

**Report to the Diocese of Northern Indiana
St. Margaret's House
September 2008**

St. Margaret's House continues to work hard in its ministry of hospitality for women and children who struggle with economic poverty. We are grateful for the leadership of our board president Nancy Brennen. We are pleased that many in the diocese serve in a number of ways to keep our mission going. Several members of the diocese serve as weekly volunteers and on our Board of Directors, including Board members Bishop Frank Gray, Pam Jentz, Fr. Larry Biller and Tim Haywood. We have had and continue to have a wonderfully collaborative relationship with the parish community of the Cathedral of St. James.

As a result of tough economic times, this summer has brought an unprecedented number of women and children seeking services to St. Margaret's House. The rising prices have hit the most economically vulnerable the hardest. We at St Margaret's House are seeing people who have not visited in years. Many have jobs at low wages or have just been laid off. Those who depend on food stamps have not seen and will not see an increase in their benefit until October. Women with very little are trying to make ends meet with less. In June we helped the highest number of people in our history. Here are some statistics:

The average number of people seeking services each day:

- All of 2007: 64
- Jan-May 2008: 80
- June-July 2008: 100

Number of people served:

- June 2007: 1655
- June 2008: 2105 (27% increase over 2007)
- July 2008: 2274 (31% increase over 2007)

We provide many programs. They include:

- Multi-week parenting program. Each segment is taught for 3 – 6 weeks and covers: child development, parenting young children, parenting teens and building self-esteem in your child.
- We continue to hold our Bridges Out of Poverty seminar entitled, "Getting Ahead in a Just Getting By World." This is a 45 hour seminar that 8-12 women will attend twice a week until mid November.
- Our Guest Services Coordinator has started her weekly empowerment sessions in preparation for Fashioning Our Lives. This is a program that women attend twice a week for 10 weeks. They learn business and personal presentation skills. They learn how to work on a team. Their efforts result and are celebrated in a luncheon entitled: *Fashioning Our Lives* to be held November 18 at the Century Center. It is a fashion and talent show and silent art auction. For tickets contact Kathy SMH at 234-7795.
- The art programs on Mondays and Fridays continue to go well.
- The Mobile Medical Unit sponsored by Saint Joseph Regional Medical Center continues to come once a month and offer on-site health care to the women and children of SMH. AIDS Ministry/AIDS Assist comes once a month to provide AIDS prevention education. African American Women in Touch comes twice a month to provide breast health and breast cancer education.

- Staff members from Bank of America come once a month to talk individually with our guests about budgeting and financial literacy.

On-going Initiatives:

St. Margaret's House joined the Community Access Network (CAN) sponsored by the United Way of St. Joseph County. As part of this network, we will join with other social services agencies to help our guests through a single database. By doing so, we will efficiently help each family get the services they need. We will also be working from the same case management model as most other agencies in our community.

We offer to our guests the 45-hour seminar using the workbook entitled Getting Ahead in a Just Getting by World, Building Your Resources for a Better Life. By hosting this seminar, St. Margaret's House joins with many other organizations to support the community-wide strategy to help people out of generational poverty. Our goal is to improve the quality of life of the community by helping people in generational poverty become investigators of their own realities and give them the tools and support necessary to help them transition out of poverty. We are working to form alliances with civic and business leaders to help them employ and retain people from this group.

We have begun a micro-loan program for women with poor credit history but have changed their lives and have the ability to repay a small loan. These loans will be made by a bank to women who have completed the *Getting Ahead* seminar (described above) and a financial literacy course. The loans are made to help women for the advancement of their employment situation and/or to get out of predatory loan circumstances. They must demonstrate the ability to pay back the loan.

As an extension of the Art Program at St. Margaret's House, we offer The Scarf Project. It is not only an art project but a women's empowerment program. It was developed to provide our guests with an opportunity to foster and support their innate creative talents, develop their leadership and enhance their work and interpersonal skills. The women create and sell hand-painted silk scarves. A portion of the proceeds go to the women artists in the form of gift certificate incentives, while the balance goes back into the project to buy materials. The women artists work together as a team, formulate business plans, represent the project to the community and plan for the future. By participating in The Scarf Project, the women explore and develop their artistic abilities, organizational, planning and business skills. If a parish is interested in selling these scarves, please contact Kathy at St. Margaret's House (574-234-7795).

Winter Walk 2009 will be held on February 22. We will begin in the basement of the Cathedral Church of St. James at 2:30 p.m. The 1 mile solidarity and fund-raising walk raised over \$52,000 for St. Margaret's House last year. We are hoping match or exceed that number this year.

We are grateful to all who have and continue to support of the ministry of St. Margaret's House. Members of the diocese are always welcome to come and visit.

Submitted by: Kathryn A. Schneider, M. Div., Executive Director, St. Margaret's House