



# Operation Dignity News

Fall 2003

Volume 1, Issue 1

## Dinner/Dance Fundraiser Nov. 8th

In January, 2001 Operation Dignity heard that the Henry Robinson Multi-Service Center (HRMSC) in downtown Oakland was in serious financial trouble. Alex McElree, the Founder and Executive Director of Operation Dignity, convinced his board that saving this program was "the right thing to do," even if it meant Operation Dignity would need to raise an additional \$250,000 annually from foundations, corporations and donors. Alex's reasoning was simple - over 60 very low income families, including close to 200 children depended on the program for their transitional housing, meals, job counseling and case management.

Since that time foundation, corporate and individual giving



has declined dramatically and Operation Dignity has had to underwrite the gap (approximately \$200,000 a year) from other programs.

Although the HRMSC is well funded by government sources, there is still a 20% gap between these grants and the actual cost of running the program. McElree is determined to keep the program operating but is concerned that if the organization cannot

raise \$200,000 from the Oakland and Alameda County community by the end of the year he will be forced to cut programs. Consequently, the Board and senior staff have launched an intense program to raise the needed funds by the end of the year.

"We are pulling out all the stops," says McElree. "We have a list of fifty corporations, thirty foundations and several philanthropists and we are attempting to get meetings with them to show them that they can make a difference in the crime rate and homelessness in Oakland and Alameda County simply by helping us underwrite this gap in our funding. In addition we are preparing a major small donor effort and have planned a celebration for November 8 to publicize the

effort."

As a Vietnam Veteran, Alex McElree has sworn to never forget. "We don't leave our people on the battlefield and we consider the streets the battlefield."

Alex continually reminds his staff that people do not make wise decisions when they are hungry and cold. By providing food and shelter, we encourage people to make the decisions that lead them back to self-sufficiency. In addition, Alex and his staff have strived to assist their clients to become part of the community through on-site volunteer work, giving back to others and becoming part of the solution. About 40% of our

*(Continued on page 3)*

## A Word from Alex

Thank you all for reading our newsletter and for all of the support this past year.

Please send any suggestion or articles that you would like to share with us to our main office.

I want to thank the staff for all the hard work in getting this newsletter together.

This has been an exciting year for O.D. & myself, especially in the way I celebrated my 57<sup>th</sup> BD being unconscious and

in intensive care after a bypass! The staff and board worked hard to hold things together during this uncertain time.

And now I'm happy to be back and working on many new projects that we have identified as we enter into the holiday season. We need everyone's help now more than ever as this is a critical time of the year for the clients we serve.

I'll have an update on all

projects in the next newsletter. Until then, keep checking the web site for news. I'm available to answer any questions you may have regarding the organization.

I also want to welcome all the new staff and thank them for their dedication to our cause.

Alex McElree  
Founder  
Operation Dignity

### Inside this issue:

Children's Corner	2
Spring Walk-a-thon	2
A Young Client	2
Newsletter News	3
Clothing Drive	3

## Children's Corner by Lauana Chase

Children without a home are in fair or poor health twice as often as other children, and have higher rates of asthma, ear infections, stomach problems and speech problems (Better Homes Fund, 1999).

Homeless children also experience more mental health problems, such as anxiety, depression, and withdrawal. They are twice as likely to experience hunger, and four times as likely to have delayed development.

School-Age homeless children face barriers to enrolling and attending school, including transportation problems, residency requirements, inability to obtain previous school records, and lack of clothing and school supplies.

Given these overwhelming impacts we, at the shelter, work hard to minimize these im-

pacts and provide programming to help children as they face homelessness.

Four nights a week we hold Children's Activity Groups providing our youngest shelter residents with a space to play, explore and create while their parent/parents attend important support groups and educational workshops.

As Director of our Children's Services, I also meet with mothers and their children to assess needs, provide support and information on community services. I also meet with children individually for tutoring and counseling. Importantly we have age appropriate toys and games for the children and youth to enjoy during their stay.

We have recently increased our focus on education and tutoring at the shelter within

our Children's Program. We now have a mini computer lab for children to use for help with homework and to play educational games. We also have regular volunteers who are giving the children much needed one on one tutoring assistance.

Recognizing that early intervention makes for future success, I am beginning to complete developmental screenings for all children 5 years old and younger who are staying at the shelter. We hope to be able to get parents and children hooked up with important services that will help them well beyond their stay at the shelter.

## Spring Walk-a-thon

Witness the ways that the Operation Dignity approach gets to the heart of the homeless problem, getting people off the street and into stable lifestyles.

