

Remarks delivered by Nelson Switzer, Direct Energy

**Partners in Solving Youth Homelessness Conference
Opening Remarks**

**Wednesday, November 19, 2008
Holiday Inn, 370 King Street West, Toronto, ON**

Thank you, Sean for that introduction, and, on behalf of Direct Energy – Welcome to the Partners Solving Youth Homelessness National Conference here in Toronto. I am so pleased to have the opportunity to tell you first hand how much the work you all do matters to us and the communities in which we live and work.

Direct Energy is one of North America's largest energy and energy-related service providers with over 5 million residential and commercial customer relationships. And through some of these relationships we have become acutely aware of the need to support those on the fringe, those dealing with the very real issue of poverty, the leading cause of homelessness.

We are proud to join with each of you and Human Resources & Social Development Canada to support this conference and its' critical mission - finding long-term solutions to youth homelessness.

Direct Energy and our employees are long time supporters of Raising the Roof, and specifically the cutting-edge research they are spearheading with the Youthworks Initiative – and why?

Because at our company, we believe that it is not only the responsibility of corporate Canada to contribute funds and products and services to community organizations, but it is the responsibility of corporate Canada to empower Canadians with opportunity, knowledge and capacity to tackle social issues. It is this imperative that helped foster the brilliant giving culture at our company – and we call this culture “helping communities help each other” – and I can think of no better example of that than what I see here today – a collection of inspired, committed members from communities across Canada and the United States – educating, inspiring and empowering one another with the tools necessary to activate the solutions proposed in the groundbreaking work detailed in the *National Strategy to Solve Youth Homelessness* paper.

After reading the study I had a few realizations and there is a couple in particular I would like to share in the few moments I have with you:

First, no one size fits all – there is no one solution that can adequately address issues in every community – in fact, trying to find the common denominator solution usually leads to highly distilled efforts. However, here, over the next three days, we all have an opportunity to hear what works and how it might apply in our communities...so we must listen and share in order to stimulate and innovate.

Next – and admittedly this thought came to me whilst I was drafting Annual Reporting documents – one of Direct Energy’s key customer propositions is that of choice – and they have the power to make it. However, homeless youth are seldom afforded that same opportunity – field research, like that done through Youthworks, and experience show that circumstances such as unstable living arrangements, inadequate support systems, abuse, malnutrition – they do not choose, the choices are often made for them.

Dostoyevsky famously wrote, “The degree of civilization in a society can be judged by examining its prisons.” I think it is worth mentioning, that the reality of the streets for many youth is that of a prison - not all prisons have bars. How are we then to judge our

civilization when we know that on the street homeless youth can not access the basic support services they need to break the cycle of homelessness and thrive?

You will hear more from my boss and colleague Janice Thomson, our Executive Vice President of Human Resources and Communications during the Corporate Panel on Friday morning where she will detail more fully what we are doing for the community and why we do it.

I'd like to thank you all again for attending this conference and allowing Direct Energy to continue supporting your work. We encourage you to use this opportunity to share your ideas, challenge each other and talk to your partners, including those of us from corporate Canada. Let's together build partnerships that can and will find solutions to youth homelessness.

Thank you.

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