

2008 NAHRO AWARDS

AGENCY AWARDS OF MERIT IN HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

PROGRAM INNOVATION: RESIDENT AND CLIENT SERVICES

ELDERLY OR SPECIAL NEEDS HOUSING – SOCIAL SERVICES PROGRAMS

CHRISTMAS FOR THE HOMELESS

1. SUMMARY OF PROGRAM

A Fort Worth Housing Authority (FWHA) employee has begun a program that provides gift bags to the homeless during the Christmas season.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAM

The FWHA is located in an area of Fort Worth where most of the city's homeless population congregates. The area is also the location of several agencies that serve the homeless, including shelters, and day labor resources. As FWHA employees drive in to work each day, they see first hand the plight of the homeless in the city-- the look of despair and hopelessness on their faces. While the FWHA has programs that provide limited housing for the chronic homeless, these programs do not nearly meet the overall needs of this population. In an effort to bring some cheer to this group during the Christmas holiday season, one FWHA employee began collecting donations to make gift bags for the men and women who congregate daily for a place to sleep, hot meals, and day labor. Employees on limited personal budgets are able to contribute to the holiday cheer.

During 2006, the employee secured enough donations to purchase 100 canvass bags and fill them with items that most people take for granted, including hats, gloves, scarves, socks, shampoo, deodorant, toothbrushes, toothpaste, soap, canned sausages, peanut butter crackers, razors, combs, candy, rain ponchos, bath towels, and bus passes. The bags were distributed to people on the streets around the homeless shelters who had slept on the streets or been sent out from the shelters.

3. THE RESULTS/SUCCESS OF THE PROGRAM

100 men and women were provided with basic personal items from employees who work with low-income families and individuals daily. Goodwill during the Christmas season was shown to the neediest population in the community--homeless people, including many who have mental illnesses.

4. THE COST/FINANCING OF THE PROGRAM

All the expenses for this program were borne by the personal donations of employees and friends of employees. There were no costs to the FWHA.

5. INNOVATION

Employees are able to provide a tangible personal service to a group they serve daily. By using personal funds, the service becomes more than a job, but a demonstration of compassion and dedication to the people they serve. Consequently, the overall quality of work for the agency and its employees are positively impacted.