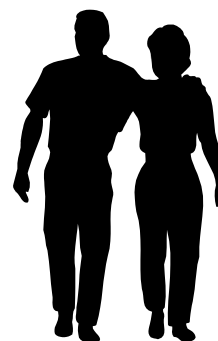
Join us in the spring for a walk-a-thon to raise money as you tour one of our shelters and walk past other important downtown Oakland landmarks. We'll probably end with a bag lunch somewhere although we have not yet

set the exact itinerary.

We will have a sponsorship form for you to download from the web site. There will be prizes for participants as well.

If you cannot do the walk but would like to help out, we will also need volunteers to assist with various things and we can transport you from location to location.

*"Every step you take will benefit someone's life!"*



## We Salute A Young Client

Recently, the Black Coalition of Trade Unions hired some of our youths to help with the election. One of our clients, an eight grade resident at the Henry Robinson since April, was one of the most consistent and responsible workers. That alone would have earned him our respect.

In fact, he was soon training others. For many of these young people, it was their first

opportunity for a job and his dedication served as a great role model.

But one afternoon while working, he spotted another young man loading a gun. It would have been easy to turn away, perhaps, to pretend he didn't see. But this man is not afraid of hard choices or hard work.

He quietly informed his supervisors about what he had seen. They in turn called the

police, who apprehended the armed man without incident, surely preventing harm and damage to others.

This young man is a shining example of someone with the character to do well in life, the will to succeed despite hardships, and the ability to look beyond his own life and help others.

## Newsletter News

While we will continue to do periodic mailings via the regular postal mail, we'd rather spend our money directly on our clients rather than postage. Please visit the web site at <http://www.operationdignity.org> and sign up for our electronic newsletter, if you haven't done so already. We will not sell or share your email with any other organization but we will use it to keep you informed about our programs and needs in a much more cost efficient manner than a printed newsletter.

The newsletter will allow us to thank our sponsors and volunteers, let you get to know

some of our superb staff, and keep you informed about the many people we serve.

While the numbers are important in terms of overall impact, it is the individual men, women, and children above and beyond numbers that we are dedicated to serving. Many of our "success stories" turn right around and help others. We'd like to let you know about the people in addition to the numbers, like one of our former clients who recently graduated from UC Berkeley.

### Board of Directors

Marjorie Wolf, President  
 Alex McElree, Executive Director  
 Roy O'Shaughnessy  
 Berdie Gomez  
 Lydia Daniels  
 Neil Weinstein  
 Theresa Thomas  
 Chris Nye  
 Dick Bridgman  
 Robert A. Crouter

## Saving the Henry (cont'd)

*(Continued from page 1)*

former clients continue to work and help at Operation Dignity.

Our Dinner Celebration and Silent Auction will be held November 8th at the First Presbyterian Church in Oakland from 6pm to 10pm. The church is located at 2619 Broadway. Our featured speaker will be Jerry Lange, who is currently finishing her book, "Images & Illusions: A Black Women's Perspective on the Media." Roz Platers of

KPIX will be the Master of Ceremonies at our celebration.

Tickets can be purchased by calling Jean Ng at 510-844-0865. Tickets are \$100 each or tables can be purchased for \$1,250, \$1,500, or \$2,000.

Please also consider donating items or services for us to auction. We already have some exciting donations and look forward to adding even more wonderful things for you to bid on!

*Please call Jean Ng at 510-844-0865 or email her at [jeannberggren@yahoo.com](mailto:jeannberggren@yahoo.com) to help.*

## Clothing Drive at Holiday Concert

Greg Lamboy will be conducting a clothing drive for us at his December 4th appearance. See his web site for details as the date gets closer. (<http://www.greglamboy.com>)

Greg is also currently donating \$1 to Operation Dignity for every CD sale he makes. He writes and sings "Acoustic Pop with a Social Conscience." You can hear some of his songs on his web site.

Greg recently attended our September Forum on Veterans' Health Issues and wrote



that he walked away "both sobered by what I heard and hopeful about the cooperation taking place between the various organizations to meet the needs of this neglected population."

Fall 2003

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*Providing a HAND-UP, not a HAND-OUT.*

*Visit us on the web!*  
[www.operationdignity.org](http://www.operationdignity.org)

## Operation Dignity

Founded in 1993 by Vietnam Veteran, Alex McElree, we offer a HAND-UP not a HAND-OUT approach, building community among vets and encouraging community outreach and support. Our services cover the continuum of the homeless situation, including a mobile outreach program, drop-in center, winter shelter, emergency housing, transitional housing, and giving furniture and household goods to those making the move into permanent housing.

People do not make wise decisions when they are hungry and cold. By providing food and

shelter, we encourage people to make the decisions that lead them back to self-sufficiency.



### Meals Served in September

Drop in:	1,418
Outreach:	1,740
Emergency Housing:	1,426
House of Dignity:	4,590
<u>Transitional Housing:</u>	<u>5,584</u>
<b>Total:</b>	<b>13,474</b>