night” (personal communication, December 28, 2011). Gall recalled that he was interested in what her organization, the Lend-A-Hand Center, was doing in the area. This report was then taken to the board forming the KCEOC.

Hall noted that on October 15, 1964, Dotson and Gall prepared the first funding request for the Knox County Community Action Program and sent it to the Kentucky Office (R. Hall, personal communication, “History of KCEOC Community Action Partnership, Inc.”). James Kendrick recalled, “An application for a Program Development Grant was submitted in 1964, the purpose of which was to carry out initial planning for a Community Action Program and to gain input from prospective participants, particularly those living in outlying areas of the county” (personal communication, December 1, 2011). Kendrick further explained,

Mahlon Miller, president of Union College, made several trips to Washington DC to discuss prospects for a major program with the Federal anti-poverty task force and emerging OEO agency. Miller promoted the idea of basing a rural Appalachian research and demonstration program in Knox County. The idea was to showcase how the overall OEO program could work together to reduce poverty. By overall program, this would include most components of OEO: Community Action Program, Neighborhood Youth Corps, College Work-Study, Unemployed Parents Program,

VISTA, Job Corps, etc. The programs would also be linked with other activities such as job creation through economic development. (personal communication, December 1, 2011)

Miller met with OEO officials in late 1964 on behalf of the county, securing relationships with the administration.

Hall noted the organization met on December 14, naming the new CAP the Knox County Economic Opportunity Council, Inc. (R. Hall, personal communication, “History of KCEOC Community Action Partnership, Inc.”). On December 17, 1964, both the Knox County Economic Opportunity Council, Inc. and the Knox County Development Association, Inc. were incorporated with the state as nonprofit corporations. Both as separate entities, the KCDA would focus on physical resources, while the KCEOC would focus on human resource development (R. Hall, personal communication, “History of KCEOC Community Action Partnership, Inc.”).

Gall recalled that Miller and Lay decided that the group needed consultants to help with the formation of the program, so a consulting firm helped produce a report (I. Gall, personal communication, December, 28, 2011). The firm toured schools and different communities and also looked at Lend-A-Hand’s programs. According to Gall, the report found that, “One way to solve the problems of the community, getting the community involved in solving their own problems, was to have a Community Action Program somewhat similar to what Lend-A-Hand was doing” (personal communication, December 28, 2011). The idea was to “be involved up the creek, with up the creek people [and to] go to the people instead of having people come to us” (I. Gall, personal communication, December 28, 2011).

This report was presented around January 1965 and Gall remembered the KCEOC getting OEO “seed money” early on. Gall believed the program she and Dotson drew up which went to Washington, helped secure initial funding for hiring and beginning the program (personal communication, December, 28, 2011). David Whisnant (1980) noted in *Modernizing the Mountaineer*, “The Knox County Economic Opportunity Council (EOC) received one of the earliest CAP program development grants in mid-December 1964. Within a year OEO grants to the CAP totaled more than \$1.1 million, and \$365,000 more went to the Board of Education for Neighborhood Youth Corps programs” (p. 112).

With the KCEOC incorporated and money on its way from Washington, the organization began to craft its programs in the community. The KCEOC was one of the first Community Action Programs in the country and served as a kind of pilot project in the area. It tried to reach its target populations and include local people in the decision making process and in the delivery of services to the area. Kendrick recalled,

The mission of KCEOC as expressed by county founders was to reduce poverty and increase economic opportunity through education, health, employment, and improved connection/involvement of community residents including those who were poor. Given that many low-income families lived in remote or isolated areas of the county, a priority was placed on outreach and the capacity to deliver programs in the rural areas where people lived. KCEOC pursued an inclusive approach to community development and organization. Rather than an ‘us against them’ conflict model, the underlying assumption was that almost everyone in the county could work together to make life better for everyone—at least after discussion, persuasion, and a little polite arm-twisting. At the same time, the philosophy was one of universal empowerment.

We were not ‘missionaries’ who would run soup kitchens or welfare for dependent souls. It was about opportunity for everyone to get involved, get educated, get healthy, get ahead economically. (personal communication, December 1, 2011)

The main vehicle for accomplishing these goals was the community center program. Though the organization administered other OEO programs, the community center program was the main outreach mechanism of the KCEOC.

The board of directors, mostly made up of local business and civic leaders, set out to select personnel. Gall was also one of the members of the original board of directors. Jim Kendrick, who had been a graduate student at Indiana University, was hired as the first executive director of the KCEOC. He had lived in Breathitt County, Kentucky, for eight months in 1961, working at a church mission. He heard about the position through an ad placed by the Council of the Southern Mountains in a national magazine in the fall of 1964. He sent his resume and was invited to Union College in early 1965 for interviews with several board members involved in the process. He was hired around February 1, 1965. According to Kendrick,

The initial period was a program development grant. I was the first person hired. My initial mission was work with people in the county, including those out in the outlying areas and plan and develop a program that was fundable by the federal government. (personal communication, December 2, 2011)

He was tasked with getting the follow up grant money and “develop[ing] a program that was workable and acceptable to people in the county including the people to be served by the program (J. Kendrick, personal communication, December 2, 2011).

Kendrick recounted that the chairman of the board of directors, Union College President Mahlon Miller wanted to establish Knox County as a “rural demonstration program for the whole antipoverty program as applied to Appalachia” and “establish Knox County as one of the national R & D centers for OEO, which did happen briefly” (personal communication, December 2, 2011). When Kendrick started working, the KCEOC already had the idea of community centers.

Gall, who had already been collaborating with the board of directors on developing the plan for the KCEOC, was hired as the Community Center Coordinator around February 1965. Gall quit her job as a schoolteacher and began to work wholeheartedly on the antipoverty effort in Knox County, building on her experience working with area missions and at the Lend-A-Hand Center. Her increased salary through her new job at the KCEOC allowed for funding of Lend-A-Hand operations and boosted the income, connections, and status of the Center. Kendrick’s wife was also hired early on as secretary for the KCEOC.

Around March 1965, Gall recalled meeting Sargent Shriver, the head of the OEO in Washington D.C., when he was setting up his new office. She and Kendrick met with him to request money for the program, recalling that they were asking for \$25,000 to \$30,000 and ended up coming home with about \$700,000 promised to the KCEOC (I. Gall, personal communication, December 29, 2011). As Gall remembered, “We were good persuaders. Told them where we were from, what we’d been working with, and what our idea was” and that Kendrick did the “financial talking,” while she explained “why our community needed this” (personal communication, December 29, 2011). Gall remembered the conversation going along the lines of: “‘How can I look over your program when I don’t even know where to set my desk.’ That’s how new [Shriver] was in the whole program. ‘Well sit down, and let me



tell you about it.' So we did" (personal communication, December 29, 2011). This early positioning with the OEO allowed the KCEOC to be one of the trendsetting CAPs in the region and the nation.

Kendrick and Gall then began hiring a business staff and people to work the community center program. The KCEOC administered or helped administer other OEO programs in addition to running the community center program. They set about to run their program in what Whisnant (1980) classified as the "community organizing" mode, giving poor people power within the organization (p. 109). Sam Bollier (2009) analyzed the history and development of the Community Action Program in southeastern Kentucky, including the KCEOC, providing a glimpse into the politics and struggles poverty warriors faced in the area.

### **The Community Center Program**

The community center program, the KCEOC's flagship operation, delivered services and leadership opportunities to people all over Knox County. Gall worked with the KCEOC from August 1964 during its formative stage, then officially from February 1965 to July 1967. Gall recalled, "We didn't have any other community to get ideas from. Most of these ideas came from what Lend-A-Hand was already doing or what we saw through the Council of the Southern Mountains" (personal communication, January 3, 2012). Early KCEOC programs were modeled after missions working on health, education, and economic issues in the mountains.

The community center program was a combination of Dotson's ideas, the consultants' report, and Gall's visions. Kendrick acknowledged that the community center program was the focal point of the early days of the KCEOC and was the delivery system or the skeleton

of the organization (personal communication, December 2, 2011). Gall began constructing and implementing the program as community center coordinator. By 1967 there were 13 community centers throughout the county, little Lend-A-Hands, which delivered services and outreach and impacted the lives of hundreds of Knox Countians.

Gall, who was active in the community and by that time, very knowledgeable about the happenings on Stinking Creek and around Knox County, was aware of the one-room schools that were closing throughout the county and wanted to take advantage of the opportunity to use those facilities. The concept of the community center program was to convert old one- and two-room school buildings into community centers in poor, rural areas of the county, through which programs and services could be administered. The schools were already scattered throughout the county in small communities, many areas off of the main road and far from the county seat of Barbourville, thus making ideal locations for getting services and programs to people in need. The community center program was beginning during the time of heightened school consolidation as well as racial integration. Initially, Gall chose one-room schools that were being vacated to house operations, then as word spread of the work of the centers, other people wanted centers in their small communities and other facilities were sought. Gall's idea of using the schools as the centers allowed the KCEOC to reach out into the communities.

Heterogeneity characterized the various communities across Knox County—some rural, some coal camps, some richer farmlands, and some more densely populated areas. People in different areas had different needs, socioeconomic classifications, businesses, and goals for their communities, all of which had to be taken into account when considering KCEOC programs. Using schools across the county enabled the program to be present in

these different localities and tailor programs to meet specific aims. Gall remembered that the idea was to go “out to the people” and “the further up the hollow you went, the better” (personal communication, December 29, 2011). Gall stressed that the key phrase was “local” and that the program was training “grassroots people” (personal communication, December 29, 2011). She remembered, “The word was ‘cycle of poverty’... We were trying to break into that” (I. Gall, personal communication, December 29, 2011).

Kendrick described the community center program as a means for service delivery; a way to get health programs, the Early Childhood Program, and other services out to people in rural communities scattered around the county and a way to get people together and communicate to work on issues that they thought needed some action (personal communication, December 2, 2011). The community centers were also a way for local people to get a say in the programs implemented by the KCEOC, providing input on what they wanted done in their community, and giving them the opportunity to develop leadership skills. It allowed for “maximum feasible participation” of the poor in the work of the CAP. The centers hired local people to administer programs, many of whom lacked skills in working in a group or delegating responsibilities. The community centers provided a place for people to work together, learn new skills, and socialize.

Community centers were physical community spaces for the community. Centers had trained staff and daily and weekly programs for the community. The centers elicited community involvement and provided opportunities, support, and funding for local initiatives. Gall quickly went to work securing school buildings and setting up centers. Within two months the program had two centers up and running. Gall recalled that the centers were open roughly 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 or 5:00 p.m. four days a week or more (personal

communication, January 3, 2012). The program expanded rapidly as Gall set about hiring staff to implement the programs of the centers. The budget for the KCEOC also increased from \$800,000 to 1.5 million in a couple of years (I. Gall personal communication, December 28, 2011).

According to Gall, the program hoped to reach people at all stages of life, especially in the poor rural areas. She took the lead constructing and implementing the program which had six major parts. The community centers would have local action groups, Early Childhood Programs, youth programs, men's programs, women's programs, and health programs. Gall hired "coordinators" for each of the programs to work with the staff at each of the community centers. Each of the community centers had a director, usually from the local area, who coordinated the activities at the center and worked with the VISTA workers and the various coordinators. Aides were hired in each center to work with the center director and their coordinator to implement programs. Gall recalled, "An aide was to be someone from the community" (personal communication, January 3, 2012). The aides were under both the center director and their coordinator (e.g. the youth aide in the Rosenwald center reported to the Rosenwald center director and the countywide youth coordinator). Total staff at the centers varied and within a year of the incorporation of the KCEOC, the organization had from 150 to 300 employees (I. Gall, personal communication, December 28, 2011). Hiring targeted local people and many who were hired had only rudimentary reading or writing skills. The centers also employed bus drivers and cooks to help with the Early Childhood Program. Centers had vehicles and supplies, their own schedules, and maintenance and planning responsibilities.

The community centers benefitted from the assistance of Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) workers, people of all ages who came from across the country and operated under the OEO like a domestic peace corps, fighting poverty in rural and urban America. VISTAs helped implement the programs at the centers and worked closely with center directors and the various program coordinators. Each center director had a VISTA worker who was assigned to work in coordination with the director on the work of the center. VISTAs, according to Gall, were supposed to stretch the center directors, give them ideas, and work together on programs (personal communication, January 3, 2012).

Gall was the VISTA coordinator in addition to the community center coordinator. She supervised, trained, and employed the volunteers and matched a VISTA with a center director or a program coordinator. Gall recalled that the first VISTA workers began to arrive in March 1965 and that around July or August 1965 a group of roughly 20 VISTAs were sent to Knox County to be trained (personal communication, January 3, 2012). She trained the volunteers at the Lend-A-Hand Center and took them around to the community centers throughout the county (I. Gall, personal communication, January 3, 2012). She remembered that around ten of the twenty stayed in the county and continued working and for the rest of her tenure more volunteers trickled in (I. Gall, personal communication, January 3, 2012). There were between 20 and 30 VISTAs working in the program at any time. The volunteers were from all over the country and lived in the communities where they worked, bringing a broader outsider perspective to the community center program.

A major part of the community center program was the local action groups which operated at each community center. These local action groups, or LAGs, were groups of community members that came together to discuss their problems and possible solutions for

the community. The community centers had open meetings once a month as a LAG. The people then elected a LAG board for their center with officers including a chairman and secretary. The local action groups developed bylaws and worked with other local action groups on projects and programs. From the officers at the individual LAG boards, two were elected to the Local Action Group Council, which was made up of representatives from all the community centers. From the Local Action Group Council, members of the low-income sector of the KCEOC board of directors were elected. The activities of the LAGs reflected the participatory element of the CAP. The people in the 13 areas throughout Knox County were given a venue to discuss their problems and find solutions based on their individual circumstances, wants, and needs. Unlike Lend-A-Hand, these LAGs incorporated community input in the work of the KCEOC.

The LAG groups were the most participatory component of the community center program. The program fostered democratic decision making, facilitated engagement, worked on citizenship building, sought community participation, and brought people together to work toward common goals. Gall noted that people were not “used to delegating authority” (personal communication, January 3, 2012) which is indicative of a culture of poverty understanding of poverty. Gall noted that participation was good at the LAG meetings across the county in the beginning, generally bringing 50 to 60 people, then later leveling off to around 20 attendees (personal communication, January 3, 2012).

