Former hard-luck mom takes care of her own

SINCE I started this column nearly two months ago, many of you have reached out to tell me about people I must meet.

I’m keeping a list, and plan to write about some of them.

In the wake of Gov. Corbett’s spending plan — which doesn’t look like it’s going improve life much for everyday Pennsylvanians — I thought I’d start with someone who helps those most in need: Eudora Burton.

On paper, Burton is a housing specialist for an organization that connects first-time moms with nurses who come to their homes. It’s called the Opening Doors program of the Philadelphia Nurse-Family Partnership.

That’s a mouthful, so some moms she’s helped prefer “miracle worker.”

Burton, 58, is a relentless advocate for mothers who, without a helping hand, might be homeless. One of them is Asia Elliott, the young woman I wrote about who is living in a shelter with her toddler.

“I’m not sure where I’d be without her help,” she said of Burton.

The job is personal to Burton. It’s one for which she is uniquely qualified.

Burton married at 19. She and her husband, both from large families, had seven children. After separating, Burton raised the kids by herself on a cobbled existence of public assistance, low-paying jobs and volunteer stipends.

She almost lost her house. She struggled to keep the heat on and food on the table. She remembers how she and her children, who bagged groceries at a nearby market, combined their money to make ends meet.

“We’d sit down at the table, bring all our money together and hope there was enough to pay the bills,” she said.

But what she remembers most is the bureaucracy she often faced when looking for help.

“I told myself if I could ever reach back and help somebody else, to keep them from all the red tape, all the closed doors, I’d do it.”

She started with an ever-growing network that she’s been building since she was the mother who needed help.

Years ago, she was talking with a school counselor about getting services for one of her sons who had a learning disability. She and her husband had just separated. She was overwhelmed.

“I could not talk without crying,” she said. The counselor suggested a family-empowerment program.

“It changed my whole life,” Burton said. Like the Nurse-Family Partnership program, it partnered her family with a home visitor.

The young woman assigned to Burton “bugged me,” she says, laughing. “I say ‘bugged,’ but it was what I needed. She talked with me about my goals for my kids, and for myself. When you’re in crisis, sometimes you feel stuck, paralyzed. You just need a little support, a push.”

When Burton told the worker that she always wanted to go to college, the young woman wouldn’t let her forget it. Burton eventually enrolled at Community College of Philadelphia. She later got her bachelor’s degree at Peirce College and her master’s from Capella University, where she is a Ph.D. candidate. She also remarried and had another child, who is 17 now.

It wasn’t an easy or straight road. But Burton went from client to volunteer to employee at organizations she once sought help from.

She’s helped hundreds of mothers in the program find safe, affordable housing. Most are referred to her from the nurses in the program. But every once in a while, there’s a plea from people who heard she might be able to help. A front-desk employee at the Partnership’s South Broad Street offices once asked if she could help a pregnant friend. Word of a miracle worker travels fast.

And just like she promised herself all those years ago, Burton tries to help.

“A lot of it is being creative,” she said. “I may not be able to get you housing right away. But maybe I can find ways to absorb other expenses, like diapers, so that it frees up money for you to pay your rent.

“Whatever it takes.”

Get someone to add to my must-meet list? Let me know. Send me your do-gooders, your only-in-Philly characters and your extraordinarily ordinary. I want to meet them all.

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Advertising industry adjusts to a new world order ...

After riding out the recession, Philadelphia’s advertising industry is coming back to life — but it may look a little different than it did five years ago.

Agencies are moving into new spaces and hiring new employees, but this time they’re looking for employees who go beyond just being tech savvy.

“Being tech savvy is only part of it — everyone younger is tech savvy now. They grew up with social media in their DNA,” said Scott Tattar, director of PR at LevLane, a Center City agency whose clients include the Center City District, the Philadelphia Flower Show and Philabundance. “There’s a creative surge in Philadelphia — I’m seeing it just in the number of bikes in the racks below the building.”

Just this year, LevLane has brought on six new employees, including a social media coordinator and a media buyer. The firm, which has 40 employees, is still looking for candidates for a variety of positions, including “a lot of things that didn’t exist five to six years ago,” Tattar said.

Another agency, O3 World, recently moved from Northern Liberties into new space at 1339 Frankford Ave. in Fishtown, in a neighborhood with two Stephen Starr restaurants, new housing and a range of new businesses.

Its second-floor space takes over a former bootlegger’s warehouse and features exposed brick walls and “warehouse” elements, but also a pool table, dart board and a bank of new computers — to accommodate the staff of 16, double the payroll of recent years.

O3 World clients include Comcast, SEL, Travis Manion Foundation, Five Below and Thomson Reuters.

To get into the agency’s new space, a glassed-in entryway offers a view of the downstairs tattoo parlor.

“That’s part of our style, our personality,” Keith Scandone, O3 World partner-and-CEO, said. “We like to be progressive, off-the-beaten path, edgy. We like being in Fishtown, above a tattoo parlor. We’re professional but at the same time we have an edge.”

O3 World, which was founded in 2005, is in 4,800 square feet and has an option to expand into another 2,000 square feet, possibly by later this year. By summer, it also plans to hire four more people, including specialists in tech support, sales and marketing, Web design and front-end development. Its specialty is interactive design and development, which Scandone admits is a lot easier to explain to people now that it’s on their phones, in their cars, at their fingertips.

Scott Tattar of LevLane. The firm is looking to fill positions that didn’t exist five to six years ago.

“Now the Internet is not just about your desktop. It’s everywhere. Everyone uses it now. Your kids use it,” he said.

In Old City, where the strategic-and-creative agency Machinery, which recently won the Philadelphia Craft Show account, is “on the cusp” of hiring new staff, agency principal Ken Cills said.

Meanwhile, there’s been activity in the suburbs as well.

Backe Digital Brand Marketing in Radnor bought...
on new staff in the summer, and is now trying to hire three account-and-project managers, John E. Backe, president and CEO, said. The agency's clients include GlaxoSmithKline, Airgas, Peirce College, Independence LED and Arcadia University.

Adglobal360, an India-based advertising agency that specializes in new media, has established a U.S. office in Malvern. To start, the office will be staffed by three people, according to CEO Mandeep Singh.

It specializes in pay-per click, social media, reputation management, SEO and email marketing. Clients include banks, hospitals, real estate firms, retail chains and so on.

More online
To see more of 03 World's digs, visit pbj.com

03 World's Fishtown digs are above a tattoo parlor and feature a 'bullpen' space.

Keith Scandone of 03 World shows off his agency's bar area, which includes a pool table and dartboard.