

Dakota Woodlands

Dakota Digest



Dakota Woodlands is the only facility for homeless women and children in Dakota County. Our mission is to empower homeless women to create stable futures for their families.

From the Desk of our Executive Director



"Random Acts of Kindness... an everyday occurrence at Dakota Woodlands!"

Besides being so cold, February is a special month at Dakota Woodlands. It is so special in fact that a week has gone by before we've been able to send our February Dakota Digest.

With Valentine's Day and the week of February 12-18 (Random Acts of Kindness Week) we have received many gifts of time, items we need and special gifts for our residents. We thought during this month, that we'd share some information regarding our work with children.

Let me begin by telling you about the littlest members of the families. We truly celebrate births of babies. (A few years ago, we even had a baby born at the shelter....thank you to the amazing talents of emergency responders and a heroic mom!) But, on a more normal course of our work, over our many years, we've worked with many pregnant women and new moms. We hold baby showers, complete with decorations, gifts, silly shower games and treats. All the staff and residents become part of this new baby's life. It is a joy to watch the new moms, the other residents, and especially the other children as they welcome the baby.

One of our residents had her baby this February. The day she returned from the hospital, I knocked on her door and got to

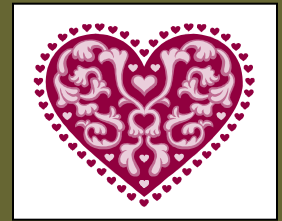
meet her baby. She was such a proud mom. The room was neat and tidy, all the new baby "stuff" taking up the usual space, cards and balloons still displayed from the baby shower. This mom was beaming, as she introduced me to her baby. Today, they moved to their new home in South St. Paul. She said she's so excited (and a little nervous).

As I've written before, it is an honor to be apart of helping these families change their lives and make such great beginnings. She'll do great. You would be proud to have played a part in the work we do with her and so many other moms and children. Let me tell you to more of our work with children....

We are planning some very special events for 2007. Mark your calendar for our HOMES event, on Saturday before Mother's Day (May 12th). This is an opportunity to invite people to come and learn more about our work. We will feature some residents talking about their experiences and where they are now. We'll be sending more information about this event. Plus, our second Flying Home event will be the evening of Saturday, October 13th. Though this is far into the future, you won't want to miss it!

Reyne Branchaud-Linsk

February 2007



We are grateful for every donation!!!!

You can donate on line at www.dakotawoodlands.org

Or please send your gift today. Thank you so much!!!



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"Every child begins the world again."

Henry David Thoreau



Random Acts of Kindness



“Volunteer of the Month”

Michelle Freeman

When a new mother is expecting a child it's customary for her friends and family to hold a baby shower for her so she can get the items she needs for the new baby. But a baby shower isn't just about gift giving, it's also a social event for the people who are important in the mom's life to come together and celebrate the birth of a new baby.

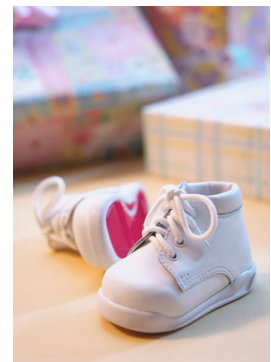
Michelle Freeman and her two friends, Jo Stitt and Connie Neight have taken it upon themselves to plan and organize baby showers for the expectant moms who are residents at Dakota Woodlands. “I want the women to feel special”, says Michelle Freeman, a new grandmother of a two year old. “I was raised by parents who taught me to give to others and this is something I can do at home that I feel really makes a difference.” She and her two cohorts hear about the baby-to-be from a family manager and start planning the party. For their first baby shower, they bought decorations that could be re-used for other showers, balloons, crepe paper, little duckies and storks, cute baby clothes, diapers and wipes. Michelle even brought over the frozen punch (and a punch bowl!) on the day of the party! They planned out the games, complete with all of the necessary items and the instructions. “It doesn't cost us much money, we always look for deals and things on sale”, says Michelle. “Whenever any of us is out shopping, we always keep an eye out for things that a mom-to-be might need.”

Michelle has been volunteering with Dakota Woodlands for several years making gift baskets and helping out with various events. It was when two of her co-workers asked her how they could help her that the idea of holding baby showers was “born”. Since they are all parents of either teen-agers or grown children, Michelle says that shopping for the new moms “satisfies our baby-fix” and the three friends have a great time planning everything and shopping together. “I have experienced financial difficulty myself and there were people helped me out when I needed it. It makes all of us feel good knowing that we can make a difference in someone's life by doing a simple thing like organizing a baby shower.”

“In Her Own Words”

We like to follow up with former residents after they leave Dakota Woodlands and see how they're doing. Recently, we spoke to a young mom who had delivered her baby while living at the shelter and is now living in her own apartment:

“I have great memories of Dakota Woodlands. I participated in the Queen for a Day event they had where we got spa treatments and makeovers. I went from being homeless and scared to being treated like a Queen! Since leaving Dakota Woodlands, I'm rebuilding a relationship with my parents (a factor in her being homeless) and we regularly bring clothes and items to the shelter together. Dakota Woodlands helped me get back my pride and dignity and made me feel safe. I got everything I needed to get my own place and feel hopeful again. I even have a good friend that I met at Dakota Woodlands and we support each other a lot.”



Volunteer Opportunities:

- We are looking for one or two people with a van to pick up donations weekly from an area store.
- Kitchen Help—work with staff and residents to prepare meals, clean and organize storage areas.
- Sorting Donations
- Playing educational games with school age children
- Rock Babies
- Reading Stories to Children
- Cleaning/Organizing Office Areas

For further information or to volunteer, please contact **Lori**: volunteer@dakotawoodlands.org
or (651)456-9110 ext 15.

Wish List:

- Empty Easter Baskets (we have things to fill them)
- Highlighters
- Toilet Paper
- Large Size Diapers, Size 5 & 6
- Condiments: Ketchup, Mustard, Mayo, Salad Dressings
- Pens (black, blue and red)
- Deodorant for women
- Baby Monitors (We need 6-7 monitors various brands are great)
- Wooden Restaurant Style Highchairs

For further information about how you or your group can assist us, please contact **Reyne** at (651) 456-9110 ext. 11. or email reyne@dakotawoodlands.org

Upcoming Events and Opportunities:



Mark your Calendars!

**H.O.M.E.S. Helping Our Mothers Experience Success
Saturday, May 12th, 2007**

Please join us for this wonderful Mother's Day event and learn more about our work with women and children.

Flying Home: October 13, 2007

Stay tuned for news about this exciting event—our second annual Flying Home benefit, hosted by our Board of Directors. A fabulous evening, featuring a silent auction and entertainment... your chance to win celebrity decorated birdhouses and learn more about Dakota Woodlands.



Dakota Woodlands is a 501c3 nonprofit organization.
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"You know, you guys reward us for doing things that help us and are good for us...that's so cool!"

– a quote from a resident to a Family Manager