

CORNERSTONE WOMEN'S & CHILDREN'S HOUSE
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A Group Home for Homeless Women & Children

I. SUMMARY & PURPOSE

The purpose of Women's and Children's House will be to provide

- Safety, shelter and crisis-services to women and children who become homeless, plus
- The counseling, domestic violence education, advocacy services, and job training necessary to help homeless women establish real independence, and
- Children's and teens' programs providing age-specific education and support for the youngest residents of Women's and Children's House, in order to help them overcome the traumas of displacement and family violence.
- Women's and Children's House will be available to single women, women with children, women and children who are victims of domestic violence, women with mobility disabilities, and women whose first language is not English.
- Women's and Children's House will provide residents of all ages and backgrounds with the "middle-ground" job training and treatment support necessary to fully recover from displacement and trauma and successfully re-establish in the community.

II. WHYS AND WHEREFORES

It is vital to provide homeless women with both emergency help and shelter and "middle-ground" job training and treatment support, along with encouragement to maintain ideals and hopes for the future.

Homelessness is often perceived as catastrophic, terminal personal failure, especially by women with young children. If only emergency support is available, this can sometimes draw homeless women toward "a homeless life-style," that is, toward chronic homelessness.

It is easier and wiser to help someone survive a first episode of homelessness, get job training, daycare and a better job and thereby re-establish, than it is to help someone who has become chronically homeless overcome that syndrome. The chronically homeless tend to be substance-addicted and to "live by emergency services." Human, social and economic costs of chronic homelessness are extremely high. When single-parent families fail catastrophically, the results echo for decades and often bring both children and parents into the criminal justice system.

An experienced caseworker with medical and substance abuse treatment experience will be the on-site project manager at Cornerstone Women's and Children's House. Residents will benefit from Cornerstone's established cooperation with treatment, job training and supportive housing providers. A comprehensive casework plan with realistic goals and timeline will be developed for every resident during the first weeks of residence. This plan will be followed up in scheduled sessions and obstacles which function to prevent its realization identified and adjustments made, all with full participation of the resident.

Women's and Children's House will provide in-house day care, so that residents with children will be able to pursue treatment regimens, job training and employment. The Cornerstone model¹ of setting up work projects in which residents are hired will be followed. Preparation of meals for the common dining room will be professional supervised but some residents will be employed. All residents will do chores.

Training in the professional operation of day care facilities will be provided as job training to some residents, who will work under professional supervision at the in-house day care facility. Without fuss, professional supervision of the in-house day care center will draw out better parenting skills in all residents and, by power of example, will tend to limit and displace harsh or inappropriate conduct toward children.

All necessary transportation to treatment, training and jobs will be provided or arranged. Research shows that provision for transportation significantly increases good outcomes.

It won't be necessary to claim threat of violence to be able to stay at Women's and Children's House, in part because homeless women are not always able to report the true causes of their homelessness.² There is an extremely strong correlation for women between being homeless and having been a victim of violence.³ "...Violence is very

¹ Cornerstone Rescue Mission operates The Woodlot, the Workcrews, the Cornerstone Thrift Store, and the Strategic Weed Abatement Team, which pay around \$7.00 per hour and offer job training and employment to Mission residents.

² The requirement of some facilities that there be immediate threat of violence in order to receive help, often reflects that these facilities receive funding under the Violence Against Women Act and must respect the conditions attached to this funding.

³ "In a study of 436 homeless and poorly housed mothers, nearly two-thirds reported severe physical violence by a childhood caretaker, 42% reported childhood sexual molestation, and 61% reported severe violence by a male partner." *Intimate violence in the lives of homeless and poor housed Women:*

much a part of the lives of the homeless, and it seems to be part of a broader picture of problems associated with risk for and experience of homelessness.”⁴ “Homeless was the adaptive response to battering.”⁵ Many women who are episodically, and therefore chronically, homeless return to abusive or relationships which they believe to be impossible because they can find no alternative shelter.

Group home operation is especially well suited to supportive, transitional housing for homeless women and children. Mutual help and companionship available in this setting function to support women emotionally and help them to make the transition from extreme circumstances to normal social contact and work. Presence of a manager trained in casework and counseling will lend to operation of Women’s and Children’s House some of the benefits of group treatment and therapy. Stays will typically range from three to eighteen months.

Women’s and Children’s House, like the WAVI shelter at the same location before it, will operate as a group home and will comply with all city, state and federal code and housing requirements.

III. PROGRAM

The casework approach at Women’s and Children’s House will be, “Why not make good use of this emergency, so that you can be more secure and more independent in the future?” Women’s and Children’s House will endeavor to provide both emergency help and shelter, plus “middle-ground support” necessary to successfully re-establish in the community.

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WCH will have case managers to work specifically with mothers and their children, and with the single women. Through weekly meetings, the case managers will assist residents in prioritizing goals, linking with community resources and reviewing each woman’s progress. Goals will be established by each woman and individualized according to her needs and choices. These may include:

Prevalence of and patterns in an ethnically diverse sample, American Journal of Orthopsychiatry 67(2): 261-278, 1997.

⁴ *Violence and the homeless: An epidemiological study of victimization and aggression*, J Trauma Stress, 7(1): 95-110, January 1994

⁵ *Patterns of violence in homeless women*. West J. Nurs Res, 19(4):490-500, August 1997.

- Completing a GED
- Enrolling in classes at Career Learning Center or other school
- Participating in job training
- Securing a job
- Completing a recovery program
- Paying off debts
- Saving money for permanent housing

Referrals and coordination of services will also be provided for the following, among others:

- Medical needs
- Childcare
- Financial assistance
- Various housing programs and options
- Educational opportunities
- Counseling services

Cornerstone recognize that each woman's long-term goal is to acquire a permanent home with sufficient means to sustain it. The road to that goal will vary for each woman, as will the time it will take for her to achieve it. The case managers will provide assistance and support to map out the route and help each woman arrive at her destination in the time that works best for her.

Security is of the utmost concern in caring for the needs of these women and children. The proposed facility previously operated by WAVI has existing electronic surveillance system and security hardware on all entrances to the facility. We will update these systems as needed and provide training to all staff on how to handle any unwanted visitor.

All guests of the house will sign an acknowledgement of rules, which includes an understanding of no males in or around the premise. Any violations of this policy will be grounds for removal from the program.

Male guests who reside at the Cornerstone Mission will not be permitted to visit at Women's and Children's House. Cornerstone Mission's rules will dictate that any male guest who tries to enter WCH will lose accommodation privileges at the Mission. Police will also be summoned to enforce the trespassing law.

Staff will work in concert with the neighborhood, community police officers and other service providers to make every effort to maintain the highest levels of appropriate security.

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