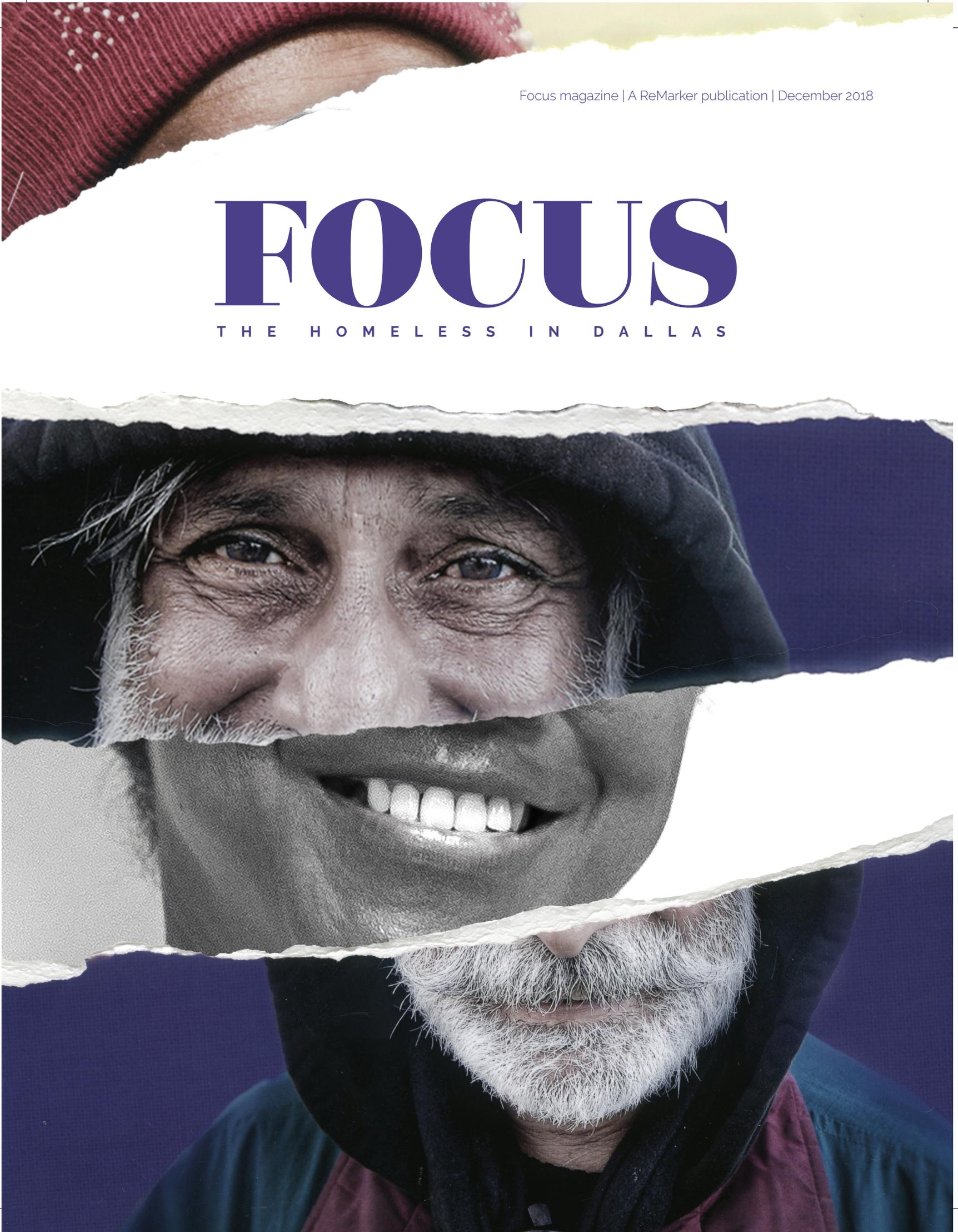


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FOCUS

THE HOMELESS IN DALLAS





Jonathan Taylor photo

Focus Magazine | Staff

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I BELIEVE In South Dallas, a homeless man in a wheelchair sits under a mural that reads "I believe."

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SHOPPING CART The number of unsheltered homeless people in Dallas jumped from 1,087 to 1,341 in the last year alone.





FROM THE EDITORS:

Why should we care?

We see them everyday when driving by Royal and 75, Preston and 635 or whichever intersection it may be.

The rotten cardboard signs.

The anything-helps styrofoam coin cup.

The dirty, stained, sleepless faces.

The homeless.

Homelessness is all around us. It's there every single day. Every single night. At any given hour.

