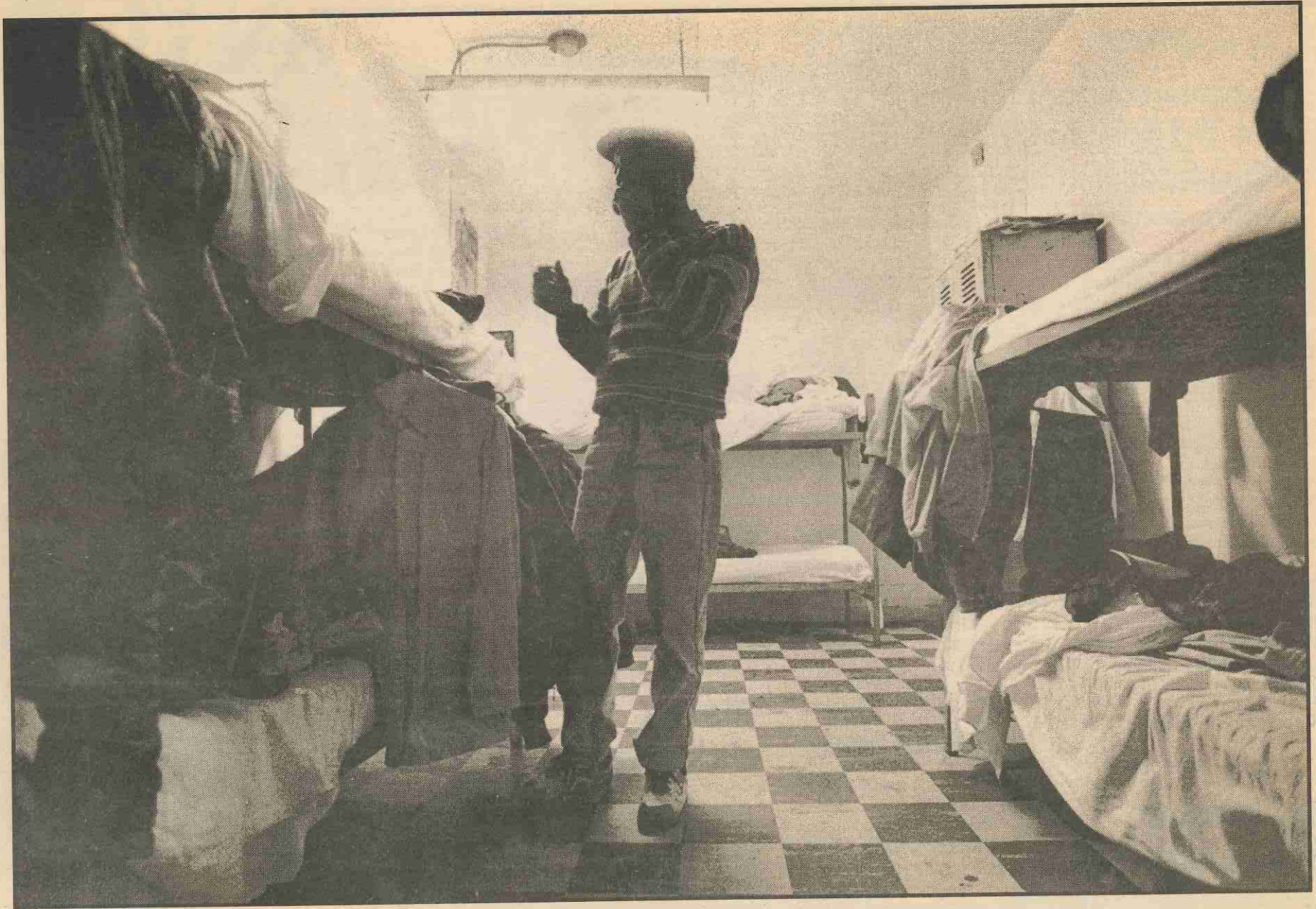


Cover story



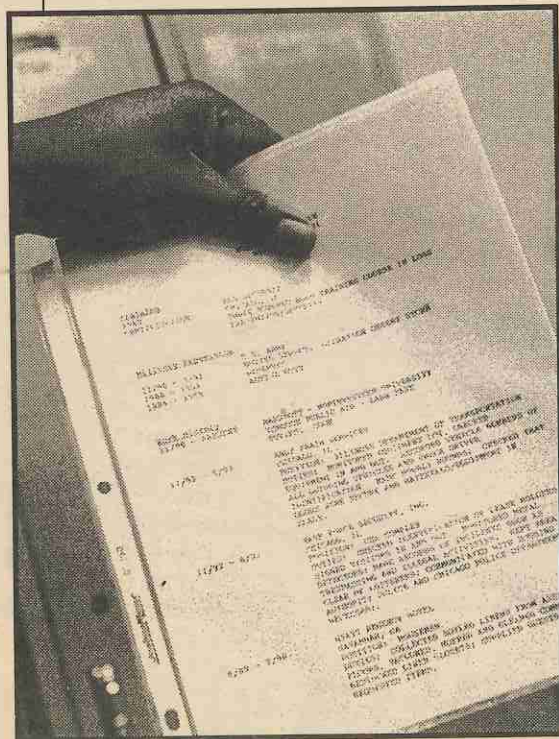
In providing

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Evanston's
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Sharing THE BURDEN

BY ANNA RAFF



A DAY'S WORK: (Top) Charles Smith reads his bed in the smaller room of the men's dorm at the Center for Public Ministry shelter. (Above) Many shelter residents have resumés ready to show potential employers.

