



The volunteers and organizers behind A Simple Thread, a charity that helps Houston's homeless population, including Jacquie Brennan (second row, right), Cathy Herrington (front row, second from right), and Jan Whaley (back row, second from right)

Inspiration can strike in the unlikelyst of places. For **Jacquie Brennan**, it was the first chapter of John Grisham's *The Street Lawyer*. The novel opens with a homeless man taking hostage a group of lawyers at a powerhouse law firm. He asks them, "What have you actually done for people?"

The question resonated with Brennan, an attorney with the Southwest ADA Center in Houston and director of the Paralegal Certification Program at the University of Houston. "It got me to thinking. I'm not a fundraiser, so what's something small I can do to help people?"

A Simple Thread was the result. Brennan founded the non-profit organization in the summer of 2008 with the help of her husband and friends to provide care packages for Houston's homeless population. Brennan credits the quick response from her friends for getting the organization up and running.

"They have helped make it happen," said Brennan, who serves as president of the board of directors. Her friends who jumped to volunteer make up the rest of the board, among them fellow Houston attorneys **Cathy Herrington** of the Herrington Law Firm, P.C. and **Kevin Connelly** of Baker Botts, L.L.P., as well as paralegals Kay Haggard of Patterson & Sheridan, L.L.P. and Jan Whaley of Hughes, Watters, Askanase, L.L.P.

The board members have provided the majority of the donations for the care packages or kits. "We haven't had any fundraisers. We've just asked friends and family. And we've gotten support from lawyers and others who have made dona-

tions," Brennan said. One-hundred percent of public donations go directly to the kits. Board members cover administrative costs.

Depending on the amount of available items, the group prepares anywhere from 40 to 100 kits every few weeks. The packages are organized by themes, including kits for personal hygiene, first aid, tooth care, and skin care, as well as packages to provide protection from the elements and packages for children. Each kit includes a referral sheet for resources and services to help the homeless.

In its first four months, the group delivered more than 1,000 kits. As of early February, that number had increased to nearly 1,700.

"I had no idea how much we would do," Brennan said. "The first time we were delivering kits, as we put them in my car, I realized that I didn't know who was homeless or where to go. I also didn't realize how many children there would be. It's heart-rending."

Brennan said people were worried about her going out to distribute kits but that she's never felt scared. "People are so grateful. It's constant 'Thank you.' They appreciate these little kits because they include things they normally can't get. Simple things to us, like cough drops or vitamins.

"I'm not trying to solve the big problem," she added. "I'm just trying to make things a little easier for some people."

For more information about A Simple Thread, visit www.asimplethread.org. ☆