

Oakland shelter helps people help themselves

BY NICOLE STAFFORD

STAFF WRITER

Wearing khakis, a checkered oxford and burgundy sweatshirt, embellished by a code of arms design, the man sitting tall at the small, beat-up conference table in the corner of the shelter office doesn't look homeless.

But, David, who wished to keep his last name private, hasn't kicked back on a couch after a day's work to watch the evening news in a place called home in more than four months.

So he sits, hands neatly folded on his lap in the Royal Oak operations base of the South Oakland Shelter, waiting for a ride to his destination — a nearby church or synagogue where he will sleep — for the night.

"I've never been homeless before," he says, offering a few words about his situation.

Organized in 1985, SOS provides individuals who are homeless with nightly shelter in a south Oakland church or synagogue, three meals a day, laundry, clothing, professional referrals and a tidal wave of life lessons.

The program lasts 30 days. Clients must get a job, turn over 75 percent of their earnings for savings and remain drug free to stay in the program. Clients who deviate from the rules are booted.

Approaching 7 p.m., the cut-off time for checking into the shelter, several other individuals, including a mother and two children, sit in the office's front waiting area.

Their retreat from the unusually



A family: At center, Nicole Miller, 28, of Detroit, holds her son Andre, 1, and sits next to her daughter Janae, 7, inside Nativity Episcopal in Bloomfield Township, where she and her family will take shelter all week.

warm but still frigid temperatures of January is quiet; only a periodic cry of a baby disrupts silence. A private security guard stationed in the office watches over the waiting area.

Other clients report to SOS Executive

Director Lillian Melville or Cathy Beaumont, the non-profit's organization's case manager.

David, still waiting at the conference table, seems overpowered by these loud, grim conversations — a muffled slur of

Facts about South Oakland Shelter

- About 60 churches and synagogues in south Oakland County participate in the program.
- Approximately 700 individuals who are homeless are served by the program annually.
- The program's recidivism rate is low — about 21 percent of their clients re-enter the program a second time.
- SOS is funded by Oakland County Community Development, the Salvation Army Family Independence Agency Partnership Grant, federal and state grants and private donations.
- For information about getting your church or synagogue involved in the program, call (248) 546-5566.

words following a question about the status of job applications and a rush of "no's," "no way's" and other denials in an insistent, high-pitched

Please see SHELTER, A11

OAKLAND DIGEST

Oakland Digest provides a summary of headline stories from around the county during the week leading up to Feb. 5.

BIRMINGHAM

Charity must redefine event: Birmingham city commissioners recently told Common Ground, the Pontiac-based, non-profit charity that operates a 24-hour crisis hotline, that they want assurances Birmingham-based charities will benefit from the organization's annual Art in Park event in downtown Birmingham. The commission denied approval of the event and instructed Common Ground to return with more details about the involvement of Birmingham charities.

CLARKSTON

Volunteer effort considered: Clarkston City Council recently decided to consider using a reduced-cost community work force as a way to expand the community's overcrowded city hall without raising taxes. Council members will also consider using an organization like Habitat for Humanity for the project.

FARMINGTON

Skateboarding may be banned: Teenagers will not

be permitted to skateboard in Farmington's downtown business district, if a proposed ordinance is approved by the city council. The ordinance has been described as one that addresses safety issues. The cities of Birmingham, Northville, Rochester and Royal Oak have local ordinances that ban skateboarding in downtown areas.

LAKE ORION

Bond application approved: The state treasurer's office recently approved the Lake Orion Community School District's \$26.2 million bond issue. Residents will vote on the bond issue, which would fund construction of an elementary school, improvements to existing schools and technology advances, in March.

OXFORD

School program works: LOOK 1st (Lake Orion-Oxford Kids first), a program approved by the Oxford Board of Education last year, has served about 50 infants or small children and their families since the school year began, according to a presentation made by the program's director at a recent school board meeting.

ROCHESTER

Shopping will raise funds: Women's clothing — sleepwear, lingerie and sportswear — will be on sale to raise funds for the Meadowbrook Center for Learning Differences, a non-profit facility in Rochester that tutors learning-disabled children. The fund-raiser is slated for noon to 8 p.m. Feb. 6 and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Feb. 7 at the Meadowbrook Center, 411 Woodward. Clothing has been donated by a local merchant and prices start at 50 cents. For information, call (248) 656-3806.

SOUTHFIELD

Providence plans are extensive: Within the next four years, up to \$50 million in renovations are planned for Providence Hospital's Southfield campus. Renovation plans include erecting a new outpatient facility and an emergency/operating room research center, and improving patient

access to the hospital campus.

TROY

Office vacancy is low: Vacancies in office and industrial buildings in the City of Troy are three percent or less, according to Troy Mayor Jeanne Stine, who reported the figure in her annual State of the City address Jan. 29 at the Northfield Hilton.

WEST BLOOMFIELD

Drug use drops: Although drug use among students in the West Bloomfield School District is above the national average, it has dropped, according to a study conducted by the Kercher Center for Social Behavior at Western Michigan University. For example, the 1998 rate of use was generally lower in all categories for seniors, compared to 1996, although still above the national average.

— Compiled by staff reporter Nicole Stafford

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