

There's no water break from poverty

By Kathrynne Skonicki

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Participants race to the finish line of the third annual PADS Run/Walk Sept. 9 in Wheaton. The event raised over \$60,000 for the non-profit organization providing shelter to the homeless in DuPage County.

WHEATON—Before heading off to Mass Sept. 9 at St. Petronille Parish in Glen Ellyn, three members of the Repking family took a 5 kilometer run and helped the homeless in DuPage County. Standing alongside her 6-year-old and 9-year-old sons, Liz Repking said, “It’s all about the family.”

Many youngsters and their parents were among the 400 participants in the third annual PADS Run/Walk, featuring a 10 K run, 5 K run and 3 K walk. They assisted people in crisis by participating in an event that raised over \$61,000 for DuPage Public Actions to Deliver Shelter.

Mike McGarvey of St. Thomas of Villanova Parish in Palatine caught his breath shortly after finishing the 5 K run with his son, Conor. He commented, “It’s about setting a good example for him.”

Runners huffed and puffed after pounding the pavement, but there was no time for a water break, commented Carol Simler, executive director of DuPage PADS. After the event, she discussed with the Catholic Explorer the growing need for affordable housing and supportive services in the county. She said, “I think the time to act is now. What we’re experiencing is poverty moving into DuPage County.”

A network of 130 congregations and over 4,000 volunteers assist the non-profit organization in providing emergency shelter for close to 1,000 homeless persons 346 nights of the year. DuPage

PADS also provides transitional housing for about 20 people and permanent housing for about 36 “persistently” homeless individuals. Simler declared, “We have a solution to end homelessness—and that is through affordable housing with supportive services.”

The affordable housing crisis has many families running an uphill battle, added Simler. According to the advocate, the average two-bedroom apartment in the county costs \$935. She said it would take someone earning over \$17 an hour to meet the expense.

The lack of affordable housing and increased expenses for health care are stretching already thin budgets too far in Will County as well, added Deb Darzinskis, director of programs for Catholic Charities in the Joliet Diocese. In fact, she said in the last 6-8 weeks, Daybreak Shelter in Joliet has been reaching its capacity of 100 individuals each night. Typically, about 70 people would bunk at the emergency shelter this time of year.

A troubling trend Darzinskis is noticing is that the clients are “intact” families. Instead of seeing single parents with children, more families with two parents and children are walking through the doors for assistance. She said, “In many cases, it’s a situation in which families have been doubled up (in their living quarters) and these situations can no longer be sustained.”

Approximately 550 clients were assisted by Daybreak Center in August, according to Donna Reed, Catholic Charities’ director of community services for Will, Grundy and Kendall counties. Shepherd’s Table, the center’s soup kitchen, served 4,524 meals to 2,262 people.

While the center spends about \$28,000 each month in providing food and shelter, it also assists clients in other ways, added Reed. It distributes about \$12,500 in housing supplementation for rents, mortgages, utility bills and security deposits. Close to \$1,000 is used for medical expenses of clients with such ailments as diabetes, asthma and high blood pressure. And about \$1,500 is offered to clients for miscellaneous expenses such as obtaining birth certificates to qualify for government programs and transportation costs.

“The need is swamping the available resources,” added Reed. She invited the community to assist through volunteering, donating and advocating. More information on how to help Catholic Charities is available at www.cc-doj.org.