

Fundraiser success to let Connections re-open showers

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Connections for the Homeless

Connections for the Homeless plans to reopen its shower facilities in Evanston for people who are homeless on April 4 -- facilities it had to close last July because of the state budget impasse.

The group's director of development, Sue Loellbach, today said that thanks to a successful fundraising gala last weekend and a \$6,000 Catalyst grant from the Evanston Community foundation the showers will be open from 1:30 to 4 p.m. on Mondays and Wednesdays for up to 20 people each day.

"With cuts to our funding, we had to choose where to cut services last July," said Larry Donoghue, Connections' board president. "Instead of taking people out of our supportive

housing program, we closed the services that have the shortest term impact -- access to showers, food, computers, and clothing for those living on the street. But don't think that means the impact wasn't significant -- it's been terrible."

Tito Vazquez, Connections' outreach manager, says, "The people who used to rely on us for access to showers have really suffered during this period. They've been using the public washrooms in town to clean up in the mornings, which just isn't a dignified way to have to live. It's really demoralizing to have no way to keep clean. It affects your ability to interact with people, to get a job, and to form relationships that can help you move forward."

Loellbach says the Evanston Public Library became a great advocate. "Instead of complaining about their homeless patrons not having showers, they spoke up and helped bring their plight to the attention of people who could make a difference."

Library staff were in touch with State Rep. Robyn Gabel's office, which in turn contacted various sources of funding. These collective efforts yielded a \$1,000 grant from AT&T and brought the issue to the attention of the Evanston Community Foundation. Together, these grants will help Connections to re-launch basic hygiene services, including showers and access to clean clothing and laundry facilities.

Betty Bogg, the Connections executive director, says, "Connections is very happy to be restoring these services. However, we want to do much more for homeless people than help them get cleaned up. The success of our gala on Saturday will help us to sustain the hygiene services permanently but will also help us to restore other lost services and do even more."

THRIVE, Connections' gala held at Venue One in Chicago, included dinner, dancing to the music of the Ken Arlen Orchestra, and a silent auction, and raised more than \$250,000 for the Evanston non-profit.

Geeta Krishnamurthi was the gala chair this year and said, "Connections' donors realize how necessary Connections' services are. They rallied at the gala to help us start to build back what the state has failed to provide. I am very proud of the results and hope that they will inspire others to support the work that we are doing."

Bogg said, "We will use the money raised at the gala to ensure that basic services like showers continue indefinitely and that we can restore other services that have been curtailed by the state budget. Plus, we want to invest more in re-housing people, along with helping them to be productive even while they are living on the streets."