

# Images

NEIGHBORS, FAMILY HEALTH

AND BETTER LIVING

87

## Advocate seeks shelter for homeless

By MAURICE WEAVER  
STAFF WRITER

**J**ackie Hill of Express Home Program is a good Samaritan.

She's a surrogate mother, a positive role model, and a conduit for vital information on training and assistance for society's underdogs.

Since 1988, Hill has converted her modest home in Maywood into a halfway house for homeless or pregnant teens who need a place to stay.

"I want to work with everybody. But people like me who work day-to-day with homeless people, the churches don't reach out to," she said.

At present, Maywood doesn't have a homeless shelter. Mayor Joe Freelon said some churches in the village offer shelter, but an organized facility does not exist.

"I would like to see Maywood do something for the homeless," he said. "Any place that we can find open, we will call and make provisions."

Hill said she has presented the mayor with a proposal for a viable homeless program for Maywood and surrounding communities.

"We can no longer put blinders on and act as if there is no problem in the western suburbs," she said.

Hill envisions a homeless committee that would set up a plan for fund disbursements, as well as the criteria for emergency funding to a particular family or individual. Another component would provide motivational training and services to the head of a household in order to regain a positive and productive status in the community.

To see firsthand how badly people are in need of help, all one has to do is look at Hill's dining room table, which is filled with overdue electric and telephone bills. She said she averages between 10 and 15 calls a day from distraught, depressed, addicted or battered people.

"The majority of kids I see are 18 (years and younger) and pregnant. Social service agencies won't have anything to do with them," she said.



Jonathan Sweeney/Pioneer Press

While Deverin checks information on the HealthDyne recorder, a device which records the vital signs of her unborn child, Jackie Hill

(right) contacts a hospital with the information and entertains Deverin's daughter, Royale, 1.

## PLCCA gives homeless priority

At Proviso-Leyden Council for Community Action, inquiries about homeless shelters are given the highest priority, said Luther Manning, vice president of program operations.

"We do things immediately. We put them up at the Chicago American Hotel on Mannheim Road," he said. "We also network with shelters in Chicago, Elgin, all over."

PLCCA no longer provides transportation for the homeless.

"We used to get funding from our parent (organization), the Community Economic Development Association, for bus tokens," said

Manning. He said there is a lengthy waiting list for affordable housing.

## Needs help

Jackie Hill of Express Home Program is hopeful that someone will read about the need for housing for homeless people and will call her at 450-1500 offering a basement apartment or an extra room.

"I need money to buy people food and clothing," she said. "Last week, I placed four people from Bellwood, two from Forest Park and a Broadview homeowner."

## They're tired of being on the street

By MAURICE WEAVER  
STAFF WRITER

**N**enee and Keisha, bright, precocious 12- and 13-year old sisters, are homeless.

The siblings attend a Maywood elementary school during the week and then catch the el to a Chicago shelter in order to beat a 5 p.m. curfew.

"A shelter should have rules, but we can't even play in the park. We can't have any visitors," said Keisha. "We get up at 6 a.m. to eat breakfast, dinner is at 5 p.m. and (we're in) bed at 8 p.m."

There are no homeless shelters in Maywood.

In the last seven years, Nenee, Keisha and their recovering addict mother have lived at 12 different shelters in the Chicago area since relocating from Texas.

Jackie Hill, a homeless advocate who buys clothes, food and medicine out of her own pocket for the needy, met the family six years ago when the girls' mother entered a drug rehabilitation program.

"I kept them for four months. When their mother came out, there was a big problem because the kids didn't want to leave," said Hill.

Hill convinced her neighbor, a single mother named Aretha, to allow the

girls to move in with her. Unfortunately, Nenee and Keisha were accused of stealing jewelry, destroying clothes and eating too much food.

"Aretha threatened to kick my butt. Nenee jumped in the fight," said Keisha.

"They're tired of being on the street," said Hill, who added that she averages between 10 and 15 calls a day, from homeless people in the western suburbs.

Keisha begins crying uncontrollably when asked about her mother. Nenee tries to console her.

"I believe that it's all my mother's fault. She sends her (Continued on page 88)



## ■ Images *Continued from page 87*

prisoner friend money instead of us," said Keisha, her head bowed. "We have to borrow money for clothes, food, even underwear."

Nenee and Keisha said their mother's relatives have also taken advantage of them.

"Our aunt on Chicago's West Side really treated us bad. She would take our public aid money and buy furniture and spend it on her children," said Nenee.

When asked what she misses most about living in her own home, Keisha replied: "Nothing. I never experienced it (a place to call home) for a good period of time."

Keisha said living in a first-floor apartment at the Chicago Housing Authority's Dearborn complex was much worse than living on the streets.

"I remember rats coming in through the window. We slept on the floor together," she said.

Both Keisha and Nenee are optimistic about the future. Keisha said she wants to grow up and become a psychiatrist. In June, they will decide to either stay with their mother or reside with an aunt in Maryland.

Deverin is another example of a woman in need who sought Hill's emergency assistance.

"In 1991, I was living with my mother. That was my last permanent home. She died of a heart attack that year. I couldn't afford to pay rent," said Deverin, as she bounced her 1-year-old daughter, Royale, on her knee.

At the time, Deverin had been on disability for eight years with bipolar disorder, commonly known as manic depression. Deverin had no other option but to move in

with an older sister in Maywood.

"She charged me \$300 a month for rent. I was making \$475 a month in a full-time job as a medical technician, and I was seven months pregnant," said Deverin.

