

Sara Hopkins-Powell

May 31, 2011

Listening Post

Note: This is a concept paper only and has not been approved by Trinity Episcopal Church. It is currently under review by the church governing board.

1. **Proposal for a “Listening Post” as a service for homeless people in Ashland.**
2. **Agency:** Trinity Episcopal Church (could be interfaith or other community agency)
3. **Contact information** of the person submitting the proposal: Sara Hopkins Powell c/o Trinity Episcopal Church, 44 North Second St., Ashland, OR 97520 hopkinspowell@aol.com
4. The **issue to be addressed** by the proposed action or project: Homeless people have very restricted social networks. A major complaint for homeless people is the lack of relationships and people to talk to during their day. O’Leary (1997) found that adults with three or fewer people in their lives are at higher risk for mental health problems, even those who are mentally healthy when they come into homelessness. In a phenomenological study of the experiences of homeless men, Lafuente (2003) found that homeless men are socially isolated in that they experience rejection both from within (i.e. rejection of one’s self) and from others.
5. The **proposed solution** to the issue is to provide a Listening Post for homeless people to talk. These listening posts are a place for **listening only**: “no counseling, no hand-outs, no preaching, no fixing, no judging, and no rescuing.” (<http://mwakeland.blogspot.com>.) Listening to people’s stories is a way to recognize people as individuals which they do not often experience on the street. We are aware of programs in Anchorage, San Francisco and Vancouver, B.C. Our proposal is to offer a fixed number of hours per week (10-12) with trained volunteers who would be able to just sit and listen with respect and

confidentiality.ⁱ Volunteers will not be evangelizing and all are welcome to seek services. We would like to partner with another agency (perhaps the city or another group) to provide office space with access to other services that homeless people need or in a central location. Coordination of services would be from Trinity Episcopal Church. The Anchorage program is in a bus station, in San Francisco it is in a SRO hotel and in Vancouver it is in a community building. Recruiting and training volunteers would be done by the key people at Trinity (see below). We would provide signage and publicize the program in the community. We would be responsible for training the volunteers and staffing the listening post. A starting date of Oct. 1, 2011 would be our goal to open for services. We would propose operating for a year and then evaluate the success by the number of people who have been served. If necessary, we could discuss increasing the hours.

6. **Brief background** of the agency, group or submitter: Trinity Episcopal Church has provided outreach services in a variety of ways in Ashland. As one of the original supporters of the Ashland Emergency Food Bank, the original location for Uncle Food's Diner and significant volunteer hours with Foods and Friends (Meals on Wheels), we are uniquely poised to be one of the partners in this project. The three key people in this project are: Martha Hutchison, MSW, Nancy Linton, an experienced Spiritual Director and group facilitator, and Sara Hopkins Powell, an experienced project manager. Volunteers will not be limited to the church, but would be recruited from the wider Ashland community.
7. **Costs and proposed sources of funding** (if appropriate).
 - We would need from 100-200 sq feet of space with comfortable chairs, the ability to close a door, and yet have other people around. We would hope to have this donated or provided in-kind.
 - The three key people will be donating their time
 - Liability insurance
 - Signage and publicity

Total costs will be under \$3,000.

We will explore the issue of mandatory reporting within the context of what we do.
Volunteers will be trained in the appropriate responses