

**Women, Work, & Community – Overview of the Vision**  
***preventing homelessness among women***  
Arin Norris, Chair, Raising Incomes Committee  
June 18, 2009 Breakfast



The Raising Incomes Committee of the Commission on Homelessness has now been in existence for almost exactly one year. In June of 2008, a few homeless service providers organized to talk about our clients and the fact that most of them need a job.

**Who Are Our Homeless**

Our clients have issues. Their cars break down. They depend on unreliable sources for their childcare. Their criminal records include felonies. The obstacles that the homeless have to finding and keeping a job are extensive. After the Raising Incomes Committee determined that our clients need jobs and have issues, we committed to finding the solution.

“There must be a community solution to helping the homeless and near homeless find and keep a job.”

Those of us who work with the homeless directly and daily believe in them. We believe in their desire to work. We believe in their ability to work. We are looking for that solution...that job that will allow them to support their families and live their American dream.

But, because all of us this morning are from different backgrounds and experiences, I want to be sure that we're all on the same page. If you personally have not worked with the homeless, there is a chance that there are some misconceptions about this population. You may have sort of a vague idea that all homeless people drink or panhandle...or that they are lazy.

As long as you're here, I'll ask you to take my word that the homeless represent a cross section of our community. They are men, women, and families with children. They represent different backgrounds. They include the mentally ill and those who suffer from the disease of alcoholism. The homeless can be recently divorced, recently aged out of foster care, or domestic violence victims. They may have had a medical bankruptcy. But, the homeless are always someone's son or daughter. And they do want to work.

So as long as you are here, and we all agree to set aside any possible personal misconceptions about our homeless population, that leads us to our next step.

**A Community Solution**

The barriers that the homeless face keep them from being able to support themselves.

A community solution should provide intensive services that wrap around a person who is homeless. This solution should provide goals that are attainable by a person who is homeless. It should provide opportunity and should take into account the skills inherent in our clients who are homeless.

After the Raising Incomes Committee agreed to pursue a community solution to jobs for the homeless, we spent several meetings desperately trying to think of how to get new members. As service providers to the homeless and impoverished, we realize that we do not have the solutions. We are charged with making connections for our clients...connecting clients with solutions. Those of us forming the Raising Incomes Committee last summer believed that we need business to help. We understood that we need community leaders to guide this effort. And here you are.

There are a lot of facts that might help set the stage for this vision. Statistics have been compiled that relate to this issue and you will find these on your tables (available also at [www.destination-home.info/wwc.htm](http://www.destination-home.info/wwc.htm)).

But here's the bottom line: The Raising Incomes Committee believes that a community solution exists for connecting people who are homeless with jobs. We envision an innovative service for the homeless that includes training, mentoring, and support services, resulting in a job that will provide self-sufficiency. We believe there are hard workers AND entrepreneurs within those who are homeless in our community. In our grandest dreams, we envision a physical location, where all these services can wrap around a person who is homeless as he/she heads toward the work that he/she was meant to do.

We know that other communities are doing this. This type of service is sometimes supported by a social venture. Some examples are on your table (available also at [www.destination-home.info/wvc.htm](http://www.destination-home.info/wvc.htm)). In St. Louis, the community developed a restaurant where the homeless can receive training and then work in the business. In other communities, a product is sold, such as jewelry, or a service is offered, such as landscaping. It has also crossed our minds that "green" jobs are the future and should be explored. Could a new social venture support workforce development services for the homeless? I don't know for sure. But I hope that you can open your minds to this and help us find out.

### **Initial Target Population**

One answer that we can address briefly is that we have envisioned this project initially as a service for homeless women. It doesn't have to be. But it gets overwhelming to address big issues like this, and in one of our meetings, the Raising Incomes Committee agreed to narrow our focus to women at the start. For purposes of our brainstorming this morning, we would like to focus on a project for homeless women.

### **Summary**

So I ask you: What do you envision? Can our community develop a social venture? Can we bring training opportunities to our homeless population? Can we personally choose to mentor women who are homeless and help them learn to do work the way that we do? Do we want to develop a community solution to help women who are homeless get and keep a job? Can we expect women who are homeless to become self-sufficient?

I think the answer is yes.

For more information or to find out how to get involved with the Raising Incomes Committee, contact Arin Norris at [mhadirector@sigeom.net](mailto:mhadirector@sigeom.net) or 812.426.2640.

The Raising Incomes Committee is a part of the city-county **Commission on Homelessness**, which oversees **Destination: Home**, the ten-year plan to end & prevent homelessness in Evansville & Vanderburgh County.  
website: [www.destination-home.info/raisingincomes.htm](http://www.destination-home.info/raisingincomes.htm)

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