Occupying a niche in the basement of the Lake Street Church of Evanston, 607 Lake St., Hilda's Place resonates with the sounds of dishes clattering, men showering and their wives sighing. An object of public and private interest as well as public and private funds, the homeless shelter for adults sits on the same block as downtown's Holiday Inn.

From the second floor of the church, the Center for Public Ministry, a private agency that helps the homeless, runs Hilda's Place and two family shelters. Kevin Hamrick, 29, deputy director of resource development and public information, speaks from behind his desk, hands clasped.

The center and the city have a very strong relationship, Hamrick said.

"We are the city's only homeless services provider," he said. "There is a concerted effort to work with the mayor's office and the police department. We have decided to coordinate our efforts as much as possible."

As the federal government continues to dismantle the welfare state, city councils and private agencies are forced to work together to maintain services. The division between their separate roles and obligations has started to blur, and it is no longer clear who is responsible for successes and failures.

A question of funding

President Bill Clinton's recent welfare reform, which imposes a time limit for receiving welfare benefits, will not affect the center directly, Hamrick said. But as the bill's

implications trickle down, more people will be in need of the center's services.

"Recent welfare changes don't affect us individually but do affect the demand for our services," he said. "We are trying to reduce our reliance on government funds at all levels because of their instability over the past few years."

For the fiscal year 1995, the shelter's revenue totaled about \$400,000, 52.9 percent of which came from government funding. But the City of Evanston only contributed about \$42,000, he said. The rest came from community block grants and other government contracts. Funding has remained consistent in fiscal year 1996.

The center is moving from a 60-40 split in public-private funds to a 40-60 split, he said.

At Evanston's Civic Center, 2100 Ridge Ave., proposed budgets and various paperwork surrounds the director of health and human services. Jay Terry, 41, has held the position for more than seven years. He oversees dozens of programs and services, ranging from the Mental Health Board to the Emergency Assistance Program.

"There has been no increase in funding (from Evanston) for the past five years, not even to adjust for inflation," Terry said. "There used to be an inflationary clause somewhere, but they did away with that years ago."

A decade ago, agencies could take government funds and justify their use through periodic reports, which outlined expenditures. Now, agencies are held more accountable for their funding.

"The government is now saying, 'We'll give you \$20 per homeless person,'" he said. "We keep asking agencies to do

more with less money.”

This burdens private agencies, who usually seek unrestricted support.

Evanston can't redraw the way social services work because it's unrealistic to put services on hold while making changes, Ald. Anny Heydemann (4th) said.

“There is a problem when there is duplication, when there are several agencies involved with the same family,” Heydemann said.

She said she would prefer one “super” agency to be in charge of all aid aspects.

“If there is duplication, it is in administration,” Terry said. “Evanston has a wide range of services. There are certain families that interact with as many as 10 agencies.”

Smaller social service organizations proliferate, and overlap occurs when a group of people form a new agency because they think they can better serve the public in need.

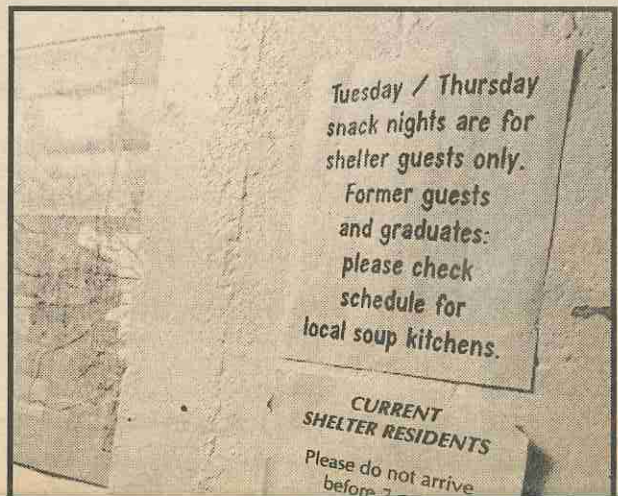
“Economics used to support that,” he said. “Not any more.”

In an atmosphere of increased scrutiny from the public, agencies compete with each other every year in applying for community block grants that are distributed by the city.

“That is one way the city has been able to influence social services,” Heydemann said.

With block grants, the city can decide to keep funding local instead of giving to regional agencies, Hamrick said.

“Block granting makes a lot of sense,” he said. “City government funding has



been reduced by design, but they still support us in a very healthy way."

