



# Homeless but not Hopeless

*Homeward Bound's 2nd Chance Program Gives Hope*

By Brenda Everman Wilcott

***Being homeless is defined as the state or condition of having no home; of living in the streets; under viaducts; in emergency shelters; being foreclosed upon or evicted from a dwelling.***

So where are the homeless in our community? They're everywhere. They can be found in shelters, under viaducts, places like the Oasis and Good Samaritan Inn, bus stations, post offices, police stations, back alleys and exiting prisons.

For example, let's examine the case of Reyna C. Rodriguez. Reyna was incarcerated for dealing drugs at her former home in Chicago. She was scheduled to be released from prison in September of 2010 and was most likely destined for homelessness. But because of the new re-entry program through Homeward Bound, Reyna was given a second chance.

A relatively new off-shoot of Homeward Bound, funded by the Department of Justice, is called 2nd Chance, which is a mentoring program. 2nd Chance has been specifically developed to address the problems of those trying to enter back into society from prison. On April 9, 2007 President Bush signed into law the Second Chance Act.

The purposes of the Act are: to break the cycle of criminal recidivism (returning to prison); increase public safety; to rebuild ties between offenders and their families; to promote stable families and communities; and to assist offenders reentering the community from incarceration in order to establish a self-sustaining and law-abiding life.

Reyna chose to be released in Decatur in order to establish a new life and new friends. If a prisoner is released back into the same, exact world from which they came, the chances of going back to prison (recidivism) are much higher. Same circle of friends; same cycle of crime. Really a no-brainer when you think about it. Breaking negative cycles allows for higher success rates, therefore less chance of committing the same crime again.

To meet these great needs of the homeless, Homeward Bound was formed in 1995 by heavy-weight Partners: Dove Inc.; Decatur Housing Authority; Decatur Macon County Opportunities Corporation; Heritage Behavioral Health Center; Community Investment Corporation of Decatur, Inc.; City of Decatur and Neighborhood Housing Development Corporation.

Homeward Bound is a program within Dove, Inc., which is a faith-based organization. Homeward Bound provides supportive services, transitional housing and innovative programs to Decatur area homeless families and individuals.

The Homeless Council Continuum of Care was instrumental in forming Homeward Bound. This umbrella organization is made up of more than 70 agencies, as well as individuals who cover the spectrum of services to assist families and individuals toward obtaining and maintaining permanent housing.

The Continuum meets bimonthly to exchange information and address gaps in services, current legislative issues and public awareness. This council is open to anyone (including you!) and is a terrific way to become involved in, and informed about, the good (Godly) work of providing services to homeless individuals and families in Macon County. Homeward Bound has also been instrumental in establishing the Decatur Jobs Council and employees continue to be closely involved in its efforts.

There are many problems for those individuals, like Reyna, being released back into society. Specifically, those problems are covered within a Top Five list:

1. Employment
2. Housing
3. Public Benefits (food and medical)
4. Obtaining identification
5. Family reunification (support system)

Reyna is originally from Cuba with the accent to prove it. Reyna explains in her own words, "I no want to be around

the same people who I got in trouble with. This is my blessing coming here to Decatur. I've been making friends here. I'd rather have 3 good friends than 20 bad people around me."

When Reyna was incarcerated, it was under an alias, thereby hindering the solving of problem number 4, mentioned earlier.

"We had to help her get all her ID," says Re-entry Coordinator, Tamika Hall. "Everything she needed done, we were going to help her get everything. She just got her medical card a few weeks ago." Reyna is diabetic and has a lot of medical needs. The combination of medical needs and needing all new ID proved to be a formidable challenge, which 2nd Chance hit head on and won on Reyna's behalf.

"I have food, a place to live and they help me with medicine," shares Reyna gratefully. Tamika is one of Reyna's personal heroes, having been her key case-worker in the beginning of her transition. In the meantime, Tamika has been promoted to Coordinator, but remains Reyna's friend and supporter.

One of the goals of LIVING Christian magazine is to share with our readers how they can help specific ministry areas and efforts. As with all of the ministry efforts taking place in our community, the need and the opportunities are great.

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2nd Chance is in need of mentors. There is certainly no shortage of individuals who need mentoring. A mentor is an advocate, a friend, a resource, a positive role model and a listening ear for the mentee.

Specifically, in order to qualify as a mentor, you must:

- be 25 years of age
- be able to pass a background check required by the Department of Justice
- participate in an orientation program
- successfully complete an 8 hour training program from Richland Community College, a partner in the project
- be willing to work in partnership with the project Case Manager
- be willing to commit to 4 months pre release and 12 months post release to the mentee
- be willing to complete all volunteer requirements set forth by the Decatur Correctional Center (DCC) and Decatur Adult Transitional Center (DATC)
- not be a relative of an inmate at volunteer sites, DCC or DATC

Volunteer mentors, after successful completion of requirements and training, are then carefully paired with mentees leaving incarceration, to become an important

part of a support system that will ultimately lead into successful transition into society.

The need for male mentors is great. Okay gentlemen, time to step up and honor the Word of our Lord from Matthew 25:37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' 40 "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

Reyna was in prison, and was visited by those, who have now become her church family. "I recommend this program if you're coming from prison and choose to do the right thing," Reyna joyfully declares.

**For any type of information  
or presentation on the program,  
contact Tamika Hall or Harold Thomas  
at (217) 428-6616.**



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