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Depaul House Helps Move from Homelessness to Self-Reliance

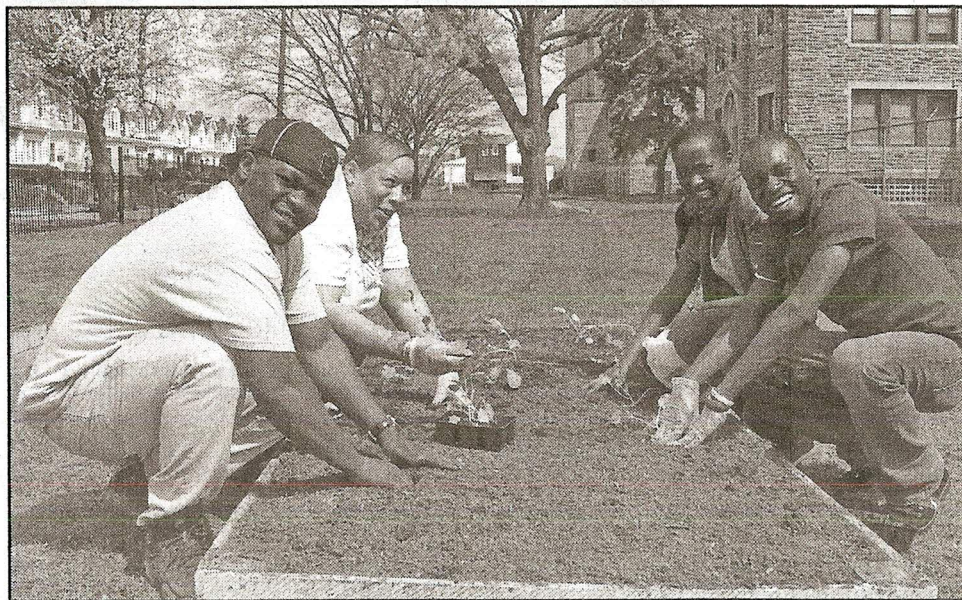
By **PATRICK COBBS**
Staff Writer

A year after the first residents came through the doors at the Depaul House homeless shelter at 5720 Sprague Street, the program can boast a pretty significant impact.

A total of 55 chronically homeless men have since come into the program and 56 percent of all those leaving have graduated with a stable living situation, a job and a savings account. Not bad, said Sandra Guillory, Depaul House program director, considering some of the residents have been living in shelters for years.

"I think we're doing really well, especially for our first year," she said. "We keep in touch with most of our graduates and most of them are doing pretty well... they're staying in their housing."

Of course there is always something to improve. So Guillory and her staff are still working to create and define the supportive programs at Depaul so they mesh with what the residents need. Job searching is important, for example, and a lot of that is done by computer, so one of Guillory's priorities is to expand beyond the current single computer available for resident's use – and fast.



Students from St. George Community College made the trip up from Maryland recently to help Depaul House plant its new vegetable garden that will be used for making "green smoothies" that residents drink every morning. Here, from left, are students Jackson Kamdem, Mary Caldwell, Sharon Gatobu and Anthony Nwandu.

Another effort, since health is central to any personal turnaround, is the "green smoothie" morning power drink that has become a tradition at Depaul. It's a combination of fresh fruit and vegetables blended into what Guillory described as a delicious

drink – green as a St. Patty's Day clover.

And the residents really do drink them.

In fact, Depaul has become so attached to the green smoothies that it has recruited several other community groups to help build a vegetable garden next to the shelter

to provide the freshest green stuff possible for the smoothies.

On a recent Saturday a group of students from St. George Community College in Maryland were on hand, as part of their alternative spring break, to help plant collard greens, kale, broccoli and lettuce for the first round of home-grown ingredients. Over the previous week the group of students also helped rehabilitate an area home and they volunteered at the Whosoever Gospel Mission Thrift Store.

"You can do something like this in D.C.," said Mary Caldwell. "But to me, being exposed to different kids and different ages – it makes me feel good."

Guillory has a few goals for the shelter's second year. She wants to more clearly demonstrate the program's results by keeping in closer contact with former participants, she said. And though several local residents helped make the new vegetable garden a reality, Guillory still wants the program to engage the local community more. She is looking for local residents who could act as mentors, and even landlords who could help orient program participants to requirements of renting an apartment. And from now on, there will also be a garden to help tend as well.