

With the Children in Mind

By Jordanna Chord

Imagine being homeless. Now imagine that your twelve and in elementary school. What would you do after school if going home were not an option? For the approximately 456 homeless children in School District 81, a handful have been given a new option. However, this new option for homeless children has now been jeopardized with the recent cuts to key community grants.

Part of the YWCA's H.E.A.R.T. (Homeless Education and Resource Team) program consists of a Homeless Education Project. A key aspect has consisted of Educational and Enrichment opportunities for homeless children. YWCA's unique venture is the only after school program in Spokane focused on the abundant homeless students that reside in this community. Partnered with School District 81 and Spokane Mental Health, homeless children have been given a new set of resources to insure their

future is one of success. In addition to after school enrichment programs that include the traditional YWCA courses such as arts/crafts, tennis, and swimming, students participate in numerous activities Monday through Friday from three to five. To insure that students stay in their original school, no matter where the family resides, the program also provides transportation for students to travel to their home schools. The goal is to make the student's situation is seamless as possible, helping them continue their education during their family's hardship.

Funding for this program has relied heavily on the Community Development Block Grant. Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) programs aid communities such as Spokane in numerous social aspects. The grants assist communities in carrying out a wide range of community development activities directed toward neighborhood revitalization, economic development, and the provision of improved

community facilities and services. The city and state fiscal crisis recently jeopardized grants that fund organizations like this one, and YWCA bore a cut to the entire grant that funded the project. With hundreds of students waiting for assistance from YWCA, the short-staffed program was forced to layoff their program coordinator. Now with a core staff of only two, YWCA faces only being able to assist approximately twenty-six children a year. With more cuts possible, it is likely that in the coming school year they will be forced to reduce that number by more. With hundreds of other children in need, YWCA now maintains an endless waiting with the dire hope that funding increases.

The after school program was not the only one effected at YWCA. Domestic Violence Programs, the Our Sister's Closet, the Child Family Care Program, and others received cuts with the loss of the grant money.

Organizations like YWCA face a crisis today due

to the budget decreases. Candidates for their services increase during period of economic downturn, however so does their budget. Organizations in the Spokane region including YWCA must now face this quandary and find innovative solutions to continue serving our community, and can only hope that they don't face additional cuts with the government looking for areas to reduce spending in.

With the summer months approaching, YWCA usually has continued their programs for homeless children with an extended day to insure that students do not fall through the cracks between school years. If funding is not increased however, YWCA may also be forced to reduce this crucial program. They are now advocating for increased funding due to the current economic situation, and can only hope that their pleas for support our heard by the gatekeepers to the city treasury.