

Meltdown Gets the Cold Shoulder

Volunteer artists and social workers from the organization Meltdown, Inc. have been helping homeless women at the Park Slope Armory for a year and a half. But when they applied to be official administrators of the shelter, the Meltdown members were left out in the cold.

Meltdown's proposal did not get past the first stage of the application process, being handled by the city Department of Homeless Services, which is privatizing the armory shelter.

"It's very frustrating that we were dismissed so quickly from the RFP because our concept was terrific," said Bronwyn Rucker, Meltdown's artistic director.

"We were dismissed as insignificant and trivial," she lamented. "Granted, we don't have a history of working as an organization [running] a shelter."

But, she said, "We know what we're doing and we have expertise working with this population, and we're the only people [voluntarily helping current shelter residents]."

The city was apparently looking for a more established social services organization to administer the shelter for 70 mentally ill homeless women. The contract will pay a reported \$1.9 million in its first year.

Rucker complained to Department of Homeless Services (DHS) official Stephan Russo that the department would not even

return Meltdown's phone calls. The next day, she got a call, but it was not what she wanted to hear.

"We were told, 'Your proposal has no social service plan and no community linkages,'" she said, asserting, "The whole thing is a social service plan and there were very specifically stated community linkages."

Meltdown had suggested a creative approach to working with the women, rather than simply traditional drug and alcohol counseling. "I'm frustrated because we know that the program works," said Rucker. "I feel we are being ostracized in the same way that the women [at the shelter] are. I get the feeling [DHS officials] wish we would just disappear."

"But, sighed Rucker, "you can't fight City Hall."

Meltdown has been running an unfunded weekly program at the 14th Street building called "Voices of the Armory" since October, 1993. Rucker said her group of professional women donate their time to the shelter residents "to let them know that not everybody in the neighborhood's against them" and "to break down some of those racist, sexist barriers."

Meltdown, which has an office at 346 Flatbush Avenue, uses theater as a vehicle to introduce the homeless women to the community, and conducts sessions at the armory every Thursday, she said.

--Erik Engquist



Bronwyn Rucker says her group was denied a fair chance to administer the Park Slope Armory's homeless program.