

Homeless shelters' plea: 'We need cash'

So far, no one has been turned away from St. Vincent de Paul shelters.



RON ALVEY Denise Lauderdale receives a kiss from De'Sean Lauderdale, her two-year-old son. They currently live in St. Vincent Gateway Shelter for women and families. Thirty days is the maximum time allowed to stay in the facility. They have spent three nights in the shelter to date.

By [Joanne Huist Smith](#), Staff Writer 8:34 PM Saturday, August 21, 2010

DAYTON — Denise Lauderdale and her 2-year-old son De'Sean have been on the move for three months, staying with relatives and friends then moving on when no longer welcome.

“I was walking around on egg shells,” the 21-year-old mom said. “My son needs a stable place to live. He is my motivation.”

On any given night in Montgomery County, 800 people are considered homeless. The Lauderdals are now residents of the St. Vincent de Paul Gateway for Women and Families and part of a growing number of homeless families.

The emergency shelter provided 255 units of shelter (one unit equals one overnight stay) to families in June 2008, a figure that leaped to 808 units in June 2010. The 220-bed shelter is currently housing more than 200 people. Last Tuesday night, Aug. 17, five new families arrived at the facility on Apple Street near Miami Valley Hospital. The average is one new family per night.

St. Vincent's also operates the Gettysburg Gateway for Men serving nearly 250 individuals daily.

So far, no one has been turned away.

“They come in at any time of the day. Many are frightened,” said Ann Goebel, director of constituent relations. “It’s our job to decrease that fear immediately. These people are hanging on by a thread.”

Goebel said they are seeing an increase in guests who have jobs, but who can’t find affordable housing. They are seeing more single dads with kids, more grandparents with custody of grandchildren, more aunts and uncles caring for nieces and nephews.

“All our statistics have grown,” Goebel said. “When people come in, it’s not just a matter of losing their housing. They have lost everything. There is frustration. There is sorrow. There is grieving. This is like a death.”

To serve the growing number of people, local shelters are seeing an increase in costs for utility bills, security, food supplies and personal hygiene products.

“We need cash. Nobody wants to help with utility bills. Nobody wants to buy a printer cartridge, but we’re in need of all of those things,” said Lisa Glandon, St. Vincent’s director of development and marketing.

Residents gain sense of community

At the Apple Street shelter, women and children sleep in a dormitory lined with cots and Pack-n-Plays, an updated version of a play pen.

“From a parent’s perspective, think how difficult it is to get a child settled down in the evening and comfortable,” Glandon said. “Now think of doing that in a shelter in a room full of strangers. Imagine how frightening that can be to a child.”

Everyone rises at 7 a.m., breakfast is a 9 a.m., lunch is served at noon and dinner at 5 p.m. No cell phones allowed, no valuables. There are showers and laundry facilities. There are few toys, because they quickly get stolen. The outdoor gym set gave way to overuse a year ago, but kids can play basketball or romp in an outdoor fenced area.

Mothers and kids gather in “the day room” in between meals, playing cards or reading.

“They form a community with one another and provide moral support,” Goebel said. “We had a couple who married on site here. We have a pregnant guest who will deliver her baby and come back here. These are not numbers. They are people. They are homeless human beings.”

Lauderdale said she has been homeless since being released from the Ohio Reformatory for Women after serving 14 months on a felony assault conviction.

“After I got arrested, I lost my job, my car and I almost lost my son,” she said. “When I got out I had nothing but the clothes on my back.”

Lauderdale says she’ll stay at the shelter until she finds permanent housing.

“I know I’ve made mistakes. I hope they won’t follow me the rest of my life.”

How you can help

The need for baby and child items has grown so great that St. Vincent is holding a baby shower to get donations of baby shampoo, wipes, and bottles, cribs, diapers, socks, underwear and sturdy strollers.

Donations are accepted through Aug. 27 at St. Vincent de Paul Hotel Gateway Shelter, 120 Apple St., from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. For more information, call 461-7837, Ext. 101.