These centers came up with different initiatives to combat poverty and other social problems in their communities. Gall recalled,

In '66 each one of our centers was to come up with an idea of having an economic or social program in their center. One program started a food coop in which they bought

food, took orders, and sold food. Around four programs had parks and they built shelters on the parks and developed roads. (personal communication, January 3, 2012)

Another innovative program that came out of the LAGs was a small business from the Cannon community center. “Cannon Industries” was a business that started out making toys, then shipping pallets, and later furniture. Local people owned stock in the company and the business had a warehouse and employed community residents. Other projects through the LAGs addressed infrastructure conditions in the area, considering ways to improve bridges, phone lines, electric lines, and roads.

There were five main components of the service delivery facet of the community centers. The Early Childhood, youth, men’s, women’s, and health programs served people in their remote communities, providing activities, opportunities for socialization, opportunities for education, and a way to interact with individuals outside their community. These were developed on the county level, largely dreamed up by Gall, Kendrick, and the KCEOC staff. The programs were made to “touch every phase of the family” (I. Gall, personal communication, December 29, 2011). These service delivery components were heavily influenced by the culture of poverty model, attempting to assimilate poor people into mainstream society through education and socialization. Gall and Kemner were in many ways already doing this kind of work at the Lend-A-Hand Center—tutoring kids, providing health services, and working with individuals and families. The women built on their previous experiences in working in the War on Poverty. The service-oriented, self-help focus and individual attention of the community center program was much like Lend-A-Hand.

The Early Childhood Program or ECP targeted children younger than school age. It was a program that taught socialization and early education skills to prepare kids for first grade. Reaching at-risk children at a young age was seen as integral to addressing poverty in communities across Knox County. The KCEOC's Early Childhood Program was a precursor to Head Start.

In the ECP, babies and children up to age six learned to write their names, to play together with toys, and to participate in various arts and crafts projects. The children had activities, colored, ate, and socialized under the supervision of trained teachers and aides hired from the local communities. The program set up classrooms in the community centers and classes were held Tuesday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. The number of kids enrolled varied, but Gall recalled around 20 children per center (personal communication, December 29, 2011).

The program worked both with the parents and children and was in many ways a lot like Lend-A-Hand's Little Children's Program, addressing many of the same early childhood development issues. It was considerably modeled after the work of Gall and Kemner and other programs from the Council of the Southern Mountains and local missions. The program sought parents' involvement and parents had to volunteer so many hours in order to have their child enrolled.

The ECP addressed gender roles in the community as well. Gall remembered problems with people not wanting to ride in cars alone with members of the opposite sex. In order to address this problem, busses which picked up kids and parents for the ECP had both a man and a woman riding along. Gall recalled that the ECP program targeted socializing mothers, noting, "That was so important, to get the child and the mother to know that there



was a world besides that home life” (personal communication, December 29, 2011).

Furthermore, the community center programs helped integrate men and women in the workforce. Gall recalled, “There was a real taboo about men and women working together” (personal communication, January 3, 2012). In her program, “You had to be able to work with a person of the opposite sex” (I. Gall, personal communication, January 3, 2012). The ECP also encouraged professional development and teaching as a profession. The centers hired professional teachers and aides to help with the kids. It encouraged aides to get their GEDs and worked on training people to become teachers, opening up opportunities especially for women in the community.

The youth program consisted of many different activities in the centers for youth including sports, after school tutoring, dancing, recreational activities, and other events to provide entertainment and education for kids and young adults. Gall noted the idea of dual integration—between communities and between races—that was accomplished through the community center program and especially youth activities. The programs were “integrating the young people to be more at ease with each other” (I. Gall, personal communication, December 29, 2011). Gall reflected, “I don’t think you have any idea how isolated these communities were” (personal communication, December 29, 2011). People from Stinking Creek mixed with people from Barbourville and Gray through these programs, playing on sports teams against each other, going to dances together, participating in music programs, and having joint community center events. One night a week there were special programs for youth at each center. Sports leagues including softball, volleyball, basketball, and flag football engaged young people and encouraged both girls and boys to participate. Gall noted, “Girls were not encouraged, you know, to do any of these things” (personal communication,

December 29, 2011). She again promoted young women's participation in their communities and advocated not conforming to traditional gender roles by getting involved with the sporting events and leading by example.

Once a month the community center program hosted county-wide youth programs. The program brought busloads of youth and community members from different parts of the county to different centers that hosted games, singings, movies, plays, parties, and different kinds of dances—round, folk, and square. Some of the centers had trained callers and regular dance events. Fetterman (1967) recounted, “On the Fourth of July, about two hundred people turned out for a picnic and afternoon of singing, a cracker-eating contest and talent show” (p. 181) at the Messer Community Center up Stinking Creek. Other events throughout the year fostered a sense of community and provided activities for youth.

The youth programs also aimed to keep kids in school, facilitating the transition from remote one-room grade schools to high school and trying to tackle dropout rates by getting kids more familiar with people outside their small communities. Gall recalled that the programs hoped to help kids stay in school, learn in school, and graduate, while becoming acquainted with each other socially so they felt more at ease working with each other, and not being scared of high school or college (personal communication, December 29, 2011). The programs aimed to impact “the children socially and intellectually” (I. Gall, personal communication, December 29, 2011). Tutoring programs at the Centers helped kids stay ahead in school and provided help many parents could not.

The men's programs at the centers were never highly successful. The men's programs merged quite a bit with some of the work experience programs administered by the KCEOC

and other organizations. Men in the community participated in the LAGs and worked on construction of the centers.

The women's program was closely tied to the health program and was also not very well received according to Gall. Many health events at the centers were geared toward educating mothers. Activities in home economics and crafts such as quilting were also part of the women's program. The women's activities worked with mothers and babies and included well baby clinics, diet programs, and cooking programs that taught women how to prepare commodity foods which were often wasted. Programs also taught women how to can, mend, and give haircuts.

Gall noted that the program was not very "successful in getting the women to come out" (personal communication, December 29, 2011). One of the main objectives of the women's program according to Gall was "to get them to come out to the center, socialize, just sit down and talk with other women other than your sister-in-law, your mother-in-law" (personal communication, December 29, 2011). The culture of poverty understanding and emphasis on individual habits and socialization underscored Gall's conception of the work of the centers with women in the community. Gall related, "They were barefoot and pregnant and now I mean that's exactly what they were, barefoot and pregnant. They weren't allowed to do anything. They were supposed to be home nursing their children" (personal communication, December 29, 2011). Working with women across the county, the community center program tried to address this issue and present different opportunities for women.

The health program involved education and screening at the centers. The KCEOC even purchased a mobile health unit that visited each center once a month to conduct tests

and refer patients. These programs hoped to address health issues for all Knox Countians, especially those below the poverty line and their children.

In the fall, around October 1965, Kemner was hired as the health coordinator. She worked in all the community centers providing health services and supervising nurses and social workers. One of the major aspects of the health program was called “the day.” Gall remembered, “Peggy came up with the idea of taking the mobile unit to a center one day a month and it was called ‘the day’” (personal communication, January 3, 2012). On “the day” there were screenings, movies, and clinics of all kinds, including well baby clinics. Thirteen days of the month, the mobile health unit was at a center providing services.

One need that had been apparent to Gall and Kemner working at the Lend-A-Hand Center was the lack of trained social workers and social services in the county. There were few social workers in the area prior to the War on Poverty. When Gall and Kemner found abuse in the community they worked with the county judge or sheriff. Gall remembered, “We had no place to send a child. We had no foster homes, no halfway houses, no detention centers that would take children” (personal communication, January 3, 2012). Gall noted that the programs under the KCEOC furthered the need for more social workers in the county and more social workers were hired. The social worker worked under the health coordinator and found abuse cases of all ages and kinds, and set out to address needs in the county (I. Gall personal communication, January 3, 2012).

The health program also addressed dietary issues and personal and dental hygiene. Gall noted of the area,

Diet was always a problem. When we first started...about every family clan had their own cow. And so they would have milk. Well then it got so that in the '60s they quit

having a cow and they went to soda pop and that's when the teeth went fast. (personal communication, January 3, 2012)

The health program provided education and preventative care, as well as opportunities for employment, especially for women. The health aide at each center was trained in basic healthcare. Gall remembered, "This was an opening for women...you could be a health aide, get training, and get paid for it" (personal communication, January 3, 2012). Many people who worked in the health program continued in healthcare as a career.

A focus on education permeated all of the programs of the community centers. Programs at the centers strived to keep kids in school, as well as further the education of adults while developing leadership. The community center program also stressed education for its employees. Many of the people Gall hired only had rudimentary skills. Every Monday evening the KCEOC hosted classes to teach people employed by the program. These adult education classes taught reading, writing, and math skills. Gall remembered, "Everybody that did not have a high school diploma had to be in one of these classes, getting their GED or getting basic education" (personal communication, December 29, 2011). Gall taught the "hardcore" class, teaching people how to write their names; how to recognize numbers, dollars, cents, and forms; and how to add and subtract (I. Gall, personal communication, December 29, 2011). Gall reflected, "Almost all of these [community center programs] had a lot of education in them because we were working with people that could either not read or write or were very poor at reading and writing" (personal communication, January 1, 2012). Other classes helped people earn their GEDS. Many youth aides earned their GEDs with scholarships available to help offset costs for taking the test.

Education enabled people to better run the community centers and be leaders in their communities. Gall reflected, “OEO from the beginning was to develop leadership amongst the people” (personal communication, December 28, 2011). The emphasis on education and leadership development added to the services offered by the centers, yet these programs were still trying to change the culture of the county and assimilate people into the mainstream.

Training was another large component of the community center program, with dozens of staff and volunteers needing to be taught the basics of the program. Gall was in charge of training and making sure the community center program ran smoothly. Every Monday, the program had a series of meetings to train employees and plan the agenda. The first Monday of each month, Gall met with directors, coordinators, and VISTAs and planned for the month, setting up the calendar. Other Monday meetings throughout the month worked out problems and allowed employees to get to know each other.

Unlike the programs at the Lend-A-Hand Center, the KCEOC community center program had some mechanisms for participation and strong institutional backing and funds for targeting poverty. The program was explicitly about addressing poverty, unlike Gall and Kemner’s mission at the Center. Though the community center program did empower people to have a greater stake in programs that directly affected them, and provided opportunities for unique antipoverty initiatives, it was still mostly a service delivery organization that focused on education, meeting needs of the community, building human capital, and infrastructure improvements. Some discussion of structural causes of poverty did come out of the community center program, but structural change was not the intent of the program, though it might have been for some of the founders of the OEO legislation including Richard Boone. The influence of the culture of poverty and regional development models can be observed

throughout the program, as can more participatory development paradigms evidenced in the local action groups. The program helped many people yet failed to enact any structural change in the county.

The early years of the community centers were not without their problems. Problems and controversies beyond the scope of this thesis include the dynamiting of a center; an armed standoff at a center; problems after an interracial dance; an interracial marriage between KCEOC workers that resulted in a bounty for Gall, a trip to Washington with the FBI, and a stay with Sargent Shriver; a lawsuit; a congressional investigation; cooptation of the program by local elites; nepotism; patronage systems; and consolidation with other Community Action Programs impacted the work of the program. Yet the program persisted in the face of many challenges and made a lasting impact in Knox County.

The community center program showed potential for changing the community with an interesting mix of ideologies. Although it was short lived and had its share of problems and controversies, it taught Gall a lot about working with community members, local power structures, and government bureaucracy. Unlike the KCEOC, Lend-A-Hand was not trying to change the community or be a community center. Gall and Kemner were not attempting to get power, influence, or votes. They were not after numbers to report to offices in Washington and “had no organization that you became a part of” (I. Gall, personal communication, January 3, 2012). Gall remarked,

One big difference between what Lend-A-Hand was trying to do and what OEO was trying to do was we weren't really trying to develop leadership as much as we were trying to have people have an opportunity to develop themselves into whatever capacity they could. (personal communication, December 28, 2011)

Gall and Kemner were knowledgeable about the county power structure, political corruption, the hegemony of the coal industry, and injustice in the county, but did not directly take a stance or oppose these structural problems in their community through the Lend-A-Hand Center or during their work in the War on Poverty. Gall and Kemner were acutely aware of the politics of the local power structure from their arrival in the county. From the complexity of finding a school to teach in when they first arrived, to having children placed in their care by the county judge, to helping people in legal cases, to getting little justice when they were harassed, to dealing with the patronage system of the political structure, to their War on Poverty experiences, Gall and Kemner were constantly confronted with structural problems, yet they chose to keep with their service-oriented mission. They believed broad systemic change was not their purpose, so their programs focused on meeting needs and trying to work within existing systems. Gall learned “to work quietly, nicely with people instead of agin’ ’em” (personal communication, January 28, 2012). She reflected,

You have to learn how to roll with the changes, not fight the changes. Roll with the changes. They’re going to come. You know the school was going to be consolidated. The school was going to be integrated. Whether we wanted it to be or not, so how can we get in there and work and make it better. That’s the way I worked with OEO for many years. (I. Gall, personal communication, January 28, 2012)

This lack of action in the face of unjust social structures does not indicate weakness or failure on the part of the Center to fulfill its mission; rather it shows that their focus was not toward systemic change. The work of the Center throughout its history has used subtle approaches to change and worked with the political structure of the county to accomplish its goals of lending a hand.



## **Emergency Funds and Service Incorporated (EFSI)**

One organization that emerged out of the early work of the KCEOC was Emergency Funds and Service, Inc. (EFSI). Spearheaded by KCEOC social worker Betty Hollinde, the organization was a spinoff of the KCEOC. This self-help, grassroots program provided a means for low-income families to earn food and other items by making crafts or helping at nonprofit organizations.

At the time there was no Salvation Army or Red Cross active in the area. EFSI took up donated items including clothing, housewares, furniture, and food and distributed them to people in need. EFSI had Pittsburgh and Louisville affiliates that also donated items. People brought crafts to pay off their debts or worked off the items they received in other ways. There was a workshop in the KCEOC building where people could make furniture, quilts, or other crafts. EFSI set up a “charge card store” in which people could charge so much worth of items and then take the card to a nonprofit such as the KCEOC or Lend-A-Hand and work it off at \$3 an hour (I. Gall, personal communication, January 4, 2012).

The program in many ways was modeled after Lend-A-Hand’s work on Stinking Creek and its philosophy of having people work off any items or help they received corresponded with Gall and Kemner’s ideology about providing for needs in the community. Hollinde worked to get Lend-A-Hand to be countywide as EFSI hoped to confront poverty more directly with self-help opportunities that would change the community.

