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Volunteers of America of **Indiana**

# messenger

## COMBATING HOMELESSNESS IN INDIANA AND SUSTAINING PERMANENT HOUSING



*Larcina Hicks, Transition Coach, works with a client applying for HPRP assistance.*

Volunteers of America of Indiana, Inc. is one of twenty Indianapolis agencies that was selected to administer \$5.8 million through the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP) under Title XII of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. These funds will help an estimated 2,044 households in the Indianapolis area, according to the United Way of Central Indiana.

For individuals and families who are at risk of becoming homeless, the funds will help pay short and medium-term assistance, security and utility deposits, utility payments, moving cost assistance and motel/hotel vouchers.

For those already homeless, the funds will be used to help arrange, coordinate, monitor and deliver housing-related services. That can include outreach and engagement, legal services, developing individualized housing plans, housing search and placement, and credit repair.

Unlike many direct assistance programs, this program can provide up to 18 months of support for participants, but requires that they be recertified every three months to show progress toward housing stability.

The recent economic downturn has shown increased numbers of families needing direct financial assistance with food, shelter and utilities. There is a significant increase in those who are homeless because of lost jobs, evictions, or under employment.

The largest populations served at Volunteers of America of Indiana have been the disabled, women with children, and Veterans. Seemingly, those populations have had fewer support systems and have been unsuccessful in navigating the complex social service system to obtain needed services. One such case is Ms. Tammy Brown (not real name).

Ms. Brown is a 53 year old waitress who has struggled to make ends meet for the past few months. She reported that the

economic downturn has had a dramatic effect on the restaurant business. As a result, she is barely making ends meet on the \$2.14 per hour salary plus tips. Ms. Brown contacted Larcina Hicks, HPRP Case Manager to discuss possible resources for assistance with back rent of over \$2,000.00 and utilities. Ms. Brown stated, "I am at the end of my rope and I do not know where to turn. I have received an eviction notice with no where to turn." By enrolling Tammy in the HPRP program, Volunteers of America was able to stop the eviction, and provide direct financial assistance to cover rental arrearage and utilities. Subsequently, Tammy has developed a housing plan with the case manager, received employment leads, and will obtain rental assistance for three months in an effort to prevent homelessness and sustain permanent housing.

The HPRP grant has had a dramatic impact in fighting homelessness in Indianapolis. Since program inception in mid-October 2009, the agency has served over 65 families totaling \$50,000.00 in direct financial assistance for rent and utilities. Larcina Hicks, HPRP Case Manager states, "Volunteers of America of Indiana is truly living the mission of *offering hope, restoring dignity and transforming lives*. Many of the individuals we see simply need that boost in an effort to obtain and maintain self-sufficiency and prevent homelessness."

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## THE VALUE OF "HOME"

by *Tim Campbell, President/CEO*

Here at Volunteers of America of Indiana, we serve many different groups of people who have a wide variety of needs. However, a common element among all of these individuals is a desire to create a stable, secure place to live. It is almost impossible to have a normal life without a safe, stable place to call "home". Unfortunately, in these challenging economic times, there are often multiple barriers to finding secure housing. Many of our neighbors are unemployed or under-employed, and others find housing options limited due to past criminal offenses. It is all too easy to find yourself and your family "on the street" with seemingly nowhere to turn for help. Now, Volunteers of America is able to assist many of those faced with a housing crisis.

We are very pleased to be part of our community's response to homelessness through the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program. Assistance is provided to those facing eviction as well as to those who have

already lost their housing. This assistance can take the form of security and utility deposits, rent assistance, moving costs, and motel vouchers. We understand that a family's financial problems may not be resolved immediately, and that the threat of homelessness can linger for some time. Therefore, eligibility for assistance can be extended for up to eighteen months.

In the first six months of the program, we have already helped more than 65 Indianapolis families avoid the trauma of falling into homelessness. The stories of these families are powerful. They challenge us to consider how we would respond if faced with similar life circumstances. If homelessness loomed as a real threat for us, how much would we value a chance to create a stable home environment for our loved ones? Our position is a simple one – the best way to combat homelessness is to prevent it. Thanks to the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program and dedicated Case Managers at Volunteers of America, many local families are making "home" a reality, not just a dream.

### OUR MISSION

*Offer Hope... Restore Dignity... Transform Lives...*

*Volunteers of America of Indiana is a faith-based organization that provides life-changing services to enhance the physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual needs of individuals by providing counseling, rehabilitation, job placement, and residential services. We serve individuals transitioning from the correctional system, the elderly, chronically addicted, and mentally ill.*

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927 N. Pennsylvania • Indianapolis, IN 46204  
317-686-5800 Phone • 317-686-5810 Fax  
[www.voain.org](http://www.voain.org)

Timothy R. Campbell  
*President/CEO*

Mary Leffler, *Editor*

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## Valita Johnson: A Volunteer Who Lives the Mission Through the Words Travel Program

**Words Travel** is the first national literacy and family strengthening program for incarcerated parents and their children. This venture is a partnership between Scholastic Inc., the global children's publishing and media company and Volunteers of America.

As part of **Words Travel**, parents gain familiarity with the different genres of children's literature and learn about conversational reading—how best to read aloud to their children. Through the six-week **Words Travel** program, incarcerated parents participate in a series of classes to learn how they can play a key role in supporting their child's reading development, even while separated by incarceration. Parents then read and record books on tape for their children. The books and tapes are either sent to the children or given to them at visits to the facility. Children who participate in the program receive a special book bag, personal tape player and other supplies to use. The children are able to keep the books, tapes and supplies so they can listen to their parent's voice and read along with the stories as often as they like. **Words Travel** provides a unique way for parents and children to remain connected during a time of separation, as well as supports and encourages reading by both the parent and their children.

