



**IMAGINE
COMMUNITY**



Invitation to Imagination

Imagine Community is an organization working to promote solidarity between housed and homeless people through creativity and skill sharing. Our immediate goal is to open a community center in Ann Arbor. This space would serve as an educational and social center for the entire Ann Arbor community, where housed and homeless individuals would create, socialize, learn, teach and stay out of the cold together.

Human connection, a sense self-worth, empowerment and emotional fulfillment are essential on the road out of homelessness. However, within the formal social services system these assets are often marginalized in a way that exacerbates problems such as depression, anxiety and addiction. As of October 2011 the Imagine Community has been engaged in opening emotional and creative spaces for self-growth. We have been operating a weekly program at the Delonis Center, holding community events at the Hathaway Hideaway, West Park and Liberty Plaza, initiating communal creative activities and offering support and assistance to individuals. Our goal for this year is to open a community center in downtown Ann Arbor, which will host our activities and serve as a warm daytime space for the homeless.

We invite you to imagine a community with us! Help us break boundaries of prejudice and fear and work toward a caring society!



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Background: Days without Community

Approximately 5000 individuals experience homelessness in Washtenaw County every year. Several of the agencies assisting these individuals are located in downtown Ann Arbor. Among those agencies are the Delonis Center, which offers shelter, meals and a medical clinic, the St. Andrews' breakfast program, and Project Outreach which provide mental health services. Many low-income and homeless people need to be in downtown Ann Arbor to have access to these services, as well as to employment opportunities, social interaction, and other resources that the vibrant and lively center of Ann Arbor offers.

With 75 beds at the Delonis center, and the additional temporary 50 spots at the warming centers during the winter, nighttime shelter space is far from sufficient. However, during the daytime, homeless people experience further challenges, since there is no daytime center at all. Shelter residents must leave the Delonis center at 7 A.M. and can only access their beds and their belongings again at night. People who have spent the night outside must wander around town during the day in search for a spot to rest. The downtown public library has de-facto become a daytime center for the homeless, but it has no resources to deal with the complicated needs of this community. Thus, daytime in Ann Arbor features hundreds of individuals roaming around downtown looking for spaces to be comfortable, warm and engaged. Needless to say, this is not an auspicious situation for people, who are already disempowered by homelessness, and who sometimes suffer from mental illnesses and addiction issues.





Our Proposal

The Imagine Community group will open a community center in downtown Ann Arbor. This warm, hospitable and creative place will offer opportunities for all of us, homed and homeless adults, to teach, learn, make friends, acquire new skills, creatively work through emotions, “stay out of trouble,” keep warm and build community.

The center will be managed and operated by homed and homeless volunteers. The community built through the Imagine Community activities in 2011-2012 will serve as the initial pool of volunteers which will be constantly expanded.

Based on our experience operating daytime activities center at the Delonis Center, we feel our facility should offer the following services:

1. Creative opportunities: Arts and crafts, creative writing, music and more.
2. Resources and individual assistance with job and home search: E.g. web navigation, counseling, resume editing, interview coaching, and networking with potential roommates, landlords and employers.
3. Educational consultations and tutoring: E.g. help with GED preparation, computer skills, literacy, and special topics of interest.
4. Quiet daytime rest space: Including comfortable couches, sofas and mattresses.
5. Safe social space: Coffee and snacks, games, library.





Current Activities

- **Activity Center at the Delonis Center:** A weekly all-day (9-4) activity center at the existing homeless shelter, offering workshops of arts and crafts, creative writing, music, and GED preparation, as well as advice in seeking employment, housing and healthcare.
- **The Imagine Parties:** Throughout 2011-2012 we have held five communal events showcasing the creative talents of homed and homeless individuals, and providing an opportunity for the community to come together and to be empowered and inspired.
- **Awareness Raising Activities:**
 - **Weekly vigil:** During the winter and spring of 2011-2012 we have held a weekly vigil by the old Borders in downtown Ann Arbor to raise awareness to the issue of homelessness in Washtenaw County.
 - **July 4th Parade:** Our homed and homeless float in Ann Arbor's 2012 Fourth of July parade brought positive recognition of the significance of the Imagine Community.
 - **Community Gardens:** We planted and cultivated a vegetable and flower gardens at the north entrance to town and at the Delonis Center's parking lot.
 - **Advocacy with City and County Authorities:** We have spoken in numerous city council meetings and other public meeting on issues of homelessness and community.
- **Individual Assistance:** The Imagine Community regularly provides assistance to individuals experiencing homelessness including:
 - Help in managing housing search, lease negotiation and security deposit assistance
 - Arrangement of short term and long term cooperative home -shares
 - Transportation and escort to house viewing, job interviews and doctor-appointments
 - Resume editing and typing
 - Supply of camping gear such as sleeping bags, thermoses, blankets and hand warmers
 - Assistance in navigation of online resources
 - Consultations regarding educational and professional goals.



Our Needs

We are seeking more volunteers, equipment donations, monetary donations, and permanent premises for our center.

- **Volunteers:** To keep expanding our activities we need dedicated individuals willing lead and/or participate in creative workshops; consult, support and coach people going through job and housing search; coordinate fundraising projects; and assist with grant writing. Formal experience is not required to volunteer.
- **Premises:** We need a space located downtown that is approximately 1,100 square feet, private and accessible to people with disabilities. The space will hold our educational and creative activities and will serve as our office.
- **Supplies:** We welcome donations of art supplies, musical instruments, board games, books, teaching supplies, computers, and furniture (for future premises).
- **Monetary donations:** We would be grateful for any monetary contribution to help pay for our supplies, as well offset monthly rental costs once we find a property.