No agency operates completely with public money, Terry said. All organizations are trying to reduce their dependency on any form of government support.

Beyond facts and figures

At Hilda's Place, private donations and government grants finance the agency's mission to rehabilitate the homeless.

Chuck Collins, night coordinator at the shelter, nods his head slightly toward the residents gathered in the hall Sunday evening.

"You've got grown men needing to be told when to go to bed," Collins said. "Most probably lacked motivation growing up. Then they found out about the welfare system.

"It's a lifestyle."

Slogans paper the hallway. One reads, "Inquiring minds want to know: What are you going to do when your time is through?"

Another is, "GET REAL!!!"

The thoughts for the week encourage residents to rise from their homelessness, Collins said.

Other weeks, the slogans have asked, "Whose fault is it really?" and "Do you love you?"

Going to and from the shower, residents pass by fliers advertising low-income housing. They can choose clothes from a room full of donations. A man in a business suit irons clothes for work the next day. Another room is used to conduct workshops on resumé writing and interviewing skills.

A woman in slippers and a robe brushes her husband's hair as he polishes his shoes in a rhythm.

Troy, 26, and Valerie, 20, who married in October, have lived in the shelter for a week and a half. Both Texas natives, said they had to leave Dallas after Troy's father kicked them out of the house.

THE DAILY GRIND: (Top) Shelter residents sort through donated clothes in the "wardrobe room" of the shelter. (Right) Live by the rules: "You've got grown men needing to be told when to go to bed," Collins said. (Above) Stuart Kahn makes his bed in the men's room of the shelter.

"There was lots of difficulty with both sides of the family," Troy said with a slow drawl.

Troy said he was an English composition major at a local university when his father told him to either study harder or leave the house. Troy opted for the latter.

"I didn't think I'd like college because I had emotional problems in high school," he said. "I was really, really proud because I was doing really, really good."

Troy has applied for a live-in position at a Chicago-area yacht club and said he doesn't plan on staying at the shelter for more than a couple of months. Residents can stay at the shelter for a maximum of six months.

"I've heard rumors that they want to close this place down," he said. "There's a lot of people who just want to play around and do nothing, but there are no bad people here.

"A lot of people here have given up. They've been through so much and don't want to be let down anymore. I've never given up on anything in my life."

Troy said he wants to find a job and live from paycheck to paycheck.

"I just want to live the quiet life for a while," he said.

Big or small?

Two or three days after residents are admitted to the shelter, counselors help them plan their way out by providing drug counseling, detoxification, referrals and Alcoholics Anonymous meetings.

"There are some things that we just can't do," Hamrick said. "Take intensive job training as an example. Because of the

economies of scale involved, the federal government is better equipped for that. It's hard to be really successful without some place to access real job training."

The efficiency of large-scale operations will not be limited to job training, Terry said.

"Market factors are going to take over," he said. "Smaller groups will have to merge with larger regional agencies — those agencies are going to be making decisions about Evanston."

But the intimacy of a smaller environment might be lost, he said. In larger conglomerates, the city can't be sure that local dollars will go to support local residents.

"Compassion fatigue"

Since the shelter is considered a residence in a non-residential district, the Center for Public Ministry has to go before City Council every October to renew its zoning variance. Evanston residents use the hearing as an opportunity to voice complaints.

While Evanston does provide extensive social services, some attitudes reflect the "Not In My Backyard" syndrome of its neighboring North Shore suburbs.

Terry used the term "compassion fatigue" to describe Evanston's apparent exhaustion of social service provisions, but said the city doesn't want this to tarnish a caring reputation.

"The city is a tremendous reservoir of support," Hamrick said. "We have a strong number of core supporters who volunteer time and dollars. But some residents reject the idea of having a homeless shelter in an affluent suburb."

Many fear their property values will decrease if there's a shelter near their homes, he said.

Last spring, many Evanston residents opposed the establishment of Girls' Hope, a home for delinquent girls. Some said another not-for-profit organization in the city would further decrease property tax revenue.

"It all has to do with property taxes," Terry said. "In the Girls' Hope case, some of Evanston's liberal progressive ideas were put to the test. When you plunk down \$500,000 to \$700,000 for a home, you become a little more conservative."

About 40 studies have shown that such transition housing has little or no effect on property values, he said.

Once an Evanston resident complained that the center was enforcing rules too strictly, Hamrick said. When shelter residents break the center's rules, they are asked to leave, causing some to congregate outside. This makes the problem more visible to area residents.

But Collins said that the center is too easy on its residents.

"We need to tighten up around here a little bit more, like making the beds," he said. "We need to motivate them to realize what (it means to be) real, to be totally self-sufficient. It's a start.

"We don't want to be a problem, we want to be a help."

Hamrick said he was satisfied with the shelter's influence on individuals.

"In the way the system is going, we fill niches when it makes sense to do so," he said. "It's all about mixing bits and pieces. We can't do it all." ■

