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PANAMA CITY RESCUE MISSION PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

New Surveys, Programs, Staff and Images Mark a Turning Point in Mission History.

In response to current homeless issues, Panama City Rescue Mission has undertaken its own study, internal and external. As a result, the Mission is making major changes in its policies and image by hiring new staff, adopting a new logo, developing new programs, and publishing a new Web site to reflect those changes.

“We have been diligently reviewing in three major areas, the need in the homeless and needy population, our current policies and programs, and the Mission’s growth needs,” Thurman Chambers, Executive Director said.

The Mission began by looking at the need in the homeless population through a survey.

“We especially needed to hear what the clients were saying about their situation in life. Who are they? What are their needs? How can we help them?” Amanda Harris, Development Coordinator, said.

In February, the Mission conducted a survey of 200 clients utilizing services. The results indicated that 70 percent of the clients served at the Mission are aged 36-65 years, 75 percent are white, and 75 percent are male. At least 57 percent are high school graduates or have had some college, yet 50 percent are unemployed. At least 45 percent are receiving government benefits such as SSI Disability or Food Stamps. The leading medical conditions are mental and physical disabilities among more than half the

population. The leading reasons for homelessness are changing locations, losing jobs, alcohol and drug problems and family breakups.

Next, the Mission has reviewed long-existing policies and has established new programs and staff positions to meet the changing needs of the community.

The *Individual Advocate Ministry* was created in response to the Mission's survey findings of current homeless needs. The new ministry targets overnight guests of the Mission.

"These people are not necessarily enrolled in a particular program of addiction recovery, but still need help overcoming barriers to their self-sufficiency," Harris said.

The care manager will meet with each individual needing to utilize the Mission's shelter services for more than the traditional 3-days. They will identify the causative agent for their homelessness and form short term and long-term goals to overcome and prevent these situations in the future.

"For example," Harris said, "if John has been staying at the Mission for three days and has not made progress towards leaving, we will sit down with him and help him make specific goals to get out of his situation."

For some, Harris says, that may include enrolling in a long-term recovery program. For others, it may be helping them get in touch with local agencies or finding government resources.

"The bottom line is accountability," Harris said. The Mission is there to help people who want to help themselves. That means helping them become accountable and productive citizens in society.

The Mission also discovered the need to focus on making programs available to women and children. The Mission hopes to establish a long-term recovery program and open a center within two months for this fastest growing homeless population. It will offer job training, work therapy, Bible classes, life-skills classes and child development programs.

Among the current changes, the Mission has also created new staff positions. The Rev. Michael Martin has joined staff as the Director of Operations. Martin has more than 10 years experience in Mission work, serving Waterfront Rescue Mission in Pensacola as Chaplain, Program Director, and most recently opening the Crestview Community Care Center that allowed the needy to come and gain referrals and assistance with their many needs.

Martin said that through the years, God has challenged him in many ways, “but I see now that diverse background of difficult situations was God preparing me for His work for me right now, right here. Already God is showing the Mission where to grow and we are excited about the future.”

The Mission has also hired an evening chaplain, Lawrence Williams. Williams had volunteered preaching in the chapel for several years, and when the Mission started looking for someone to fill the position he gladly agreed to come on part time.

“This Mission reminds me of that wonderful scripture, Hebrews 13:2,” Williams said and he recited the warning, “Be careful how you entertain strangers, as some have entertained angels unawares.”

While planning had already been in place for Panama City Rescue Mission for months, the latest issues with the Downtown Improvement Board brought some additional planning considerations to light, such as facility and location needs.

A strategic planning committee is in place taking advice from other Rescue Missions and community leaders on developing programs and is considering new facility and location possibilities. It is scheduled to report to the City Commissioners in two months.

“Hopefully by then, we will have a better picture of the role of the Mission in the community and the needs not only for now, but for the future,” Executive Director Chambers said, “There will be much prayer taking place between now and then.”

For more information on the Mission, please go to www.pcrmission.org or call 850-769-0783.