



# Solutions to Homelessness

WINTER 2007 NEWSLETTER \* PORCHLIGHT, INC.

*From the Desk of Steven Schooler, Executive Director*

A colleague has a poster in his office that reads: "The end of the road is just another name for an opportunity for a new beginning". In many respects, that is what the Drop-In Shelter is to an increasing number of homeless people in Dane County.

Porchlight has been operating the Drop-In Shelter at Grace Episcopal Church for over twenty years. With the help of thousands of volunteers from over sixty faith communities and other community groups, we have been able to offer that opportunity to thousands of homeless men in the Madison area. This is at a cost of approximately \$11.00 per night, less expensive than five years ago.

Unfortunately, despite our best efforts and programs to reduce the need for the shelter, the need has in fact increased dramatically in the past two years. The number of shelter nights has risen from 26,000 in 2003 to over 34,000 in 2006. The number of men served has also grown significantly.

We don't know why we are seeing this incredible increase. What we do know is that contrary to common belief, the greater numbers do not represent an influx of homeless people from Milwaukee or Chicago. Intake data indicate that over 70% of guests had a last known address in the state of Wisconsin, and approximately 50% from within Dane County.

Whatever the cause (and we will continue to try to determine the reason), the fact is that we are serving more people than ever before. Our system of overflow shelters is designed to serve a maximum of 120 guests per night. We have been experiencing numbers above 150. This has stretched our resources and our volunteers to their limit. Nevertheless, we continue our policy allowing people up to 90 nights of shelter in any given year (the maximum allowed by our funding sources), and continue our cold weather exemption.

We would never have been able to serve these numbers without incredible community support. Our volunteers have stepped up their efforts to meet the growing demands, providing the food and the personnel for serving close to 70,000 meals in the last year. When a call went out for blankets, towels and new mattresses, volunteer groups responded with donations of these items and contributions to purchase the new mattresses.

The University of Wisconsin Athletic Department provides us with the leftovers from its student athletic programs at the Kohl Center and Camp Randall. The Loraine and Kitchen Hearth have donated and delivered leftover food from the week each Friday. This has been invaluable in filling the gaps in food when they have occurred.

We are fortunate that Grace Episcopal and St. John's allow the use of their facilities to serve the increasing shelter demand. We open a second overflow shelter as it gets colder in the winter months, which for the past few years has been housed at the First United Methodist Church on Wisconsin Avenue. However, First UMC's decision to rebuild last fall left Porchlight staff scrambling to find a suitable space to shelter more people.

Harold and Garth Langhammer of Central Properties came to our rescue by offering the use of the basement of a building on Henry St. and West Washington. The space needed remodeling as well as upgrades for a heating system, but in less than a month our outstanding maintenance staff and contractors made all the required upgrades. Building and fire inspections passed, and the overflow shelter opened its doors November 6th.

We are grateful to the many faith communities and individuals who provided the contributions (including a substantial donation from Beth Israel Center) to cover the significant remodeling costs. Pertzborn Plumbing generously donated half the cost of labor and materials to get the new location for the shelter operational this season.

We continue to struggle with the incredible numbers that appear each evening. The increased need has stressed our budget, our amazing volunteers and our staff of dedicated night managers.

Nevertheless, we are nowhere near the *end of the road*. We continue to provide a simple bed and a couple of meals to all who are need. As one of our volunteers once observed about those we serve at the Drop-In Shelter, "There is not a cold winter night that I don't think about them." Indeed, but with the help of this community, the shelter remains available as an *opportunity for a new beginning*. \*

## Home for the Holidays

### Housing First Program Gives Family a New Start

Tracey Robinson never imagined she would be homeless. The 34 year-old mother of four held a steady job as a certified nurse aid and was raising her children in an apartment on Madison's west side. When an illness kept her from work for an extended period last summer, she was unable to keep up with her rent and was evicted along with her children and brand new grand daughter.

"It was a very scary time", says Robinson. "We didn't know where we would end up."

Without extended family in town to turn to, the Robinson family set off on a four-month odyssey of moving from place to place, staying with friends, in motels, and even spent a few nights in a shelter.

Then their luck turned. Tracey's family was referred by the Madison Metropolitan School District to Porchlight, as a possible candidate for Porchlight's new Housing First program. Housing First identifies people who are likely to move into the shelter system, and moves them directly into housing and provides extensive support services.

With funding from United Way, this program covers a security deposit for the new housing, ensures that rent will be no greater than 30% of the resident's income, and pays for utilities for one year. Intense case management (such as money management and budgeting, employability skills, and accessing nutrition and medical resources) is given to ensure stability. Participants must be employed and graduate from a money management program to remain eligible for Housing First support.

This is a somewhat novel approach to serving homeless families. Housing First programs nationwide have generally focused on supporting single homeless people. The United Way was interested in applying its principles to families, and Porchlight agreed to establish a program.

The Robinson family became the last of four families to be supported by United Way's funding in this pilot year of the program. And a week before Christmas, Tracey's family moved into a three bedroom apartment on Madison's west side.