EFSI especially benefitted women by providing an alternative means of income and an avenue to put their talents to use making things. Women would make quilts or prepare the last of the garden crops, going to homes and picking the leftover produce. Groups canned beans, apples, pears, and other staples for EFSI which in turn gave out the food. This design

provided material assistance, education, and social time for women in Knox County. Local women got together and canned food, talked, and socialized, becoming friends and building relationships.

EFSI still exists as an autonomous organization that gets some assistance from the KCEOC. It has its own board of directors on which Gall has served as chairman nearly continuously since its inception in the 1960s. The organization has since expanded and encompasses different programs while focusing on crafts as alternative economic opportunities for people. There is an extensive body of literature on the use of crafts to promote economic diversification and provide jobs and income in Appalachia and the EFSI program has proven the possibilities for nonprofits to use alternative strategies while providing for people in need.

### ***Stinking Creek***

Around 1967, Louisville journalist John Fetterman visited the Stinking Creek community gathering information for his book *Stinking Creek*. Searching for an understanding of the “hillbilly,” Fetterman set out to talk to the people of the Stinking Creek watershed, gathering their stories, asking questions, and observing ways of life in the community. *Stinking Creek* explored poverty, welfare programs, outmigration, religion, lack of jobs, coal, environmental degradation, culture, and the future of the community. Fetterman’s depiction of the residents of Stinking Creek focused on individuals’ lives, giving vignettes of the people of the area in colorful language with an overly dramatic, judgmental tone. Although his exaggerated language and generalizations clouded the account in many ways, his first-hand experience in the 1960s gives an interesting point of view on the workings of the community, the Lend-A-Hand Center, and the KCEOC.

Fetterman featured a chapter on the “Do-Gooders,” profiling Gall, Kemner, and the work of Lend-A-Hand. The chapter opened observing, “No area such as Appalachia could long escape gleeful discovery by do-gooders, those fervent, tireless Americans among us who are driven, as if though by demons, to do unto others” (Fetterman, 1967, p. 163). Fetterman, who gathered his information through interviews with the women, told the story of Gall and Kemner coming to Kentucky, meeting each other, fixing up the farmhouse, and forming Lend-A-Hand. Fetterman (1967) noted, “They agreed not to become an agency for passing out money, free food and clothing, or free service, on the theory that greater respect would be obtained if the patients paid something” (p. 167).

He discussed the Center’s health work in the community describing visits to patients on the Creek and problems with malnutrition and worms. Fetterman (1967) also examined Lend-A-Hand’s farm practices, cooking program, 4-H club, and Sunday school classes. He considered Gall and Kemner’s religion and motivations and described the women writing, “They are not among the zealous workers who prattle of lost lambs and a goody-goody, senseless evangelism” (Fetterman, 1967, p. 174).

The chapter featured a section on Judy and Andy Warren who were staying at the Center at the time. In what he called “a permanent policy,” Fetterman (1967) explained that “whenever children encounter unusual hardship, are abandoned, or live too far up a hollow to get out daily to school, there is usually a place for them at Lend A Hand” (p. 172). Fetterman (1967) covered the different programs of the Center well and highlighted some of Gall and Kemner’s philosophy.

Fetterman (1967) went on to explore the nascent KCEOC including Gall’s involvement with the community center program. He described how President Johnson’s

“Great Society” was coming to the area through the Knox County Economic Opportunity Council. Talking with Gall, Kendrick, and community center director Escoe Smith, Fetterman shared the stories and experiences of poverty warriors and was wary yet hopeful for the success of the program. He described the optimistic and ambitious nature of the program. Fetterman (1967) wrote that the Office of Economic Opportunity “asks that the poor themselves be permitted to have a voice in their own uplift, and it attempts to prevent local political hierarchies from using the money to perpetuate their own power” (p. 178). He went on to observe, “The poor are learning to speak with the voice promised them by the Office of Economic Opportunity” (Fetterman, 1967, p. 190).

This philosophy of participation is one of the greatest contributions of the War on Poverty to antipoverty efforts in Appalachia and one of the greatest lessons learned from the KCEOC’s community center program’s operations and organizational structure. The program did provide education, training, leadership opportunities, jobs, and met real needs in the community, but the empowerment of local people and the participatory aspects of the program were what set the program apart from other service work in the region. This concept is one of the most promising possibilities for the future of antipoverty efforts in Knox County and the region. Although short lived and unable to reach its full potential, the KCEOC’s community center program gave people the opportunity to speak with their own voice, an idea that should continue to be fostered through participatory antipoverty efforts that use community assets to confront structural causes of poverty.

At the end of *Stinking Creek*, Fetterman posed questions about the War on Poverty and the KCEOC. After his description of the newly formed agency charged with combating poverty in Knox County, Fetterman (1967) wrote, “History must judge the still-new War on

Poverty, its costs, its effectiveness, its blunders, its achievements” (p. 189). Though history has shown the failures of the program and poverty is still a major problem in Knox County, the history of the Lend-A-Hand Center and the KCEOC community center program include valuable insights and lessons for service delivery in Appalachia.

Gall recollected that the journalist was in the area during the first few weeks of the War on Poverty and went to stores and socialized with local people, much like she and Kemner did when first integrating into the community (personal communication, April 1, 2013). Fetterman talked with Gall and Kemner twice and hung around the community for several months (I. Gall, personal communication, April 1, 2013). According to Gall and Kemner, the reaction to the book in the community was not wholly positive. A large section of the book focused on Brown’s Branch and profiled many people in the Brown family, an emphasis which Gall remembered other people in the community did not particularly appreciate. People were also bothered by the idea of a mean streak which came out through the book, with violence, rough living, and individualism being highlighted throughout the narrative. Although Gall noted that in her opinion, this was in some ways true, it did not reflect the community well (personal communication, April 1, 2013). Gall believes the Stinking Creek watershed is more violent than other areas, noting that it was a “way of life for a long time...If you didn’t want to be enterprising and abide by the law, you lived up Stinking Creek” (personal communication, April 1, 2013). She was also bothered by the portrayal of the Shady school in *Stinking Creek* because she had previously taught there and it seemed to be a much less bleak situation during her tenure (I. Gall, personal communication, April 1, 2013).

Kemner remembered people's discontent with the section on Brown's Branch and the pictures featured in the book. She related, "Even though they're true, they don't look good to outsiders" (P. Kemner, personal communication, September 4, 2008). The Brown's Branch chapter depicted some questionable activities and the pictures showed the poverty in the area, depicting poor housing, unclean clothing, and barefoot, disheveled children. Kemner also did not really appreciate being called one of the "Do-Gooders" (P. Kemner, personal communication, September 4, 2008).

Despite the flaws and value judgments within the narrative, *Stinking Creek* brought the Lend-A-Hand Center into the spotlight during a very interesting time in the history of uplift work in Appalachia. Its cautious treatment of the War on Poverty and the KCEOC foreshadowed the future of the "Great Society" and its portrayal of the "Do-Gooders" spread awareness about the work of the Center. It contributed to the genre of 1960s community exposés and made a lasting impression on the community and outsiders' perceptions of the Stinking Creek watershed.

### **The End of the War**

Gall and Kemner's involvement with the formal War on Poverty was rather short lived. Circumstances changed as Gall became more disillusioned with the program and administrative changes tainted her hopes about the possibilities of the KCEOC. In the beginning Gall was hopeful of the promise of doing the same kind of work Lend-A-Hand and other organizations were already doing in the region with government money, recounting "Wouldn't that be exciting? And most of us fell for it—the missions" (personal communication, January 3, 2012). She related,

And we really did think that we'd be able to develop leadership at each one of these centers, not just one, but leadership. The youth people and everybody and we really did think that we could develop groups of people, the LAG groups, who would really be interested in doing something for their community. Really did believe it. Took me quite a while for that to be knocked out of my head. (I. Gall, personal communication, December 28, 2011)

She considered some of the downfalls of the program, noting that the organization,

Really thought that people would develop their own plans, would be interested. And what I saw come soon after that by '72, '73 one of the things that I saw happen was these leaders that we developed became little dictators in themselves. We had replaced [Knox County Superintendent of Schools] Jesse Lay with some others. (I. Gall, personal communication, December 28, 2012)

People developed their own "little kingdoms" (I. Gall, personal communication, December 28, 2012) and the program created a new level of local elite rather than changing any of the systemic problems in the county.

Furthermore, autonomy was diminished as Washington exerted more control over CAPs. Gall (2008) reflected in her book,

I was getting more and more disenchanted with the way Washington was dictating what could be done on the local level instead of the local action group making those decisions. It seemed the local action group's ways were too slow and cumbersome. We were expected to solve the many poverty problems developed over the years in just a year or two. Since a lot of these problems were dictated by our political structure, it was impossible for them to be solved overnight. Consequently, instead of

the local action groups devising programs, Washington began handing down more and more ‘canned programs’ that they would pay for. (pg. 58)

Gall further related, “By ’67 everything came down from Washington. Up till ’67, we decided what we were going to do and when we did it and how many centers we were going to have” (personal communication, January 3, 2012). Gall’s experience directly corresponded with Whisnant’s (1980) account: “Poverty warriors enjoyed considerable flexibility in spending available funds during the first year of OEO activity. As the program became more visible in local communities, however, Congress began to insist upon more specific guidelines on spending and program operation” (p. 108).

Accountability was always a difficult issue with the community center program. Unlike many of the programs of the Lend-A-Hand Center, the KCEOC had to prove it was accomplishing the work it set out to do and was helping people in the county. The community center program had to measure and report its impact, money spent, number of people in programs, and other benchmarks. It is difficult to account for intangible concepts like empowerment, leadership skills, a sense of community, democracy building, and other participatory elements of the centers’ work. Gall saw the levels of red tape and reporting as hindrances. She remarked, “The government has a tendency to make liars out of you. You have to be able to show improvement” (I. Gall, personal communication, January 3, 2012). This focus on measurements of success held back the more innovative possibilities for the community center program.

Consolidation and bureaucracy clouded the effectiveness of the program as the KCEOC was combined into an eight county CAP, the Cumberland Valley Area Economic Opportunity Council in 1966. ECP programs became consolidated to cut costs, which Gall



observed was the opposite of the original intent of getting out to the people (personal communication, December 28, 2011). LAGs had less authority over the ECP and Kendrick was replaced by Hollis West and the new administration had different ideas for the KCEOC and the community center program.

In July 1967 Gall was fired from the KCEOC due to disagreements with the new director, and Kemner resigned a few months later. The community center program waned and soon ended around the 1970s. The KCEOC is still in existence today, now known as the KCEOC Community Action Partnership Inc., doing many of the same types of service delivery programs as it did in the 1960s with fewer avenues for participation and outreach into individual communities.

Gall and Kemner's experience with the War on Poverty was an interesting aside in their mission to Lend-A-Hand on Stinking Creek. It helped them experiment with different types of programs, afforded them new ways to reach out to the community, and helped build social capital throughout the county. The women juggled building a new house, taking care of a baby, hosting volunteers and family, and fighting the War on Poverty during the mid-1960s as they continued their health, agriculture, and education work on the Creek. The KCEOC community center program offers interesting points of comparison with the work and philosophy of the Lend-A-Hand Center and provides insights into a very interesting time for uplift work in central Appalachia.

### **3rd Era: The Home Health Years: 1967-1995**

From 1967 to 1995, the Lend-A-Hand Center served as a home health agency for the Stinking Creek watershed. During these “home health years,” the Center administered innovative programs, continuing its service to the community and expanding its outreach. Its pioneering pilot projects evolved into decades of service in Knox County. Lend-A-Hand managed a complex operation with dozens of patients and staff for nearly 30 years, spreading its reputation, serving hundreds of people, and building countless relationships.

#### **Programs**

During the home health years, the diversity of programs continued at the Center, while new activities were incorporated into the mix. Lend-A-Hand kept its involvement with the Council of the Southern Mountains, though the Council went through many changes over the years and was eventually dissolved in 1989.

Health services expanded at the Center and starting in 1981 a local doctor was available during clinic hours for patients to see. Prior to that, Kemner or other nurses met with patients in the clinic. Kemner continued to deliver babies in the community and provide referrals and services. Gall and Kemner saw many changes in women’s roles over the decades. They observed that in the 1970s and 1980s there were not as many babies born on the Creek and women increasingly worked outside the home. Kemner noted that in the 1970s, more women found jobs which changed the face of community and provided more income for struggling families (personal communication, February 15, 2013).

The Lend-A-Hand Center added programs that addressed housing conditions in the community during the home health years. Work groups and volunteers did housing improvements such as installing outhouses, wheelchair ramps, septic tanks, bathrooms,

porches, and completing housing repairs for people in need. These groups also remodeled houses and installed safety features. Gall (2008) related in her book,

We have mended roofs, put on new roofs, crawled under houses to put in new underpinning and painted lots of houses—both interior and exterior. If there was a job to be done to make a house more livable, we have helped do it. (p. 75)

These projects met immediate, pressing needs and allowed volunteers and staff at the Center to get to know local residents, many of whom were elderly or unable to afford necessary repairs. Unlike many other programs working in the region, the home repairs Lend-A-Hand did over the years were on a personal level. Gall recalled,

We had a real network of knowing what was going on and if we did work one week for one family, then four or five other families came to us to ask for help. (personal communication, January 20, 2012)

Through their work in the community, volunteers built social capital and cultivated individual relationships. The directors and volunteers at the Center personally knew many of the people they assisted because of their involvement in the area. There were no prerequisites for help, unlike many government programs. Community members helped pay for materials and work groups and volunteers from Lend-A-Hand provided labor. Gall related of the program,

[There was] no asking how much money you made. Sometimes it was based on an immediate need. Maybe somebody in the family died and the family needed an uplift, just to, you know, to give them a little push forward. Sometimes it was just a person had a stroke and had no way to get in and out of the house so we built a ramp. (personal communication, January 20, 2012)

Gall and Kemner saw a need and set out to address it. The program changed with the times as volunteers went from putting in outhouses to taking out straight pipes and installing septic tanks. Through home repair projects, Lend-A-Hand did similar work as organizations like Appalachia Service Project which also operated and continues to operate in the area. Building projects which have continued throughout the history of the organization allowed volunteers to interact with local folks and see other needs in the community.

