



Brighter Futures

Meeting Summary: March 17, 2009

For information:

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Services for homeless youth provide hope, but more safe places needed

There are too few safe places available for Milwaukee's many homeless youth. That was apparent in discussion at the March meeting of Milwaukee Brighter Futures.

Several BF programs were outlined at the meeting. The need to create greater public awareness of the problem was discussed with representatives of both Pathfinders and the Walkers Point Youth and Family Center.

Genise Bellows, of Pathfinders, said that each night there are 400 homeless youth in the city, but only 16 beds available.

In the process of publicizing the name change of the agency from its old name of The Counseling Center, the agency dramatized the issue of youth homelessness, she said. The Pathfinders campaign began in November 2008 with billboards first showing a child alone, without wording, following it up with the question, "Did you see her?" "How Can You Sleep?"



Genise Bellows of Pathfinders makes presentation on Pathfinders services for homeless youth.

"Our youth homelessness is invisible," she said. "You don't think about children being homeless."

The campaign aroused interest in the homeless issue, increased donations, brought greater involvement of the agency board, and gave the staff a greater sense of purpose, Bellows said.

Todd Witt, program director at Walkers Point Youth and Family Center, said the center has an eight-bed Teen Crisis Shelter for 11- to 17-year-olds and its focus is family reunification. The shelter handles both boys and girls. "We provide a little bit of stability for them for up to two weeks, he said. "Our role is to case manage them and come up with a plan. As soon as they come into our shelter, we're looking for discharge planning."

Witt said the center's programs focus on youth that could be called "runaway and homeless youth," who come because they may be kicked out of homes, have communication problems with their parents, are about to face various crises or may soon become homeless. Walkers Point provides some respite for the youth and families "to give them a break" in order to redevelop a stable home.

A teen transitional living program for 16- and 17-year-olds; the youth may stay

up to age 18. Witt said the agency works to prepare them to become adults. The eight bed facility is coed, but can't take children. The youth are established with a Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare worker, and they are linked to Badger-Care, dental care, Social Security and other appropriate programs. The program is the only one of its type in Milwaukee, and served 20 youth in the previous year.

An adult transitional living program, called Insights, covers 18- to 21-year-olds; it's a scattered site program with a capacity of 18. Witt said the young people can stay for 18 months, and the agency works with them so that the youth gain self sufficiency. There is case management for the participants. In 2008, he said, the program served 35, but turned away 158.

A fourth program involves street outreach, using a van to cruise the streets covering children age 11 to 22.

"The main focus of Walkers Point and Pathfinders is we want to create a safe environment for the youth," Witt said. "They are coming from horrific situations. My number one hope is we offer nurturing for them and safety."

The primary clients, he said, are African-American, Hispanic and LGBT youth. One in 5 LGBT youth in the nation are homeless, he said. The Walkers Point programs served 241 residential youth last year; up 17% over previous year. These workers seek to link the youth with services and possibly to shelters. The

(Continued on page 2)

Goal to create safety for homeless youth

(Continued from page 1)

program also includes counseling at home.

Katie Ames, of Pathfinders, said the program served 254 in teen shelters last year, describing the program as similar to that of Walkers Point.

The program provides ongoing case manager services with counselors, and she said, "It really is about family reunification." She said 94% of youth exited the program to a safe home or a safe alternative, she added.



Todd Witt

The program focuses on youth empowerment, she said. Brighter Futures enables the program to have three paid youth counselors and to focus on youth specific behaviors.

She said Pathfinders is working with LGBT Center to

provide scattered site housing, very similar to the Insight program, for LGBT youth. "There's such a need for safe housing for young people who identify themselves as LGBT youth," she added.

Ames said the agency tries to engage youth in activities outside of the youth shelter and by getting them off the streets. She said they use volunteers among young people, mainly those who have stayed in the shelter in the past and "want to give back." There are some volunteers from other youth groups, who are "giving time back" to the shelter.

She said the young people tell her they come because it's a place for them to get away from the problems of their home, neighborhood or other environments. She said the shelter offers a place for them to have a meal together, noting that "if you

offer pizza, they come running. It's about giving them a safe place where they are listened to and where they are honored, and that's what we try to do," she said.

Walkers Point also uses youth volunteers who provide that connection between adult staff and the youth, many of whom have problems talking with adults, according to Witt.

"These young people can say to our residents, I know exactly what you're going through," Ames said. As caring as the adult staff can be, she said, they may not connect as well.

