

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

EMPLOYEE DONATIONS HOMELESS GIVEAWAYS

1. SUMMARY OF PROGRAM

The Fort Worth Housing Authority (FWHA) was asked to participate in an inter-agency service provider fair for the homeless on April 19, 2007, and bring "giveaways" for attendees. Rather than purchase a single item, FWHA staff made generous cash and in-kind donations to provide practical and useful packages to be given out. All homeless persons attending the fair received a bag, and leftovers were donated to the Fort Worth Day Resource Center for the Homeless.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAM

FWHA is committed to providing assistance to the homeless of Fort Worth by utilizing all appropriate agency programs to do so, as well as continuing to seek other avenues that allow provision of services to this unique population. In an effort to involve all staff in this endeavor, it was decided to ask employees to provide "Care Packages" for the homeless fair. Because the items were donated, FWHA was able to provide more than agency funds would have allowed. With a homeless population in Fort Worth of 1,252 sheltered and unsheltered (As determined by the National Alliance to End Homelessness homeless count conducted in January 2007), a goal was set to provide 1,000 packages containing packs of peanut butter crackers and toothbrushes in a one-gallon zip lock bag. These were chosen based on the stated need by the Fort Worth Day Resource Center for the Homeless, an agency that provides services to Fort Worth's "street people."

An agency-wide e-mail was sent in March listing the items and quantity needed, and an announcement was made at the March 21 Mid-Managers meeting that challenged managers and directors to raise either funds or in-kind donations within their departments. A box was set up in a break room for drop-offs, and an Administrative Assistant collected monetary donations. Regular e-mails were sent updating the progress of collections. Staff also made e-mail announcements of bargains to be found and where they were located, with a little

competition amongst them to out-bargain each other. The final goal was reached on April 17, 2007 and staff gathered on April 18 to package the items for distribution at the Homeless Fair on April 19. Leftover funds were used to purchase candy to also be given away at the fair.

3. THE RESULTS/SUCCESS OF THE PROGRAM

The FWHA Admissions Department and Shelter + Care staff manned a table at the Homeless Fair for the purpose of taking applications for housing. Each homeless individual who visited the table was given a package and encouraged to take the complimentary candy provided. Over 350 individuals visited the table and received a package. The packages remaining were donated to the Day Resource Center for further distribution among the target population.

Because each package was labeled "Provided by the generous employees of FWHA", the homeless and service provider communities were made aware of the generosity and selflessness of staff and their commitment to provide compassionate service to all. In addition, a stronger working relationship was established with the Day Resource Center, and awareness that the homeless have need of the most basic items was raised among employees.

It is anticipated that, because of the success of this endeavor, FWHA employees will continue to donate giveaways for future service provider fairs for the homeless community and other target populations.

4. THE COST/FINANCING OF THE PROGRAM

The only cost to FWHA for this project was for 1,000 adhesive labels attached to the packages stating they were donated by staff, which came to approximately \$15.00. All other expenses were absorbed by employees.

5. INNOVATION

FWHA participates in several service provider events throughout the year and has traditionally either paid for minimal giveaways or not provided them at all. Asking employees to provide items enables better quality items to be distributed and encourages staff to engage in giving assistance to those in need in a tangible way outside of regular FWHA duties. In addition, the community as a whole sees employees as being involved in service provision in a more compassionate way. While many places of employment involve staff in charitable events during holiday seasons, FWHA has established a precedent in asking employees to directly assist those whom the agency serves.