In the early 1970s, the Center also hosted programs for teenage mothers and young women. Women ages 16 to 25 came to the Center for programs that discussed Planned Parenthood, personal hygiene, and childcare. The Center hosted well baby clinics, teaching mothers how to take care of babies and providing checkups. Tutoring programs started in earnest at the Center around 1971. One night a week local teachers came to the Center to help students with schoolwork. 4-H continued to be a part of the youth work at the Center until it became integrated into the local schools circa 1980. By 1987, the Center was only holding one day camp for younger kids in the summer.

Farming operations continued at the Center during the middle decades of the organization's history. The farm experimented with different crops, technologies, and programs and worked on conservation and forestry. Through 1990 Gall performed a lot of custom farm work and sharecropped for widows in the community who were unable to plant their own fields. Building projects continued on the grounds as new structures were erected, including barns, sheds, a guest house, and another dike on the Creek.

### **Home Health Program**

Lend-A-Hand's innovative home health program directed the organization's operations for nearly thirty years. First begun as a pilot project under the then new Medicare

program, home health grew into a sizeable undertaking serving hundreds of people in the Stinking Creek watershed and employing volunteers from around the country. Gall (2008) recalled, “The Home Health Program dominated most of our activities and need for volunteers in the 70’s, 80’s, and into the 90’s (p. 61).

Medicare and Medicaid were created by Congress in 1965 to provide healthcare to people over age 65 and people with low incomes, respectively. These new programs allowed for different approaches to healthcare and changed the possibilities for the Lend-A-Hand Center. Kemner (2000) noted that under Medicare and Medicaid, “Many people who had stayed at home because of the cost were now able to go to the hospital” (p. 60). More people had access to healthcare, services were broadened, and there were further options for people seeking treatment.

After their experiences with the War on Poverty and providing health services to people around Knox County, Gall and Kemner set out to create several pioneering pilot projects from 1967 to 1968. They put together a pilot project through the Lend-A-Hand Center that would fall under the new Medicare and Medicaid programs. Their project would allow them to administer health services to people in the Stinking Creek watershed and expand many of the services they were already providing. Gall recalled,

In [19]67, I was fired and Peggy quit OEO pretty quickly after that. The Medicare law was written and we were excited about doing some pilot projects and we worked it out with, I think, the Council of the Southern Mountains...to make a pilot project called ‘home health agency’ or ‘home health program.’ As far as we knew, there was none to pattern after. We had to draw up all the—I don’t know how much you know about laws when they’re passed by Congress, but they’re very vague. There was

money there for somebody to take care of people in the homes instead of going to the hospital, but they had to be under a doctor's orders and they had to follow medical protocol, much more than what Peggy had been following. Before that Peggy just had a doctor who gave her standing orders. (personal communication, January 20, 2012)

So, starting in 1967 and coming to fruition in 1968, the pair's home health program was accepted by Medicare and the Lend-A-Hand Center became a home health agency. Kemner remembered,

Before [1967] when I took care of patients in their homes we just got paid a few dollars or something and then that was when Medicare put out the money for it and we could accept the patients from the doctors who needed home health and we went and found some of them on our own, people that we knew were sick. (personal communication, February 15, 2013)

Working under the supervision of local doctors, Kemner and a staff of nurses, aides, and social workers began going into homes in the Stinking Creek watershed providing home healthcare. Doctors referred patients to Lend-A Hand's home health program, but Gall recalled, "Most of the time it was the other way around. We found the patients and then we found a doctor that would take them and we hauled them back and forth to the doctor to get them signed up" (personal communication, January 20, 2012). The home health program, in theory, only served people who were eligible for Medicare or Medicaid, elderly people, or people with low incomes; and the women wanted to ensure that community members enjoyed the full benefits of these two government programs. Yet Gall and Kemner seldom turned people away and often took care of other patients outside the official government program. Gall related, "If they didn't fit the slot and they had the need, we took care of them"

(personal communication, July 24, 2013). The women were very involved in the community and actively recognized needs and set out to address them, seeking out people that could benefit from home health services. From their previous health work, home repair work, and activities with youth in the community, the women knew what problems and needs existed.

The new home health program filled a void in the community. Gall recalled, “There was no other home health program in the county or anywhere around, but we decided that we’d do only Stinking Creek area because that’s what we’d been doing before and we’d cover that area” (personal communication, January 20, 2012). The home health program provided a range of services to a variety of patients. Kemner recalled working with people who had had “strokes that needed therapy, people with cerebral palsy who needed therapy, sometimes people that needed help with their diet like diabetics...heart attacks—after surgeries lots of times we would have to do dressings changes” (personal communication, February 15, 2013). Nurses also worked with many people who suffered from kidney disorders and were on dialysis. The program served people who needed therapy after injuries or illnesses, providing physical therapy, speech therapy, and working with several people who suffered from cerebral palsy and similar disorders. Many of the patients Lend-A-Hand served would have been much more physically limited had it not been for the home care the program provided.

Kemner had to keep up with paperwork and reporting for the program. She remembered there was plenty of paperwork involved and that every two months she had to fill out a form and have it signed by each patient’s doctor (P. Kemner, personal communication, February 15, 2013). As the program became more defined and structured, the women set up administrative levels and other systems to keep business in order. Kemner

was the nurse administrator and visited patients, supervised nurses and aides, worked out problems, kept a rapport with doctors and the health department, and worked with the schedule, assigning duties, and keeping up with “who was to see who” (P. Kemner, personal communication, February 15, 2013). Gall was the administrator of the home health program. She took care of the paperwork and also worked on scheduling and billing. She reflected, “My job was to make sure [Peggy] wrote the papers right!” (I. Gall, personal communication, January 20, 2012). As the program expanded, the Center hired a billing clerk part time then eventually full time. The program also hired more nurses and office staff in addition to volunteers in order to take on more patients on Stinking Creek.

In addition to receiving funding from foundations, the Appalachian Fund, and other sources, the work of the home health program was financed mostly by Medicare and Medicaid. Gall (2008) explained, “The first two years were a subsidized Home Health Program, and we both drew a regular salary. Then we were on our own, billing Medicare, Medicaid, private insurances, and supposedly the patients themselves” (p. 105) Gall remembered the difficulties with the bureaucracy of the home health program:

If you had a patient that had Medicare and Medicaid, you had to bill Medicare first and this was slow mail we’re talking about. You send that whole batch off and it’d come back and they wouldn’t pay for it. Medicare wouldn’t pay for it or they’d only pay this much for it. Then you have to bill Medicaid and then it’d come back and sometimes we were supposed to bill the patient. That’s written into the law, but that was a part of the law we never—very seldom did we take a paper to a patient and say, ‘Here you have to pay us this much.’ If we didn’t get it from Medicare, Medicaid, we didn’t get it. ... We were usually two, three months behind getting paid for what we



were doing... That kind of spoils the attitude of taking care of people. Now the first couple years, Medicare didn't squabble. We turned it in, they paid for it, but then they got very particular. (personal communication, January 20, 2012)

When the funding was not always there for supplies or services that were delivered, the women cut into their own resources to make sure the program was able to meet the needs of the community. Gall remembered the program paid she and Kemner but "if we couldn't pay everybody else a salary, we would borrow from our salaries to pay for that" (personal communication, January 29, 2012). The women were able to keep the agency in the black through the years even though payments were often delayed or did not come at all. The program went through periodic budget cuts and changing political administrations over the years. Gall and Kemner remembered cuts to Medicaid in the 1980s that made more people have home deliveries (personal communication, January 20, 2012). The home health program relied on the work of volunteers and work groups that also brought some income. The Center's volunteers, sometimes as many as five, worked with the home health program and were paid a \$50 a month stipend.

Lend-A-Hand's home health program changed quite a bit over the years, going from an experimental pilot project to a structured independent home health agency under the auspices of government programs. The agency proved extremely influential in the community and built upon the prior health work of the Center.

### **Contracted Transportation & Dental Program**

Another health-related pilot program developed in the mid-1960s at the Center was "contracted transportation." Lend-A-Hand had already been transporting patients to hospitals in Lexington, Corbin, Louisville, and Knoxville, and under Medicaid, contracted

transportation enabled them to expand their services. The transportation program was funded by Medicaid and according to Gall, “by a special program the first year or two from the Council of the Southern Mountains under the Appalachian Regional Commission...so that way we could take patients whether they were under Medicaid or not” (personal communication, January 20, 2012). Lend-A-Hand did not get paid for transporting patients under Medicaid until around 1966 when funds were made available to assist people needing a ride to the doctor. Like the home health program, the Center often provided transportation services regardless of eligibility under government programs. Kemner remembered,

We found out that people didn’t have a way to get to the doctor. We did a lot of trips to Lexington and even somebody whose husband worked couldn’t get to the doctor, even Pineville and Barbourville, and we would take them and if they had a medical card then they had to call in. (personal communication, February 15, 2013)

Volunteers were largely responsible for transporting patients. A major part of the program was taking people to dialysis appointments. Kemner recalled,

We’d get up at 4 o’clock in the morning, 3:30, take these people all the way to Lexington and we’d try to get a whole load of them, three or four patients and take them to Lexington for a 6:00 appointment for their dialysis. (personal communication, January 20, 2012)

Volunteers often had a hard time getting people out of bed and Gall remembered the program worked with people on individual responsibility and keeping up with schedules. The Center had a fleet of vehicles to transport patients, keeping three or four vehicles on hand all the time with volunteers who focused on the maintenance of the vehicles. The transportation

program preceded programs like RTEC (Rural Transit Enterprises Coordinated), which now operates in the area and provides transportation services.

Another health program that developed at the Center in the late 1960s was a dental program which targeted low-income children in the area. The program transported children, who often never had their teeth examined, from school to see dentists to perform needed dental work. Kemner recollected,

The dental program was we went to the schools and found people who had not been to the dentist or who had a problem and these had to be Medicaid patients, too, and then we'd load up the van and take them in, maybe three or four at a time and have their work done because most people did not go to the dentist, so we tried to bridge that gap, too. (personal communication, February 15, 2013)

The women worked with the principal of the school and had an arrangement with local dentists. The program was funded by the Center's general fund and benefitted from the cooperation of local dentists working to make services affordable. The program lasted from around 1966 until the 1980s.

### **Volunteers & Family**

During the home health years, the volunteer program greatly expanded at Lend-A-Hand. Dozens of short- and long-term volunteers and work groups stayed and served at the Center working on the home health program and helping in the community. Family living played a large role in the organization as the Center continued to take in people in need and the Lend-A-Hand family expanded.

Gall and Kemner hosted countless volunteers over the middle decades of Lend-A-Hand's history. Volunteers helped with the day-to-day operations of the Center. They had set

schedules and performed a variety of tasks with the home health program, on the farm, and in the community. Gall recalled, “Almost all of our volunteers after ’68 worked in the home health program one way or another, either directly as a social worker aide or as a home health aide or as a nurse” (personal communication, January 20, 2012). Volunteers would work in the community with home health in the morning, then work on the farm or building in the afternoon. The Center volunteers were responsible for keeping up maintenance of the vehicles, running the Little Children’s Program, tutoring once a week, working with 4-H students two days a week after school, transporting patients, holding day camp in the summer, and keeping up with the chores at the Center. Volunteers were also encouraged to develop their own programs. They had a level of autonomy and were able to talk to people in the community to gather their input and plan programs around expressed needs. Gall recalled that most volunteers over the years have been younger folks, ages “18 to 25 about. Every once in a while we got one older one like 50 or 60 years old” (personal communication, January 20, 2012). Many of the volunteers at Lend-A-Hand have been in transitional stages in life. Young and impressionable teens and college students volunteered at the Center, in between jobs or school, looking for a safe place to figure out what they wanted to do in the future. Gall and Kemner helped countless people providing direction and guidance while the farm in remote Knox County allowed an escape for many volunteers struggling with different problems themselves.

The Center developed a family atmosphere as volunteers would stay for months or years at a time. Gall recalled of the volunteers,

We always almost always had breakfast together and we almost always had supper together so that’s when we would plan out the work; who was going to do what and

who was going to drive where and all that kind of thing and that was my job.

(personal communication, January 20, 2012)

There was plenty of room in the new Center building and with so many volunteers it was sometimes difficult to keep everything organized. Gall recollected the sometimes controlled chaos, “We had to feed all these people. We had to wash dishes, keep house, wash clothes” (personal communication, January 20, 2012). Gall and Kemner worked to keep up with the constant rotation of people, hosting around 12 long-term volunteers in the 1960s, over 50 in the 1970s, and 20 in the 1980s, in addition to dozens of short-term volunteers.

In the 1960s the Center hosted alternative service workers. Lend-A-Hand was an outlet for conscientious objectors, many from the Church of the Brethren, who worked out their service time up Stinking Creek, often as mechanics and helpers on the farm. The Center continued hosting BVS volunteers, several of which made decades-long connections with the Center. Sue Richards and Janet Berkenbosh (Berk) came to Lend-A-Hand through the BVS program. Sue Richards, now Meadows, came to the Center in February 1971 and served a year as a BVS volunteer. She was then hired as a part of the home health staff for five years. She worked with Gall and has been a part of the Center off and on ever since and is currently on the board of directors. Berk first came in 1981 with a work group through the Church of the Brethren and has stayed at the Center every summer since 1986. BVS volunteers made a huge impact on the middle decades of the history of Lend-A-Hand, providing manpower and creating long-term relationships within the community. There was a steady stream of BVS volunteers until the 1980s when more restrictions were put in place and volunteers became more costly. Insurance on volunteers became more expensive and the Center could not take any more BVSers.

Another source of volunteers beginning in the late 1960s was the Appalachian Semester program at Union College. Established around 1968, the Appalachian Semester allowed students to have cross-cultural experiences. With many students coming from other parts of the country, the program provided an outlet for students to learn about Appalachia. The program combined service work and cultural studies as students learned about Appalachian culture and history while getting hands-on experiences with organizations such as Lend-A-Hand and other nonprofits in Knox County. Union College students served at Lend-A-Hand working alongside other volunteers on the farm and in the community.

