

**G S
R**

**Monday
Sept. 9th**



Monday, August 20, 2001

Story last updated at 11:46 p.m. on Sunday, August 19, 2001

Jacksonville churches join aid network Program provides meals, housing for homeless

By Mary Maraghy
Times-Union staff writer

On a whim, Karen Olson bought a sandwich for a homeless woman. She planned to drop the sandwich and run, but the woman grabbed her hand and they chatted.

Olson was moved by the woman's hunger for warmth and compassion -- so moved that she recruited nine churches and a synagogue to help her provide meals and transitional housing for homeless families.

That was in New Jersey in 1986, where the first Interfaith Hospitality Network was born.

Today, five churches in Jacksonville are planning to join the network.

"It's heartbreaking to realize that there are parents who came upon hard times and can't provide a home and shelter for their families," said Ben Allen, a lay leader at St. Paul United Methodist Church in Arlington. "We want to work with those who need a little help to get back on their feet."

The other four churches are Arlington Presbyterian, Hodges Boulevard Presbyterian, Ortega United Methodist and St. Andrew's Episcopal. Their goal is to begin helping their first families by Christmas.

Gainesville formed the first such network in Florida four years ago. Other networks are forming in Bradenton, Melbourne, Orlando and Tampa.

Churches take turns housing and feeding homeless families to help them save money and get back on their feet.

About 90 networks have formed in 28 states. Olson heads a national office in New Jersey that promotes and supports them.

Hitting home

Church congregations interested in joining a new Jacksonville-area effort to help the homeless are asked to call St. Paul United Methodist Church at [904] 724-0022.

NEWS

- METRO
- COMMUNITY
- OPINION
- OBITUARIES
- BUSINESS
- DAILY SPECIAL
- SPORTS
- WEATHER
- VOICES



MARKETPLACE

LEARNING CENTER

ENTERTAINMENT

JACK'S CAFE

YELLOW PAGES

ABOUT US

SEARCH

HOME



St. Vincent's

**Where The
Experts Are**



**Trust Your Local
Super Hero**

*its hard to
stop a trane*



The churches or synagogues take turns hosting a few homeless families for a week at a time. Family members sleep on cots set up in a sanctuary or in Sunday school rooms. Families stay in the program an average of six weeks.

The host church or synagogue provides dinner and breakfast for the families, plus transportation each morning to a day center. The day center can be another house of worship or a rented facility where adults can shower, read the want ads, make telephone calls or use a computer to work on a resume.

Support churches provide food, clothing, furniture, transportation and other needs.

Networks are typically funded by congregations, government grants, fund-raisers and donations. Volunteers do most of the work.

The network hires a social worker, the only paid person in the program. The social worker screens families who want to enter the program. The worker will also help families develop a plan to find jobs and housing.

In Jacksonville, many families are turned away from area shelters because of a lack of space. This program will help fill the gap in services, said Amy McGeorge, a network volunteer from Hodges Boulevard Presbyterian Church.

The Interfaith Hospitality Network of Greater Gainesville has about 26 congregations. It operates on an annual budget of \$105,000 supplied through grants and donations.

Network social worker Donna Lawson said congregations provide extras for the families, such as cars, gasoline cards, bus passes, money for car insurance and movie passes. Some have hired clients or found them jobs. And none is paid to help the people, she said.

"They are doing it because it is the right thing to do," Lawson said.



[Search Tips](#) - Use + to require word, - to omit.

Enter words describing a concept or keywords.

[Story Archives](#)

[News](#) | [Marketplace](#) | [Learning Center](#) | [Entertainment](#)
[Jack's Cafe](#) | [Community](#) | [Home](#)

[Metro](#) | [Neighbors](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Obituaries](#) | [Business](#)
[Daily Special](#) | [Sports](#) | [Weather](#) | [Voices](#) | [Wire](#)

[About us](#) | [E-mail staff](#) | [How to advertise](#)

This site, and all its content, © The Florida Times-Union