

Shelter in East Cleveland struggling

Donations fall off, forcing founder to consider closing

By **JESSE TINSLEY**
PLAIN DEALER REPORTER

EAST CLEVELAND — Generosity has helped keep the doors open at Broken Connections, the sole shelter for the homeless in East Cleveland. But money is running low at this home that is keeping 13 children and nine adults off the streets.

Nicole Howell-Crawford, who opened Broken Connections two years ago, said she might have to close it because of a lack of private donations and foundation grants.

Piecemeal donations, along with her personal contributions, have not been enough to keep



CHRIS STEPHENS / PLAIN DEALER PHOTOGRAPHER

Residents of Broken Connections, the only shelter for the homeless in East Cleveland, surround founder and chief benefactor Nicole Howell-Crawford. From left are Niaquita Williams, John Adams, Howell-Crawford, Joe Scott and Cheryl Crenshaw. The shelter is a 23-room house given to Howell-Crawford by her mother, Patricia Howell.

the shelter going, said Howell-Crawford, who runs the shelter with the help of a few volunteers.

"I have been running this homeless shelter with my own income," said Howell-Crawford, a full-time administrative assistant at the Ohio Lot-

tery Commission. "When I'm about to shut the doors, something comes through."

It costs about \$1,200 per month to run the shelter, she said.

Donations have fallen short over the last few months, Howell-Crawford said.

SEE HOMELESS/3-B

E. Cleveland's only shelter for homeless scrapes by

HOMELESS FROM 1-B

That, coupled with mounting utility bills and other expenses, could force the closing of the Euclid Ave. shelter early next year, she said.

Christmas was expected to be particularly disheartening, she said, because there wasn't enough money to buy presents for the children. An anticipated donation fell through, she said, adding that ham and trimmings had to do.

"Some of these kids have never had a Christmas" with presents, Howell-Crawford said. "Now they are not going to have one this year. I need more donations, be-

cause a program like this can't operate on my own money."

Howell-Crawford's shelter has been praised by local and state officials, including Charles Christian, a regional representative of the state treasurer's office.

"Once fully funded, Broken Connections has the potential to become a model program," he said. Christian added that Howell-Crawford's "individual dedication and commitment in the fight against homelessness prevention, especially using your

own funds, are indeed a rare and noble quality."

East Cleveland Mayor Emmanuel Onunwor said the city was unable to provide funding for the shelter last year but was urging Howell-Crawford to hang on until after January.

"We want to see the shelter remain open," Onunwor said. "We will find some funding in 1999. When she [Howell-Crawford] came to us this year, it was too late."

Howell-Crawford, who also

lives at the shelter, said helping the homeless was her way of giving something back to society.

She opened Broken Connections, the only nonprofit group in East Cleveland dedicated to helping the homeless, after working as a volunteer for a Cleveland shelter. Broken Connections is set up in a 23-room house given to her by her mother, Patricia Howell.

"I always had when I was growing up, and I have always been a giver," she said. Her elders always taught me that it's better to give 10 cents and you will get 10 cents in return. The best thing I feel is to see people's lives better turned around by something you did."