Gall served on the organizing committee for Appalachian Semester with professor and local historian Sherman Oxendine, in addition to working on the program's board of directors for several years. She remembered,

Right after my experience with OEO I was on a committee at Union College, a service committee, where they were beginning to want their students to do so many hours of service work and we drew up a program—this was Appalachian Semester kids—and they would do so many hours in the community work and take studies and so on. We worked with that program for quite a few years. (I. Gall, personal communication, January 20, 2012)

In the 1970s the Center began hosting volunteers from the Commission on Religion in Appalachia (CORA). According to the *Encyclopedia of Appalachia*, “The Commission on Religion in Appalachia was begun in 1965 to initiate, support, and coordinate secular and church-based antipoverty projects at the grassroots level throughout Appalachia” (Kaufman, 2006, p. 1309). The organization works for economic and social justice in the region and features a volunteer program which “coordinates work camps and volunteer placement of

more than three thousand volunteers annually from over 150 churches, universities, and colleges” (Sessions, 1999, p. 168). CORA is still in existence and working in the region, although Lend-A-Hand no longer took volunteers from the organization around the 1990s.

The Center also hosted volunteers from the Coalition for Appalachian Ministry (CAM). This Presbyterian-Reformed mission agency formed in 1974 to also address issues in Appalachia. Part of the organization is a “Volunteer Recruitment Program, which matches volunteers from churches and universities with community-based sites throughout the region” (Rader, 2006, p. 1309). CAM’s partnership with Lend-A-Hand began around the 1970s and lasted into the 1990s. CAM is also still in existence and continues to promote service and volunteerism in the region.

During the home health years, the Center continued to build on its web of affiliations, working with various important organizations within the region, especially through the volunteer program. The Center benefitted from the technical assistance, expertise, and manpower available through connections with organizations doing similar work in Appalachia.

Work groups peaked at Lend-A-Hand during the Home Health years. The Center hosted six to eight work groups a year, usually for a week at a time. Groups worked in the community and at the Center, becoming familiar with Lend-A-Hand’s programs, assisting with home health work, getting the chance to milk a cow, and learning how to mend fences or lay rock. Groups did a lot of work in the community remodeling houses and interacting with local people. Gall recalled,

The work groups that came in in the summertime most of them had a project in which we rebuilt porches, we put in bathrooms, we did a lot of just simple house repair and

roofing, but I think porches and bathrooms were the big thing. One year we did outhouses, built outhouses. We built them here and transported them to different places in the community....The work group usually had one or two places in the community they worked and then they usually had some project here [at the Center], repairing houses, hauling rock, building barns, putting in pipelines, putting in septic tanks. (personal communication, January 20, 2012)

One of the greatest impacts of the Lend-A-Hand Center has been its legacy through its volunteer program. Hundreds of volunteers have come to the Center either in a work group or as an individual from countless organizations and multiple denominations. The volunteer program has been very much interdenominational. Gall (2008) reflected,

We have had groups from all over the nation but mostly from [n]earby [sic] states and the East Coast. We have had Brethren, Methodist, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Christian, Reformed, Roman Catholics, Holiness, Pentacostal [sic], Independents, and Community church groups. Some have been children or family groups, some junior or senior high school, and some adult groups. (p. 78)

The volunteer program reflects the wide reach of the organization, bringing in volunteers from around the country and world. Individuals and groups have come to the Center from across the US, many from the Midwest and even other countries. Gall (2008) pointed out,

They came from Indiana, Pennsylvania, Iowa, Michigan, Sweden, Germany, Virginia, Ohio, and Switzerland. They were nurses, school teachers, mechanics, and teenagers. They worked as nurses, Home Health aides, mechanics, social workers, drivers,



housekeepers, and helpers on the farm in the garden and in building. They were from BVS, CAM, CORA, plus 'walk-ins.' (p. 32)

The volunteer program impacted the work at the Center, the community, and also the lives of volunteers. Gall noted that the volunteers "had completely different backgrounds" (personal communication, January 20, 2012). They brought with them different skill sets and interests and have been integral to the success of Lend-A-Hand. Many volunteers learned from their experiences at the Center and turned out to be teachers, nurses, social workers, and were able to gain experience and training through their time on the Creek. Several volunteers even ended up marrying locals and settling down in the area. Volunteers built long-term relationships with groups of people, churches, families, and individuals and bought into the philosophy and mission of the Center directors. Gall (2008) reflected in her book,

Even though Lend-a-Hand is Peggy's and my dream, there are a lot of people who not only made it come true, but lent their colors, too. There were so many. Naturally all the family members made their marks – some were sweet and some bitter, some challenging and some inspiring. Then, too, all the long term volunteers colored our program. But even the short term volunteers left their hues in the pattern. (p. 89)

Teaching volunteers about Christian living, serving others, stewardship, traditional skills, family living, and personal and community responsibility, Gall and Kemner's volunteer program made an impact on hundreds of people through the home health years. The volunteer program even facilitated intergenerational learning, pairing volunteers with children or elderly patients in the community.

Through the history of the organization, people who came to volunteer at the Center have been largely outsiders. Very few volunteers over the years have been Knox Countians.

Volunteers came from all over the world from different churches or service organizations, but there was little input from local people. College students from Union College were often from different parts of the country and many volunteers were from the Church of the Brethren in Indiana, Iowa, or Pennsylvania. Some local people came to volunteer at the Center who were on public assistance and had to volunteer so many hours to receive benefits. Gall noted that this did not work out well and that many people did not want to work (personal communication, January 20, 2012). Some of the local children Gall and Kemner raised, as well as children who had participated in programs, helped out at the Center.

In the 1970s Gall and Kemner recalled taking care of a series of pregnant women, prostitutes, and young mothers. In spite of their efforts some women under their care still became pregnant. Gall and Kemner would help take care of the women's babies as they finished school. A family atmosphere continued at the Center as volunteers and family would look after each other. The women also remembered that they hosted a series of young men who came and worked at the center in the 1980s. People came and went over the decades and one summer there were 18 people living at the Center.

### **“To Lend A Hand”**

In 1969 the Center was featured in a CBS special as part of the “Lamp Unto My Feet” series. The piece titled “To Lend A Hand” was a thirty-minute profile of the work of the Center presenting “the story of two women who live on Stinking Creek” (To Lend A Hand). The episode gave the background of the women and told the story of the development of the Lend-A-Hand Center. In the feature Gall explained, “We didn't want to be a mission, we wanted to be just people, just ordinary people living in an ordinary place with an extraordinary mission” (To Lend A Hand).

The special highlighted the range of activities at the Center and featured footage of tutoring programs with children and adults; working with adults on GEDs; visiting households for the Little Children's Program; 4-H activities in carpentry, cooking, and sewing; singing with neighbors; family devotions at breakfast; and Sunday School services. In the special Kemner explained she and Gall wanted to "instruct the children in the ways of Christian living and so we started our own Sunday school so that we could let our witness along this line also" (To Lend A Hand).

The special also focused on the healthcare work of the Center and the home health program. It showed Kemner giving shots to an anemic boy; performing therapy with an elderly lady who Kemner found was bedridden for 10 years and was unable to move her legs or right arm; performing therapy with a twenty-five-year-old cerebral palsy patient; and working with a four-year-old with cerebral palsy. Kemner described their Home Health program,

We have federal money just to set up our home health program which is a program which is sponsored mostly by Medicare and Title 19 here in Kentucky, welfare patients, where these people can be cared for at home by home nurse visits instead of having to stay in the hospital which would be much more expensive. (To Lend A Hand)

The special also featured clinic visits and the Center's dental program in the Dewitt School. It showed housing conditions in the area and profiled the volunteers that were working at the Center that summer. During the time of the taping, Gall and Kemner had five people living with them and five BVS volunteers. The special showed Melody as a toddler and introduced the volunteers, including one conscientious objector and a nurse from Germany. Gall

described the BVS program, relating that the “Church of the Brethren set up a program for the young people or anyone, in fact, to serve a year or two years in active, constructive service for our country” (To Lend A Hand).

“To Lend A Hand” also featured agricultural activities at the Center. The piece showed footage of farming and canning. It mentioned the Center’s forestry programs, Gall’s selective livestock breeding, the cash crop demonstration program that used peppers to transition away from tobacco as a primary agricultural driver, and the women being paid two pigs for delivering a baby. The piece highlighted the importance of raising their own food and teaching people about food preservation at the Center. Gall stressed stewardship and sustainability by relating,

We believe that the land is God’s gift to us and to the people who follow us. We feel that we need to do everything we can to make the land better, both for ourselves and for people who live around us. (To Lend A Hand)

The feature was based on interviews with Gall, Kemner, and community members including Bowman Brown from Brown’s Branch; Robert Messer, the principal of Dewitt School; Wilber Early, the agricultural extension agent for Knox County; the Hopkins family; and Lucy Kinningham, the women’s neighbor. Many people testified about the good work of the Center and their impact on the community. One woman said of Gall, “Her and Peggy both has been a blessing to me and to my family” (To Lend A Hand). Bowman Brown related, “Mighty fine women. Them’s good nurses. I like them...Fine nurses them is. I’m glad they come in our country. Good for us. We need anything we can go to the doctor close. That’s awful nice women, them is” (To Lend A Hand). Lucy Kinningham attested,

Peggy and Irma has lived their name Lend-A-Hand Center. They have let their light shine all over the Kentucky hills...Peggy and Irma has done wonderful things for the people in the communities. Not only this community but the surrounding communities. The night never got too dark nor the weather too bad with what they would go if Peggy and Irma was called to help somebody in trouble. (To Lend A Hand)

Clearly by the late 1960s, Gall and Kemner were well known in the area. These accounts show that the women were well assimilated into the community and the work of the Center was making an impression on neighbors and people throughout the county.

“To Lend A Hand” painted an interesting picture of the Center during a particular time in its history. It gave a firsthand account of the work of the Center during the 1960s and incorporated the views of community members, as well as Gall and Kemner’s early philosophy. It captured an era and a way of life on the Creek, bringing conditions in Knox County to a nationwide audience. The piece did a very good job covering the various programs at the Center and presenting an accurate portrayal of the nurses’ work.

### **Developments & Difficulties**

Many changes took place during the home health decades at the Lend-A-Hand Center. In the nearly thirty years that Lend-A-Hand served as a home health agency, the organization went through several developments and difficulties. The Center took on a variety of projects, hosted hundreds of people, served all around Knox County, was featured in several articles, and made changes within the administration of the organization. On June 6, 1968, the Center filed articles of incorporation which specified its purpose, goals, and organizational structure.

As noted, the work of the Center was featured in several newspaper and magazine articles during the organization's middle decades. Lend-A-Hand has been featured in the local paper the *Barbourville Mountain Advocate* countless times over its history, highlighting projects, anniversaries, and different events at the Center. The March 29, 1987, edition of the *Lexington Herald Leader* featured an article titled "Return to Stinking Creek" (Lewis, 1987). It profiled some of the people that were featured in Fetterman's book 20 years earlier, showing where they were and what they had done since 1967. *The Pittsburgh Press Sunday Magazine* of August 1987 featured an article titled, "Stinking Creek: Pittsburgh Nurses Lend a Hand in a Remote Reach of Appalachia" (Davidson, 1987). The article told of a group of nurses from the University of Pittsburgh that visited Stinking Creek, did research in the area, and performed school physicals. The *Detroit Free Press Magazine* ran a lengthy pictorial in September 1990 titled "On Stinking Creek" which profiled community members much in the vein of *Stinking Creek* over twenty years earlier (Noriyuki, 1990). The article referenced migration to and from Detroit and featured religion and poverty conditions in the watershed. In the March 24, 1991, edition of *The Courier-Journal Magazine*, the article "Eternal Hills, Enduring Wills" told the story of the Center and of Gall teaching in "one of the poorest, most backward counties in Kentucky" (Hill, 1991, p. 10-11). The piece also featured pictures of farm and health work explaining Kemner's home healthcare and Gall's building and farming. The article considered poverty in the area and some of Lend-A-Hand's philosophy. Gall was quoted as saying,

'Many times the frustration gets to me, but I'm not supposed to change the way things are. My job is to help people see different ways, to broaden their horizons, to show

them they don't necessarily have to be like their mothers and fathers, that there are other ways.' (qtd. in Hill, 1991, p. 15)

This sentiment again showed the culture of poverty understanding and empowerment or "sparkle in the eye" approach to social issues, so central to Gall's philosophy. These articles brought national recognition and attention to Lend-A-Hand programs and continued to spread information about Gall and Kemner's work on the Creek.

In 1976, increasingly burdened by paperwork, Gall resigned as administrator of the home health program. She continued as the bookkeeper for the organization and moved from the Center to a little log cabin in the Salt Gum area of the Stinking Creek watershed. She had found the log cabin while on a hunting trip and she and volunteer Sue Richards fell in love with the place. It had been abandoned for about 12 years and was in a state of disrepair, but Richards took the opportunity to buy the property. The cabin, which they named "So Much," was in a very remote section of Stinking Creek. It took 40 to 60 minutes to get there from the Center traversing creeks and winding up gravel roads. The cabin had no running water or indoor toilet, and the nearest telephone was a two mile drive and one mile walk away—three miles in total. The women did purchase a gas refrigerator and had a root cellar, garden, and a coal and wood stove. Most people in the area by the 1980s had electricity, although many did not have central heating. Several people still had grate fireplaces and stoker coal. Gall recalled it was not until the 1990s that electric heat was the norm on Stinking Creek.

Gall and Richards moved into the So Much cabin in August 1976, gradually fixing it up until 1989. While at So Much, Gall and Richards no longer attended or assisted with Lend-A-Hand's Sunday school program. They did continue to work at the Center, driving the 10 miles down the Creek to help with the day-to-day operations of Lend-A-Hand. Also in

1976, Gall and Kemner further specified the work of the Center. Gall recalled developing a formalized division of labor which delineated responsibilities and clarified expectations for the directors and staff (personal communication, January 20, 2012).

In the 1980s, the Center suffered some very difficult years. In what Gall has labeled the “reign of terror” the Center was the target of a stint of terroristic threats and arson. Around 1975, Gall finished building a big stone barn on the Lend-A-Hand property. Work at the Center progressed and Gall and Kemner helped take care of their neighbor Lucy Kinningham whose husband had passed away. From 1980 to 1981, a mentally unstable neighbor subjected the women to nine months of harassment including burning the new big barn, burning an older barn, setting fire to the chapel, setting fire to the bridge, and burning the hillside behind the Center. The neighbor threatened both Gall and Kemner and imposed a state of fear on Patterson Branch. The women hired night watchmen and received little relief from local officials. Gall remarked, “We ran into the law in the worst way...it was lawless. There was no real law around here” (personal communication, January 28, 2012). The arsonist was in and out of jail and Gall and Kemner had restraining orders against him, but he kept up his menacing behavior and arson. Finally, just before the man was to appear in court for his hearing on his activities at the Center, he was killed by a car after a party on the Creek. A group of men were drinking in preparation for what Gall thought would turn into violence at the Center. Kemner was called in to help at the scene. The man driving the car was tried for murder and found guilty, but only served one year in prison.

