

Neighborhood Times

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A helping agency goes far beyond housing or feeding the homeless.

ASAP goes far beyond housing or feeding the homeless. It works to help them become self-sufficient.

Case manager Tiquila Turner logs onto the e-mail account of Melvin Oliver, left, at the HUB, a program designed to help the homeless that recently moved into a former business at 1055 Fourth St. S.



By Waveney Ann Moore
Times Staff Writer

Two men and a woman sorted through clean clothing to wear after showering Thursday morning. The soiled garments they'd slept in the night before would be left behind to be washed and dried and used again by others who also had no homes.

That's how it works at ASAP Homeless Services, an agency tucked out of sight on a quiet side street near St. Petersburg's downtown. Over the years she has run the program, executive director Karen Bolden has grown familiar with the depressing cycle of men and women who appear each weekday morning for sweet rolls and coffee, to

FAST FACTS

ASAP Homeless Services

423 11th Ave. S., St. Petersburg, asaphomeless.org, or (727) 823-5665
The HUB, 1055 Fourth St. S., asapthehub.org

shower and change and then disappear into the streets only to return again.

Bolden is behind a new effort to change the pattern. This weekend ASAP was set to officially launch Hands United in Business — the HUB — a program designed to help the homeless become self-sufficient.

"You cannot maintain housing without

employment," said Bolden, who has headed ASAP for six years.

Initially, said board member and treasurer Dennis Shea, the ASAP board was hesitant to commit scarce funds to a new program. Since it has been launched, though, the effort has expanded beyond computer and job training.

"It sort of broadened out to all kinds of people coming in and giving seminars. I think we are at the point now of basically saying that the HUB will become a permanent part of ASAP. It's no longer experimental," Shea said.

"It's almost a natural extension of what we do, anyway. A lot of the people have criminal backgrounds, and a lot of people have been out on the

streets a long time and have been out of the game."

Last week, Bolden gave a tour of the 4,200-square-foot center set up in the former Pick-a-Deli at 1055 Fourth St. S, next door to ASAP. The agency began leasing the former deli building last August and hopes eventually to purchase it, Bolden said.

On Thursday morning, unmatched desks and chairs were neatly arranged along with tiny, child-sized furniture for children from homeless families. There were computers, shelves lined with books, an organ, a train set and toward the back, a few racks of clothes and shoes for job hunters. Besides learning how to write resumes and complete online applications, the men and women who use the HUB also will get advice about dressing for work. Each client will get five

outfits once they get a job, Bolden said.

"We're seeking employers at this point. We had to start at some point," she said. "We're getting (job seekers) community voice mail, so when they fill out applications, they have a way for employers to contact them."

Clients also will be set up with e-mail. The agency, which is helping clients tackle criminal records, has arranged assistance from the Public Defender's Office and other legal aid, Bolden said.

Founded in 1986, ASAP provides weekday breakfast, showers and clean clothing at its drop-in center and emergency housing for families and individuals in 11 apartments off 11th Avenue S. The programs are funded

with government and private grants and donations.

The new HUB effort has received a Community Development Block Grant from the city of St. Petersburg and one from the University of South Florida St. Petersburg. Another grant from the Hobbs Foundation has been used to establish a media center for clients' children.

Shea says increased funding is imperative for the program to grow and improve.

"It's evolving," he said. "So far, nothing but good things are happening. It's a chance to take ASAP to the next step. It's not just a place to get a shower and a meal; now it's a place to get help and get back into the system."

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11

apartments for homeless families and individuals

1,444

homeless clients served last year

862

clients who used the drop-in center

\$25,000

monthly budget