

## Uplifting children is focus of "marketplace" festival

The Biblical woman Hagar lived many roles — Egyptian princess, human with failings, handmaid-en of Sarah, mother of Ishmael, servant of God. And, for a time — homeless single mother.

Inspired by Hagar's story of rising above fundamental life challenges, Deborah Wall founded a faith-based organization to help families overcome homelessness.

Wall organized Children of Hagar in 2006, with the goal of "strengthening communities through permanent supportive housing, while making a positive difference in the lives of children."

Prior to that, she volunteered for 12 years with several organizations working to end homelessness.

Having a place to call "home" is the basic foundation for well-being in all other areas of life. In recent years, efforts by both private and government entities to end homelessness have been strengthened, but much work remains.

What's different about Children of Hagar? Two things. Unlike many programs, it focuses on permanent housing. "We're not a 'hot and a cot,'" Wall



poetry, music, art, dance, resource information, and family fun." It is also a fundraiser for Children of Hagar youth and family services.

Individuals and several churches have sponsored tickets for children living in shelters to attend.

Hosted by media personality and musician Doc Christian, the event will feature performances "for the heart and soul" designed to uplift children and families.

Performers include poets, dancers, krumpers, and a band playing jazz, contemporary, and gospel music.

The marketplace will feature 25 exhibitors made up of local businesses offering crafts, foods, and other items for sale, and service organizations providing information on family resources.

The event is open to the public. Admission will be by a love offering and a perishable item for the Foodbank of Southeastern Virginia.

Those who are unable to attend are invited to donate \$10 to sponsor attendance for a child in need. By so doing you can still take part of this "village" effort.

WE BEGAN WITH TRADITIONAL HOUSING programs, congregations, and other service agencies end."

Its primary purpose, she says, "is to locate and provide affordable scattered housing opportunities to 'at risk' populations."

The second distinguishing feature is that the program is designed and run by its clients. Wall notes that, "Rather than being regarded as part of the problem, our clients are intent on being part of the solution to ending homelessness."

This collaborative approach has valuable intangible benefits which include pride and security in maintaining permanent homes and a feeling of belonging to an empowered community while contributing to the community.

Wall makes it clear that to be eligible for services, applicants must adhere to a strict list of criteria, demonstrate the desire for independence, and be willing to work for it. Finding affordable housing is not easy. Children of Hagar serves a modest number of families and has a waiting list.

Through collaborations with churches and social service agencies, client

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Performing groups include steppers of Teens With a Purpose, pictured at top, and Friends of City Dance (of Richmond)

families are offered an array of supportive services, including life skills training and debt management, to help them remain stable.

Wall understands from personal experience the challenges inherent in regaining stability after an upheaval. She considers herself a walking miracle.

At age 23 she suffered an aneurysm and was unable to perform basic skills like feeding herself and talking. "I went from a successful career as a buyer for Macy's to suddenly being disabled," she said.

After struggling for two years to recover on her own, Wall moved in with her mother and eventually was able to live independently again. She remains

partially paralyzed and uses a cane. Making a positive difference in the lives of children is high on Walls list of priorities. She believes that children of the homeless are no less deserving than others in their aspirations, goals and dreams. "These children have endured tremendous upheavals and instability as part of their families' path to homelessness," she adds.

The Poet's Society of Children of Hagar, established in honor of Wall's late brother Daryle Richard Wall, is instrumental in many of the children's activities.

On April 11 the Poets Society will sponsor Celebrating Children: It Takes a Village," billed as a "marketplace of

## Celebrating Children: It Takes a Village

A marketplace festival of poetry, music, art, dance, resource information

Sunday, April 11  
4:00 p.m.

Sacred Heart Catholic Church  
520 Graydon Ave.  
Norfolk, VA 23507

**ADMISSION:**  
Love offering and a food item  
donation to the Foodbank of  
Southeastern Virginia  
for children of Haiti

Peanut butter, cereals,  
canned meats, vegetables,  
fruit juice, pasta, pasta sauce  
are highly desired items.

For information:  
757-583-0502

hrgazeti.blogspot.com