Gall reflected that even through all their neighbor subjected them to, “he was still a valuable person in God’s sight” (personal communication, January 28, 2012). The women suffered greatly under their neighbor’s harassment which impacted the rest of their lives.



This bizarre episode in the history of the Center demonstrated Gall and Kemner's persistence in their mission on Stinking Creek and reliance upon God's plan for their lives. Through all the hardship, the women stuck to their work and faith even though they feared for their lives. After a few months, the women began to recover from this curious twist and started to rebuild the barns six months later.

Another tragic event that greatly affected Gall and Kemner occurred in the mid-1980s. In April 1985, Kemner's daughter Melody was in a car accident that left her in a coma until July, with brain damage and her arm and face badly injured. Gall and Kemner had to aid in rehabilitating Melody and lived through a very difficult situation. Melody never fully recovered from her injury and four years later broke a bone in her back, furthering her medical troubles.

In the 1980s Peggy went back to school, taking a year off with funding from the Steele Reese Foundation in New York to earn her certified nurse midwife certification (CNM). She studied at the Frontier Nursing Service for three weeks and hired another nurse to fulfill her duties as she studied for her exams.

After staying in the log cabin on Alex Creek, Gall and Richards moved to nearby Middlesboro in Bell County and operated a bed and breakfast for fifteen years, from 1989 to 2004. Richards wanted to start a B&B and the women looked for places in the area that were available. They found a 22-room house and called it "The Ridge Runner." The women still worked at the Center from roughly 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. after taking care of their guests. They hired people to work at the B&B, helped form Bed and Breakfast Association of Kentucky, and worked at night cleaning offices to help finance "The Ridge Runner" and work at Lend-A-Hand.

## **The End of Home Health**

In July 1995, Lend-A-Hand's home health program merged with the Knox County Health Department as the Health Department took over operations on Stinking Creek. Changing social services, education, and health opportunities in the area transformed or lessened the need for many of the Lend-A-Hand services over the decades. More staff at the Health Department and more social workers in the county allowed for much better services for people than what was available in the 1960s.

The busy years of home health made a major impact on the Stinking Creek community, meeting the needs of the sick and elderly and building relationships. The pioneering programs persisted through difficult times as the Lend-A-Hand home health agency became an example for others in the area. The innovative programs that sprung up in the late 1960s and beyond set the trajectory for the work at the Center as volunteers made great contributions to the lives of people up and down Stinking Creek.

Like the War on Poverty program, Gall cited the increasing bureaucratization of the program and the mounting demands of paperwork as contributing factors to the dissolution of the home health agency at Lend-A-Hand. Autonomy decreased as the government began handing down instructions and aspects of running the program became too burdensome. Gall recalled,

At first when we had the home health we had to devise everything ourselves and then by the mid-'70s it was all bureaucratic by that time and they told us exactly what we had to do and what we had to write and what we could [do]. If you didn't write the words just right, why you didn't get paid and it became very, very much a government program. (personal communication, January 28, 2012)

She further iterated,

As the home health progressed, the government took much more control and determined how long a patient should be eligible for [services]. It's gotten more and more that way to the place now that they tell the hospital how long they'll take care of a patient, not the doctor—doctor doesn't tell a patient how long they can be in the hospital, the government does and that's what they began to do with home health...And at that time, almost all the little mission hospitals around us, all these that used to belong to Council of the Southern Mountains, lost their little hospitals, due to Medicare and Medicaid—which you'd think it would be just the opposite. (I. Gall, personal communication, January 20, 2012)

After the merger, Kemner went to work for the Knox County Health Department, while keeping up her midwifery services and clinic hours. The Center increasingly became a referral agency. Starting around 1985, the Center began referring problems in the community to different agencies. The women worked with a series of other organizations including the Knox County Health Department, Medicaid, Medicare, the KCEOC, and other social services, keeping aware of what programs and services were available.

Many changes occurred over the decades the Center administered its home health program. Stinking Creek was a lot different in the 1990s than the 1960s, with improved infrastructure conditions, decreased poverty rates, better housing, better education, and a more modern way of life on the Creek. Programs at Lend-A-Hand expanded and contracted as needs changed in the community. Volunteers came and went, while some stayed to make lasting contributions to the area and the Center. Gall and Kemner, in their 60s by the mid-

1990s, continued to steer the organization working on health, agriculture, and education, and lending a hand in the community.

#### **4th Era: The Later Years: 1995-Present**

The Lend-A-Hand Center continued serving the Stinking Creek community after the dissolution of its home health program. Gall and Kemner, having already become well respected on Stinking Creek, with a reputation of honesty and service, continued doing what they could in the area, with a gradual reduction in programs as the women approached their 80s.

Kemner worked with the health department until her retirement in 2007. She delivered her last baby in 2008, with a total of 509 babies successfully delivered during her time in Kentucky. She had some health problems with her leg in 2007 and suffers from osteoporosis, but continues to garden and keep up with the work at the Center. Kemner battled a serious illness in 2011, but has since recovered and coordinates much of the transportation activities at Lend-A-Hand.

Gall and Kemner still serve as co-directors of the Center and continue farming and organizing various activities. Lend-A-Hand adopted new articles of incorporation in January 2010. The bylaws were rewritten and a board of directors was set up to decide on the work and future of the Center. The board and the new bylaws were put in place to help with the transition from Gall and Kemner's leadership and to decide the trajectory of the organization. Also around 2010 the Center acquired Charlie Kinningham's property including two houses, a barn, and around 30 acres.

The Center has hosted a series of anniversary celebrations over the last few decades. In 2008 they celebrated 50 years on the Creek with a big celebration with Loyal Jones as a speaker. This followed a 35th anniversary celebration in 1993 and a 40th in 1998. Former

volunteers, family, and community members attended the festivities. The Center has also been the site of many weddings and parties throughout its history.

The Lend-A-Hand Center was featured in *Blue Ridge Country* magazine in the March/April 1997 issue. The article titled “Lending a Hand at Stinking Creek,” though containing some factual errors, told the story of the Center and highlighted Kemner’s work for the health department visiting patients in their homes. The article noted, with customary journalistic verbiage, “Appalachia in 1958 was a world apart” (Schroeder, 1997, p. 43). The author described the area observing that eastern Kentucky was a place “where played-out coal mines have given way to subsistence farming, fast-food jobs, and welfare as the means of survival for many residents” (Schroeder, 1997, p. 42). The article was yet another journalistic portrayal of the community and the Center that did not delve adequately into the complex nature of the social and economic conditions of the area. Other articles featuring the Center appeared highlighting the organization’s decades of service on the Creek. Gall also began writing a weekly column for the *Barbourville Mountain Advocate* in the summer of 2010. The general interest column highlights different aspects of life on the Creek and Gall’s musings and interests.

Gall and Kemner and their organization have been awarded countless accolades for service to the community over the years. In 2012, they were presented the Helen M. Lewis Community Service Award by the Appalachian Studies Association. Gall and Kemner are both Kentucky Colonels and have been recognized by Berea College, Union College, and many other organizations.

## **Programs**

During the last few decades there has been a gradual reduction of programs at the Center. Having already worked in the community for decades, Gall and Kemner's interests and abilities changed. The Center's farming and health work continued, though to a lesser degree. Gall no longer did any sharecropping after 2005, and as already noted, Kemner delivered her last baby in 2008. The clinic continued to operate and the importance of family living, keeping an open door for those in need, and working with volunteers still played a large role at the Center, though not to the same degree as during the home health years.

Youth activities including camps continued at Lend-A-Hand. Bible quizzing was begun during the later years in the history of the organization. Beginning in the 1990s, Kemner helped local children memorize Bible verses and compete in competitions. Kemner described the program:

They learned Scripture; they'd work on one book at a time like Genesis. The children worked on Genesis then Exodus and then I'd work with them during the week after school and then we'd travel to the quiz meets. The children had just four and the teens had six every year. (personal communication, January 29, 2012)

Several local children participated in this team activity and many earned trophies at meets. Gall remembered one of their best quizzers was shy and "didn't mix well with other young people," (I. Gall, personal communication, January 29, 2012) but is now a lawyer. In addition to children's activities, the Center also hosted workshops for women. One volunteer did a weeklong day camp for young women ages 15 to 25 on how to take care of children, dress appropriately, and search for jobs, with childcare provided, although it did not go over very well.

Building projects continued on the Lend-A-Hand campus and in 2000, the women built a goat barn with built-in outhouses. In 2005, Gall began a major undertaking as she worked to move the little log cabin “So Much” from Salt Gum to Lend-A-Hand on Patterson Branch. Gall wanted to preserve the log cabin so she, with the help of work groups and volunteers, took apart the cabin and rebuilt it near the main Center building overlooking the cow pasture. Gall then moved back to Lend-A-Hand from Middlesboro into what she calls her “retirement home.”

### **Volunteers**

In recent years, the nurses continued to welcome short-term, long-term volunteers, as well as work groups. According to Gall (2008), there were 29 long-term volunteers in the 1990s and eight from 2000 on (p. 33). Steve Baltic arrived in July of 1996 under CORA and has worked at the Center ever since. He also works as a referral agent for Appalachia Service Project (ASP), which does home repairs in the area, continuing the partnership between Lend-A-Hand and other service organizations working in the county. Sara Bennett arrived at the Center as Sara Provost in 1996. She worked as a part-time assistant, volunteer coordinator, and assisted with other activities until 2001. Bennett married a local man and is currently a teacher in the Knox County school system and serves on the Lend-A-Hand board of directors. The Center partnered with AmeriCorps beginning in 2000 and hosted four AmeriCorps volunteers through 2008. The Center continued to host Appalachian Semester volunteers until 2001, when the program ended. Gall (2008) related, “By the turn of the century, we did not need so many volunteers. We could not afford many and there weren’t many to be had” (p. 35). The Center continued hosting work groups, as volunteers became more difficult to acquire and more expensive.



### ***I Am with You Always and Walk With Me***

In 2000, Kemner published a book recalling her exploits as a nurse midwife in eastern Kentucky. *I Am with You Always* presented a first-person account of living conditions, healthcare services, and life stories of families in the area over several decades. The introduction to the book written by a former volunteer noted that the Lend-A-Hand Center “has not lost sight of its original goal which is to ‘Lend-A-Hand,’ by reaching out to people’s physical, emotional, spiritual, social and intellectual needs” (Kemner, p. xii).

Through the book, Kemner the told the story of over 90 deliveries. She made observations about mountain people, noting colloquialisms and cultural traits; household interactions; and men’s and women’s roles in the community. Giving vignettes of families and illustrating poverty conditions, Kemner wrote candidly about her faith and praying to God in difficult situations. She recalled making friends in the community, frequently referencing Gall’s help during deliveries and the work of volunteers who went with her on visits. Kemner depicted the different obstacles she faced while ministering on the Creek and the serious life or death situations she often found herself in. The book illustrated the amazing amount of courage and a little bit of luck that kept Kemner in practice for so long. The autobiography is a unique account of conditions in the Stinking Creek area and Kemner’s personal experiences as a midwife in eastern Kentucky.

Written in conjunction with the 50th anniversary of the Center, Gall’s reflective autobiographical account of the Lend-A-Hand Center, *Walk With Me*, chronicled the nurses’ experiences on the Creek. Gall explained in her own words finding the house on Patterson Branch and developing and implementing programs over the years. She organized the

chapters by program and time period, interjecting personal anecdotes and reminisces. The book included photographs and stories about volunteers and the Lend-A-Hand family.

Through these two accounts, Gall and Kemner reflected on their lives and organization they built on Stinking Creek. The focus and details of their books are telling about their priorities, legacy, and perceived impact in the watershed. These first-hand accounts are invaluable to the history of the organization and the Stinking Creek community.

### **USA Today: “The nurses' birthed a better place at Stinking Creek”**

In 2008 Gall and Kemner were contacted by John Fetterman's daughter, Mindy, a journalist for *USA Today*. After visiting the women and local residents, she produced an article for the national newspaper titled, “The nurses' birthed a better place at Stinking Creek.” The article in the December 26, 2008, paper told the story of Lend-A-Hand and Gall and Kemner's current work. Fetterman (2008) wrote, “Gall and Kemner brought a social revolution to the remote hollows of southeastern Kentucky. They advocated birth control, civil rights, education for women, and health care. All were seen as radical ideas. ‘People called us communists,’ Gall says” (p. 9B). Fetterman (2008) further related, “For the young girls of Stinking Creek, Gall and Kemner were the first women they'd ever met who had college educations and were independent and living on their own” (p. 9B). The article discussed birth control and featured several excerpts from community members including Suzi Carnes Brown, Escoe Smith, Myrtle Brown, and women of the Sizemore family. The article cited birth control, education, healthcare, and infrastructure work as remedies for poverty, much in the vein of service and uplift work rather than systemic social change. The article was excerpted in the *Appalachian Journal* in the “Signs of the Times” section of the Spring/Summer 2009 issue.

*USA Today* also produced a video segment titled, “Return to Stinking Creek: A Personal War on Poverty” that accompanied the article. The short clip told the story of Gall and Kemner featuring pictures from John Fetterman’s book and interviews with Gall, Kemner, Loyal Jones, volunteers, and local residents. The piece showed footage of cooking at the Center, Kemner doing health work in the home, Gall farming and milking a cow, young volunteers working at the Center, housing conditions in the area, religious activities, and family living at Lend-A-Hand. The piece mentioned Kemner’s work on birth control and Gall’s idea of putting a sparkle in people’s eyes. The video shared the successes and difficulties of 50 years on the Creek. Recounting the women’s hardships in the 1980s, Gall remembered her neighbor said, “I’m going to tear down the rocks so much that you never knew that Irma put one rock on top of the other” (*USA Today*). Yet through all the problems and barriers, the special highlighted the women’s perseverance and resolve in their mission on the Creek.

The piece also showed Mindy Fetterman going back to Stinking Creek to see what had changed and what had happened to the people of the area since her father wrote his infamous community portrait in 1967. Fetterman related, “Particularly for young women on Stinking Creek, Peggy and Irma were an example of how you can live your life a different way” (*USA Today*). Although the article and video highlighted changes on the Creek since Gall and Kemner’s arrival, in some ways, the younger Fetterman’s work was the same as earlier representations of the area. The pictures selected and the journalistic portrayal of Stinking Creek and Lend-A-Hand presented a limited viewpoint and understanding of poverty and service provision in the area.

