



# GOOD WORKS

Worldwide Mission of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur

## COLLABORATION for the Homeless

### Voice for the Homeless:

*Interview with*

*Sister Linda Bessom, SNDdeN*

Serving as Outreach/Senior Community Organizer since 1995, Sister Linda Bessom, SNDdeN works with the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless (Coalition). Since its beginning in 1981, the Coalition acts from a strong belief in the inherent human dignity of each person, and considers housing as a basic human right, integral to the common good. Through direct service, homelessness prevention and advocacy, the Coalition attempts to ensure that everyone has a place to call home. In her ministry in Lynn, MA, Sr. Linda fulfills the organization's mission to eradicate homelessness in the State by collaborating with people who address the root causes of homelessness. She listens to the voices of people most impacted, and engages them in a process to find long-term solutions for systemic change. She is a voice also for people experiencing homelessness and those at risk in their struggle for decent affordable housing, adequate income and accessible services. Sr. Linda sees her ministry as **direct service, education and advocacy.**

### Direct Service

In her outreach, she engages organizations, schools, faith communities through an educational process involving testimonies of people most affected. Her phone calls and meetings every day lead her to direct those in



*Two workmen from the Coalition for the Homeless collect the boxes and bags from the SNDdeN community at Ipswich, MA.*

need to resources for shelter, food and rental assistance. Sometimes she advocates for them, especially when there is a wrongful denial for shelter. Occasionally, she solicits emergency funds from faith communities to house temporarily individuals or families denied shelter or rental assistance. Her direct service for *Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled and Children* involves many agencies, groups and individuals. For this reason, she promotes project drives for the Furniture Bank in Lynn. She collects back to school supplies, holiday gifts/toys, winter coats and accessories, toiletries, gift cards for emergency aid, especially for children who are truly destitute.

The Furniture Bank provides cost-free furnishings to low-income families and individuals transitioning from homelessness to permanent housing in new apartments, when they do not have any furniture. Assistance with basic house items gives them a solid foundation as they rebuild their lives. Throughout the year, Sr. Linda conducts specific drives. This past year over 9,500 men, women and children (3,776 were women and children) received assistance from one of the Furniture Bank programs. 1,462 persons/families were able to access furniture and household goods for apartments. To families in need, the Coalition distributed 4,800 hygiene kits which included deodorant, soap, shampoo, conditioner, tooth brushes, tooth paste, combs, hairbrushes, razors, and shaving cream.

Recently, Sr. Linda asked for help from a community of over 60 Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur who live in Ipswich, MA. Most of these Sisters are retired from active ministry, after having served many years, especially as educators. Now, they engage in a ministry of prayer, remembering all the intentions asked by those in the area as well as those who send prayer requests to the religious Congregation. Their ministry extends also to a variety of services for those living in poverty. Responding to Sr. Linda's request, the Sisters in the Ipswich Community sent 35 bags and 32 cartons of clothing in early April to the Coalition for the Homeless. This clothing replenishes needed items in the Clothing Closet at the Furniture Bank in Lynn. This is one way that the Sisters are able to collaborate with Sr. Linda for those in need of clothing.

### **Education Leads to Advocacy**

Sr. Linda knows firsthand how difficult it is for families to survive with such meager benefits to meet basic human needs. She represents these critical voices of people experiencing poverty and most affected by homelessness. She meets with faith communities, shelter and human service providers and concerned advocates who bring these voices to state legislators, able to

influence public policies for long-term solutions. Often the Sisters become advocates in post-card campaigns to endorse legislation for emergency aid for elderly, disabled and children living in poverty. Sr. Linda is an organizer with other staff in this campaign for public policy. Many Sisters become endorsers of advocacy campaigns for helping the homeless. Now, after so many years, there is legislation to strengthen a state funded program reaching more than 21,000 extremely destitute individuals.

### **Another Project**

A proven pathway out of homelessness is assurance of an education through high school for children in low-income families. A good night's sleep has a major effect on a child's capability to learn; lack of sleep has negative consequences for learning. *A Bed for Every Child Initiative* arose from a critical need for beds. Coalition staff, collaborating with public schools three years ago, noticed hundreds of exhausted students too tired to focus on learning in the schools. They were sleeping at night on floors, couches or with siblings or parents. With a goal to distribute 1500 new beds annually, Sr. Linda helps to raise funds and collects new bedding as well. The Coalition provides these beds (\$250 a bed) and linens for children in need. This past year 940 children received new twin beds, mattresses, bed frames and linens. This ongoing project is demanding to meet the goal.

In these projects for the homeless, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, their Associates and co-workers respond with action to requests from Sr. Linda. Her outreach expands as she continues to organize drives and distribute necessary items to people made vulnerable through homelessness or limited income. Collaboration and partnerships with faith communities are keys to success in Sr. Linda's ministry as she networks and stands with those made poor in our society.

Website: [www.mahomeless.org](http://www.mahomeless.org)



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*Good Works On WordPress*

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