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## Expansion of The Friendship House Job Readiness Program

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### **Introduction:**

Each economic downturn hits the working poor first and hardest. In the current recession, an ever-increasing number of unemployed and under-employed Americans are losing their housing. Bread-winners who earn less than \$10 an hour and/or cannot find full-time employment struggle to pay for their family's basic living expenses (e.g. rent, utilities, food, clothing, transportation and medical coverage). Once such people become homeless, their recovery is complicated by several recent political and economic trends with unintended consequences:

- The passage of the Real I.D. Act has made it extremely difficult and expensive for displaced Americans to re-acquire duplicate copies of their lost birth certificate, social security card and state I.D. Without these documents, a person cannot enroll children in school, qualify for government assistance or apply for a job.
- There has been a drastic reduction of permanent, entry-level blue-collar jobs. Americans have not only seen jobs lost overseas; they have also seen most entry level positions outsourced to temporary employment agencies. As they try to pick up the pieces, homeless Americans find themselves reduced to settling for low-paying temp jobs that provide neither employee benefits, job security nor hope for promotion.
- Lastly, when the homeless do try to apply for employment with national chain stores, they frequently find themselves on the wrong side of a digital divide. They are required to apply for work online. A store may have one or two computer stations and the application process can take up to one hour even for a computer-literate applicant. Most of the homeless neither type nor spend much time on computers. Intimidated by the process and/or tired of waiting, they experience such applications as simply another blow to their self-esteem.

### **Current Job-Readiness Services:**

Friendship House has always offered a broad spectrum of job-readiness services to both its day-center clients and its housing residents. In recent years, the demand for these services has skyrocketed.

The traditional Friendship House services to day-center clients include:

- Helping clients obtain work-required identification
- Providing work-appropriate clothing
- Supplying bus tickets to interviews
- Updating people's resumes

- Serving as a "Home Base" (i.e. mailing address, phone/fax services, etc.)
- Providing clients unable to open bank accounts with an escrow savings fund

Another 125 Friendship House clients annually are either transitional housing residents or participants in its employment training program at its Clothing Bank of Delaware. Such clients have demonstrated their commitment to holistic, long-term recovery programs. In recognition of their dedication and to amplify their efforts, Friendship House offers them personal and intensive case management with addiction recovery, money management, employment counseling and additional services which include:

- Four to twelve months of subsidized housing
- Matching funds for debt reductions
- Funds for continuing education and/or vocational training
- Fatherhood & family re-unification programs
- Two to three months of paid employment training

### **2008 Expansion of Friendship House Job-Readiness Services:**

#### **A. The New Technology Centers**

In the first half of 2008, Friendship House expanded its job search services to include on-site technology centers in both its day centers and its housing programs. Using grants from the Verizon Foundation and the Wilmington Rotary Club, Friendship House redesigned its two daytime drop-in centers to create a technology center in each from which clients could receive computer training and apply for jobs on line with the assistance of Friendship House staff and volunteer job coaches. Purchasing five new laptop computers, it also established satellite technology centers in its transitional housing programs and at the Clothing Bank of Delaware. It also installed high-speed internet service at each site. With renovations complete, Friendship House began to aggressively recruit volunteers to educate its clients in the skills needed to apply for employment and housing in a digital world.

The new technology centers are one more tool in Friendship House's ongoing effort to help its homeless clients regain their independence. The homeless are not merely persons without shelter. They are displaced persons who have suffered physical, economic and emotional loss. They are persons in need of skills, opportunity and communal support. The technology centers are forums where all three social needs--skills, opportunity, and communal support--may be met. Firstly, they are the means of teaching motivated homeless clients the computer skills needed to navigate the internet and apply for jobs online. Secondly, they provide these clients with the opportunity to hone computer skills in a supportive and affirming environment. For many clients, the starting point will simply be basic computer training. Volunteer mentors can also guide clients to job opportunities that they might otherwise have missed. Lastly, this job and resource search experience becomes a positive experience where clients learn the rewards of perseverance, patience and asking for help. The encouragement and guidance of trained volunteer mentors is crucial to this process.

## **B. Expanded Program Case Management:**

To maximize the access and effectiveness of the new day center technology centers, Friendship House also expanded the day centers' operating hours, devoting four afternoons weekly to the case management of Day Center, Housing and Clothing Bank clients interested in a more rigorous job-readiness program. The center staff:

- Conduct needs and resource assessments for interested applicants
- Design a multi-staged and holistic empowerment strategy specific to each client's individual issues and needs
- Assign the appropriate program resources and engage the ministry partners necessary to implement each client's current strategic goal
- Collaborate with Housing and Clothing Bank staff to provide services, resources and case management to clients involved in more than one FH program
- Teach the life skills needed for program participants to maintain their focus and perseverance to accomplish specific tasks in their proper sequence and priority
- Provide weekly case management and pastoral care

## **C. Expanded Resources**

Friendship House has also committed the following resources to this expanded program:

- Personnel:
  - Computer Lab Monitors
  - Mentor/ Job Coaches
  - Case Managers
- Material Resources:
  - Expanded phone/fax services
  - Use of the Computer Lab
  - Referrals to transitional housing programs
- Financial Resources:
  - For employment
  - For Continuing Education/Vocational Rehabilitation
  - For life recovery issues

## **2008 Program Report:**

Since August 2008, the Day Center technology centers have been open three afternoons weekly. The satellite centers at the Transitional Houses and the Clothing Bank are available for individual residents and trainees on an as-needed basis. Initially, the day center technology labs were serving 10–12 clients weekly. By November with an increasingly number of displaced people looking for any kind of work, the Men's Technology Center was seeing an average of 35 clients weekly and had expanded its hours to four afternoons weekly. In the last quarter of 2008, Mike Williams of

Men's Job-readiness Program had worked with 111 clients on resumes, computer training, online applications and strategic case management of other employment-related issues. While less than 30% of these clients were hired by local employers, all dramatically improved their online job-seeking skills. The Women's Day Center technology center is off to a slower start. Pam Ray has worked with 26 clients, mostly on improving their computer skills and learning to apply online for jobs. She usually sees one to two clients daily.

This technology center is also used at night by the residents of Andrew's Place, Friendship House's 24 bed shelter for elderly homeless men. Andrew's Place volunteers offered computer literacy classes twice weekly; to date, nine residents have taken the six week course. The Andrew's Place residents also use the lab for online job application and to access senior citizen and Veteran's Administration social services. Using the technology lab resources, seven Andrew's Place residents have found part-time jobs. The residents of Friendship House's nine half-way houses are using their on-site computer labs on an almost nightly basis in their search for better paying jobs. Two residents with very marketable skills have been able to secure full-time jobs in other states on their online job searches.

### **ONGOING NEED:**

In our current economic recession, unemployment among the homeless is over 75%. Most of the entry level stepping-stone jobs used by employable homeless men and women to get back on their feet have dried up. They also find themselves in competition for these lower-end jobs by an ever growing number of skilled, housed unemployed workers. While Friendship House cannot create for its clients jobs that are not there, its job-readiness program can keep people focused and positive. It can use this down-time to upgrade their future employability by providing them with technological training and by helping them resolve whatever personal issues hold them back from a full, productive life.