

Hi TCase Study: Logic Models
~ About Decatur Cooperative Ministry (DCM) ~

Founded in 1969, DCM is a faith-based nonprofit organization supported by more than 35 congregations from 14 denominations. DCM works in conjunction with schools and educational institutions, government agencies, businesses, civic organizations, and community groups. DCM's mission is to "alleviate and prevent homelessness while affirming the dignity of each family." DCM operates a continuum of programs designed to address homelessness, including an emergency assistance/homelessness prevention program (Project Take Charge), an emergency shelter for women and children (Hagar's House), and a transitional housing program (Family Transitional Housing).

Advocating for social justice and long-term solutions to homelessness is part of DCM's vision, and so DCM also "serves" its volunteers with a small educational component that focuses on the root causes of homelessness. They provide limited opportunities for volunteers to participate in advocacy activities. DCM has a very active Board of Directors, which has an Organizational and Program Assessment Committee that oversees evaluation activities. For the last 10 years, the Atlanta-area Evaluation Association has partnered with the committee to evaluate DCM's core programs and assist in overall program evaluation capacity building. In 2005, Hagar's House was selected for evaluation. The story follows:

~ About Hagar's House ~

Hagar's House is an emergency shelter for homeless women and their children operated by DCM. The operating budget for Hagar's House in 2005 was \$112,672. The program is funded through state and county grants, FEMA, United Way, congregations, grants from foundations, individual contributions, and DCM's annual fundraising event. It receives many in-kind donations as well. All food and most supplies are donated. When the program began in 1985, it was housed at in donated space at Holy Trinity Episcopal Church. In August 2001, DCM purchased a facility located near the square in Decatur. The new facility has five bedrooms rooms, each with a private bath. The physical building also has a common dining room, kitchen, laundry facility, a computer center, a large community room, and offices for shelter staff and volunteers. DCM offices are physically adjacent to the shelter. A fenced playground is also located on the property grounds.

Population Served

Hagar's House serves homeless women with children. Up to 30 persons may stay at the shelter. Typically, each family has a private room to itself, though occasionally two mothers and their children may occupy a room. (This is in contrast to many shelters that have more "gym-like" accommodations.) Hagar's House is one of the few shelters in the metro Atlanta area that accepts women with more than three children, so families staying at Hagar's House often fill up the rooms. Because it has private rooms, Hagar's House can also accept mothers who have boys aged 13 to 16 years, which is very uncommon in homeless shelters. In 2004, 88 mothers and 240 children were served. Most of the women are referred to Hagar's House from the Task Force for the Homeless, but the program also accepts referrals from other agencies or congregations.

Services Offered

Hagar's house is an emergency night shelter. Families may stay at Hagar's House for up to 30 days (a limit set by funding requirements). Operating hours are 6 p.m. to 7:30 a.m., except holidays. Families may stay until 9:30 a.m. on Saturdays and 8:30 a.m. on Sundays. The shelter is closed during the day, except for Saturday mornings for those using the computer lab.

In addition to the bedroom and bath, each family is provided with linens for their use at the shelter. Toiletries, laundry supplies, and a small clothing supply are available as needed. Toys and games for the children are available in the community room, and a phone is accessible during operating hours. Volunteers prepare and share a hot dinner each night at 6:30 p.m. Cold breakfast foods are available to the families before shelter closing in the morning. Drinks are available at all times.

In addition to room and board, Hagar's House also offers families a variety of other services, including case management, emotional support, computer access and training, and homework help. When available, MARTA tokens are provided for transportation. In addition, a variety of child enrichment activities, such as birthday parties, craft projects, stories and books, and occasional outings are provided by the DeKalb Library Outreach Program, congregations, and other service groups.

The shelter also has relationship with the City Schools of Decatur. Children staying at the shelter can attend nearby schools and are also enrolled in after school programs offered through the schools, providing them with a safe and educational experience in the time before the shelter opens in the evening. Preschool children may enroll at Our House, a preschool program for homeless children in Decatur, as space allows. Children also attend summer programs at the Decatur Recreation Center.

Staffing

Hagar's House has limited professional staff resources and operates with extensive volunteer and intern commitment. The program has two dedicated professional staff persons. The shelter manager has direct management responsibility for the operations of the shelter and also provides direct case management and counseling services to the families. The assistant manager lives on site from Sunday until Thursday and oversees daily operations, including ensuring that the mothers complete their assigned chores. She also manages breakfast and ensures the families leave by closing time. A part-time facilities manager is also on staff to maintain the physical property. During a portion of the evaluation, the position of shelter manager was vacant for an extended period, during which time the assistant manager assumed multiple roles.

Dozens of volunteers are involved with shelter activities. More than 7,700 volunteer hours (more than 21 hours each day) were recorded in 2004. Each night, a Lead Volunteer welcomes the families and trains and coordinates the other volunteers. Other volunteers include the dinner volunteers, who bring the hot dinner for the families, the homework help volunteers, and the volunteers helping in the computer center and providing special activities. On Friday and Saturday nights, volunteer Overnight Hosts stay at the shelter, manage breakfast in the mornings, and ensure families leave for the day. Because so many volunteers are active in Hagar's House, the volunteer coordinator for DCM also plays a key staff role in Hagar's House operations. A police background check is performed for all volunteers, except dinner volunteers.

From an administrative perspective, the Executive Director of DCM is responsible for the financial stability of Hagar's House and for supervising the paid staff. The DCM Board provides general oversight and has a work group dedicated to overseeing Hagar's House operation and management.