Volunteers of America of Indiana has been participating in the **Words Travel** program since its inception in 2002. The program was originally delivered at the Indiana Women's Prison; however most recently it is being delivered at our own reentry center – Theodora House. The program provides a great opportunity to engage volunteers in our work. One great example is Valita Johnson.

Ms. Johnson began her volunteer service in October 2009 when she used her background in data analysis and computer skills to work behind the scenes to enhance our **Words Travel** database. Valita was excited about the program, how it empowers parents and children to read, and was willing to help in any way she could. In early 2010, Valita was able to get more directly involved with the program and took the necessary training to become a **Words Travel** Instructor. Her dedication to the program and the Theodora House residents is an inspiration.

One Words Travel participant stated, "*Ms. Valita has been so helpful and welcoming! I was embarrassed about my reading level before the Words Travel program. I thought about quitting many times. This has been such a great opportunity for me and my kids! I am so grateful for this opportunity. I can't wait to get back home and read books to my kids. I love to read for myself now too! I can tell a difference in my reading in just the short time I have been involved in the class and now I read anything I get my hands on!*"

Volunteer Coordinator Sara Pugh states, "*Valita is dedicated, dependable, and truly cares about supporting family connections. Through her gift of time and talent, she has been able to live the mission of "offering hope, restoring dignity, and transforming lives."*

**Words Travel** will soon be starting new sessions at Theodora House and plans are to expand the program into the Marion County Jail, Brandon Hall and Hope Hall. More volunteers are needed for this program. If you, or anyone you know, may be interested in becoming a **Words Travel** instructor, please contact Sara Pugh, Coordinator of Volunteer Services at 317-224-2616. You may also contact her by email at [spugh@voain.org](mailto:spugh@voain.org).



# BROWNSTONE MANOR SPRUCES UP FOR SPRING!

Brownstone Manor apartments located in Terre Haute has leaped into spring with a landscape revitalization project. Residents were treated to new flower beds and plantings that outline the building, plus a new coat of stain and seal for the much used Gazebo.

Built in 1993, the 52 unit senior housing complex offers senior citizens, age 62 or over, quality living at a price based on their income. Each apartment consists of one bedroom with bathroom, living room and kitchen. Water, sewer, trash removal and gas (heating) are included. Tenants are responsible for electric, phone and cable (both optional). On-site maintenance and management services are provided.

The staff members at Brownstone Manor arrange for fun, educational, and informative activities for tenants to enjoy such as group meals, holiday activities, educational seminars and blood pressure screenings.

Conveniently located at the corner of 12<sup>th</sup> and Ohio, Brownstone Manor is close to downtown Terre Haute, with easy access to churches, banks and medical services. Brownstone Manor offers a chance for seniors to live among a community of their peers.

Many residents have been out and about enjoying the new landscape and spring weather. The next time you travel to Terre Haute, stop by and visit Brownstone Manor. The staff will be glad to show you around and our residents are always eager to welcome guests and potential new neighbors!



## VOLUNTEERS OF AMERICA MINISTERS GATHER FOR RETREAT

Sunday April 18 through Tuesday, April 20, 2010, Volunteers of America ministers from the Central Region gathered at beautiful and serene Maumee Bay Lodge and Conference Center in Oregon, Ohio for a Minister's Retreat. Ministers from the affiliates of Indiana, Northwest Ohio, Greater Ohio, Michigan, Western New York and the National Office were in attendance.

Volunteers of America ministers were joined by Dr. Juliet Spencer, Pastor of the St. Charles United Methodist Church, located in Destrehan, Louisiana. Leading ministers through sessions on Identifying Our Spiritual Gifts and Using Gifts in our Ministry, Dr. Spencer enriched and blessed the retreat participants.



Ministers from the Indiana affiliate in attendance were Tim Campbell, Anna Caldwell and Mary Leffler.

## VECTREN FOUNDATION MAKES GRANT TO VOLUNTEERS OF AMERICA



President and CEO, Tim Campbell, receives a \$5,000 check from the Vectren Foundation from Board member, Laurie Thornton, who serves as Manager of Government Affairs at Vectren Corporation. This gift was the first from a major company or foundation in the southern Indiana region for Volunteers of America of Indiana. It was the initial gift that launched the Healing Families Program at the Hope Hall facility in Evansville in early 2010.

## NAP Tax Credits Provide Benefit to Donors and Counseling Services to Clients

Volunteers of America of Indiana received Neighborhood Assistance Program (NAP) tax credits for the fiscal year 2009-10 in the amount of \$6,279 from the Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority (IHCDA). This award allowed us to leverage \$12,558 in donations for our Healing Families Program counseling services. We also acquired several new donors through this opportunity. Our NAP credits are sold out for this year but we will be applying again in the next round. Look for more information in the next issue of The Messenger or check our website frequently at [www.voain.org](http://www.voain.org). Donations of \$100 or more are eligible for a 50% state income tax credit on your Indiana taxes. For example, a \$250 donation would equal \$125 in Neighborhood Assistance Program tax credits. Your NAP contribution can also be claimed as a federal tax deduction, if you itemize. More information can be obtained by contacting the Development Office at VOA Indiana at 317-686-5807.



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Volunteers of America of Indiana  
for information on ways to make a  
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*Consult your tax advisor regarding these  
types of gifts and estate planning.*

