

northwest

Jean DeMaster

Working for community

by Sarah Dougher

Jean DeMaster was honored Nov. 8 by Metropolitan Family Services for her extraordinary 30-year support of Portland's low-income families.

DeMaster is executive director of Human Solutions, an organization that works with the Mid and East Multnomah County Community Development Corporation to help people gain self-sufficiency by providing affordable housing, skill development and family support services.

In addition to her work at Human Solutions, DeMaster has contributed to the social service infrastructure of Portland by running the area's largest YWCA for four years, ending in 2002. She led a \$7.9 million capital campaign to refurbish the downtown YWCA building, and she raised \$4.1 million to restore Camp Westwind, the YWCA's camp for girls and women on the Oregon Coast.

She worked as program manager for the Adult Care Home Program of Multnomah County, executive director of Transition Housing Projects and program manager at Portland Impact.

One of DeMaster's most important contributions was as the co-founder and co-director of Technical Assistance for Community Services (TACS). For more than 25 years, TACS has provided knowledge, skills and resources to more than 6,000 nonprofits. Its Nonprofit

Helpline assists more than 3,000 callers each year.

The goal of the organization is to make the business of running a nonprofit trouble-free and less complex, so the work can stay focused.

Executive director Kay Sohl, who is the other co-founder, remarks: "Jean is an absolutely dynamic leader. She brings energy around whatever issue she's working with and can really express the core essence of what an organization is trying to accomplish. She does this in a way so that people are inspired to get involved in a way that they maybe wouldn't otherwise."

"Since she left TACS in 1982, she's been involved in the issue of homelessness and has worked with so many parts of the issue. She has a consistent commitment to help people who have resources to share with those who have no resources. This is a great gift."

Sohl also admires DeMaster's understanding of public policy and the way large systems work, noting that because of this, she is able to be effective in advocating for change on both a state and local level. "She is truly tireless and willing to shoulder any burden."

Jawea Mockabee, president of On Target Fundraising, which has helped Human Solutions with events in the past, recalls DeMaster's founding of the Oregon Feminist Federal Credit Union in the late 1970s. "She thought that women and low-income women in particular should have access to a credit union," notes



Jean DeMaster, executive director of Human Solutions, receives an award for her 30-year commitment to Portland's low-income families.

Mockabee. "It was pretty revolutionary for the time."

When asked how her politics as a lesbian affect her work on homelessness, DeMaster says: "For our whole community to be better, we all need a place to live. Our goal should be to have a community that is accepting and caring about everybody in it.... There are a number of gay people who become homeless. It is important for me in all the shelters I've worked in that there be no discrimination."

DeMaster's current work at Human Solutions puts her at the helm of the leading social service agency providing anti-poverty programs and services in East Portland and Mid and East Multnomah

County. It is the major safety net for low-income families in this 245-square-mile region. Since 1988, Human Solutions has provided access to emergency shelter and affordable transitional and permanent housing paired with a broad range of social services. The program finds its history from a federal agency from the mid-1960s called Multnomah County Community Action Agency.

Human Solutions serves more than 25,000 people in more than 7,300 families. 10

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