

Year-End Report For St. John The Evangelist Homeless Shelter Shows That Homelessness Is A Complex Issue In Need Of Multiple Solutions

GREEN BAY, Wis. (July 29, 2008) – During its 177 nights of operation, St. John the Evangelist Homeless Shelter in Green Bay was a refuge for 280 individuals who, together, stayed a total of 6,805 nights from November 2007 to April 2008.

But statistics don't tell the whole story about how the shelter provided much more than a break from the cold. The shelter's professional staff connected clients to more than a dozen community resources, such as health care screening, mental health services, Housing Choice Voucher Program outreach, employment training, voter registration, clothing vouchers, transportation assistance, and identification assistance.

Additionally, of the 280 people who used the shelter, "at least 30 moved into their own apartments and six are being served through transitional living programs," said Mary Marks, executive director of the shelter during the 2007-08 season. Other successes include eight people completing alcohol and other drug abuse (AODA) treatment programs and five residing in AODA halfway housing.

In her year-end report to the shelter's Executive Committee, Marks provided several profiles that lend a face to homelessness. For example, many of the people in need of shelter have limited education (no high school diploma) as well as limited job skills and underdeveloped social skills. They often have disabling health problems that have gone under- or untreated. Also:

- Younger clients tend to be disconnected from their families, have questionable cognitive or social abilities, and may have been born with fetal alcohol syndrome.
- Middle-aged clients often have never been on their own, having lived with relatives or elderly persons who have recently died or been moved to a nursing home.
- Elderly clients have lived on society's margin most of their lives, getting by on low-skill work until now when they can no longer sustain a job.

The year-end report was also distributed to the city's Protection and Welfare Committee, the Brown County Task Force to End Homelessness, the Brown County Homeless Issues and Affordable Housing Subcommittee, and the Emergency Food and Shelter Program's local board.

"This year-end report illustrates that homelessness is a complex issue affecting real people," says Deacon Timothy Reilly, Director of Administration for the Diocese of Green Bay, which operates St. John Shelter. "I think Mary Marks and her staff did an excellent job connecting clients to existing community services and building relationships with neighbors and the community liaison officer."

According to the report, the shelter averaged 38 guests per night from Nov. 6, 2007, to April 30, 2008. Of the 280 individuals who passed through the shelter's doors, 237 (85%) were males and 43 (15%) were

females. Forty-six were veterans; 97 were considered chronically homeless (without a home for longer than one year and/or having four episodes of homelessness in the past three years).

More than half of the clients (52%) used the shelter for less than seven days. Seventeen clients (6%) stayed 8 to 14 nights; 36 clients (13%) stayed 15 to 30 nights; 50 (18%) stayed 31 to 60 nights; and 31 (11%) stayed 61 nights or more. Thirty-eight people who posed a risk to others or themselves were denied shelter.

During the nightly intake process, clients were asked where they stayed the night before. The most common responses (89%) were friends/relatives (41%); an emergency shelter (17%); non-housing such as the street, a park, a car, etc. (16%); other such as paid for a motel (9%); and jail/prison (6%).

St. John the Evangelist Homeless Shelter is a seasonal, temporary shelter for people who do not qualify for help at other shelters. The shelter is scheduled to reopen Nov. 1 and operate until the end of April 2009. It relies on donations to support a small staff and it relies on volunteers who represented 10,000 hours of volunteer time during the 2007-08 season.

"The number of people who volunteered meals, clothing, personal hygiene items, funds and their own time made all the difference to the staff, the shelter's executive committee and most importantly, the shelter's clients," says Deacon Reilly. "We appreciate everyone's prayers and cannot thank people enough for their support."