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### **Nonprofit offers safe haven, chances to homeless women**

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Article Text:

This series features the words and works of good people in our community. Their voices are seldom heard in the torrent of sensational news, their successes are seldom noticed publicly, but they contribute mightily to our quality of life. We present this forum at least twice a month to recognize and support their good deeds.

Staff writer Denise Barnes interviewed Pascale-Emmanuelle Nouama, director of development at N Street Village, a nonprofit organization that serves homeless women.

Question: How did the N Street Village begin?

Answer: N Street Village was created by Luther Place Memorial Church located in the heart of Washington, D.C., on Thomas Circle in Northwest. The congregation of the church responded after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968 and the de-institutionalization of the mentally ill. The winter of 1968 was particularly cold, and the church opened its doors and put mattresses in the hall of the church. Today, what started as a ministry is a \$1.4 million nonprofit institution serving 700 homeless women a year.

To be consistent with our philosophy of helping the poor, we felt in the early 1990s that we should build affordable housing as well to complete our continuum of services. According to the recent statistics of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, 50 percent of the homeless in District have an addiction. The other portion have mental illness. In our continuum of services we tackle those issues without being a treatment center.

Q: What's the homeless situation in the District as it pertains to women?

A: Well, let me say that at the time N Street Village was established in 1973, there were not many shelters for women in the city, but there were ample shelters for men. We know that it's difficult for women to be homeless - having nowhere to go - but also the abuse that women face in the street. Some women are gang raped, some are constantly harassed in the street - not only by homeless men but by

Joe and Jack. Homelessness of women is on the rise today. We know that we have 14,000 men and women who are homeless in the metropolitan Washington area. And, in the District alone, there are 8,000 homeless. The percent of women and children who are homeless is up about 15 percent compared to last year.

Q: What does N Street Village do to help women?

A: Our goal, first and foremost, is to serve as a healing refuge for women. We want them to feel safe when they come to us. Of course, because our philosophy is not to put a Band-Aid on the problem, we want to go to the core of the problem and get them off of the streets so they are able to reclaim their lives. We are willing to give them all the basic tools that they need, which include a myriad of programs that we offer at N Street Village. For instance, we have the Bethany Women's Center, a day program that's open every day of the year, and it serves between 100 and 120 women a day. We serve breakfast, lunch, afternoon snacks as well as daily needs such as clean clothing, toiletries, showers, laundry facility, mail and telephone.

The other program is the Luther Place Night Shelter, a 31-handicap-accessible-bed facility that provides transitional shelter and supportive case management. For example, if a woman wants to become a part of the night program, she would complete an intake with a case manager. She's then required to work with her case manager to set and pursue her specific goals towards moving out of homelessness. Often these include stabilizing one's medical and or mental health, job training, education and applying for benefits.

Q: To date, how successful has the Luther Place Night Shelter been?

A: More than 50 percent of our residents have reclaimed their lives and moved out of homelessness. The percent is pretty amazing considering the downturn of the national economy and the fact that the philanthropic world is tightening its belt. We wish we could do more, but it's only a 31-bed facility. Right now, we have 12 women on our waiting list. Of course, we wish we could serve more women since we know of the need in the city.

Some of our other programs include a residential addiction recovery divided into prerecovery, which is Harriet Tubman [House], and postrecovery, which is Sarah House. In Harriet Tubman, the first phase of addiction recovery is addressed through a structured and therapeutic program. Sarah House is the second phase of N Street Village addiction recovery. Participants continue in their recovery, and attend school, training, or they work. Our residents are strongly encouraged to be involved not only in activities that we have on the premises, but with other organizations that have partnerships with us.

We are fortunate to have a Wellness Center on the premises that focuses on a holistic approach towards health. We offer several classes free of charge. For example, we have yoga, acupuncture, dance classes, women's health, stress management, massage and a host of others. We also have a dental and eye clinic for our women, and the services are offered at no cost.

Q: I know that N Street Village focuses on women, but how do you take care of the children?

A: When the women come to us, it's usually already too late for the children. In many cases, the children are lost in the foster care system. Or, best-case scenario, they are with the grandmothers. So, what we

try to do at the level of Sarah House, women who wish to be reunited with their children begin re-establishing their roles as parents. We offer a parenting class to women, and the children may visit and spend one night with their mothers every two weeks. It's a long process, and it's very painful for mothers and their children because the children have been hurt before and they don't trust their mothers. Reunions tend to be a little difficult because mothers have been disconnected from their children for so long.

We have a 63 percent success rate in the residential addiction-recovery programs. That's pretty high. Of course we want to do more, but we can only serve 57 women a year in the residential addiction recovery. Another important factor here at N Street Village is that we don't push our women - we let them work at their own pace; we will not push them out. We respect their pace, and we want them to understand that their addictions are curable; it just takes time.

Q: What does N Street Village need?

A: This year marks N Street Village's 30th anniversary. In February we were able to launch our anniversary celebration with a very successful fund-raiser gala, thanks to the generosity of the **Catherine B. Reynolds Foundation**. This year, we have addressed various organizational issues in order to strengthen our programs in "Welcoming the Stranger." With that in mind, our board of directors has hired a new president, Zelna E. Joseph.

As you know, it takes a community to make a difference. In our case, it takes a village, and we invite the Washington, D.C., community to contribute financially. But beyond the financial donations, we are looking for volunteers because N Street Village relies on 1,500 volunteers a year. Our volunteers are the backbone of our organization. People who are interested in volunteering can contact our volunteer coordinator, Kristopher Lindh, at 202/939-2096.

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N STREET VILLAGE

Founded: 1973

Contact: Pascale-Emmanuelle Nouama, director of development, 202/939-2071. Donations can be sent to the office at 1333 N Street NW, Washington, D.C. 20005, [www.nstreetvillage.org](http://www.nstreetvillage.org).

Staff: 37 full-time employees

Background: The mission of N Street Village is to welcome the stranger, to be a place of biblical hospitality where all are welcome. Each day N Street Village responds to the needs of homeless women, but also tackles the causes of homelessness, which include poverty, physical and mental illness, addiction and the lack of decent, affordable housing.

Caption:

Pascale-Emmanuelle Nouama, director of development at N Street Village in the Northwest, seen here with Sondra Stein (right) of the National Institute for Literacy, said the group's philosophy is "to go to the core of the problem." [Photo by Roey Yohai/The Washington Times]

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