

TOPEKA RESCUE MISSION MONTHLY REPORT SEPTEMBER 2021

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REACHING THE UNSHELTERED: AN IMPORTANT COMMUNITY CONVERSATION





REACHING THE UNSHELTERED: AN IMPORTANT COMMUNITY CONVERSATION

On any given night in the United States, hundreds of thousands of people experience homelessness. Of these individuals, approximately one in four is classified as chronically homeless - meaning they repeatedly experience homelessness while struggling with one or more disabling conditions such as a serious mental illness, substance use disorder, medical condition, or physical disability.

A large number of the chronically homeless live unsheltered, in unsafe locations such as on the street, in parks, in abandoned buildings, under bridges, or in other places not suitable for human habitation. Due to Covid and a nationwide housing affordability crisis, there are more unsheltered individuals in our community and our nation than ever before. You see them every day. You pass them on the street, you encounter them in public spaces as you go

about your life. But while our lives, jobs, relationships and dreams seem to evolve and grow, those experiencing homelessness seem stuck for years, endlessly repeating the behaviors or reliving the traumas that led them to life on the streets.

The cost to our communities is astronomical. People living on the streets often access services at the most expensive points in our community: the emergency room, police interventions, and jail.

Across our nation a question has come to the forefront: What do we do to address the unsheltered? How do we help our most vulnerable citizens when they often do not have the mental, emotional or physical resources to help themselves? How do we help someone transition from living outdoors in inhumane conditions and help them become a valued, respected member of our community?

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For 68 years TRM has provided shelter and services to the homeless in our community. With our shelters at full capacity due to an ongoing need for social distancing, we have begun looking for other options to reach out to people in addition to the existing shelter and services TRM provides. We need to think beyond what has previously been done. What can we do to address the issue of the unsheltered homeless?

We believe it is time to have an important community conversation about what we can do - not just TRM, not just other Topeka agencies, but what we can do together as a community. We need to build a bridge by working together through multi-focused approaches to bring dignity and hope to our unsheltered homeless neighbors.

Ken Kraft, CEO of Hope of the Valley Rescue Mission in Los Angeles said:

“The streets shouldn’t be a waiting room for more suitable housing to become available.”

Next Steps?

What is the next step from chronic homelessness to new opportunities?

We believe a vital next step is providing safe, secure, transitional housing for the unsheltered while services are being received, and providing a sense of being part of a community.

What do we need to do to achieve this?

As a community, we need to be educated on the issue of chronic homelessness including the causes as well as the barriers to finding a way out of homelessness. We must think beyond what has previously been done and seek out new

opportunities of creating change. Permanent housing is the goal, but it cannot be built or achieved overnight.

What can we do in the meantime?

We need a place where someone who has massive challenges, who doesn’t fit into a neighborhood or cannot care for themselves, to have a space of their own to rest, heal, receive services, and begin to see different opportunities for their future. A dignified, humanitarian option to move from their current situation and come into a safe, clean, healthy environment where they learn that they are supported, not shunned.

How can we do this?

TRM has begun looking into an option of a tiny home transitional village using “Pallet” shelters. These shelters are

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quick and cost-effective to build and capable of housing many individuals in safe and clean environments, giving them a space not only to sleep but also to learn how to care for themselves, how to trust others, and how to be part of a community - often for the first time.

The tiny home transitional village would serve as a bridge between chronic homelessness and permanent housing, offering on-site support services to address complex challenges.

While the solutions to our ever-growing homeless concerns are complex and not easy to obtain, we are compelled to press on in spite of difficulty. Whether you give financially, share your time and



Rendering of proposed transitional tiny home community.

resources, and offer your prayers, you are the team that we so appreciate and admire. Thank you for standing in the gap of suffering and unmet needs with us as we reach the broken with the hope and confidence that

they are valuable in God's sight and yours. Together a significant difference has been made in the lives of those who so desperately need help. In spite of the complexities, together we will be there for them in the challenging days ahead.†

Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward them for what they have done. Proverbs 19:17 NIV

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