



Friendship House

Newsletter

www.friendship-house.org

Christian Ministry Making A Difference In The Lives of Homeless People

We, The Homeless

Bill Perkins, Executive Director

Where we stand can largely determine what we see. This is especially true of social issues like war, hunger, poverty or homelessness. Depending on one's perspective, each issue can be defined either exclusively or inclusively. Exclusive definitions tend to be narrow, black-and-white and limited to a relatively small subsection of the general population. From such a perspective, "homeless" merely means "shelterless".

The Federal Government uses such a definition when determining which homeless programs to fund. The homeless are those who would be living "in places not meant for human habitation" if an emergency shelter or transitional housing program were not available. When creating a national shelter network did not eliminate the problem of homelessness, the government began defining the problem even more narrowly. It required homeless programs, receiving federal funds, to count the percentage of the "chronically homeless", the "seriously mentally ill", addicts, and people with HIV or AIDS within their total population.

Of greater concern than the accuracy of such surveys for measuring the real needs of homeless people, however, are the implications of defining homelessness as the mere lack of physical shelter. Such an exclusive definition of homelessness enables the maintenance of an "us/them" dichotomy. "We" can look at "them" and see nothing of ourselves. As such, we may feel pity for their situation, but we are incapable of feeling compassion for someone who could easily be us or someone we love. Even if the

shelterless in America total half a million people, they are still only .1% of all Americans. If the majority of the homeless are either addicts or mentally ill, society may feel an obligation to shelter them, but it can also view their condition as probably beyond rehabilitation.

An inclusive definition of homelessness begins with deeper understanding of home vs. physical shelter. What is "Home"? When do I feel "At Home"? This question has been asked of each of the three hundred people who have taken Friendship House's four-part course *Homelessness in the 21st Century*. Typically, people described the components of "Home" as things like safety & security, privacy & sanctuary, family & community, connectedness & continuity, memories & traditions, love & unconditional acceptance. The group discussions, however, never continued for very long before certain individuals began recounting personal stories of either loss or lack. At some point in their lives, most people were able to identify either an experience of "losing home" or of growing up without vital pieces of the home that others enjoyed. It might have been the death of a marriage or the loss of someone dearer than life; it might have been having one's family uprooted and moved every few years or being unexpectedly fired from one's job. For some, it was growing up and leaving the only home they had ever known; for others, it was growing old and letting go of the place that held fifty years of memories.

Every person has many such experiences in his or her lifetime. Each has known the feelings of loss, powerlessness, anger and shame, and each has passed

through the stages of recovery. Each experience enables one to appreciate what it would feel like to lose one's place entirely or to be born into a world where one had no physical or emotional place of one's own.

From such an inclusive perspective homelessness may be defined as any physical, emotional, economic or societal experience of displacement. It describes a universally shared life experience. The difference between any two person's situations is a matter of degree, not of substance. There is only "WE". This inclusive definition may be messy and open-ended. It may defy quick-fixes or quantifiable program goals. It does, however, make compassion possible. We who are willing to remember our own experiences of displacement are able to walk with others in their time of need. My experience of homelessness may seem minor compared to the devastating loss or impoverished condition of another, but it still provides the life-link that enables the community that restores home.

Human service agencies like Friendship House can supply the homeless with the resources to survive and the tools to rebuild. Our government and community organizations must confront those destabilizing social and economic issues that are displacing so many Americans. Ultimately, however, it is a community of one's peers that gives the displaced person the courage to start over. Only compassion and companionship of such a community has the power to cast out shame, restore hope and welcome people into their new home. Compassionate communities composed of staff, volunteers and clients minister everyday throughout the various Friendship House programs. The following article, "Seeds of Love, Seeds of Hope", tell some of their stories.

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Homelessness in the 21st Century a series of seminars by Bill Perkins

If you would like to attend this series of seminars, they are scheduled for the first 3 Tuesdays of April @ St. Mark's United Methodist Church on Limestone

Rd. from 7:00-8:30

Seeds of Love, Seeds of Hope

by Bill Perkins

Friendship House is a tapestry of churches, businesses and community organizations working together to try to make a difference in the lives of homeless people in Delaware. This coalition of community sponsors has produced both the leadership and the money needed to create and sustain major Friendship House programs like Andrew's Place or the Clothing Bank of Delaware. Just as importantly to the mission of Friendship House, thousands of volunteers of these various corporate partners have chosen over the years to walk in friendship with the people served by those programs. While the Friendship House staff provide clients with professional assistance and serve as the program coordinators and gate-keepers, volunteers perform their service at Friendship House as peers.