Witt said the nurturing program which is funded by Brighter Futures assists in prevention efforts to lessen the possibility of youth becoming homeless.

The definition of homelessness was discussed; Julie Bock of the Milwaukee LGBT Center indicated it rarely means youth sleeping in doorways, and Witt added, "If you see a youth that has slept in three different homes in a week, they're homeless. Most of the youth are not sleeping under bridges; they are finding one resource and connecting up with them for a period of time and possibly transitioning to an unsafe living environment. That house might be a drug house, or they might be participating in survival sex. If you hear families are doubling and tripling up, it's not a safe environment."

About one percent are what you consider the traditional homeless, that is on the streets and under bridges.

"Young people who are put in really unsafe situations is who we are working with," Ames said. "They don't want other people to know they are homeless; there's such a stigma attached to it."

Regarding what happens to the youth when they leave the programs, Witt that 67% who left Walkers Point went back to place they came from (usually a legal guardian) while 20% went to a safe alternative, such as family friend or relative or trusted agency. Both programs provide after care for youth once they're out of the program.

Witt said they will make a referral to W-2 agencies for the eligible person, and Brenda Bell-White of the Department of Children and Families identified Joyce Simms as a contact for persons having issues with W-2 problems. Simms may be reached at 416 (217-4576)



Katie Ames

Witt said the programs try to keep families out of the child welfare system, but that if the programs are at capacity, there will be a referral to the BMCW. Neither Walkers Point nor Pathfinders will ask for identification or immigrant status to determine a youth's citizenship.

Norma Madison urged that there be legislative support for providing more funds for such programs; Witt noted that homeless programs should be getting some of the stimulus money which will be distributed through the WARS (Wisconsin Association for Runaway Services) program.

History of Homeless Programs in Milwaukee

Joe Volk, director of Community Advocates, Inc., is the coordinator of the Continuum of Care (COC) coalition that deals with Milwaukee's homeless. He said the COC brings in about \$10 million of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funds into the city.

He said there's a tendency to forget that half of the homeless population are children. That became clear early in this decade, he said. The original homeless programs began in the 1980s, mainly to deal with single men who had addiction or mental health or alcohol issues. Many of them lived in the older downtown hotels, most of which have been torn down, leaving this population with few options. They had to rely upon shelters, of which there were few.

(Continued on Next Page)

Agency of the Month: Pearls for Teen Girls

A new monthly meeting feature was introduced, in which an agency will be selected each month to give a brief overview of the programs. The agencies will include all agencies that are active in Brighter Futures, whether funded or not. The programs will be randomly selected, and the first was Pearls for Teen Girls.

Gerry Howze said Pearls provides leadership training & development for girls from the 5th through the 12th grades. All areas of programming takes place under our Leadership Compass, which covers five different areas; 1) Loving Myself, 2) Building Relationships, 3) Striving to Achieve, 4) Believing the Sky is the limit, and 5) Helping Hands in the Community. Each girl participant is also asked to establish at least one goal per semester; she is

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month

Jan Buchler of The Parenting Network, reported for the Milwaukee Child Abuse Prevention Services (MCAPS) coalition. She distributed blue lapel pins that signify support for such prevention efforts and urged agencies to set up programs to celebrate the month.

The Family Connection/Program Committee meets regularly every other month. Its membership includes family resource centers and agencies serving families.

Homeless History (Cont.)

He said that when the AFDC system in the 1990s changed, first to a "pay for performance" plan and later to the current W2 program, "that's when we began to see a lot of homelessness among families displaced due to welfare reform."

In the early part of this decade, he said, there was a spike in the number of single women entering shelters, for which there were not enough beds. The important point to notice is that many were not sin-

given coaching on developing steps to meet the goals and then she must provide evidence of how she met the goals. After they reach the goals, they have a "goal party," which she said was a "really cool way to provide some positive support." The program is located at 13 sites and has a total of 20 groups currently running. Five of the groups are for high school girls and the others are for middle aged girls; the groups meet once a week from 1 ½ hours to 2 hours with a capacity for up to 25 girls per group.

The model is based on using youth/adult partnerships allowing teen and adult facilitators to plan and facilitate groups for middle school girls. Teen Facilitators are also active members of one of the Teen Groups.