## **Transition**

In their 55 years on the Creek, Gall and Kemner have witnessed a great transition in society in the Stinking Creek watershed. Cultural norms, economic activities, and lifestyles on the Creek changed from a traditional rural system to a more modern, integrated way of life. Many systems that had already given way in other places persisted in Stinking Creek into the late 1950s when the women arrived. The nurses saw the changing social landscape of an area undergoing a transformation, with the modernization of lifestyles and changes in the social structure making Stinking Creek a different place than when they first arrived.

Over the decades the Stinking Creek watershed, a peripheral area within Knox County, was further integrated into the larger economy and the modern world system. The switch from subsistence farming to more formal wage work and corresponding changes in lifestyle made a lasting impression on the watershed. Changes in infrastructure, the impact of women working outside the home, environmental degradation, and coal and timber interests have been evident to Gall and Kemner as they have observed the community the past 55 years. Gall (2008) discussed the quickening of rural transition in *Walk With Me*:

We arrived in time to experience mountain life very much like it had been from the beginning. There were people huddled on mountainsides in groups or clans, a type of subsistence living, and large families. World war had brought some changes like coal and logging camps. Missions brought health and educational services to the area, but they were scattered and not well received except for emergencies. The lack of roads, bridges, vehicles, and communication services made for real isolation. Often it was easier to walk over the hill than travel down the Creek. There were many one room schools about every eight miles, and there were post offices and stores. But young

children, and especially girls and women, seldom had the privilege of going to the store. It was the norm for girls to be packing a baby by the time they were teenagers up to the end of the child bearing years....We were here before television, cell phones, large consolidated schools, house trailers and double-wides changed the speech patterns as well as the way of life here on Stinking Creek. (p. 113-114, see also p. 51)

Through the decades the women recognized the changes occurring around them and the differences between Stinking Creek and their hometowns. Gall observed,

Our community or life along Stinking Creek has gone through many changes as in diet, access to facilities, government services, entertainment, education, and daily living which has instigated changes in not only our services, but in the delivery. For example when we suggested bringing in a mobile home very few people even knew what we were talking about. Now mobile homes have replaced much of the housing even several miles up the hollows. (personal communication, November 30, 2012)

Kemner recalled the changes in heating sources she and Gall witnessed over the years, from people having grates, fireplaces, and stoker coal to switching to gas and electric central heating (personal communication, January 28, 2012).

The women witnessed firsthand a real economic transition. According to Gall, the impact of the oil embargo in the 1970s had a particularly dramatic effect on the local economy. The expansion of coal mining in the area put people to work and quickened transition from the family farm. The women remembered when people quit gardening and “sold their cows. They didn’t deal with hogs or chickens anymore” (I. Gall, personal communication, December 28, 2011). Gall explained,

The whole change was instead of everybody having a little farm, one person, one farmer each had maybe two-tenths of an acre of tobacco and so that way they had a little income. In the '80s, well then one farmer would buy up everybody's tobacco allotment and then do all the work and get all the money...[Farmers] began to specialize. One farmer would have 10 cows and the next 10 farmers didn't have any cows anymore. We went from every family clan having cows and pigs to one person on the hollow. One person up the Creek and I think we're to the place now, there's about 10 or 12 and that's it on Stinking Creek. (personal communication, December 28, 2011)

When the women first arrived, the Creek was closer to a traditional rural society, whereas today the area resembles any other modern rural Appalachian community. Although the nurses and the work of Lend-A-Hand influenced the lives of people all along Stinking Creek and addressed real needs, they were not the primary driver of many of the changes in the area. Natural progression and the evolution of ways of life changed opportunities and norms for residents. Better roads, different jobs, more healthcare options, welfare, and more public work made life different for subsequent generations.

Many of the same social problems such as poverty, domestic abuse, substance abuse, substandard housing, poor educational attainment, and violence, are still present in the Stinking Creek watershed. New problems have also arisen, as prescription pill abuse and methamphetamine production have given rise to substantial underground economies. Though poverty rates fluctuated over the years, according to the Appalachian Regional Commission, 36.4% of the people in Knox County from 2007 to 2011 were below the official poverty line and the county still ranks as one of the poorest in the state and nation (Appalachian Regional

Commission, n.d.). Although people transitioned to a more modern way of life compared to the 1950s and are able to afford many more amenities, the area is still poor relative to other parts of the county. Poor economic growth, a lack of jobs, and the absence of sustainable economic drivers in the area present real challenges to families today.

Gall and Kemner have gone with the changes, working within existing social structures to deliver services and to provide opportunities for empowerment. They have upheld many of the traditional ways of life in the area including farming, food preservation, and crafting in the face of modernization, while embracing more modern conveniences like the internet and air conditioning. Staying true to their mission to be available to lend a hand despite changes, the women continue to serve the community while in their 80s.

### **Programs Today**

The programs of the Center today have scaled down considerably since the hectic days of the home health agency. Since Kemner's retirement as a nurse midwife, the health services at the Center now only include clinic hours. Kemner noted, "There's a clinic once a month for people who have no insurance and they pay \$5 to see the doctor" (personal communication, February 15, 2013). Many people also come for physicals so that they are eligible for a commercial driver's license. Physicals are performed at a reduced rate of \$30. Dr. William Ashburn from the Barbourville Family Health Center oversees the clinic hours and physicals. Many small clinics and family health centers have cropped up in Knox County in the past few decades, along with better roads, lessening the need for the clinic on Stinking Creek. Kemner remembered, "When it was easier to get a medical card the [clinic] numbers dropped off" (personal communication, February 15, 2013).

Lend-A-Hand also still runs a transportation program through a partnership with RTEC which has been ongoing for over a decade. The Center also helps other people with transportation needs who are not eligible through the program. Workers at the Center transport patients to medical appointments and give rides to other places as needed. There are currently two volunteers staying at the Center in addition to volunteers who sporadically come to help out. The Center hosts a few work groups through the year for building projects. A work group also plans and runs a weeklong day camp for local children in the summer. Gall tutors local children, and workers at the Center continue to go to meetings through different organizations working in the region.

As has been the case from the beginning, the Center is open for people to come by when in need. The women are still “lending a hand” in any way they can. Gall still farms the land, keeps livestock, and cuts hay. Kemner keeps a fruit and vegetable garden and cooks and preserves harvested produce. Steve Baltic works with ASP and Gall and Kemner are still involved with the EFSI board as well as church organizations and other groups in the county. The Center continues to receive funding from individual sources, including donations from volunteer alumni, as well as the Appalachian Fund. Running on a smaller budget with less funding sources, the Center currently is making the most of its limited resources and human capital.

### **Success**

It is difficult to fully evaluate the impact of the Lend-A-Hand Center on the Stinking Creek community and beyond. Its range of services, staying power, and adaptability have proven the viability of its model. The hundreds of people Gall and Kemner have come in contact with and the countless lives they changed had a rippling effect. Their influence is



worldwide with people from different countries working at the Center and partnerships with different organizations around the region and nation.

Measuring success has never been a focus of Lend-A-Hand. Rather than charting the number of people they impacted or the amount of items or assistance they distributed, workers at the Center focused more on meeting needs and building relationships. Gall observed,

I often say that the best way we can grade ourselves to be successful with a family or a problem in the community is when they don't call on us anymore. They don't need us anymore. Hooray. They've gotten some way that they've gotten on their feet and they're going on themselves. (personal communication, January 28, 2012)

The personal level of engagement and different definition of success set the Center apart from other service organizations. Lend-A-Hand philosophy has never been driven by measurements, attainment levels, or numbers, but rather person-to-person interaction, social capital, trust, and a sense of empowerment.

It is hard to empirically gauge the effectiveness and success of the organization. Gall remarked, "I don't know how many times...we felt like we were an absolute failure" (personal communication, January 28, 2012). Lend-A-Hand's philosophy about assessment differed from Gall and Kemner's experience with the OEO. Regarding their work, Gall remarked,

You can't count this. This is the biggest difference between OEO and Lend-A-Hand. We were willing to do things and try things and be there for—to lend a hand, where maybe our hand got slapped and we did not succeed. In OEO you have to succeed. You have to be able to count noses. How you bettered their lives. But many, many

times we never found out, like [these two girls we helped], we didn't find out for years that they had gone on and finished high school and made something of themselves. I ran into one of her brothers and he told me, 'Oh we'll never forget what you did for us.' We were counting it a failure, see. (personal communication, January 28, 2012)

The Center's work with families and children was often long and tedious. The women have spent 50 years working with some of the same families and are still dealing with similar issues they faced in the 1960s. They did not solve all the social problems or promote sweeping social change on the Creek, but they did not set out to do that kind of work.

Gall and Kemner's influence on women in Knox County and the personal relationships they fostered over the years shows how important the nurses have been as role models in the community. When discussing programs that involved working one-on-one with individuals, Gall remarked, "All through my 55 years of history in Kentucky, it's a program that at the moment does not seem to work and 10 years later you have somebody come back and say you changed my life" (personal communication, December 29, 2011).

Acceptance and appreciation in the community may also be seen as indicators of the success of Lend-A-Hand over the years. Nearly everyone on the Creek knows Gall and Kemner or knows someone who has been impacted by their services in the area. Everyone is aware of the bridge and the Center and the people who make up the organization. Gall remarked, "Even though we weren't accepted when we first came, we are well accepted as part of the community now" (personal communication, September 4, 2008). The women have built trust and become an integral part of the community over the past 55 years.

The organization, steered by the nurses' leadership and drive, persisted through difficult times. Driven by a mission and backed by a network of support, Gall and Kemner overcame budget shortfalls, failures, fires, disagreements, and changing times to succeed in making a difference on the Creek. Through all the hardships, successes, and failures, the women persisted in their mission as the organization grew. Gall remarked, "There were times when we wondered how in the world we were going to survive, financially, how we were going to survive physically, whether this flood would carry us completely away" (personal communication, January 29, 2012). Hardships strengthened the tenacity of the women and through the last few decades, Gall and Kemner have continued to push through in the face of new challenges and change.

### **Future**

The Lend-A-Hand Center is currently at a crossroads. In its 55-year history it has been flexible, meeting the challenges and needs of a changing community and adapting its role on the Creek. Gall and Kemner, now both in their 80s feel as though they have completed their goal of lending a hand. Gall remarked, "The main reason we're here and stayed here is because we felt this is where God wants us to be and there's work to do, there's still work to do, and we would like to see it go on" (personal communication, January 29, 2012). The women know there is still a place for Lend-A-Hand in the community. Many social problems persist and as Kemner put it, "There's still a lot of changes that need to take place" (personal communication, February 15, 2013). The women cited issues including drug abuse, education, and housing as persistent needs in the community.

The Center's future is somewhat uncertain. The women and the board of directors are currently waiting for direction for the next step in the organization and for opportunities to

present themselves as the organization transitions from the leadership of the nurses. Gall and Kemner are hunting for someone to take over the Center, someone willing to give their life to the mission of the organization, as they have done for 55 years. Gall explained,

Our whole mission, [our] project was to do what God wanted us to do. One of the hardest things you have to do is wait for God's direction... Time after time we waited to see the direction... Time after time we've waited and somebody has come along... That's the story of our lives... we've had to wait until it's God's time.

(personal communication, January 29, 2012)

Though this is not the conventional turnover strategy for nonprofit organizations, and is hard for many people to understand, Gall and Kemner are adamant in their trust that their organization will endure. The women have truly given their lives to their organization. As a nonprofit, Gall remarked, "Neither Peggy nor I could ever profit from it. It was just the opposite. Lend-A-Hand profited from us and we kept it alive" (personal communication, January 29, 2012). She continued, "Peggy and I had our whole lives wrapped up in this and all our finances... We really have our life's blood in this" (personal communication, January 29, 2012). The personal nature of the Center and its directors' interaction with the community is both a strength and weakness moving forward. Although Gall and Kemner both feel like they have accomplished their mission to Lend-A-Hand on Stinking Creek, the organization stands to continue their legacy into the future.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

The brainchild and lifework of Irma Gall and Peggy Kemner, the Lend-A-Hand Center has become a staple of the Stinking Creek community and has impacted thousands of people from Knox County and around the world. This history provided a comprehensive overview of the organization from the personal viewpoints of Gall and Kemner through first-person accounts of the philosophical underpinnings and motivations behind the various programs of the organization. The Center clearly illustrates the important work of service providers in Appalachian communities. Its long, complex history invites a layered analysis considering the intersections between the organization and other organizations, social movements, and pivotal events in the region. The Center, through its 55 years, has added to the social makeup of Knox County and contributed to the discourse on the history of nonprofits in eastern Kentucky. The history of the Center may be seen as a case study of service work in Appalachia and a microcosm of issues within Appalachian Studies. Issues involving poverty, culture, stereotypes, health, religion, family life, economics, politics, government intervention, gender, and education, all come to light through this account. Analysis of the Center contributes to further understandings of service work, community dynamics, social networks, community development, mission work, and the history of the Stinking Creek watershed.

The four eras presented here work to situate the Center within the context of larger regional and national trends. Five major themes are present throughout the history of the organization. 1) The exemplary work of the Center and its impact on the local community; 2) the influence of a particular philosophy about poverty and uplift work; 3) the web of

affiliations that affected the work of the Center; 4) the central role of women and women's empowerment in the history of the organization; and 5) the great potential for the future of the Center and organizations like it in Appalachia are each delineated through this analysis.

The experience of the Lend-A-Hand Center serves as an example for other service providers and community development organizations in the region. The Center has made a major impact on the community for decades, providing much needed services to an impoverished area. The organization's rich history evidences its growth and maturity over the years, as well as its continuing commitment to its mission. As a service provider in a persistently poor area, the Center has met the needs of many individuals and families through health services, education, agriculture, youth activities, individual assistance, volunteerism, and empowerment. Stressing the importance of education, personal relationships, and a "sparkle in the eye," the Center filled many voids in the community.

Over the 55 years the Center has been active in the Stinking Creek watershed, there have been a variety of programs addressing the needs of the community, but the motivation, mission, and goals of the Center have remained the same. The driving force of the organization, Gall and Kemner's strong wills and persistence, has allowed the Center to accomplish its goal of lending a hand. Combining their personal strengths and utilizing available resources, the women led the organization by balancing their very different personalities, backgrounds, and capacities. With a broad mission and a commitment to establishing relationships rather than meeting measurable goals, the Lend-A-Hand Center has been extremely successful in making a difference in the community.

