

BranchingOut

March 2009

Dear Friends,

During these unprecedented economic times, we're all searching for ways we can help each other make the best of the situations in which we find ourselves. This issue of *BranchingOut* explores ways our featured nonprofit organizations are helping the most vulnerable people in our communities.

From sheltering the homeless and feeding the hungry, to programs that help families struggling to find their way through physical and emotional abuse, each of these agencies is supporting people who may find their lives shaken by current events. These are organizations that need our help now more than ever.

As always, we appreciate not only your support of these programs, but your thoughts on ways we can improve *BranchingOut*.

Sincerely,



Doug Jansson
President

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Providing tools to prevent homelessness

Take a look at Milwaukee's efforts to tackle as well as solve the city's homelessness problem and you'd be hard pressed to find a program or provider that didn't have some kind of involvement from **Community Advocates**.

In the 1980s, when homelessness began to emerge as a national crisis, the general advocacy agency emerged as a local leader in addressing the problem.

Community Advocates was one of the original members of the Milwaukee Shelter Task Force that led to the creation of several emergency shelters around town. It recently assumed operation of Autumn West, a supportive housing project for the homeless and mentally ill. It also spearheads Milwaukee's Continuum of Care, a 75-member planning group that's developing a long-term strategy to end chronic homelessness in the city.

These days the number of low-income people and families who depend upon Community Advocates to meet their housing and other basic needs has grown. From 2003 to 2007, the agency has been the second highest referral source for Milwaukee County's 2-1-1 @ Impact information and referral hotline.

The agency has never wavered in its work toward homelessness, but in recent years it has focused a lot more on preventing the crisis than simply addressing the problem. Through its homeless prevention program, Community Advocates provides funds to help people pay their rent or utility bills. Families and individuals who are at risk of eviction can also turn to the agency for help with landlord disputes, budget advice, money management and education about their rights.

Through the Public Policy Institute, which Community Advocates launched in late 2007, the agency ultimately aims to reduce poverty by conducting research and pushing for policies that will create lasting change.

Funding needs range from \$500 for a single month's rent to prevent homelessness for a family facing eviction due to job loss or medical emergency, to \$10,000 to cover the costs of security deposits for 15 families to move from shelter to permanent housing. ■



Homelessness knows no racial, gender or age limits. Community Advocates works with low-income individuals and families to maintain their housing, basic needs and dignity.

Grants of \$250 and more will help any of these outstanding organizations meet important community needs.

Putting the arts to work for Milwaukee



As part of ArtWorks' Urban Airbrush project led by artist Malcolm McCrae, apprentices designed, created and marketed their own T-shirts using airbrush techniques.

As Milwaukee's current workforce is weakened by layoffs and record unemployment, the city's future workforce is also suffering.

A unstable labor market creates an even greater disadvantage for teens who lack the soft skills as well as the work experience to get their foot in the door.

An employment training program called **ArtWorks for Milwaukee** uses the arts as a way of engaging and educating at-risk teens about the world of work. Interested teens can apply for one of eight paid apprenticeships offered in the spring, summer and fall. Each team of eight apprentices is designed to represent a mix of ages, races, zip codes, grade levels and disabilities to mirror the diversity teens will experience in the workplace.

Apprentices work with local professional artists on arts-related projects that last eight weeks and stretch across a variety of mediums. In the past, teens have written and published a book of poetry, created posters of Milwaukee neighborhoods, designed wearable art and painted murals for the Zoological Society and a Harley-Davidson dealership. Upcoming projects include an anti-violence T-shirt campaign for Safe and Sound, a mural in the Harambee neighborhood and a project that captures images representing Milwaukee's different zip codes.

While earning a paycheck and stretching their artistic abilities, teens also earn real world experience and learn bankable job skills, such as public speaking, teamwork and critical thinking, that positions them well for any job setting.