Whatever their titles, accomplishments or responsibilities beyond the shelter doors, each volunteer helps most by being themselves. Whether they're making phone call for the women of the day centers, sorting clothes with the employee-trainees at the clothing bank or sharing supper with the residents of Andrew's Place, such friends in ministry empower the homeless to see themselves through new eyes. Volunteers become companions, teaching one another to hope for that which they cannot see.

Companions also become advocates. The seeds of each new Friendship House program are planted by staff and volunteers, who give voice to the unmet needs of their homeless friends. This "bottom up" form of strategic planning constantly challenges everyone's faith. Rather than asking the rich and the powerful what they are willing to support, such planning listens for the voice of God in the cry of the poor and dares to do what it can to help. Programs created by such planning tend to be small, pragmatic and sustained by the time and money of people who are involved in a hands-on way. They change the world one life at a time. They give birth to ministries that create new communities of mutual support. Several of these ministries are highlighted in this newsletter.



Outreach Ministries

by Lauri Perkins

Lu Johnston describes Friendship House's outreach ministry as "a bridge linking people who want to help with those who need it". A former Friendship House volunteer and board member, Lu is now part of the Women's Day Center staff that builds such bridges every day.

In these hard economic times, churches see a steady stream of strangers who are in desperate need of financial assistance. While they desire to respond compassionately, most church pastoral teams lack both the time and expertise to interview such persons, assess their need and distribute the church's limited funds in an equitable manner.

In response to this challenge, Friendship House and many of its supporting churches have formed a partnership through which pastors can refer people in need to the Friendship House day centers for evaluation and counseling as a condition for financial assistance. Not surprisingly, the majority of such referrals are women with children.

When a referred client comes to the Women's Day Center for her appointment, she may be angry, scared, aggressive, embarrassed or even passively resigned to

her fate. The first challenge for the outreach worker, therefore, is assuring the woman that people do care and want to help. This begins by giving the woman time to tell her story. It continues by helping her to do a realistic assessment of her financial situation by reviewing her household's income and expenses. Having completed the interview and verified what information she can, the outreach worker must assess both the client's need and the ability of the limited church funds available to get the woman back on her feet.

Such discernments are never easy. If assistance can realistically resolve the setback, the outreach ministry staff often becomes the client's advocate, not only to the referring church, but to other church partners as well. Because Friendship House has earned its reputation for doing the time-consuming research and fact-checking required for each referral, churches honor its recommendations. Friendship House can then provide the approved client with a designated check for the total amount of aid available, knowing that it will be re-imbursed by its church partners. If the client's need is beyond the available financial help, the outreach worker offers to work with the client on an alternative recovery strategy.

This outreach partnership utilizes the strengths and resources of everyone involved. It provides the churches with a professional referral service; it enables



Milltown Road in Wilmington is one couple's response to the Lord's call to help those searching for home and struggling to survive. Thirty years ago, Angie and Chris Malmgren converted their large colonial house into a sanctuary program and a facility for retreats and small conferences.

While the retreat program evolved into a mostly weekend ministry, the steady stream of homeless men, women and children coming to the door in need of overnight refuge led to a parallel Monday- through-Thursday ministry of hospitality and sanctuary.

In recent years, the Jesus House ministry team has searched for the means to respond to many unmet human service needs of their homeless guests. Last September, while attending the Friendship House course on *Homelessness in the Twenty-First Century* at Resurrection Catholic Church, the church's Just Faith advocacy group, which included numerous supporters of Jesus House, met with Bill Perkins, the course presenter and executive director of Friendship House, to explore the possibility of Friendship House providing counseling and case management for the Jesus House homeless residents. This idea quickly developed into a collaborative ministry involving Jesus House, the Friendship House Women's Center and Resurrection Catholic Church, merging the special gifts and resources of each community. The Friendship House Women's Day Center staff will handle client intakes, counseling and transition into more permanent shelter. Deacon Joe Jackson and his wife Loraine of Jesus House will coordinate the short-term emergency shelter services at the retreat center, which will focus on homeless women and children. Volunteers from Resurrection Catholic Church will provide hot meals and fellowship to the homeless guests. Together the three ministries will be able to provide God's people with a service that none of them could have accomplished alone.

Friendship House to interact and aid more people in their time of need; and it affords people going through a painful and humiliating experience the dignity of being treated as a person and given a fair hearing.

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Want to learn more about
Friendship House

and its volunteer opportunities?

We offer a 1.5 hour tour of our facilities and programs on Tuesdays and Fridays, giving an overview of all our ministries to the homeless in the Wilmington area. You learn about specific volunteer tasks for individuals and for small groups. The tour is an effective way to explain who we are and what we do. You won't be disappointed!

Call Lu Johnston @ 652-8033

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Jesus House & Emergency
Shelter for Women and Children

by Jim Clark

The Jesus House Prayer & Renewal Center on

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Mother's Day Garden

Mother's Day is a special time to celebrate and remember those women who gave us life and taught us

love. People may choose to make a donation to one of our many programs for women and children in their mother's name. With a portion of these donations,



Mother's Day Memorial Garden will be planted at the Jane Ashford House.

