



Friendship House

Newsletter

www.friendship-house.org

Christian Ministry Making A Difference In The Lives of Homeless People

The Canaries Are Dying

Bill Perkins, Executive Director

In the pre-dawn darkness, employees Marc Marcus and Doug Mayhew arrive to open the Friendship House Men's Center. A dozen homeless men and women are already waiting outside for the doors to open. By 7:30 AM, 120 to 140 people will have come to the Center seeking a hot cup of coffee and sanctuary from the elements. On a typical morning at the Friendship House Women's Center, the hospitality area is filled with women and children. While volunteers and interns provide hospitality, staffers Genell Walls, Pam Ray and Lu Johnston are meeting with clients in need of everything from groceries for their families, medicine for their babies, birth certificates for their children, bus tickets for work to shelter for the coming night. From an average of 45 clients daily in 2004, the Center now routinely serves 80 to 90 women and children each day.

After a ten year hiatus, Charles "Rambo" W. comes back to Friendship House in need. Back then, Rambo would easily have been voted "most likely to die on the streets or in prison", but he had beaten the odds - held a steady job, kept a roof over his head, supported his children. Now in his fifties and suffering from a lifetime of hard manual labor, steps leave him breathless. Being unable to work the last two months has forced him to sell his car and give up his apartment. He holds three prescriptions in his hand, a cost of \$585/month. Without employer health insurance and ineligible for Medicaid, he asks Friendship House to pay for the two least expensive. As he leaves, Charles shakes his head and says, "It's cheaper to die." Virtually every homeless ministry in Wilmington is seeing people in unprecedented numbers. While there is no single explanation for this spike in numbers, some kind of Tipping Point has occurred. More people are becoming homeless

and are remaining homeless longer. Increasingly, it is the daily struggle for survival that is consuming the time, energy and limited resources of both the homeless and the agencies that serve them. Like justice, *recovery delayed is recovery denied*.

For generations, canaries in cages were kept in coal mines to alert humans of danger. When the canaries sickened or died, the coal miners knew that the air was growing toxic and their own lives were at risk. The poor in general and the homeless in particular are this society's canaries, and the canaries are slowly dying. Their lives are in danger at every possible levels. Poor parents are expected to support their families on minimum wage jobs with no benefits. Most must rely on temporary employment agencies who chew them up and spit them out when life leaves them unable to make the bell. Many are reduced to living in spaces not their own - emergency shelters, cheap motels, spare rooms in other people's houses - knowing that they can be displaced at any time. Their families are often without adequate or affordable health care. They are the acceptable price of Homeland Security - barred from public spaces, unable to acquire the very forms of identification that the State demands that they have to get employment, apply for public assistance or enroll their children in school. Everywhere they wait - in soup kitchen lines for a meal, in labor pool hallways for a job, in emergency waiting rooms for a doctor, in prisons for their day in court.

They wait for the rest of us to realize that their world is also ours. What they face today, we will know tomorrow. If we will not be moved by compassion, let self-preservation be our motivation to create a more hospitable, less toxic society in which to raise our mutual children.

Expansion of the Employment

Training Program of the Clothing Bank

Bill Perkins, Executive Director



As part of its employment training program, Friendship House's Clothing Bank annually employs about thirty women who are entering the work force for the

first time in their lives or after lengthy unemployment. In recent years, the majority of these women have also been recently incarcerated and are housed in the Friendship House transitional housing program. Each woman receives a paycheck while relearning the skills necessary to find and maintain employment. As part of their three-month internship at the Clothing Bank, women employees are encouraged and compensated to seek better paying, more permanent employment.

Every woman who is accepted into the employment training program is motivated to work and committed to change. They have been struggling with life issues – homelessness, incarceration, addictions, abusive relationships – that have consumed their energy and derailed their lives. For this reason, most of them, even those who have held full-time jobs in the past, begin their time at the Clothing Bank professionally “out of shape.”

For some women (about 20%), basic job skills are beyond their current capacity. For the rest, however, eight weeks of employment at the Clothing Bank are sufficient to make them reliable, punctual, courteous and hard-working employees. Besides successfully fulfilling all the tasks typically associated with warehouse work, each woman has also had some customer service experience, receiving donations and taking orders both in person and over the phone.

If an employee-trainee has previous work experience and/or a marketable job skill, she is usually now able to step up to a more permanent and better-paying job elsewhere. For many of the women, however, the Clothing Bank is the first job at which they've ever really succeeded and they lack the self-confidence to believe that they can

make it or be happy in another job. Some are also dealing with major employment impediments like lack of private transportation, bad credit, felony convictions and being a single parent without reliable child care. Such women struggle to find another job and many have to settle for part-time or minimum-wage jobs that will not enable them to make it on their own.

To assist this second category of employee-trainees, Friendship House in 2006 will be initiating a Stage Two employment-training program that would involve short-term internships with private employers, interested in providing a social service to the community.

After an employee-trainee had successfully completed eight weeks of employment at the Clothing Bank, she would be eligible to participate in Stage Two employment training. Given the experimental nature of this pilot project, involvement would be both optional for the employee and available at the discretion of the Clothing Bank management.

