

Birkenfeld - Stella Maris (Our Lady Star of the Sea) House

By Suzie Hamlin and Denise Agee

On May 28, 2009, St. Vincent de Paul, Our Lady Star of the Sea conference, held a groundbreaking event for a new shelter that they are building. The initial idea began several years ago with Board President Harry Morris, tired of putting “band aids” on their current shelter, wanted to see a new shelter for women in Kitsap County. Their current shelter consists of two small single-family homes, with a total of 1590 square feet, built in the 1930’s. They can house up to eleven people, primarily in bunk beds. In 2006, they applied for, and received, funding to do a feasibility study to determine whether it would be better to remodel and add on to their current facility or to build new. For many years, they have “made do” with what they have and made it the best they can for the women and

children who need those services. There have been numerous maintenance issues that have needed attention. The current shelter is very cramped, has little privacy, but has a nice, homey feel to it; the women who use it appreciate it. However, staff often have to turn away people due to their size or disability, due to limitations of the current shelter and the use of bunk beds. The new shelter will not have any bunk beds. It will also have



The Groundbreaking Ceremony

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Homeless Count 2009

By Kallie Wood and Phedra Elliott

On January 29th and 30th, the Annual Point in Time Homeless Count was conducted in locations around Kitsap County by members of the Kitsap Continuum of Care Coalition and volunteers to measure the number of homeless individuals and families in Kitsap County. This year also marked the first time the Operation Homeless Connect was conducted. Located at the Fairgrounds, this event brought together service agencies, resources

and those in need.

Overall, the Count identified 822 homeless individuals in Kitsap County compared with 715 in 2008. In addition, 115 individuals who indicated they were homeless prior to jail, or expect to be homeless after their release, were separately counted.

This year’s Homeless Count revealed a significant shift in the demographics

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Almost 55% of those interviewed cited job-related issues as a cause of their homelessness.

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Special points of interest:

- New Women’s Shelter
- Results of Homeless Count 2009

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a room specifically to accommodate women who have a disability.

The feasibility study determined that it would be more cost effective to build a new shelter, as opposed to remodeling the current one. At about this time, they learned of a grant opportunity through the C. Keith Birkenfeld Memorial Trust. They applied and were one of the agencies funded, receiving \$400,000. They contacted Rice Fergus Miller to assist them with this project. Many of the staff, including Steve Rice, wanted in on this project from the beginning and have been tremendous supporters. They have had support from city officials, St. Vincent de Paul conference members, their board, staff and other community agencies.

Things seemed to fall together for them as they were in the planning stages. They determined that their property was in a small area of land that was zoned, "district core center". This meant that this type of building was allowed and they didn't have to work on getting the property rezoned. At least partly due to their many community partnerships, they received funding through the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Staff have named each of the rooms in the new shelter. They put a lot of thought into which names to use and which rooms seemed to fit that particular name. Since they will need assistance in furnishing the rooms, they are considering an "Adopt A Room" idea. There will be areas to offer more privacy and no more than three beds per room in the new building. The new building will have 4,460 square feet of living space, 5 beautiful bathrooms, will have 17-18 beds and will be handicap accessible. There will be a "secret garden" with a 4' X 6' Our Lady Star of Sea mosaic

The existing shelter was built in 1930, as a single-family residence with a small "mother-in-law" apartment next to it. The total areas of both buildings is 1590 square feet and it is not handicap accessible. It is full 95% of the time, even though the quarters are cramped. During the building of the new shelter, they will keep the current shelter open. No women will be displaced; they will move from the current shelter to the new shelter when it is completed.

In the shelter, women typically bond with one another. Many have come in pregnant, delivered their babies and returned to the shelter with the newborn. They have lots of "moms" to help with the new baby. Some will initially find a home to rent together so that they can afford the rent when they first move out. Often single moms with children are able to move into Kitsap Community Resource's transitional housing program. The Thrift Store often hires women from the shelter; they are always given an opportunity to apply for any openings. Almost always the Assistant Manager for the shelter is a resident/former resident.

The Our Lady Star of the Sea St. Vincent de Paul conference has been involved with working with homeless people since the 1940's. They purchased the current property in 1991.

Some of those from St. Vincent de Paul who have been very involved with ensuring this dream of a new shelter becoming a reality are Suzie Hamlin, volunteer for over 20 years, Harry Morris - Board President, Denise Agee - Assistance Office Coordinator, Victoria Sherman - Shelter Manager, Leon Puzon, Walt Codorniz, Lou Goodheart and Roz Owen.

