

Hope for Tucson's homeless

Primavera WORKS extends a better future and renewed sense of pride to the city's homeless population.

BY ETHEL JOHNSON

HOMELESSNESS IS AN UNFORTUNATE REALITY THAT MANY Americans have to face, especially in these stormy economic times. All across the United States, people are being laid off and forced to struggle for their survival. In Tucson, Ariz., Primavera WORKS is helping people conquer this challenge.

Primavera WORKS, one of the eight programs operated by Primavera Services Inc., has been in existence for a little more than five years and specializes in finding employment for homeless and low-income workers. By doing so, it offers competitively priced day labor to residential and business clients. Businesses utilizing day labor often pay a placement fee, but because Primavera WORKS is a not-for-profit agency, no fee is added to the price. Since its inception, the program has provided labor for many employers, including local and state governments, apartment complexes, manufacturers, construction companies and landscapers. It is this variety that has been most beneficial for some Primavera WORKS employees.

"Primavera WORKS has helped me a lot," says one program participant. "I don't want to be inside. I would rather be outdoors. That is where Primavera WORKS puts me. I am very satisfied working in the open air."

That is just one account. But there are an estimated 26,000 homeless people at any given point in time in Arizona, and an estimated 40,000 to 50,000 throughout the course of a year, according to Internet reports. Tucson accounts for nearly 20 percent of that, with an estimated 5,000 homeless people in the city, according to the Tucson Planning Council for the Homeless. It is Primavera WORKS' mission to change that by promoting economic and social justice to build a future in which all people are ensured basic human rights, a livable income and safe affordable housing.

"We are committed to providing employers with quality workers, and we realize that to be able to do this, it is necessary for our workers to have a variety of resources available to them," says Dr. Don Chatfield, executive director for Primavera WORKS.

Primavera WORKS provides job readiness training, opportunities to transition to full-time employment, access

to a nutritious diet, clothing, housing provisions and higher wages for employees. It is viewed by many of its participants as much more than a program. For them, it is a lifesaver.

"I have been blessed," says Juan, a Primavera WORKS employee. "I was homeless with nowhere to turn. I ended up in the Primavera shelter, and thanks to that, I am still on my own two feet."

The program has earned local and national attention by participating in Mott Foundation studies and working with the Aspen Institute to determine the impact such programs have on the economy. Primavera WORKS was also recently nominated by the Tucson Alliance of Construction Trades to receive special recognition by employers in that field. But those are just the physical accolades. Chatfield has been hearing positive reports all along.

"What I hear from employers is that it's been a positive experience for them because they are able to have a source of reliable, temporary workers who show up at the job site ready and eager to work," Chatfield says.

And even though the recognition of the employers is a cause for pride, Chatfield says the real accomplishment is seeing the employees believing in themselves again. "The most fulfilling part of my job is looking into the eyes of one of our workers," he says, "and seeing the pride, self-esteem and accomplishment that comes with being productive." ♦



"The most fulfilling part of my job is looking into the eyes of one of our workers and seeing the pride, self-esteem and accomplishment that comes with being productive," says Don Chatfield, executive director of Primavera WORKS.



With such services as job readiness training, opportunities to transition to full-time employment, higher wages and more, Primavera WORKS offers program participants a renewed chance at life.



For more info

- > Primavera WORKS
- ✉ 325 S. Euclid
Suite 101
Tucson, AZ 85719
- 📞 (520) 882-9668