Funding needs include \$250 for art supplies per program, \$3,000 to cover the cost of a lead artist for a summer program, and \$8,000 to cover the cost of eight apprentices during the eight-week summer program. ■

Opening doors to success, independent living



Marty had struggled with homelessness for nearly 10 years before learning about the Guest House. He turned to the agency for help in 2006 and just last year, Marty successfully moved into his own apartment.

Guest House of Milwaukee has long been known as a drop-in spot for the city's homeless men.

Typically, 80 men fill the Guest House cots each night. This past winter, more men have relied upon the agency as a safe haven. Recently, 100 squeezed into the shelter while another 30 remained on the waiting list.

While anyone is welcomed as a guest, the agency hopes they do not become frequent visitors. That's because its priority is to help men move up and move out. By walking through the doors of the emergency shelter on North 13th Street, men are expected to take that first step toward opening their own doors to stable housing, a self-sustaining income and long-term success.

In return for a place to sleep, each guest agrees to follow an individual service plan designed to help them overcome the problems that first led them to the Guest House. With the help of a case manager and counselor, they participate in LEADS, a five-stage structured program that provides the tools and support to accomplish their plan's goals. After successfully completing each stage, men are rewarded with additional privileges within the shelter. The ultimate goal is to prepare men to leave the Guest House for a place of their own.

Within recent years, Guest House has made that ultimate goal more attainable by increasing the availability of affordable, supportive housing. In February, the agency opened Prairie Apartments, a 24-unit apartment complex at 1218 W. Highland Ave. It now runs 170 units throughout the area, providing the city's homeless with a greater chance to live independently.

Funding needs range from \$250 for a week's worth of underwear, socks, T-shirts and personal care items for 10 guests to \$3,000 to purchase six sets of replacement bunk beds for the shelter. ■

A safe and stable alternative to the streets



Teens who feel uncomfortable talking to adult staff about their problems can turn to volunteer youth counselors, some of whom are former shelter guests.

For a teen and his or her family, surviving adolescence is no easy task. Miscommunication and misunderstandings are common. Add poverty, interfamily conflicts and a host of other factors and the tension intensifies. Teens and parents often can't stand to be in the same room, let alone under the same roof.

Last year, 241 runaway or homeless youth turned to the emergency shelter at **Walker's Point Youth and Family Center** as a respite from the chaos they experienced at home. That represented a 17 percent increase in the number of troubled youth the agency served in 2007. Staff expect that number to rise as the recession continues and stress within families grows.

The agency's 24-hour, eight-bed shelter not only offers teens a roof over their heads, but also a safe space where they can sort out their problems and address the issues they face at home. Teens ages 11 through 17 can stay up to two weeks at the shelter, which is one of two for teens in Milwaukee. Though the emergency shelter is a temporary living situation, it is a structured environment. Teens are expected to help with chores, attend school, complete their homework, and abide by house rules. While there, they also receive private counseling and attend group therapy.

Walker's Point's ultimate goal is to reunite teens with their families. The agency invites parents to attend counseling and address issues with their teens. Both groups learn new ways to cope, communicate and confront future conflicts. Ninety-five percent of the teens that leave the emergency shelter or the agency's transitional living program return home or to a safe alternative.

Funding needs include \$250 to cover heat and electricity in the shelter for 10 days, \$300 to provide counseling for an average nine-day shelter stay and \$500 to cover food costs for five residents in the shelter for two weeks. ■

Working with batterers to break cycle of violence



Olusegun Sijuwade and Terri Strodthoff head up the *Men Ending Violence* program, a batterer intervention behavioral change education program.

Violence is not genetic, but it can be passed on from generation to generation. People who are exposed to violence at home or in the community will grow up believing and accepting it as a natural behavior without a role model to show them otherwise.

To break that cycle, it becomes just as important to help batterers take responsibility for their actions and reform their lives as it is to help victims recover from the abuse.