Please join us in continuing this tradition of supporting our families in their need and creating a living tribute to the strength, gentleness and beauty of the women in our lives. Upon receipt of your contribution, Friendship House will send a beautiful card to the person being honored or the family of the person being memorialized. No gift amount is mentioned in the card. We will also send you an acknowledgment that the gift has been received.

What a fitting way to honor the life or memory of someone you care so much about. Look for our upcoming mailing in a few weeks or call Roxane Blake for details at Friendship House 652-8133.

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Annual Report

If you would like to have a copy of our 2004 Annual Report contact Roxane Blake @ 652-8133

Operation Warm and the Clothing Bank Partner for "Warmth"

by Linda Harrison

Seven years ago Friendship House founded the Clothing Bank of Delaware (CBD) to fulfill three primary missions:

- ! to improve the free distribution of donated clothing to the poor by providing local churches and community centers with high quality clothing
- ! to provide entry-level employment and training to disenfranchised women
- ! to create entry-level volunteer opportunities for churches, businesses and community organizations.

Within a year the CBD program began to exceed the organization's bravest dreams. Today over 300 organizations comprise the network for donations and redistribution into the community, delivering about 12,000 pounds monthly. An average 25 women annually participate in the employment training program. CBD also enjoys Friendship House's largest volunteer corps; over 770 members collected, sorted or delivers clothing for the CBD last year.

November 10, 2004 was an especially exciting day at CBD. For four consecutive years, a caring partnership has been able to spread "winter warmth" to the children of our community just when they need it the most. Thanks to the Operation Warm planners, the Rotary Clubs of Southeastern Pennsylvania, the Clothing Bank staff and an army of volunteers, 4000 new children's coats were delivered and distributed throughout New Castle County, Delaware. With Operation Warm and the Rotary Clubs providing the coats and the CBD providing the warehouse space and distribution partners, the simple, but tremendously important program has succeeded in its mission for four consecutive winters with this year's effort being the largest by far.

Operation Warm, a non-profit organization based in Chadds Ford, PA, seeks to enhance the self-esteem of disadvantaged children by providing them with brand new winter coats. This organization's impact is felt throughout the community via schools, day cares, social workers and the American Red Cross.

Just as the CBD is about more than "clothes", Operation Warm is about more than "coats". It's about giving a child confidence. It's about feeling good on the inside because they know they look good

on the outside. It's about keeping a child in school because they can stay warm while waiting for the bus. It's about stretching the family budget and using "coat/clothes money" for food or electricity. We have witnessed first-hand that not only does a new coat keep a child warm... it puts a smile on his or her face. The Operation Warm/CBD partnership is another example of "people helping people".

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The Clothing Bank of Delaware is in need of of volunteers to drive and deliver clothes.

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Andrew's Place Dinners

We need Volunteers to bring in dinner for the men at Andrew's Place for the summer months (May, June, September & October) There are several dates open. Contact Roxane Blake at 652-8133 or email fhroxane@aol.com.

Partnership for Women's Health

by Marcy Perkins

Numerous obstacles prevent homeless women from securing healthcare, particularly of a preventative nature. When a person is simply trying to survive from day-to-day, she does not have time or energy to take care of her health. Restricted finances interfere with doctor's visits; prescriptions prices are prohibitive. Even Medicaid clients, who formerly did not have a co-pay, now have a prescription co-pay to work into limited budgets. Lack of health insurance causes too many women to use the emergency room as their primary physician; the unpaid bills end up on their credit report and hound them for years.

In the summer of 2004, the Friendship House Women's Ministry Team and the Christiana Care WomenFirst Program formed a partnership to bring preventative health care to the clients of the Women's

Day Center and Women's Transitional Housing. With this collaborative effort, we hope to help women climb off the "health-crisis/emergency-room/bad credit " treadmill.

Each Wednesday morning, Friendship House staff transport 2 or 3 women to Wilmington Hospital, where they receive a thorough physical. If they need prescriptions, Friendship House and Christiana Care share the cost. They are screened by a financial aid officer to be enrolled in a program to provide low-cost or free follow-up care. Thus far, 25 women have been examined at the Wednesday morning clinic.

In addition, there have been presentations every Tuesday morning at the Women's Center on various health/mental health topics. Wednesday evenings, at Jane Ashford House, a Stress Management group is

enabling the residents to talk about their stressors and learn positive ways of coping.

The partnership with Christiana Care and the WomenFirst Program is truly a gift which has filled a gap in services for our clients. We are deeply

appreciative for the concern and dedication of the health care professionals who are making this program succeed.

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be directed to the address above*

