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Above: Carol Woodworth, principal, Optimal Organizing and Lisa Todd, volunteer manager, Connections for the Homeless, worked side by side to ensure that the shelter would operate more efficiently through improved approaches to organization. Connections for the Homeless operates out of the Lake Street church in Evanston.



Above: Lisa Todd's office *before* she began working with Optimal Organizing. **Below:** Free of piles of clutter and with a freshly streamlined approach to her work, Lisa Todd's office is more welcoming, attractive and user friendly than it was before the completion of her organizational revamp.



Professional organizer aids homeless shelter

Submitted by **BETSY STORM**
Contributor

An Evanston-based shelter, Connections for the Homeless, is operating more efficiently, attractively and even strategically after several sessions with a Rogers Park-based professional organizer.

Connections for the Homeless not only houses the homeless but also provides support for people at risk in their goals of self-sufficiency. One of its programs, Hilda's Place, is a transitional shelter based at the Lake Street Church, 607 Lake St. The facility serves adults in 30 commu-

nities of northern Cook County.

In 2010, Lisa Todd, volunteer manager, regularly received high-quality donations of gently used clothing, bedding and other household items from Optimal Organizing, a Rogers Park-based professional organization service. Carol Woodworth, principal, Optimal Organizing, impressed Todd with her can-do attitude and organizational acumen, as well as her extensive background in nonprofit management. (In 2008, after 28 years, Woodworth was laid off from her management position with a large human

services agency in Chicago. She launched Optimal Organizing in 2009.)

A recent survey conducted by the National Association of Professional Organizers revealed that 91 percent of respondents said they would be more efficient at work if they were better organized, and 71 percent indicated their quality of life would improve with better organization. The task of getting organized presents itself in countless forms. Sometimes it's paper management, applying the discipline of throwing away or recycling items no longer in use or using space more

efficiently. In many cases, success requires all of the above ... and more.

Over a period of several months, the team of Todd and Woodworth applied a keen eye and organizational effort to transform the space.

"Taking into account our limited financial resources, Carol displayed sensitivity in tackling problems and effecting change within our organization," says Todd. "I was at a loss regarding how to improve the work environment in our overcrowded and cluttered space, but Carol was unfazed. Together, we created a plan, and every session brought vis-

ible improvements."

Todd reports that coworkers and clients quickly acknowledged the enhancements and began to express greater pride in the space and the organization.

She continues: "A big surprise to me was that at the same time I started working with Carol, our in-kind donations and offers of help began to increase. As a result of our collaboration, I was able to take advantage of these opportunities so much more. Three of our spaces recently were renovated with donated labors and materials — simply because I felt more organized

and could better communicate our needs and our plans for improvement."

Not only has the shelter benefited from the collaboration; so has Woodworth.

"When I lost my job in 2008, it certainly became clear that we're all just a step away from losing everything — our security, our homes, our way of life," she says. "That reality was driven home to me when I began my partnership with Connections for the Homeless. I've gained a great deal from this volunteer experience, including a deeper appreciation for the important work of Connections for the Homeless."