The Center's impressive longevity and wide reach has set it apart from other organizations. For 55 years the Center has worked in the Stinking Creek watershed and

witnessed a dramatic transformation of the community. Gall and Kemner have seen many changes over time and have persisted in the face of many challenges. The organization's far-reaching programs have influenced hundreds of Knox Countians and out-of-town volunteers, spreading the organization's philosophy and passing on the knowledge and skills of the two women. The Center's influence has reached much farther than the hollows up Stinking Creek. As a leader and contributor to the regional dialogue about poverty in eastern Kentucky, the Center serves as a role model for other service organizations. Its work reached not only people in the local community, but also had a profound impact on volunteers from throughout the US and overseas. The Center has taught life skills, Christian living, environmental stewardship, and community service to countless volunteers and left a legacy of social workers, nurses, and teachers. The scale and scope of the work of the Center is notable, from working with neighbors to international volunteers and individual households to transnational organizations, Lend-A-Hand's influence has been local and global.

The Center was in many ways on the cutting edge, creating precursors to later programs in the region. Many programs, including home health, contracted transportation, the Little Children's Program, modern farming techniques, children's Sunday school, and the Lend-An-Animal program were ahead of their time and have influenced other organizations.

Much can be learned from the history of the Lend-A-Hand Center about service work in central Appalachia. The importance of organizations like Lend-A-Hand and their place within the mix of community groups in rural areas is evident in this analysis. The work of Gall and Kemner show the importance of building trust in a community, becoming integrated into the community, cultural competency in service delivery, strong leadership, persisting through difficult times, meeting the changing needs of an impoverished area, as well as the

possibilities for organizations working with limited resources. Overcoming insider/outsider tensions, gender bias, stereotypes, and religious differences has proven challenging but worthwhile for the organization. Religious motivation has always been a cornerstone of the organization, and building social capital and cultural awareness has also been central to the success of the Center. Lessons learned from the successes as well as the failures of the Center may be applicable to other areas in central Appalachia. Taking into account the experiences of organizations like Lend-A-Hand, nonprofits and communities in Appalachia may better address issues relevant to residents.

The history of the organization also shows how particular understandings of poverty affect service provision on the ground in Appalachia. Lend-A-Hand philosophy and programs in many ways reflected the culture of poverty theory, the popular understanding of poverty and uplift work of the time. The work of the Center evidenced contemporary sentiment prevalent in the 1950s and 1960s, as well as the individual philosophy and motivations of Gall and Kemner. The women were highly influenced by Perley Ayer and the work of the Council of the Southern Mountains and books like Weller's *Yesterday's People*.

The organization's frameworks for addressing poverty evidence the impact of culture-of-poverty-era understandings. Through the service-oriented mission of the organization as well as its self-definition as an uplift organization, the Center stressed meeting immediate individual needs, education, assimilation into the cultural mainstream, and modernization of lifestyles. The Center's focus on health, farming, material assistance, women's issues, and individual empowerment or what Gall refers to as the "sparkle in the eye," directly demonstrates the culture of poverty thesis.



Though there may be some truth in the culture of poverty thesis, there are definite limits to the theory and methods of addressing poverty by focusing only on individual causes. Though the Center has not been a community development organization, it does evidence possibilities for the work of service providers in changing communities for the better. Programs alleviated individual problems, but did not fix systemic issues, though it may be posited that organizations like Lend-A-Hand have the capacity to do such work. The experience of Lend-A-Hand shows that there are limitations to service provision in addressing social problems. Different organizations and individuals have different roles to play in the mix of community associations. Lend-A-Hand chose to focus on health and education as a service provider. It is important to differentiate between service providers and community organizations pushing for progressive social change in the scope, purpose, and goals of these types of organizations.

Although aware of structural issues, the programs and operations of the Center were largely based on individual and cultural understandings of poverty, rather than structural causes. The organization's work focused on providing for individual needs rather than changing the community or promoting structural change. Helping the community through service and individual empowerment rather than directly confronting regional inequality, social injustice, and local political structures has characterized the history of the organization.

Service providers have the capacity to go further than just delivering goods and services to people in need. Successful organizations solicit support and input from community residents and tackle deeper structural problems. This sort of participatory development seems promising for struggling communities and utilizes broader, more structural understandings of poverty and social issues. Community-based development rather

than service provision is a possibility for organizations like the Center. Gall's community center program during the War on Poverty was an interesting example of possibilities for community input opposite Lend-A-Hand's less participatory programs. Organizations must be able to adapt to the changing times and needs of rural communities that are increasingly integrated into globalized structures, in addition to being aware of the multifaceted nature of social problems.

Better models are also needed for service providers and community organizations to use. Conceptualizations of poverty must be critical and holistic, while at the same time place-based and specific, so they are able to adjust to evolving needs. Wider ways to define poverty beyond economic definitions to include quality of life, opportunity, agency, and empowerment provide a more rounded view of social issues. Using community as the unit of analysis will help in assessing social problems and positing innovative solutions. There are still many concerns involving Appalachian poverty, culture, and other social issues that warrant further research, both theoretical and empirical.

Using a structural analysis such as Wallerstein's world systems model may help organizations like Lend-A-Hand better understand the wider context and causes of poverty in their community and how their community fits into larger structures. Knox County, Kentucky, has been persistently poor for many decades. Located in southeastern Kentucky at the fringes of the coal producing area and bypassed by a major interstate, the county may be seen as a periphery within a periphery. It is in Appalachia, a periphery within the United States, and specifically located in the heart of central Appalachia, between the resource-rich coal producing counties and the flatter, better farming areas toward the bluegrass region of the state. The Stinking Creek watershed in the rural, northeastern part of the county might be

seen as the periphery of the periphery of the periphery. By looking at Stinking Creek's integration with the modern world system, structural plans to help alleviate social problems and build community could be more effective than service provision. Citizen-based organizations, which the Lend-A-Hand Center has the potential to be, could take the lead in understanding and addressing these structural problems. Yet currently, citizen-based organizations such as the grassroots multi-issue organization Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, are limited in Knox County.

Overall, the experience of Lend-A-Hand shows what may be accomplished through individual uplift efforts, education, and empowerment based on culture of poverty theory understandings, although Lend-A-Hand should not solely be assessed through the culture of poverty model. The Center has used a mix of philosophy in its endeavors on the Creek and a more cultural understanding of poverty does provide insights into community issues. Yet, in order for community service organizations to be more successful there needs to be a more structural approach to poverty instead of just providing services and individual empowerment.

Taking into account larger economic, social, political, historical, and environmental factors could help organizations like the Lend-A-Hand Center combat poverty and improve communities.

The importance of regional and national organizational affiliations in nonprofit work in eastern Kentucky is also shown through the history of the Center. Lend-A-Hand has always been active in a web of affiliations and social networks, collaborating with other organizations working on poverty and social justice issues, including the Council of the Southern Mountains, Berea College, Union College, Red Bird Mission, Frontier Nursing

Service, Brethren Volunteer Service, the Commission on Religion in Appalachia, the Coalition for Appalachian Ministry, the KCEOC, Appalachia Service Project, Appalachian Semester, Appalachian Regional Commission, 4-H, RTEC, AmeriCorps, and local governmental agencies. The Center's integration into this larger system of organizations working toward the betterment of central Appalachia and the availability of opportunity and resources for local communities was integral to its success. Such affiliations and networks assisted the Center in its mission and contributed to the longevity and financial stability of the organization. Helen Lewis (2009) examined the importance of collaboration and coalition building, explaining, "Community groups need to make linkages and form networks and partnerships with other groups to gain strength, share resources, and learn from each other's efforts, successes, failures" (p. 80).

Gall and Kemner learned from their experiences within the CSM and with the KCEOC during the War on Poverty, building bridging social capital in the region and utilizing outside resources. The women also built bonding social capital in the community, working at an intimate level with families and individuals. They were intertwined with developments within the network of social uplift organizations in Appalachia and kept up to date on issues on the Creek and in the region. The women made connections with important figures such as Perley Ayer and Sergeant Shriver and extended their network of professional contacts.

The work of the Center also evidences the central role of women and feminism within the organization's structure and programs. The strength and leadership of Gall and Kemner; their gender-role defying activities and occupations; the prevalence and influence of female volunteers; the transmission of a variety of skills to female volunteers; the programs that

addressed women's issues including midwifery services, Planned Parenthood, and 4-H activities for girls; and the organization's work towards women's empowerment all show an awareness of women's issues built into the frameworks of the organization. Though not overtly feminist in their motivations, the nurses clearly were conscious of their role in addressing the needs of women in the community.

Throughout their time on the Creek, Gall and Kemner witnessed the broader transformation of cultural attitudes towards women. They saw women's roles expand from a primarily domestic "servitude role" to include formal wage employment, public leadership positions, and fewer childrearing responsibilities, in addition to smaller family size. In the vein of earlier female reformers, the nurses addressed health and education issues with women in the community, working to change prejudiced perceptions. War on Poverty programs through the KCEOC also addressed women's issues. Female leadership of the Center played a key role as female volunteers made major marks on the organization, many becoming nurses and teachers themselves. Through women's health programs and firsthand experience working with families, Lend-A-Hand addressed real needs in the community and built bonds with women.

This history of the Lend-A-Hand Center helps shed light on the role of feminist organizations in the Appalachian region and changes in gender roles in a rural community. There is still work to be done to more fully understand the changing gender dynamics of the Stinking Creek watershed. Sexism, prejudice, and mistreatment still exist in the community as there are more strides to be made toward gender equality.

There is enormous potential for the future of the Lend-A-Hand Center, while at the same time, the trajectory of the organization is in limbo. Because of the organization's

existing social capital, networks, and reputation on the Creek, Lend-A-Hand is in a unique position to move forward. Existing physical and organizational infrastructure and ties in the community may be built upon and expanded as the organization moves past Gall and Kemner's direction. There are still needs to be met and a place for the Center in the Stinking Creek watershed. Issues involving poverty, health, education, and farming are still significant in the community. The organization will most likely evolve, changing programs, direction, and focus in the future and adapting to the changing needs of the watershed.

As suggested, the Center has the potential to take a more structural approach toward social issues and work less as a service provider, incorporating more community input and grassroots control. Lend-A-Hand has established many critical programs, but has fallen short of true community-based development. The organization has the possibility to transition to more community-based development like KFTC. Lend-A-Hand could function more like a true community center soliciting local input and direction. The Center may borrow from the community center program of the KCEOC, incorporating grassroots participation and working toward alternative economic development strategies.

The Center may also continue health work in the watershed, though healthcare is much more widely accessible than when the women first arrived on the Creek. The organization has the possibility to continue as a community health care provider like the Mud Creek Clinic in Floyd County, Kentucky. It could also refocus more on general health, preventative care, diet, health education, addiction, and exercise.

Agricultural work may also be an avenue continuing into the future. The Center, with its hundreds of acres of forestland and pasture, may be useful as a demonstration farm as young people in the community are increasingly removed from the area's agricultural past.

Focusing on people's connection to food, self-sufficiency, and sustainability, the Center is positioned to continue its farming practices and share insights with a new generation.

Lend-A-Hand is still well suited as a place for youth and adult programs. Continuing education and outreach in the community that address a range of issues may be one way for the organization to respond to changing needs. The Center has the potential to build upon its history of work with women in the watershed. Programs could focus on girls' and women's empowerment like the High Rocks organization in Hillsboro, West Virginia. Volunteerism and service will also be important aspects of the future of the organization, building on decades of institutional networks and personal relationships. Nonprofit organizations like Lend-A-Hand are built on the sacrifice, enthusiasm, and drive of the volunteers that make up the organizations.

Religion may also likely play an important part of the future of the organization, as it has in the past. Christian service has been a driving factor for Gall and Kemner and volunteers over the years. The women have been motivated by religious conviction, yet subtle in their approach in the community which has contributed to the Center's success. The Center is an ideal place to hold camps, religious meetings, and promote simple Christian living.

Lastly, the Center has the possibility to become a cultural center, focusing on heritage preservation, traditional skills, local history, and Appalachian culture. The Center could host conferences and events and partner with the Knox County Historical Museum and local schools in educating people and preserving local heritage. It could host programs similar to the Pine Mountain Settlement School and work with other networks of heritage centers in the

region. Gall already has an exhibit in her cabin that tells the story of the Lend-A-Hand Center which could be expanded to include information about the Stinking Creek watershed.

Strong leadership will be needed to steer the organization as Gall and Kemner have done for over five decades. The social capital the women have built over the years will be hard to reproduce. The direction of the Center is unclear as the board of directors is currently waiting on someone to take the lead at the Center. The past 55 years on Patterson Branch has set the stage for the future of Lend-A-Hand and the Stinking Creek watershed. Gall and Kemner have made enormous contributions to the community and have left a legacy of service and empowerment. The history of the Center is really the collected stories of Gall and Kemner, their life experiences, struggles, and successes. Based on oral histories, this examination of the organization shows the storied past and the great potential for the little organization that set out to “lend a hand” on Stinking Creek. It has been 46 years since John Fetterman created “a portrait of a mountain community.” Many things have changed on the Creek and at the Lend-A-Hand Center, but as long as the Center keeps its focus on the community and is responsive to the changing needs of residents it will continue to be an important organization in the watershed and region.



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## Vita

Kathryn Susan Elizabeth Engle was born in Corbin, Kentucky, to Allen and Elizabeth Engle. She grew up in Richmond, Kentucky, and graduated from Model Laboratory School in May 2007. The following autumn, she enrolled at Eastern Kentucky University and studied General Business, English Literature, and Appalachian Studies. In May 2011 she was awarded the Bachelor of Business Administration degree, Bachelor of Arts degree, and a Minor in Appalachian Studies. In the fall of 2011, she accepted a research assistantship in Appalachian Studies at Appalachian State University and began study toward a Master of Arts degree. The M.A. was awarded in August 2013. Immediately following, Miss Engle commenced work toward her Ph.D. in Sociology at the University of Kentucky.

Miss Engle edited the local history compilation *Madison's Heritage Rediscovered: Tales from a Historic Kentucky County* which was released in July 2012. She is currently a contributor to the *Rob Welch Economic and Social Justice in Appalachia Project* and is working on a chapter for the forthcoming collection.