



Keys to Hope necessary for community

By JIM MUSIAL Citizens Concerned for the Homeless / Sep 30, 2014

On April 10, it was reported that Citizens Concerned for the Homeless, Inc. had taken over a project to develop and open a resource facility at 1802 Franklin St. here in Michigan City.

So much has happened since April and we are excited to share the progress that has been made toward the opening of this critically-needed facility. Citizens Concerned for the Homeless, Inc. is a 501 (c)(3) organization which has served Michigan City and La Porte County for the past 22 years. It has operated two primary programs, Sand Castle Shelter for Homeless Families (established in 1994) and the Grace Learning Center (established in 2010). Keys to Hope Resource Center will be our third program.

The primary program that will be utilized at Keys to Hope Resource Center program is aptly titled the "ABC's to Self-Sufficiency", focusing on Appearance, Behavior Modification and Case Management/Courage to Change. The goal of the ABC's to Self-Sufficiency is to give each individual every opportunity to succeed and survive, and to live a healthier, happier and more productive life. The Keys to Hope program will have a multi-level benefit. First and foremost, it will benefit and serve the homeless community of La Porte County. In addition to those who are officially classified as homeless, those served will include the homeless sleeping in cars, couch surfing, sleeping outdoors and otherwise uncounted by the official count. It will also serve the disenfranchised, those on the brink of homelessness and those who simply need help to survive.

The La Porte County Home Team (our County Continuum of Care) has long recognized the need for a resource center which would serve the fundamental needs of the

homeless and disenfranchised in our community. The Home Team's 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness discusses a number of concepts, specifically "allowing shelter residents to stay during the day to receive job training, case management, counseling, etc." Keys to Hope has expanded the concept to serve all homeless and disenfranchised from Michigan City and the greater La Porte County area. Keys to Hope has also received a full written endorsement of the Home Team after a unanimous vote of its members at a recent meeting.

The first piece to this program was to secure a facility to house it. CCH has recently signed a 15-year lease for the 1802 Franklin St. location at a rental of \$1 per year and cost of operation. Local Architect Roger Potratz, President of dh2w, Inc., drew up plans for the physical layout as determined by the CCH Board of Directors. Keys to Hope has secured all required zoning approvals as well as State of Indiana approval for the renovations. There are no other programs in La Porte County which will provide, in one facility, the type of amenities and programs Keys to Hope will bring to the table. Keys to Hope will coordinate with existing efforts to benefit the new program and the people we serve. Keys to Hope will provide intensive case management, a five-unit computer lab for job, housing and other program searches, shower facilities, laundry facilities, mail and phone access, lockers, various life skills training and other services in the case management area.

Keys to Hope will serve as a referral destination for every organization in La Porte County that does not offer services like those to be provided at the center. With the help of community partner Duneland Health Council, classes that are now being offered exclusively to residents at Sand Castle Shelter will now be available to a much larger, county-wide, target group. These programs will include Flight School, a cognitive behavioral therapy class designed to focus on change and growth. A program for the Keys to Hope visitors is currently being designed by LCSW Michelle Alexander and will be available after Keys to Hope opens. Nutrition and cooking classes will be offered by Purdue University Homemakers Extension group. Smoking Cessation and Prevention (with free Nicotine Replacement Therapy) will be offered by Director James Musial.

There is already one success story that can be shared. A program testing the case management concept was run at the Men's Interfaith Shelter (men's overnight shelter) from Oct. 2013-April 2014. We worked with an individual who was disabled, who smoked, who was homeless and who had no health insurance. Using community resources and intense case management with the individual, progress was made. He quit smoking with the smoking cessation program, he secured insurance with help from Health Communities and Covering Kids and Families and was reinstated with HIP (Healthy Indiana Plan). We assisted in securing a new attorney for help with his Social Security Disability application and appeal. Recently, he rang the door at Sand Castle Shelter to give us an update. His insurance paid for a hip replacement, he remains smoke free and his disability was approved. He was apartment hunting and wanted to share his success and his gratitude. With the opening of Keys to Hope, we are certain more wonderful success stories are soon to follow.

It has been our mission and the goal of Citizens Concerned for the Homeless to provide homeless families with more than food and shelter. Our standard and model has been to provide guidance and support to families in three primary areas, obtaining jobs, obtaining available public and private aid and securing their next housing opportunity. Ancillary needs include health care, child care, education, clothing and other fundamentally necessary items and services required simply to allow an individual to survive. The goal of Keys to Hope is to expand CCH's mission to all individuals in La Porte County. To date, this goal has been endorsed through grant funding through the Community Development Block Grant program, Duneland Health Council, United Way of La Porte County, Unity Foundation, Barker Welfare Foundation and other individuals and groups.

CCH would like to thank everyone who has stepped up in support of this very necessary program.