

# ***NEWS RELEASE***

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For Release: March 2, 1992

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## **SOUTH BEND CENTER FOR THE HOMELESS OFFERS MATTIE A FIRST HOME**

SOUTH BEND, Ind., March 2, 1992 -- Mattie was a social worker's nightmare. An addict of 40 years, she spent a lifetime in and out of reform schools and rehabilitation centers. Her criminal history involved theft, prostitution, and illegal possession of drugs. Rehabilitation seemed improbable at best, until she found an unlikely home that offered her the support, safety, and encouragement necessary to turn her life around.

"In many ways, the [South Bend] Center for the Homeless is the first home I've ever known," reveals 49-year-old Mattie. "I never really had a home growing up. All I remember is a bunch of drunk people around all the time. Both of my parents were alcoholics and my father physically and sexually abused me from the time I was 4. I started drinking when I was 8. It was my way of escaping."

(more)

(add one)

## MATTIE

However, this escape route quickly led Mattie to addictions to alcohol, heroin, LSD and 35 other drugs. Begging, stealing, and prostitution became means of survival.

"I never stood on a street corner or anything, but I did have sex for drugs," says Mattie. "I've gone as low as you can go to pay the dopeman. I even stole money from my dying mother. The money was supposed to go to the hospital to pay her bills but I took it to buy drugs. She couldn't move because she'd had a stroke but she knew what I was going to do. I could see it in her eyes." Mattie's eyes fill with tears as she continues, "I'll never know if she forgave me for that."

Today Mattie is a different person. Sober for 4 months, she now faces her daily challenges with faith rather than drugs.

"I'm living proof that people can change," says Mattie, "and the center has helped me do that. The staff is great because they treat us like normal people. Last week, they took us (the residents) to the movie "Grand Canyon." It was a great movie. Just doing something normal like seeing a movie made me feel a natural high, the one you get from life, not drugs."

"The homeless are changing. They're not just bums with crabs anymore. They're women and

(more)

(add two)

MATTIE

children, blacks and whites. This place is the end of the line for a lot of folks. They're scared and they're lonely. They need people to understand. They need love."

Of the thousands of homeless shelters in the nation, South Bend's Center for the Homeless is one of the few that offers residents: a medical clinic, counseling for the mentally ill and those with addiction problems, legal aid, on sit Alcoholics Anonymous conference rooms, GED classes, and job training programs.

"This place doesn't need more clothes," says Mattie. "The people here don't want new sweaters. They want help putting their lives back together and the center helps them do that. If people want to help the homeless, they should help the center."

Mattie's future can appear uncertain and frightening. As an epileptic and as a recovering addict, she is afraid of being alone.

"The center will let me stay until I have something better lined up but that could take a while. The wait for low income housing is anywhere from 6 months to 2 years and most of those places are in drug neighborhoods. That's exactly what I'm trying to get away from. It'll be hard but for now I'm okay. I'm homeless but I'm not without a home. I'm lonely but I hold tight to God. And I just remember that every day I don't do drugs is a miracle."

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