

# Update from the DCEH Congregational Organizer

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**The Downtown Congregations to End Homelessness (DCEH) mission is to work together as people of faith to end homelessness.** Supporting the goals and recommendations of the Heading Home Hennepin plan we work to create systems change in our society so we will no longer just manage homelessness but work to end it!

So, how have we worked toward those goals lately?

People at Salvation Army Harbor Lights on Currie Avenue have seen overcrowding for many months. It took some creative thinking and understanding of why people were stuck for many years living on the floor at this shelter and now we are actively engaged in finding a solution. That community wide solution is the Currie Avenue Partnership. Plymouth's contribution to this collaborative has helped to move 40 people into permanent housing in the past 5 months. Of these 40 people, the average length of their homelessness was 8 years, with the longest being 17 years staying in a shelter every night! In total, 150 people will move out of housing in 2010. This work is important, but we are not yet finished!

This year, over 700 people engaged in political advocacy from the DCEH by receiving action alerts on a regular basis from January through May of 2010. Plymouth had 291 advocates participating. They were asked to write letters, call or visit their legislators or send letters to the editor. With the state budget deficit, most safety net programs were slated to be cut, such as General Assistance Medical Care and Minnesota Family Investment Program, which supports people who have no income, who cannot receive unemployment, and may be disabled. Our advocacy work is so important and collaborates with many organizations in the community to strengthen the work of ending homelessness. This work is important, but we are not yet finished!

DCEH has a bike ministry partnering with our outreach programs. A donated & reconditioned bike enabled a member of St. Olaf Catholic Church to continue to volunteer 15 hours per week at the downtown Minneapolis public library. He suffers from anxiety and depression and volunteering at the library provides him some structure and allows him to be productive in his own way. He is physically able so the bike helps with him get to his volunteer job, provides a way to stay in shape as well as help with his mental health. DCEH has given away 10 bikes so far and has 50 more waiting to be reconditioned! We need your help if you enjoy fixing up bikes. This work is important, but we are not yet finished!

Plymouth is a partnering congregation and we invite you to participate in whatever interests you! You can **learn** about homelessness, **support people** moving into permanent housing by donating items that will be given to the homeless and/or **speak up** at candidate forums this fall and ask the hard questions to candidates that tell you if this candidate has a commitment to ending homelessness!

**Learn!** On August 23, 6-8:00p.m. we will offer a workshop to help you understand why people panhandle and how you can respond! Often when you are downtown you see people asking for money. As people of faith, we are called to care for our neighbors, but is giving money to the panhandler the way we should respond when they hold out their hand and ask for money? Attend this forum at the Basilica of St. Mary and learn more! We will have the zAmya Theatre Group (with members who are or were homeless) explore the reasons people panhandle and the

different ways we can respond. The forum will include an interactive dialogue with Monica Nilsson, Director of St. Stephen's Street Outreach, previous panhandlers and downtown business partners.

### **Support folks who are moving into permanent housing through Currie Ave Partnership!**

The DCEH is collecting **Welcome Baskets** to give to the Currie Avenue Partnership for folks moving out of shelter and into permanent housing. They need cleaning supplies! Go to our website [www.dceh.org](http://www.dceh.org) to find the list of items to donate and where to bring them!

September 25, 9-Noon, the DCEH is sponsoring the **Sofas & Spokes Collection**. We are looking for good used furniture for people moving into housing and bikes for our bike program to offer to low-income neighbors looking for work, exercise or just to get to the grocery store. Bring your items September 25 from 9-Noon to the big truck in the parking lot of Hennepin Avenue United Methodist Church.

### **Speak up!**

Go to [www.dceh.org](http://www.dceh.org) to find a list of questions on ending homelessness to ask candidates this summer and fall at community forums. Sign up to receive Action Alerts next January and be a part of an organized effort to advocate with your neighboring faith communities who are members the DCEH.

And as always, it is a pleasure and joy to partner with Plymouth to make all this happen.

### **I want to thank:**

**Heading Home Plymouth Leadership Team** (Mike Manhard, Jessica Frehse, Julia Welle Ayers, Steve Thronson, Jan Neville & Jim Swanson), for all the work they have done this year at the Take Five Tables and planning training sessions,

**DCEH Interfaith Team members** (Jim Swanson and Jan Neville) from Plymouth who meet each month with the other participating congregations and share ways of engaging our members in this work,

**Connie Marty** for her staff leadership on the Steering Committee of DCEH & Executive Team,

**And the whole congregation** for your spiritual & financial commitment to this collaborative that believes everyone deserves a place to call home.

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