Besides weekly group sessions, Pearls has several all-site events. Upcoming all-site events include our annual sleepover, and closing ceremony. Pearls is a voluntary program, which is free for participants. To become a member of Pearls a girl must bring a contract signed by her parent/guardian and herself. She must also be willing to make a commitment to her own development and be willing to support her Pearl sisters in the program. In cases where girls have shown that they are not ready for the level of commitment required, we believe that even if she's not ready now, it doesn't mean she won't be ready to work on her personal develop-

ment at a different time in her life. We live by the philosophy that "once a Pearls girl always a Pearls girl."

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Girls interested in getting involved should call Howze at 414 265 7555 x103.

The program needs volunteers, and information is available at <http://pearlsforteengirls.com>

Howze said that last year 100% of all girls did **NOT** get pregnant! All seniors graduated high school with 80 to 90% being accepted into college. Colleen Fitzgerald founded the program in Milwaukee at Jackie Robinson School in 2001 and last year it served over 600 girls. The program works at various schools and CBO's throughout the City and also in South Milwaukee. "Our program seeks to provide services where the girls are at," she said.

Teen Pregnancy Prevention Report

Racquel Bell reported that the Youth Ambassadors program is about training youth to talk about risky sexual and negative behaviors. The ambassadors will be doing conferences around the city. She made a plea for more participation from among agencies and youth. "This is a huge issue and if you want to become involved in something in which you're really doing something and not just meeting, please join us," she said. The group meets the second Thursday of every month from noon to 1:30 p.m. at the Silver Spring Neighborhood Center, 5460 N. 64th St.

The 3rd Annual Family Unity Night is scheduled for Oct. 8, in which families will be encouraged to "gather around the dinner table" dramatizing the reality that families that share dining together tend to be more successful and have children that tend to avoid risky behaviors. More information will be provided later.

Meeting Attendance March 17, 2009

Aurora Family Service

Please send any corrections to keng@communityadvocates.net

NOTE: All Brighter Futures funded agencies are expected to attend monthly MYFDA meetings, according to their contract

First Name	Last Name	Agency
Kasandra	Tarkington	AGAPE Community Center
Terri	Strodthoff	Alma Center Inc
Stephanie	Jung	BEAM
Cyndie	Ody-Weis	Bethany
Karina	Simons	Big Brothers Big Sisters
Sandy	Malone	Boys and Girls Club
Racquel	Bell	Community Advocates
Aricka	Evans	Community Advocates
Kenneth	Germanson	Community Advocates
Joe	Volk	Community Advocates
Mark	O'Neil	Diverse & Resilient
Bob	Waite	IMPACT
Clarence	Rice	Innerworks
Betsy	Heinen	La Causa FRC
Laura	Wojciuk	Lad Lake Inc.
Cristina	Ledezma	Latino Community Center
John	DeMott	Marquette Univ. Center for Peacemaking
Jennifer	Carrasco	Marquette University
Natalie	Fleury	Marquette University
Lenora	Shaw	Milwaukee Adolescent Health Program
Kathi	Boyce	Milwaukee Christian Center
Shirley	Senaya	Milwaukee Health Dept.
Julie	Bock	Milwaukee LGBT
Terry	Grazer	Modjeska Youth Theatre Co.
Debbie	Wilhelms	New Concept Self Development
Fessahaye	Mebrahtu	Pan African Community Assn.
Mary	Rodgers	Pan African Community Assn.
Brendan	Gants	Parents Plus
Katie	Ames	Pathfinders
Gerry	Howze	Pearls for Teen Girls, Inc.
Marge	Kreuser	Perez-Pena, LTD
Theresa	Post	Sojourner Family Peace Center
Brenda	Bell-White	State of Wis MPSIO
Jan	Buchler	The Parenting Network
Angela	Ellis	The Parenting Network
Crisela	Zavada	The Parenting Network
Georgann	Moore	United Health Care
Shaunte	James	Urban League
Stephany	Pruitt	Vincent Family Resource Center
Todd	Witt	Walkers Point Youth and Family Ctr.
Marissa	Lopez	Walker's Point Youth and Family Ctr.
Monica	Lawrence	Wis Dept of Health and Human Serv.
JohnRae	Stowers	Wis. Foundation of Independent Colleges
Mark	Torinus	Wis. Foundation of Independent Colleges
Tom	Spellman	
Leah	Ganjbakhsh	WRTP/Big Step
Jan	Wilberg	Consultant

Milwaukee Brighter Futures

A better community through prevention

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Family Unity Night — F.U.N. — set Oct. 8th