Deverin's doctor had taken her off medication for her mental disorder when she found out that she was pregnant. A four-month stay at Loyola University Medical Center was followed by an additional month of testing at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Deverin said she made close to 50 telephone calls to area social service agencies. Often, she was told about waiting lists and requirements of marriage with no children to qualify for help. At wits end, Deverin decided to move into a 10 x 12 room in another sister's house, where she was denied access to the refrigerator, constantly picked on and forced to pay half the mortgage.

After six months of being turned down by a variety of social service agencies, she found Hill's listing in the yellow pages.

"I talked to Jackie," she said. "She helped me get a studio apartment."

Deverin only stayed in that apartment for five weeks. She said her roommate, another single mother, was too disruptive.

"It was not a nurturing environment. I was threatened in my own home," she said.

Good news came last week when Deverin learned of a one-bedroom apartment she can afford. She plans to take it after the delivery of her second child.

"I'm elated," said Deverin, who plans to go back to school and become a physician's assistant.



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## Couple involved in helping the homeless

By CASPER RICHARDSON

STAFF WRITER

Aside from working together to provide shelter, food and clothing for five of their eight children, Maywood residents Jackie Hill and Michael Bosby are helping homeless people in the Western Suburbs to get off the streets and onto their feet both financially and emotionally.

Hill runs the Express Home Program, a nonprofit organization which provides guidance and encouragement to homeless people so they can make better lives for themselves.

As executive director of the organization, Hill supervises her children Michael Henderson, 16, Shantae Stevenson, 16, Corey Babin, 16, Knikyta Hill, 13, Jataryla Hill, 10, and 6-month-old Ebonique Bosby, who are her staff of volunteers. They visit shelters on holidays, collect clothing, locate affordable housing in the area, provide job training and find employment for their clients.

Bosby, when he is not working as a film processor, runs Joyn Productions Network — Express Home's only contributor. Through his organization, Bosby arranges and promotes musical concerts, social events and educational exhibitions.

Bosby's company has two functions: It provides financial backing for Hill's program, and it exposes Chicago area talent to audiences they might not find through their own efforts.

"It's kind of a unique situation because it's not one thing. It's like one hand washes the other. You're doing something you love and you're helping the homeless," Bosby said. "Everyone who comes into the organization understands that their time is donated. The only thing we guarantee is the exposure."

All proceeds from JPN-sponsored events are donated to Home Express.

"We do not receive state funds. Everything we do is out of our pockets and off our kids' backs," Hill said. "I'm trying to slow down (for the number of people helped) because I went through approximately \$10,000 of my own money (last year) buying furniture and

paying (other) peoples' security deposits."

Since 1980, Hill has received 1,289 applications from homeless people wishing to take advantage of her services. Of that number, 678 received job training and 409 eventually became employed. Hill also placed 285 of the total number of applicants in shelters and 343 in temporary housing, and helped secure permanent housing for 618 applicants.

Initially, Hill said she recruited applicants from the streets and shelters in Chicago. Now people in need find her either through word of mouth or in the telephone book.

Express Home is the offshoot of another program Hill began in 1985 to help veterans find jobs and affordable housing in Proviso Township. Hill, who worked in special investigations with the U.S. Air Force, did similar work when she was stationed in Misawa, Japan. But Hill soon discovered that veterans were not the ones who needed help the most.

"I started noticing homeless people on the street, and I thought maybe I can help them by modifying my program," she said. "I felt I had to do something. If they had a little bit of help, they could get back on their feet."

Hill says she is only interested in helping people who want to change their attitudes and behavior patterns so they can become self-sufficient.

"(Many homeless people) didn't just get in that predicament. But by the time they get to a shelter, they are so down on themselves," Hill said. "They are so down on the system, which they should be. But I try to stress to them not to wait on the system. If you can't help yourself, I can't help you."

Hill said a lack of funding and commitment to established facilities for the homeless are major reasons why so many people fall through the cracks of the system. She explained that homeless people come from all walks of life and all educational backgrounds.

"You can't put them in a category and say everybody who is homeless is the same. That's not true," she said.

Because of this, there is a need for individualized motivation and skills training so

(Continued on page 12)

## Couple *Continued from page 10*

people get the tools necessary to become self-sufficient and keep them off the streets for good.

Hill said she continues to help the homeless because, in some ways, she identifies with them. When she was a young girl, her mother had a bit of bad luck and her family moved in with relatives.

"To me, I was homeless. I know what it felt like not to have my own home. All that stuck with me," Hill said, adding that the relatives said cruel things to remind her that the living arrangements were temporary.

Bosby supports his wife's efforts because helping oth-

ers is part of his character.

"I've always been the type of person to look out for other people," he said, adding that he often gives money to people on the street who ask him for it. "I know some people run scams, but I'm a sucker for it every time because I don't know if it's legitimate or not."

Hill said she and her husband are currently working to raise enough money to buy a building, somewhere in Proviso Township, and convert it into a shelter and job training center. Hill stressed there is an urgent need for a suburban homeless shelter since

most places are located in Chicago.

Hill acknowledged that the couple cannot resolve the suburban homeless problem on their own.

"We need support. We need everybody's help because it is not one man's problem. Being homeless is a state of mind. If you are living under a roof and you don't own it, you are homeless, too, because at any time (the owner) can tell you to get out," Hill said. "You don't know what's going to happen tomorrow, and everybody better start waking up and realizing that."