

East Oakland Community Project Newsline

Spring 2009

Harsh Realities *Homeless Hit Hardest by Economic Downturn*

In today's economic climate it is almost impossible to pick up a newspaper or turn on the television or radio and not hear the words "recession," "crisis," or "foreclosure." According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, as of January 2009 the national and statewide unemployment rates were 7.6% and 10.1%, respectively, both at their highest marks since the mid-1990s. You would be hard pressed to find a community unaffected by the recession. East Oakland Community Project is no exception.

Homeless Youths Adapt

At Our House, Linda Fuentes, Case Manager and Program Coordinator, sees the difficulties homeless youths face on a daily basis. Two of her clients are looking for work. "The process is very difficult," she said. "One of my clients put in over thirty applications but [found] nothing." The credit crunch has also affected tuition disbursements, so the best path out of homelessness—education—has become a more difficult goal for clients.

There is, however, a silver lining. "Sometimes employers are more likely to hire people that are homeless, to help them out," Linda explained. She is often able to get free medical care for her clients since providers can write off the expenses as charitable donations. These opportunities are welcome, but are stopgap measures at best. Most youths do not attain the type of employment they would need to become independent. "One of my girls is working part time," said Linda, "and she just got health insurance, but she has to pay over \$200 a month for it! I just don't know how she's going to make it."



Dee Hoyle (left), an EOCP Case Manager for many years, counsels a resident at Crossroads.

Homeless Adults Face Competition

Dee Hoyle, Case Manager at EOCP's Crossroads Emergency Shelter, has been seeing more of the same. "Some of our residents are ex-felons," Dee explained, "or have substance abuse issues, which makes it that much harder for them to compete in the job market." Due to higher rates of unemployment, the lower paying jobs for which a homeless person would normally be able to compete are being taken by more qualified applicants.

Partial employment or "involuntary part-time work" is another problem impacting EOCP's residents. "Many of our clients who had no problem getting up to 35 hours of part time work a week now have trouble getting 20 or 25 hours a week," Dee said. In fact, Crossroads recently saw an increase in underemployed clients who could not pay their

rent, and thus ended up homeless.

In such troubling economic times, good news is scarce. Dee summed up by describing how "one of my clients, was not only able to maintain his employment but actually got a salary increase. But he's the only one, the only one."

Staff Refuses to Settle for Less

The situation is similar at Matilda Cleveland, EOCP's transitional housing program for single mothers, says Patricia Ramirez, the site's Client Empowerment Specialist. Here, most of the women are seeking employment while trying to get their high school diplomas or complete job training programs.

In spite of the tough times, Patricia stays resolute about EOCP's goals for clients. She knows that without the right

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Aiming Higher

Behavioral Health Care Partners with EOCP

Robert Ratner, MD/MPH, is the Housing Services Director for Alameda County's Behavioral Health Care Services (BHCS). Dr. Ratner, who has worked in the mental health services community for over ten years, explained that "with funding from the Mental Health Services Act [Proposition 63], we now have an opportunity to create affordable housing specifically dedicated to people with mental health issues." EOCP and BHCS will serve homeless clients already in treatment for their substance abuse and/or mental health issues. This partnership with BHCS aims to provide culturally competent, accessible, emergency housing services for Alameda County homeless residents living with mental health issues.

On any given night, there are over 6,000 homeless people in Alameda County. Twenty-one percent suffer from some form of mental illness and 22% report drug dependency (2004 Alameda County Homeless Count Report). To those that must deal with these extra layers of hardship, achieving social stability and permanent housing remains an unachievable reality.

As waiting lists grow longer than

ever to receive residential and substance abuse treatment, EOCP will bridge the gap between detoxification and crisis response community-based organizations and emergency housing. Instead of being discharged back into the street, homeless people who receive treatment

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EOCP has dedicated ten beds to the BHCS collaboration to serve as a resource for county providers of mental health services. Case management provided at EOCP will give clients the opportunity to attain housing best suited for their needs. "Also thanks to this funding," said Dr. Ratner, "service providers across Alameda County, including EOCP, will receive additional training to better serve individuals living with mental health issues in the areas of housing matters and wellness."

This new emphasis on treating be-



Adam (right) with Raija Freeman, his Case Manager at Crossroads.

havioral issues combined with EOCP's holistic emergency housing services has made a difference for Adam, a resident recently referred through this partnership. "I've been enjoying my stay here at EOCP," Adam said. "During my time of need I wasn't shut out of the facility; I was allowed to come back once I completed a stint at Cherry Hill Detox." Clients like Adam benefit when services can be tailored to their needs and are not cut off at the first sign of relapse. At EOCP, where staff and services are empowering and professional, Adam enjoys many amenities. "I'm especially grateful for the on-site groups," he stated, "because they help me maintain my life and stay focused."

• Harsh Realities

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Patricia Ramirez (right) meets with a client at the Matilda Cleveland supportive residence for homeless families.

kind of employment, and perhaps more importantly, the right attitude, clients cannot succeed once they leave the program. "The women are definitely in a better position while they are here," Patricia asserted, "because once their basic needs are met, they are able to focus on obtaining employment or education, and work on living a more balanced life, which gives them a better chance at finding permanent housing and achieving sustainable financial success."

President Obama declared in his inaugural address: "Today I say to you that the challenges we face are real, they are serious and they are many. They will not be met easily or in a short span of time. But know this America: they will be met." And here at EOCP, where the challenges are as real, as serious, and as numerous as anywhere in the country, clients are meeting their obstacles with the help and care of staff and the peace of mind that comes from knowing that every night they will have food on the table and a warm place to sleep.

*EOCP gratefully acknowledges
our supporters and donors*

November 2008 to February 2009

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Alameda County Behavioral Health Care Services
Alameda County Office of AIDS, Ryan White
Alameda County Social Services Agency, CHASS
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Honoring funds for District 9 affordable housing projects are (left to right) Lawrence Parks, Senior Vice President, Federal Home Loan Bank of San Francisco; Elizabeth Tracey, Vice President of Community Development Banking, JP Morgan Chase; Congresswoman Barbara Lee; and EOCP Executive Director Wendy Jackson. (Photo by Mike Jones)

On February 18, EOCP proudly hosted the Federal Home Loan Bank (FHLB) award ceremony to honor Congresswoman Barbara Lee for her ardent support of affordable housing in 2008. Congresswoman Lee's recognition highlighted the FHLB grants to cities in Congressional District 9, totaling \$79 million. Through the FHLB Affordable Housing Program, EOCP received \$1 million for the construction of Crossroads, our new and green emergency housing facility.

MISSION: EOCP empowers homeless individuals and families in Alameda County to regain a life of self-reliance. We provide dignified emergency and transitional housing and compassionate, comprehensive support services that prepare homeless people to successfully transition to well being.



Destiny donated her beautiful harp performance at Crossroads in February.

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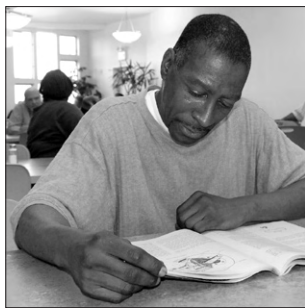
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EOCP staff Dee Hoyle (center) and Wendy Jackson (right) were thrilled to speak with Congresswoman Barbara Lee (left). (Photo by Mike Jones)



[Helping Homeless People Transition to Well-being]



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