

A home for the homeless

A home that once housed some of Cleveland's rich and famous now houses some of the poorest, thanks to the efforts of Nicole Howell-Crawford.

Howell-Crawford has opened up a non-profit shelter in a grand old mansion, just



Nicole Howell-Crawford

a stone's throw from John D. Rockefeller's residence at Forest Hills Park. She calls it Broken Connections, and she takes in homeless people with a variety of problems. Crawford believes she has found a solution for homelessness.

"Love, pure love," she says. "I stay there, I mop the floor, I cook. I have

a hands-on approach."

She decided to start Broken Connections after a brief stint as a volunteer working with the chemically dependent. "I was just going to volunteer, but I saw that they needed more," she said. "They need to know somebody cares about them."

But operating a shelter is no easy task. Howell-Crawford, 32, works full time at the Ohio Lottery Commission as an administrative assistant and attends school part time. Almost all of her free time is spent at the shelter, where she now lives. "When you see lives being changed, it's worth it," says Howell-Crawford. "You have to make some kind of sacrifice to succeed. I graduated from Regina High School, and I had the best of everything, the best education, the best clothes, but I saw people who needed more."

Howell-Crawford says she has been able to keep the doors open with private donations and foundation grants, and that she and her mother, Patricia Howell, have refinanced their home to get a loan to keep the shelter going. "It's hard to convince people that you just do things because you want to in your heart," Howell-Crawford says. "This is the most important thing that I have ever done in my life."



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