



'Keys to Hope' will benefit community

By NANCY PHILIPPI and JIM MUSIAL Citizens Concerned for the Homeless / Sep 8, 2014

As the Michigan City police can confirm, there is a growing number of incidents of derelict behavior throughout our community, and notably in the downtown area. Citizens Concerned for the Homeless (CCH) is the organization which runs Sandcastle Shelter for Homeless Families and the Grace Learning Center, both on W. 8th Street. They have taken on a new project, a daytime resource service center, to provide basic resources to marginalized members of our community, including homeless men and women.

"Keys to Hope Resource Center," which is scheduled to begin operations in late 2014, will provide social services and training programs, including computer-based job searching (as an online Work One site), self-improvement workshops and individual career and job skills counseling, along with basic services such as lockers, showers and laundry facilities by appointment. The proposed location of the resource center is 1802 Franklin St.

A meeting was held last Tuesday, where the board of directors of CCH met with concerned owners of the small businesses located in the 1700-1800 blocks of Franklin Street. The business owners voiced concerns that the incidences of derelict behavior which have been plaguing their neighborhood and the whole community will increase in their immediate neighborhood if a daytime resource service center is located there, and that shoppers and diners will not frequent their businesses as a result both of that increase and of the increased presence of the "marginalized" who are drawn to the services provided at the center.

Board members of CCH believe that a resource service center at 1802 Franklin will actually serve to reduce the incidences of delinquent/derelict behavior and of vagrancy in the community and in that specific neighborhood. The resource center is neither a shelter, a soup kitchen nor a "hang-out." Our business model, which has been used at both of the current facilities on W. 8th Street, has an actual 76 percent success rate of putting homeless families into permanent housing since June of 2013, because the heads of household are empowered to obtain employment. A large part of that success rate is because those facilities have rules and regulations which their clients both agree to follow and are held to by the staff. Failure to follow the rules means the loss of the use of the facility.

The neighborhood business owners agree that such a facility would benefit our community, but do not want it on their block, for the reasons stated. Members of the Michigan City community are invited to visit and take advantage of the services and products offered by the businesses in the 1700-1800 block of Franklin Street. CCH looks forward to working with their business neighbors on Franklin Street in a positive relationship as we provide both the neighborhood and the larger community of Michigan City with a solution to the problems which accompany vagrancy and homelessness.