

Q&A

Carol Simler, executive director of DuPage PADS for eight years, recipient of this year's Robert Christ Affordable Housing Award



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Staff photo by Kate Dougherty

Carol Simler, who recently received a humanitarian award for her work with the DuPage Public Action to Deliver Shelter, reviews a map of the communities served by PADS.

PADS chief honored for work on affordable housing

By **Brian Hudson** ■ bhudson@mysuburbanlife.com

A little more than 20 years ago, there were no overnight homeless facilities in DuPage County.

Now, as executive director of DuPage Public Action to Deliver Shelter, Simler is leading the Wheaton-based nonprofit's effort to provide shelter and support to help homeless people find permanent solutions.

Countywide, DuPage PADS operates 28 overnight shelters which last year served 1,295 people. This week, Simler received the 2008 Robert Christ Affordable Housing Award. The award was presented by the DuPage Homeownership Center at its 17th anniversary celebration Wednesday. The center recognized Simler for her work to expand DuPage PADS into the field of affordable housing. Last week, Simler sat down to discuss her work with PADS and the homeless.

Q For those who don't know, what is PADS? What do you do?

A We are committed to ending and preventing homelessness in DuPage County, and we do it in three ways: housing, support and community action. What we're about is providing housing solutions for

people in crisis.

We at DuPage PADS have moved into developing housing for people who are termed "chronically homeless" — so they've been on the streets a year or more. They have a disability, whether it be mental illness or substance abuse or a disabling health condition.

Q When did you realize this is what you wanted to do with your life?

A My work I view as a calling from the Gospel, and I look at my work as ministry. For other faith denominations, it could be viewed as active service. That comes from when I was very young, and the giving of self for others.

I didn't pull myself up by my own boot straps. I have family. I have friends. (I) have my faith life. I have community that I have lived in for more than 35 years, and I took that for granted when I was young.

Our folks that we work with — they lost or never had that kind of support system, and I see them as being very vulnerable and in need of love. They need the same thing that you and I need and maybe didn't get it or wore it out in their lifetime.

To read more about DuPage PADS, log on to mysuburbanlife.com.