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Voice of the Poor Advocate
Society of St. Vincent de Paul
Ishpeming Conference (14 miles from Marquette)

Sometimes people think St. Vincent de Paul is just a thrift store. We are a Catholic lay organization that operates independently of the Catholic Church but have the church's support and endorsement. We are present in 144 countries besides the U.S. We work hand-in-hand with those living at poverty levels, our "friends in need," caring for and helping them as Christ entrusted all Christians to do. By serving the poor, we are serving Him.

We provide food, clothing and household items; and help with living expenses such as rent, utilities, many other needs such as transportation expenses to doctor appointments, obtaining needed documents like birth certificates, ID cards and make many referrals to other agencies. We serve the poor, the afflicted, the addicted. No one who qualifies under the 200% federal poverty guideline is judged or turned away.

My role, as voice of the poor advocate, is to speak up for my friends in need wherever I can. And so I am here today to represent their cries for help when it comes to mental health.

There was a recent article in our local paper, The Mining Journal, retelling the story of years ago, when most of the mental hospitals in Michigan closed down and the mentally ill were released, left to their own devices for survival and treatment. Many ended up homeless and many in the prison system. In the last few years, our own local mental health provider, Pathways, has had to release patients and cut staff due to state budget cuts. One who was in danger of being cut was my own grandson, under my care at the time, suffering from anxiety, depression, social disorder, bipolar, anger control, ADD and other problems. His caseworker fought hard to keep him on and won. Later, after he returned to his mother's care in Wisconsin, he was diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome. I thank God he wasn't cut from Pathways but it tore at my heart that these cuts were being made and it didn't matter if you were a child or an adult.

Last year a gentleman I know who is jobless, but looking for work, homeless but staying with a friend, was taken to Marquette General by law enforcement with suicidal and homicidal ideations. There he was seen by someone from Pathways and although he first doubted anybody could help him, he began to make progress and was encouraged by that fact. His medications were adjusted and he was released from the hospital. His Pathways counselor in the hospital said that they would cover his hospital bill, and he was to make an appointment with Pathways that following week for an evaluation. Imagine his reaction when, upon his release from the hospital and his first visit to Pathways, he was told he wasn't severe enough to receive care. They gave him a list of other counselors who worked on a sliding fee scale. Remember, he has no income. If this gentleman didn't feel like going out and taking several people with him before, he sure did then. He has flashbacks from the verbal, physical and

sexual abuse he suffered as a child. He has horrible nightmares. He suffers physically from broken bones from his childhood abuse that were never treated. Although he called out for help to his other family members, teachers and law enforcement, no one did anything. He is calling out for help again, and again, no one is doing anything.

His physician told him that there is a greater need for counselors to help people in his position who have no income and are not accepted by Pathways. I believe we also need some kind of advocates, facilitators, liaisons, someone to help people get the help they need. Especially after Sandy Hook, the fact that someone like him is unable to get any kind of help is scary.

I hope and pray that you seek out those who help people in poverty in order to discern the best methods to reach those who need help and what kind of help they really need.

I have composed a list of our local organizations who help the poor, the homeless and the abused in our community for your reference. Thank you for your time today.

Janzen House, Inc.

Homeless shelter. 146 W. Spring Street, Marquette, (906) 226-2271.

Harbor House

Women's domestic violence shelter. Phyllis Loonsfoot, director. (906) 225-1346, ext. 113 or 226-6611

Room at the Inn

Homeless shelter that runs in the wintertime, sheltering at a different church every week. Douglas Russell, executive director, 347 Rock Street, Marquette.

Salvation Army

Helps homeless, poor, many others. Salvationarmy.org
Marquette, 1009 W. Baraga, (906) 226-2241
Ishpeming, 222 E. Division, Ishpeming, 49849, (906) 486-8121

Society of St. Vincent de Paul

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