



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **CROSSWALK AND WOMEN'S HEARTH ONLY HUD-FUNDED SUPPORTIVE SERVICE PROGRAMS IN SPOKANE**

Spokane, WA: An important part of the City of Spokane's homelessness response system may surprise you – building relationships and trust are the cornerstone of this response, and it's not a housing program at all, but an engagement program.

Only two HUD-funded Supportive Service programs (SSOs) for homeless persons are left in Spokane: Crosswalk and the Women's Hearth. They uniquely work to engage people in relationship before placing them in housing. Despite significant funding losses in the past years as the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) refocused its funding towards housing-only programs, Crosswalk and the Women's Hearth continue to do a tremendous job of assisting people to move from homelessness to housing. The numbers tell an impressive story.

During the past two years, Crosswalk (a program of Volunteers of America) exited 190 participants from its program. 73% of those leaving Crosswalk were considered successful exits, meaning they entered a safe and permanent place to live. That's nearly 140 young people who moved off the streets and into housing. They do this by minimizing barriers to housing, such as finding deposits, talking to landlords, providing household items and community, and building the skills youth require to be successful in housing. They do it by retaining staff who are recognized and provide consistency. They do it by including the participant in decisions that impact them.

The Women's Hearth, a program of Transitions, works mainly with women coming from homelessness, and their track record is similarly successful. During the past two years, the Women's Hearth has helped nearly 100 women move into stable housing. They do it by creating a safe place, a place where women eventually ask for things that in the past they were told they didn't deserve. Just like Crosswalk, they minimize barriers to service, welcoming any woman who wants to move forward. Here are some thoughts about the Women's Hearth from the women who use it:

"Thank you for having the support services that have made it easier for me to do a housing search while I was here."

"This place is a godsend and I don't know what most of us would do without it but i sincerely hope for all involved that we don't have to find out. Thanks to all the people who make the Hearth possible. God bless u all."

Considering this same two year time frame, these two programs have survived with very few financial resources: each program receives approximately \$21,055 in federal funding annually. For the rest of their funding, they continually search.

The Women's Hearth has seen federal funding drop from a high in 2014 to this low point. The story is similar at Crosswalk. Crosswalk once received \$250,000 in various federal funds, and now also is at its lowest amount ever.

Despite their successes, these programs face a daily struggle to stay open, while continuing missions that result in the serving of 1500 women annually at the Women's Hearth, and 600 youth at Crosswalk.

Here's a story of one person benefitting from the Women's Hearth: A year and a half ago Janeen had a job, insurance and an apartment in Colorado. She lost her insurance and with it the medication and therapy that was successfully treating her mental illness. Things spiraled out of control and she lost her job and her apartment. She had an old friend in WA who invited her to come and live here, promising her a job and a place to stay. When Janeen got here she learned that there was no job and her friend was actively using drugs. She put all of her belongings back in her car and after several weeks without medication checked herself into the hospital. She was released from the hospital in November, went to Hope House and from there found her way to the Women's Hearth. We were able to get her a Section 8 voucher, she applied for Medicaid and got state assistance. She is now stable on medication, and today, May 7 she signed a lease. Janeen said, "I was really scared of being homeless, this has been an amazing, heartbreaking, beautiful and wretched experience. I am grateful for it and I learned from it but I am ready to stop being homeless now. I couldn't have made my way without the Women's Hearth and Hope House. I have felt very welcomed and sheltered here."

A Crosswalk story - this is a former youth who now works in the shelter.

"I find it peculiar that we're not aware of some of the moments that impact our lives as they happen to us. It's later on in life while reflecting on the past that we can recall these moments for what they were. Crosswalk was one of the biggest for me. While living there I was ignorant to the effect the staff and volunteers would someday have on me. Let alone the emotional attachments I would have to them and the building itself. Towards the end of my time at Crosswalk, I knew there was staff I would remember fondly and some I would deeply miss but I didn't realize they had impacted my life and ultimately the kind of person I wanted to be. If you had all day to sit down and talk with me I could reminisce and go on and on about these people and moments but I would like to tell you about two.

I had a horrible week and was coming down off drugs. I fell asleep during school and my teacher Ken, came back and woke me up. He said if I was going to [be] here I needed to be up doing school work. I just lost it, I was so upset and I just started yelling at him and saying how horrible my week had been, this is where I lived, I had no place else to [go], I needed sleep. He said if I continue this behavior that I needed to leave the building and I looked at him and I told him I hate you. With the most serene calmness he said to me 'That's okay Shawna, you can hate me, and together we can take that hate and turn it into something positive, how about you sit down and write about it.'

All the anger and frustration fled my body. I sat down and wrote about the week I had and when I finished I felt uplifted. Looking back on the moment I realized it was the first time in a long time I felt understood, I realized he had taken the time to observe and get to know me and knew that writing was something I enjoyed and soothed me and he knew that. Today I strive to respect and observe without prejudice like Ken Jernberg.

In a time when inconsistency was all I knew, there was one constant in my life, Megan. No matter who came and went at Crosswalk, Megan was always there. She was the first adult I learned to trust, slowly building a relationship without me even being aware it was happening. Nurturing my achievements and healthy choices, while never pushing me away during the times I made horrible decisions. She was the mentor I never asked for but desperately needed. In a time when abandonment was all I knew, she never abandoned me, never gave up. She got me through the darkest time of my life, never getting credit or praise. I hope she knows now what I didn't know then, I needed her and she saved me. So while Crosswalk did prepare me for adulthood and shelter me in my hours of need, ultimately it was the staff and the volunteers that truly impacted me."

Both programs value the federal focus on housing first, but they know that supporting a person in their journey towards success in that housing is equally as critical. But right now, it doesn't appear that the federal government recognizes this reality.

**Volunteers of America:** Part of a national nonprofit organization, Volunteers of America of Eastern Washington & Northern Idaho helps the most vulnerable and under-served people in the Inland Northwest to achieve their full potential. VOA works to prevent homelessness where we can—specifically among high-risk and foster youth and families on the brink. Founded in 1985, Crosswalk is an emergency shelter, a school drop-out prevention program, and a group of lifesaving and life-changing programs dedicated to breaking the cycle of youth homelessness. In an average year, Crosswalk serves more than 1,000 youth.

**Transitions:** Since 1995, Transitions has been helping women, children, and families rebuild lives affected by abuse, addiction, mental illness, poverty, and homelessness. Transitions is made up of five programs: Women's Hearth, Miryam's House, Transitional Living Center, EduCare and New Leaf Bakery Cafe; the Home Yard Cottages will be added as a sixth program this fall. The Women's Hearth creates a safe space for women who have experienced trauma and homelessness by offering a "hearth" of welcome, respect and community. We offer access to showers, phones, hygiene items and a weekly food bank. Staff meet each woman where she is at on her path to stability by providing crisis intervention and access to legal services, housing, health care and mental health services. In 2017, the Hearth served 1,523 women who completed 16,596 visits with us, building trusting, life-changing relationships.

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