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For Immediate Release

Volunteers of America Chesapeake's Lighthouse Center uses Art as Catalyst for Empowering Women Facing Homelessness
The HeART Project Provides Women a Therapeutic Way to Express Themselves through Unique Art Program

Virginia Beach , VA – (May 23, 2011) – Volunteers of America Chesapeake's Lighthouse Center, a day program for homeless adults offering case management, life skills training and other essential services, is also helping women rebuild their lives through a unique weekly art program created by the Center's program director **Debbie Maloney**.

With the help of mixed-media artist and Lighthouse Center volunteer **Beth Bender**, the Women's HeART Project encourages adult women facing homelessness to create inspirational works of hope using papier-mâché hearts. The women decorate the hearts to reflect on their lives, share feelings and display hopefulness for the future. Maloney's goal is to encourage these women, who have fallen on hard times, to see their full potential and unlock the amazing possibilities in their own hearts and their futures.

"When I developed the program earlier this year, I envisioned it as a tool for the women to be able to tell their stories," Maloney said. "But it has turned into so much more than that. The participants in the HeART Project have told me that sharing their feelings through art has given them confidence and allowed them to visualize positive changes for themselves in the future. It is an amazing way for these strong women to use their talent for bettering themselves and others."

Artwork created from the Lighthouse Center's Women's HeART Project has also been on display at the Contemporary Art Center of Virginia.

"Creating art helped me accept everything as it is and dream of the best that I can be," said Candace, one of the participants in the Women's HeART Project. "I now write poetry in the open for others to read. For years, I hid my poetry and would not share but working with the other women and receiving encouragement from others in this project has inspired me to share. It has also made me very thankful to give back to others."

The Women's HeART Project is one of many programs run by Volunteers of America Chesapeake's Lighthouse Center to provide homeless adults the services they need to once again become productive members of society. These services are also essential in helping the Virginia Beach community deal with its growing number of homeless families, which, according to a study by the City of Virginia Beach, is the fastest growing population of homeless people.

The City of Virginia Beach is currently proposing a new Lighthouse Multi-Service Center as part of its 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness - a commitment to enhance and expand services to help people obtain housing services and escape homelessness.

“What the City of Virginia Beach is proposing would have an amazing effect on the men and women I see come in the doors of our current facility each day,” Maloney said. “These are not hopeless individuals. They are just men and women that have just fallen on hard times and need support to get back on their feet through programs such as the HeART Project and other services we provide. I have to turn away calls every single day from individuals and families that we just don’t have the additional resources to provide for, which is why this new facility is so much needed.”

To read more about the new proposed Lighthouse Multi-Service Center in Virginia Beach, please visit:

<http://www.vbgov.com/vgn.aspx?vgnextoid=254ed14b461fd210VgnVCM100000190c640aRCRD&vgnnextchannel=e81ffd67f3ad9010VgnVCM100000870b640aRCRD&vgnnextfmt=default>

ABOUT THE LIGHTHOUSE CENTER

Since 1997, the city-owned Lighthouse Center in Virginia Beach, VA provides day support services for homeless adult men and women seeking opportunities to advance their chances to obtain housing, education, employment or other services. During the winter months the Lighthouse Center also operates a Winter Shelter Program in conjunction with the Virginia Beach faith community serving more than 100 people each night. Volunteers of America Chesapeake's unique partnership with the City of Virginia Beach and more than 75 area faith communities, allows each partner to bring their resources, strengths and support together to help those in need. For more information visit: www.VOAchesapeake.org/Lighthouse

VOLUNTEERS OF AMERICA CHESAPEAKE

Volunteers of America Chesapeake, Inc. is a faith-based, non-profit organization whose mission is to inspire self-reliance, dignity and hope through health and human services in Maryland, Virginia and the District of Columbia. Founded in 1896 in Baltimore, MD, Volunteers of America Chesapeake is one of the first branches of Volunteers of America - one of the nation's largest and most comprehensive human services organizations. Through a dedicated and committed team of management, staff and volunteers and guided by our Core Values: Caring, Respect, Faith, Quality and Trust Volunteers of America Chesapeake helps more than 9,000 people each year at our 26 programs serving: the homeless, mentally ill, individuals with intellectual disabilities, the aging, those in need of affordable housing, those recovering from substance abuse and community corrections. For more information about Volunteers of America Chesapeake, visit: www.VOAchesapeake.org