Alma Center works exclusively with male batterers, believing that since violence is a learned behavior, it can be unlearned as well. Staff help men recognize what factors led to their destructive behavior and teach them how to make the right choices in their relationships moving forward.

The agency's seven-month *Men Ending Violence* program encourages men to open up about their past experiences and teaches them about trust, respect and other values that form a healthy relationship. Through the *Caring Dad's Initiative*, men learn how to become better parents and role models. Alma Center also works with men through its *Finding Work* program to gain the skills and eliminate the barriers that stand in their way of finding a steady job.

The agency recognizes that not every man can change immediately, but it has shown success in converting men into role models versus repeat offenders. In criminal record checks conducted on program graduates, there has been an 86 percent reduction in repeat domestic violence arrests and a 60 percent reduction in overall arrests.

Funding needs include \$3,500 for writing journals for 350 participants, \$3,700 for bus fare for the unemployed men and \$27,000 to hire a *Men Ending Violence* program graduate to coordinate outreach and support for all Alma Center programs. ■

New program fills void in city's 'food deserts'



The UMOS Job Center South, 2701 S. Chase Ave., is one of the host sites for SHARE's mobile food sales program.

Soaring food prices have created sticker shock at the supermarket and put a strain on family budgets.

Among central city residents, whose food options and financial resources are already stretched thin, the rise in prices has put their food security even more at risk. Corner stores become convenient alternatives, but they are neither the most cost effective nor do they provide the most health conscious options.

SHARE, a volunteer-driven, food buying club, is reaching out to those people who lack the access to healthy, nutritious food. The nonprofit's traditional monthly distribution program offers food at a reduced cost at more than 200 locations throughout Wisconsin, northern Illinois and Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Through *SHARE Express*, a new mobile food sale program, the club will introduce its concept to "food deserts" or underserved areas in metro Milwaukee that lack grocery stores.

On select days at select sites throughout the month, families have a chance to purchase a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables, meats and other items on a first come, first served basis. No membership fees or income eligibility is required. With SHARE's distribution model, clients can save 30 to 50 percent on their total bill.

Through the pilot program launched last summer at four sites, SHARE served more than 600 families and helped them save about \$5,500 in grocery bills. The agency hopes to grow the number of sites to nearly 20 by the end of 2009.

Funding needs include \$1,200 to purchase a wireless scanner needed to process food stamps, \$2,500 to purchase signs and outreach materials and \$3,000 to cover supplies needed to handle and distribute the food (i.e. storage trays, infrared thermometer, ice, order forms, etc.) ■

Stemming the tide of domestic violence



As part of individual or group counseling sessions, children express their emotions through art. In 2008, 143 children affected by domestic violence received counseling from the Women's Center.

The best indication of success for staff at **The Women's Center of Waukesha** would be for the agency to put itself out of business. Only then would they know that domestic violence and sexual assault were no longer issues affecting families in southeast Wisconsin.

That milestone has not yet been reached, but over the past 30 years since the center opened in an old home in downtown Waukesha, the awareness of the issue has grown and so have the number of success stories.

Success – as well as survivors – comes in all different forms. It could mean a woman finds the courage to call the center's 24-hour confidential crisis line or come in for counseling. It could mean she makes the decision to leave her home and find solace at the emergency shelter or take the steps toward a new life by living in one of the agency's affordable apartments or homes. For many, it is simply being able to talk about the stress and abuse they face and the impact it has had on their families.

Serving the women who show up at its door is only part of the center's mission. Preventing them from having to come in the first place is also a priority. Staff connect with churches, schools and other community groups to raise attention to the issue and lower the tolerance for the abuse.

No matter what each woman's goal might be, whether returning to their partner or venturing out on their own, the center provides them with the support, strength and empowerment to take that first step.

Funding needs include \$250 to pay for five counseling sessions for a woman or child who has been abused or assaulted, \$350 to cover the cost of one week's stay in the shelter for a woman and her children and \$900 to pay for one month's dinner for up to 30 people in the shelter. ■