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HOMELESS EDUCATED, READY TO WORK SURVEY SAYS

4-in-5 Have High School Diploma or Equivalent

September 1, 2004 --- Countering the conventional wisdom, a recent survey shows that four out of five homeless people working to rejoin the labor force have achieved at least a high school diploma, GED or Vocational Certificate. The national survey was released today by the Association of Gospel Rescue Missions (AGRM). The results were a surprise, as one of the most common reasons assumed for unemployment among the homeless is a lack of education.

The Panama City Rescue Mission participated in the survey, where 87 percent indicated that they had earned at least a high school diploma or equivalency.

Two in five respondents were working in a full-time or regularly scheduled part-time position at the time they became homeless. "There may be many issues involved in why a person becomes homeless, including the loss of a job," said Thurman Chambers, Executive Director of Panama City Rescue Mission. In the national study, 53 percent (62 percent locally) said the loss of a job had a direct impact on their becoming homeless.

Chambers also noted that 40 percent reported they had lost a full-time or regularly scheduled part-time job in the six months prior to the survey. Of those, 62 percent (100 percent locally) said addiction had a part in the job loss, and 28 percent (14 percent locally) responded that they had quit the position.

"Most often, performance issues were the reason for losing a job," Chambers said. "Fewer attributed it to things over which they have little control – illness or injury, relocation, the business was closed, or the position was eliminated."

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When asked how the mission program had helped them prepare to re-enter the job market, respondents pointed to addiction recovery, personal counseling, restored personal relationships, stable address, work therapy, anger management, and job readiness programs as critical to their preparation for seeking employment. Only 8 percent said the mission had not helped them prepare for the job market at all. “Those participating in mission programs say that the remedy for homelessness includes much more than affordable housing,” Chambers stated.

For one client of the Rescue Mission, affordable housing was the main reason he turned to the Mission after being released from prison, but what he found was much more than just a place to sleep. “I had been trying to save for a car and tools, but motel rates were just too high to be able to save,” John Gaskins said. The United Way referral service told him about the Mission’s work program where he could pay a small weekly fee in return for housing, food and counseling.

“The men and women at Panama City Rescue Mission and Bethel Village participating in the recovery programs learn new trades in areas such as carpentry, lawn and facilities maintenance, retail stores and human service,” Chambers said. That’s because these students are required to work in return for the free program, including lodging, meals and personal and group counseling sessions.

“Now I don’t feel like life’s beating me down too bad,” Gaskins said. “I can save and make my way towards independence.”

He says the most impact has come from being able to continue regular Bible study, the Christian fellowship group meetings provide and the support from other former addicts through regular Narcotics Anonymous meetings. The day he arrived, Gaskins says the Mission’s Chaplain, Lawrence Williams, immediately welcomed him into the family with his signature greeting. Williams shook Gaskins’ hand. But he didn’t let go. Williams stood right there in the lobby of the Mission and prayed for him.

“I said God is good.”

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Previous job stability was higher than expected in the national survey. Nearly half (45 percent) replied that they were employed in only one or two jobs during the previous five years. “I think potential employers would welcome this result,” Chambers said. “We’ve discovered that a lot of people in rescue mission programs have the ability and desire to be stable employees.”

The survey also asked about work history among the respondents. Construction (39 percent), Food Service (35 percent), Warehouse (31 percent), and Factory or Assembly Line (26 percent) were the most frequently noted types of jobs previously held.* Of note, 13 percent said that they had management experience. When asked what types of work they would seek after they leave the mission, each of those fields experienced significant decline, while increases were noted in Medical, Technology, Education and Ministry fields.

“Through our mission programs, people are hoping to move from physical labor to human service jobs,” Chambers said. “Many of our clients choose to go on for further education in human services or return to the mission or similar agencies to work paying jobs.”

The survey, completed in August, asked nearly 2,500 individuals about labor and homelessness at 60 rescue mission rehabilitation programs across North America. To provide confidentiality, the “blind survey” was conducted in classroom settings with respondents returning the study facedown and unsigned.

Panama City Rescue Mission has served Bay County since 1972, serving more than 83,000 meals and 20,000 nights of lodging annually. The number of clients enrolled in the recovery and work programs has steadily increased over the past three years of operation, serving more than 176 people. For more information on the Mission’s work program and addiction recovery program call 769-0783.

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For more information about the Association of Gospel Rescue Missions, go to www.rescuemissions.org or call 1-800-4RESCUE.

*When appropriate, the survey asked those participating to check all responses that applied.

1. Were you working in a full-time or regularly scheduled part-time job when you became homeless?
40 percent Yes 60 percent No

2. Have you lost a full-time or regularly scheduled part-time job in the past six months?
40 percent Yes 60 percent No

If yes, why did you lose the job (check all that apply)?

62 percent Addiction 6 percent Business was closed 8 percent Disagreement with boss 17 percent I was fired
28 percent I quit 16 percent Illness or injury 10 percent Position was eliminated 6 percent Performance
13 percent Relocation 7 percent Work related discipline 9 percent Other

3. Did the loss of work have a direct impact on you becoming homeless?
53 percent Yes 47 percent No

4. What is the highest level of education you completed prior to coming to the mission?
20 percent Some high school 28 percent High school graduate 15 percent GED 8 percent Vocational certificate
20 percent Some college 7 percent College graduate 2 percent Post graduate work or degree

5. How many full-time or regularly scheduled part-time jobs have you had in the past five years?
22 percent One 23 percent Two 23 percent Three 11 percent Four 21 percent Five or more

6. What types of work have you done in the past five years (check all that apply)?
9 percent Clerical 39 percent Construction 2 percent Custodian/Maid 17 percent Driver or Delivery
3 percent Education 5 percent Entertainment 26 percent Factory or Assembly Line 2 percent Finance
35 percent Food Service 1 percent Landscaping 13 percent Management
5 percent Medical
0 percent Ministry 2 percent Real Estate 12 percent Retail Sales 1 percent Security
5 percent Technology 9 percent Telemarketing 31 percent Warehouse 3 percent Other

7. What types of work will you seek after you leave the mission (check all that apply)?
9 percent Clerical 26 percent Construction 2 percent Custodian/Maid 15 percent Driver or Delivery
7 percent Education 4 percent Entertainment 20 percent Factory or Assembly Line 2 percent Finance
21 percent Food Service 1 percent Landscaping 11 percent Management
8 percent Medical
2 percent Ministry 3 percent Real Estate 9 percent Retail Sales 1 percent Security

