

## Working hard together to end homelessness

*October 4, 2011 / My View, written by Timothy C. Joyce*

The Star on Sept. 30 shined a bright light on two of the many facets of the homelessness issue in our city.

John Tuohy's fine story focused on the Community Court of Indianapolis, one small front in the battle against personal upheaval and homelessness. Those who work on the front lines know that trusting relationships and a gentle touch usually make the difference in whether an individual focuses on his challenges and comes off the streets, sometimes after years of turmoil and homelessness. Community Court provides that personal touch by helping individuals see the ripple effects of their actions and sets the stage for building the relationships that result in a stable life.

Matt Tully's insightful column drew the much-needed distinction between panhandlers and people who are experiencing homelessness. More important, he explained that well-intentioned people who give money to those who are begging may be doing more harm than good. Panhandlers' success will keep them coming back to the most lucrative corners. And handouts help those who are homeless to stay on the streets, obviating their need to go to a shelter and be safely housed temporarily and exposed to services that may lead to permanent housing. It does much more good to donate to the outstanding agencies that meet these neighbors and help them combat the challenges brought on by joblessness, poverty and homelessness.

Every day, an outreach worker forges a deeper bond with a person on the street, building trust that may eventually bring him inside. Shelters welcome families who have been victimized by the recession, provide a temporary home and teach them skills that will help them better weather future downturns.

School counselors face daunting statistics -- more than 3,000 homeless children in Indianapolis alone -- yet they help these youngsters deal with the everyday challenges of doing their best at school. Recovery houses help substance abusers to face their addictions and the damage they cause, and give them the courage to say, "I will take care of my responsibilities."

On Thursday evening, the community will celebrate its progress at the annual Blueprint Celebration, which honors individuals, corporations and collaborations that have gone above and beyond in advancing Indianapolis' 10-year plan, the Blueprint to End Homelessness.

Among those who will be singled out at this year's event, which will be held at 5:30 p.m. at the Indiana Landmarks Center, are the Community Court featured in Tuohy's story and the men and women who work tirelessly with homeless youths in public schools.

Five days later, we will take another significant step toward ending homelessness when people from across our community will gather at the Community Summit on Homelessness to voice what they want to see in the plan that will follow the blueprint. The event, also at the Landmarks Center, is scheduled for 1:30 to 4:30 p.m. Oct. 11.

Come celebrate with us, and then share your ideas at the summit. Let's be glad for what we have accomplished and resolve to continue this important work.

**Joyce is executive director of the Coalition for Homelessness Intervention and Prevention.**