All who have been involved feel that they have been blessed in many ways throughout this project:

- ❖ Blessed to receive a \$400,000 grant to get them started
- ❖ Blessed with many wonderful people who care about homeless people in our community
- ❖ Blessed with a beautiful mosaic of Stella Maris
- ❖ Blessed with great partnerships with other organizations, which helped tremendously in securing funding

Those involved in this from the beginning feel that it has been a remarkable process and is a dream come true.



Shelter progress - July 2009

Homeless Count 2009

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of the homeless. In 2008, there were 132 homeless children and youth under the age of 17 counted in Kitsap County, or 18 percent. This number was nearly double in 2009, with 262 homeless children and youth reporting. This age group now represents 32 percent of all homeless individuals in our community. While 346 people indicated they are currently in shelter, 290 are living with family or friends and 173 are on the streets, in tents, or living in cars. Overall this means that 77% are in temporary or unstable situations and 21% are living in conditions not meant for human habitation.

The poor economy was especially evident at this year's Homeless Count. Almost 55 percent of those interviewed cited job-related issues, such as loss of a job or under-employment as the major reasons that caused them to become homeless. Housing issues also played a role in homelessness this year, with 38 percent of those interviewed, naming reasons such as an eviction for non-payment and the inability to pay the rent or mortgage as

the cause of their homelessness.

Another large contributor to homelessness in our county was due to medical and healthcare related issues such medical costs, medical illness, and mental illness.

Almost a quarter of those who are homeless indicate that it is due, at least in part, to issues with prior convictions and jail time. Those who attempt to reenter our community from jail or prison often find that they are not eligible to rent in certain areas due to their convictions. In addition to lack of money, many have no rental or credit history.

These new numbers are daunting and, in reality, don't represent all of the homeless in our county. The Kitsap Continuum of Care Coalition recently updated its Homeless Housing Plan and agencies are working to implement new strategies to combat homelessness in our community.

For more information about the homeless count, Homeless Housing Plan, or strategies to combat homelessness in our community, please contact Terry Schroeder, Kitsap Continuum of Care Coalition, 360-473-2028.

“This year’s Homeless Count revealed a significant shift in the demographics of the homeless.”



About 32% of the homeless population counted in Kitsap County are youth under the age of 18.

KCoCC Newsletter

This is the first issue of a quarterly newsletter for the Kitsap Continuum of Care Coalition.

The newsletter will come out quarterly at approximately the end of the quarter (March, June, September, December).

The newsletter will have information about events that have occurred or will be occurring regarding homeless, highlighting homeless/affordable housing programs, etc. If anyone has information that they would like to see put in the newsletter, contact Terry Schroeder, 360-473-2028, tschroeder@kcr.org.



Name Your Newsletter

As you will notice, the newsletter needs a name! There will be a contest to name the newsletter. Please submit your suggestions of newsletter names to Terry Schroeder by Thursday July 9, 2009.

The Community Education & Outreach committee will choose the name from those submitted. A \$25 Starbucks gift certificate will be awarded to the person who provides the winning entry.



Kitsap Continuum of Care Coalition

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The mission of the Kitsap Continuum of Care Coalition is to provide a coordinated, compassionate and effective environment to help homeless persons achieve self-sufficiency through:

- Creation and preservation of affordable housing.
- Prevention of homelessness.
- Restoration of homeless persons to stable living environments.
- Promotion of community awareness through education, advocacy, mutual support and sharing of resources.

We're on the Web!

<http://endhomelessnesswa.org/resources/counties/19/>

Pictures from the Birkenfeld - Stella Maris House



The first shovels: Jeff Granlee - Fischer General Contracting, Inc., Dan Richards - RiceFergusMiller, Jamie Osterman - RiceFergusMiller, Denise Agee - St. Vincent de Paul, Harry Morris - St. Vincent de Paul, Marie Vila - City of Bremerton, Suzie Hamlin - St. Vincent de Paul, Father Dick Ward - Our Lady Star of the Sea, Deacon Bill Hamlin - Our Lady Star of the Sea, and Polly Grennish - St. Vincent de Paul & The Lady Eagles



Bremerton Mayor,
Carey Bozeman,
Speaking at the
Groundbreaking ceremony

“The Our Lady Star of the Sea St. Vincent de Paul conference has been involved with working with homeless people since the 1940’s.”