

The Community Partnership Finds Award Winning Ways to Conquer Homelessness

By Julie Solomon

In late October, Alison Schmidt, the Executive Director of the Community Partnership for the Homeless (CPH), headed to New York to accept a Met Life Award for Excellence on behalf of the organization. This award recognized CPH's Veteran Re-Entry Program. As the only organization in Austin and Travis County that provides transitional housing solely for veterans, CPH helps about 45-50 single veterans per year with a success rate of 80%.

In 1990, a previously homeless woman founded this organization with two daughters whose husband had fought in Vietnam. She recognized the need for a program strictly for veterans. The need was great, as 40% of the national homeless population is comprised of veterans. Men out of the military are two times as likely to end up on the streets, and women are four times as likely. According to Alison Schmidt, it takes approximately 8-10 years after discharge for veterans to exhaust their resources, thus we are currently receiving a flux of homeless veterans who served in the Gulf War. The Community Partnership provides housing while partnering with Caritas of Austin, which provides the case management to take care of those who served our country.



The program involves seven houses embedded in average middle class neighborhoods. One of the major differences between this program and other transitional housing is that its neighborhood feel allows veterans to avoid feeling auspicious and allows them to concentrate on job training and employment. Three to four veterans live in each house to give a feel of family style living; there is a property manager, food bank, utilities, etc. provided for each house. Veterans living in this housing are asked to pay whatever they can afford to live in this housing, which can range from \$25-\$300 monthly. CPH also provides Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) for the veterans in their programs. This is a program designed to help and encourage low-income

individuals to save their money. The Community Partnership offers a match for its clients' deposit. Each client may deposit up to \$1200 per year for two years but must stay in the program for at least four months to collect their matched funds. Upon exiting the program, clients are rewarded for saving their money and get back double the amount they deposited.

The Community Partnership also has one other major program, Cottage Community. Cottage Community is their effort to provide affordable housing to single parent families making at or below 50% of the median family income. This project consists of a seven acre, 30-cottage community in Northeast Austin. Six of the houses will be set aside for homeless families that have a family member with a disability. There will be onsite childcare with many after school programs, which is a service needed by single, working parents. The need for this kind of program is evident in the following statistics:

- Single parents (or caretakers) would have to earn three times the minimum wage to be able to afford living in a two bedroom apartment in Austin
- 46% of the homeless population of Travis County is families (30% are children five years or younger!)
- Texas ranks 45th in quality childcare facilities. Working parents need affordable and available childcare.



Case management will be required if needed. SafePlace will provide this service. Because residents will be required to pay no more than 30% of their income in rent, much help is needed in funding this four million dollar project. The Community Partnership has recently put in its final grant request for this project to the Texas State Department. Various government agencies and private foundations will fund this project. Construction is set to begin in early 2005, with completion slated for the end of 2005.

With its two full time staff and three part time contractors, the Community Partnership for the Homeless runs two very successful and effective programs. These programs encourage their participants to jump back into the community and rely on the community's help to make them feel welcome and able. By providing unique housing opportunities for both veterans and single parent families, the Community Partnership allows them to merge back into the community without the potential feeling of separation that sometimes occurs when living downtown in shelters.