In the course of less than a week, Porchlight staff furnished their new apartment with donated items. Through Porchlight's Guardian Angel program, Christmas presents were purchased for each member of the family as well as a \$100 gift certificate to Copp's. Jung's Garden Center contributed a Christmas tree, and the Robinson family was ready for the holidays in their new home.

The Robinsons are prepared to make the changes they will need in order to maintain housing. Every member of the family has made a plan for how they can help. "This is a family that worked together to make it through tough times", says Porchlight's Sharon Hutchins. "And what impressed us most about this family was the lengths to which Tracey went to keep her kids in school during all their various moves."

The Robinsons asked us to thank all those in the Porchlight community for giving them a safe, secure home. "From here we can move forward", said Tracey. ✨



**The Robinson Family**

## Creative Giving Brightens Holiday for Porchlight Clients

The holidays can be a particularly tough time for people who are working to put their lives back together. Rates of depression increase this time of year, and expectations of gifts add stress to people already struggling to meet the needs of their families. So the folks at Porchlight make a special effort every year to make the holiday season a little brighter for its clients. But we don't do it alone.

This year, friends of Porchlight found many creative ways to be involved in spreading goodwill. We would like to say a special thanks to:

- \* *Land's End* donated several hundred duffel bags for gifts for people staying at the Drop-In Shelter over the holidays. Temple Beth El, Blackhawk Evangelical Church, Zimbrick West Side Office staff, and the Madison Freeze women's hockey team went to great lengths to fill each bag with warm hats and gloves, toiletries, flash lights and other surprises.
- \* *Ancora Coffee Roasters* sold a special "Porchlight Blend" coffee over the holidays, and gave proceeds to Porchlight.
- \* *Employees of the Hilton Monona Terrace* donated 20 holiday turkeys to Porchlight residents.
- \* *West High seniors Kelly Layton, Antonio Marques and SuhYoung Ali* decorated the lobby at Brooks St. as a community service project for a class. And the first graders in Jane Jung's class at Lapham School made beautiful decorations for the Christmas tree.
- \* *Nancy Enderle, Laurel Rasmussen and Chris Elholm* each hosted a holiday gathering, and asked guests to bring a gift for Porchlight clients.
- \* *Friends at the Wisconsin Restaurant Association, Trinity United Methodist Church, and the US Bankruptcy Court* held gift drives for Porchlight.
- \* *East Town and West Town malls* sponsored the Giving Tree program, which provided hundreds of gifts for Porchlight residents.
- \* *Simon Schatzberg* used funds he received for his bar mitzvah to make a generous donation to Porchlight.
- \* *St. Mary's staff* gathered gift items for Safe Haven clients.

- \* *Neesvig Meats* provided turkeys for holiday meals for nine Porchlight families, and contributed meat for the Brooks St. Kitchen for the Thanksgiving meal.
- \* *Roof Over Our Heads at West High School* raised money for winter gear for Porchlight clients.
- \* *VA Hospital Canteen* offered a 20% discount on gifts purchased for Porchlight residents.
- \* *Forty-four individuals, families, and businesses* participated in the Guardian Angel Program, sponsoring 34 families and 102 individuals.
- \* *Girl Scout Troop 717* wrapped gifts for Porchlight residents.



**The Madison Freeze women's hockey team with the mountain of duffel bags they filled as gifts for guests of the Drop-In Shelter.**

## Calling All Volunteers!

The Drop In Shelter is in need of a group (or groups) to help with preparing and serving meals. We have two six-evening shifts open this year:

**The 2nd Tuesday of each odd month  
and  
the 3rd Wednesday of each odd month**

If your group is interested in a meaningful way to support the community, contact Steven Schooler at 257-2534.



## Porchlight Needs List

The following items are in high demand and in short supply at the Porchlight donation warehouse. If you would like to donate any of these items, please call (608) 257-2534 or drop them off at the donation warehouse at 1490 Martin Street at Door #3 on the side of the building during regular business hours.

- |                              |                          |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Twin bed sheet sets</b>   | <b>Deodorant</b>         |
| <b>Double bed sheet sets</b> | <b>Laundry Detergent</b> |
| <b>Bath towels</b>           | <b>Baby diapers</b>      |

**\*\* Please note that we are currently oversupplied on children's and women's clothing \*\***

The following items are needed by the Brooks Street food pantry. The pantry serves Porchlight residents living at 306 N. Brooks Street.

- |                               |                     |                      |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Canned meats and stews</b> | <b>Frozen meat</b>  | <b>Peanut butter</b> |
| <b>Jam/Jelly</b>              | <b>Pasta sauce</b>  | <b>Canned fruits</b> |
| <b>Cereal</b>                 | <b>Frozen Pizza</b> | <b>Juices</b>        |
| <b>Microwave dinners</b>      |                     |                      |

*Our Mission:* Porchlight strives to decrease the Dane County homeless population by providing shelter, housing, supportive services, and a sense of community in ways that empower residents and program participants to positively shape their lives.

[www.porchlightinc.org](http://www.porchlightinc.org)

Non-Profit  
Organization  
US Postage  
PAID  
Madison, WI  
Permit No. 2333

Winter 2007

306 North Brooks Street  
Madison, WI 53715

