



2008 PRESS RELEASE

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Contact: Ann Pitcher
P.S. Communications
(630) 887-0278
ann@pscommunications.com

“SLEEP OUT SATURDAY”- NOV. 1

5th year RAISING AWARENESS FOR HOMELESSNESS

Bridge Communities Event to Raise \$135,000 for Homeless Families

Glen Ellyn, IL, August 18, 2008 – For the 5th year in a row, DuPage County young adults will transform their yards into homeless shelters during “Sleep Out Saturday”, a Nov. 1 fundraiser that serves as a “wake-up call” for homelessness. More than 1,500 teens and adults will spend the night outside in tents, boxes or cars to raise money for Bridge Communities, an organization that provides shelters for homeless families in DuPage County. The all-night event will be held in backyards, parking lots and parks and includes approximately 75 groups of youths and young adults.

Today, more than 121,000 DuPage County residents are one paycheck away from being homeless and approximately 45,000 DuPage residents live in poverty. Surprisingly, the average age of a homeless person in DuPage County is eight years of age. Researchers estimate that about 7.7 percent of youth experience homelessness at some point during their life.

Although DuPage County has the second highest median income in the Chicago area, it has more low income persons than the total population of 87 counties in Illinois. In fiscal year 2007, 32,631 persons, or 10,502 households, received emergency assistance in the form of housing, food, clothing, prescriptions, or transportation.

These startling statistics are why Bridge Communities wants west suburban residents to open their eyes to the issue of homelessness right here in DuPage, and experience firsthand what it’s like to be homeless.

The event will kick off with a rally from 6:30-8 p.m. at the Bridge Communities parking lot, 505 Crescent Blvd. in Glen Ellyn. The rally will feature celebrity emcee Rob Johnson, CBS2 anchor/reporter, entertainment and testimonials from formerly homeless individuals. Sleep Out Saturday's major sponsors are Central DuPage Hospital, Harris Bank and Icon Digital Design (platinum) and Directions Training and Monarch Landing (gold).

Last year's event raised more than \$110,000 for Bridge Communities' programs for the homeless in DuPage County. This year, Bridge hopes to raise \$135,000 in order to promote its mission to connect homeless families to a brighter future.

"When people think of homeless, they usually think of the guy sitting on a bench by the train station," says Bridge Communities co-founder Bob Wahlgren. "This image is of the visible homeless. Our program serves the people you don't see – the invisible homeless, single parents with children. When I learned about children being homeless in DuPage County, I was shocked and knew that we as a community could do more to help these kids." says Wahlgren. "Some of our families were living in laundromats, cars, and one family was living in a tent in a corn field."

Currently celebrating its 20th anniversary, Bridge Communities serves annually more than 100 needy families in our transitional housing and shared-equity homeownership programs. Through our transitional housing program each family is paired with a faith-based or community-based organization that provides a mentor team and a \$10,000 annual commitment to sharing the cost of the family's housing and services. Within two years, families are generally able to cross the bridge from homelessness to self-sufficiency. It has been proven that transitional supportive housing is an effective strategy for ending homelessness, which is what Bridge Communities offers.

Founded in 1988, Bridge Communities is DuPage County's oldest and largest provider of transitional housing for homeless families. The non-profit organization also offers a network of services such as mentoring, career coaching and counseling, job training, tutoring and transportation. For more information on the Sleep Out Saturday Rally, to participate, or to sponsor a "sleeper", call (630) 545-0610 or go to www.sleepoutsaturday.org.

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