Participants in this second stage employment program would work three days a week at the Clothing Bank and two days a week with private employers, who have partnered with Friendship House to provide its employee-trainees with more diversified work experiences. Such “internships” would be similar to those provided to students, who need some “real world” experience in their chosen profession. For the Clothing Bank trainees, the purpose of the internship would be as much the exposure to a larger world as the enhancement of their job skills. For the employer-partner, the internship would be an opportunity to involve his or her company in a community-service project that is as much about “community” as “service.”

For the employee-trainees, such an internship would be a leap of faith with built-in safeguards. Since the experience is designed to be both part-time and short-term, the trainee would not be risking everything on an unknown possibility. While she might be working in a new and very intimidating environment beyond her normal life-experience, the employee-trainee would be supported by the Clothing Bank staff who would handle her orientation and debriefing. She would also have the communal support of other employee-trainees, involved in similar internships with other employers. For the employer, such internships provide safeguards and support not normally available to companies who wish to give

someone a helping hand. Since Friendship House would continue to keep the intern on its own payroll and workman's comp, the employer would be incurring neither additional payroll costs nor liability. Friendship House would also have screened and recommended each prospective intern. A designated Friendship House staff person would also be available for orientation, debriefing and trouble-shooting.

Friendship House has written several grants to help fund a pilot project for 2006 and is actively recruiting employer partners from its sponsoring churches. Anyone interested in participating in the internship project should contact Bill Perkins (302-652-8133) or Pat Burrows (302-654-1390).

Patterson House

Women's Housing Grows by Another House

Marcy Perkins and Shirley Pritchett



On May 18, 2005, Friendship House purchased 718 N Union Street, a two-story brick duplex directly next door to the Jane Ashford House. This property enables Friendship House to expand its women's housing program to include more families with children. Its purchase was made possible by several

very generous donations. The principal donation is being made by the Patterson family in the loving memory of Gordon and Laurie Patterson.

Since Patterson House received its first resident on July 11th, it has been home to seven women and ten children. The importance of providing space where mothers can be reunited with their children cannot be over-stated. Both mothers and children have experienced lives of chaos and instability. Both need time and support to reforge family bonds.



Our mothers are irreplaceable, no matter how painful or

dysfunctional their lives – and, as a consequence, our own – may have been. The children of our residents love their mothers unconditionally, yet they have felt abandoned when their mothers have had to leave them to get help for their own issues. Trust needs to be re-established; anger needs to be expressed and healed; life needs structure and predictability.

While the Patterson House moms start their new life, they also need to help their children start over. It is a daunting process and it doesn't happen overnight. The women must have courage and patience and they must have a safe environment in which they can be honest about their own frustrations while helping their children deal with their emotions.

We, the staff and volunteers of the women's housing program, are so grateful to have a beautiful, warm home in which this process can take place. We ask for your prayers for our moms and children.

Marc Marcus Named Assistant Executive Director

Bill Perkins, Executive Director

At the recommendation of its Assessment Committee, the Friendship House Board at its November meeting voted to establish the position of Assistant Executive Director and to promote Marc Marcus, the Men's Day Center Program Coordinator, to fill the position.



The new position arises from two board concerns: The need for someone capable and knowledgeable enough to serve as interim executive director should Bill Perkins becomes unavailable for an extended length of time, and for more skilled pastoral ministry help in men's ministry, especially during the winter months.

In reviewing possible candidates, the board found Marc Marcus to be an appropriate and available choice. Marc has also served on the Friendship House board as vice president and as St. Mark's board representative.

Marc's expanded duties at Friendship House will require him to resign his part-time position at St Mark's United Methodist Church. For this reason, the new position will not take effect until January 1, 2006.

Burton House gets a New Look

Jim Clark, volunteer Funding Coordinator and member of Westminster P.C.

Last Spring, when the Burton House Mission Committee got the news that the estate of a former member of Westminster, had bequeathed a generous gift for "Burton House", we were ecstatic, surprised and curious. What did she have in mind for the halfway house on the church's parking lot that accommodates up to three men in Friendship House's men's transitional housing program? Inquiries to several persons who knew her left the question unanswered.

Our committee pondered the best use of the gift. We looked back at Burton House's 15-year history, a pioneering effort of the Rev. Jon Walton, Westminster's senior pastor at the time and Bill Perkins, Director of Friendship House. The church would provide the building and financially support the housing program that would be managed by Friendship House. At the beginning—and throughout those years—the beds, dressers, chairs, sofas, etc., were all donated, a mixture, to be sure. Also, the House was dark and badly in need of more lighting. Kitchen counter space was almost non-existent, and drawer and shelf space minimal.

The Committee decided to refurbish Burton House. We produced a two-page list of upgrades, room by room, for both furnishings and improvements to the building's interior – electrical, painting, plumbing, flooring. The Committee is responsible for procuring the furnishings, and a construction consultant lined up and managed all the subcontractors, an invaluable service to the project.

We are right on our timeline to open Burton House for residents before Christmas, and well within the gift funding. First came the complete emptying of the house, ably done by men residents in the program. Lots of coffee and donuts! Immediately after, the trades crews came on the job, and the conversion was underway. At the time of this writing their work is complete, and our committee is re-furnishing the rooms.

The interior transformation is wonderful indeed. We are grateful for the donor's bequest, and believe she would have been proud of how her gift has enhanced Burton House.

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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. Call Lu Johnston @ 652-8033

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