And it's grown at a 32 percent rate since 2015.

But why does it matter? Why do we care? Why should we care?

Everyday after work, school or whatever it may be, we make our way home, anticipating the rush of air conditioning as we walk in, the hot meal waiting for us on the kitchen table and the warm water of the shower refreshing our bodies after a long day.

Over four thousand people in the Dallas area, however, don't get to experience having a home the same way we do. They don't get to feel the cold air of the A.C. in the scorching summer and the comforting warmth of the heater in the freezing winter. They don't get to eat a hot meal for dinner. They don't get to take a warm shower and clean themselves everyday.

It can be hard to realize how much impact having a roof over your head has until it's taken away.

There is a gigantic pile of issues Dallas has to tackle.

Homelessness is a symptom of a multitude of them. But everyone in our city should have a place to call home—it's a basic human necessity that so many people in our city don't have access to.

More importantly, it's our city. And as close or as far away we might be removed from people without homes, they're our neighbors and share the same city as us. They live on our streets, under highway overpasses and bridges and in many shelters scattered around Dallas. They're a growing part of our city that can't and shouldn't be ignored.

That's why we wrote about this—to tell the stories of some of the thousands of people that live in our city.

To tell the stories of people that have fallen on hard times yet still have so much to contribute to making Dallas the best it can be.

So we ask you not to pity the thousands without homes, but rather to ask yourself what you can do—what we can do as a community to provide a solution for the homeless in our community.

How they got there

Every homeless man, woman or child has a different story. But a large percentage become homeless after going down one of three very distinct paths.

Chances are you have a strong social network. Your network probably consists of family, friends, maybe a church or synagogue that you can go to when you need help.

But when your social network collapses, you lose everything. You lose your connections. You lose your life. You lose your home.

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Most people are able to avoid homelessness because they have built up a strong social network which they can rely on in times of crisis. If their income falls through, they have family and friends they can rely on for support until they regain their footing. But those without a social network typically end up homeless.

Leading the development of the homeless response system that will make homelessness in the Dallas and Collin County rare, brief and non-recurring is the Metro Dallas Homeless Alliance (MDHA).

"There's this idea in recent social sciences literature called collective impact," said David Gruber, development and communications director for the MDHA. "Real change comes from lots of different non-profits working together to facilitate a set of common goals rather than one great idea that one non-profit comes up with."

Gruber and the MDHA as a whole understand how crucial social networks are to staying afloat.

"A person becomes homeless when that network of social connections has frayed or was non-existent to start with," Gruber said. "And so they can't rely on this, and they end up becoming homeless."

Although the number of homeless in Dallas is only about one percent of the 420,000 people who live below the poverty line, it is becoming increasingly a more prominent local issue. According to the Texas Homeless Network, every major city in Texas had seen an increase in homelessness in 2018.

More interestingly, almost all of the homeless fall into three groups: veterans, victims of natural disasters or the mentally ill.

1. Veteran homelessness

One-fifth of the homeless population is composed of veterans, suggests We've Got Your Six (WGYS), a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping homeless veterans rebuild their lives and redevelop their self-confidence.

WGYS says that on any given night, 144,000 veterans will be homeless. Seventy-six percent of them live in a metropolitan area like Dallas.

Being away from society for an extended period of time can cause someone to lose basic social skills and their social network.

"Your social network might not be that great if you've been overseas or in the service," Gruber said.

While being a veteran will likely not be a main driving force of homelessness, it is a contributing factor that can easily send someone tumbling down a slippery slope. In many cases, it can be the root of mental or physical disabilities.

Fortunately, the homeless veteran population has dropped 50 percent since 2010 thanks in part to efforts from organizations like the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs. However, veterans still remain a prominent issue in the field of homelessness.

2. Natural disasters

Natural disasters make 14 million people around the world homeless each year. Locally, victims to Hurricane Harvey have added to that population.

Harvey was a devastating hurricane that cost the Gulf area and the east around \$125 billion.

Natural disasters cause quick relocation of a large number of people. The first response is to immediately open shelters for those who are being relocated.

Locally, the Dallas Foundation, with the help of MDHA, has been helping with the aid of these victims who are relocating. The organization was able to provide a large portion of these relocated victims places to stay until they had determined their next steps of returning home and possibly receiving aid from other local or national organizations.

Many of them, unfortunately, weren't as lucky.

"You have a few hundred families where their situation was so tenuous back in Houston that the dislocation in their life due to Hurricane Harvey meant that they had nothing to return to," Gruber said. "Those families stay at the help centers because they've got nothing to go back to."

Hurricane Harvey created so many of these long-term issues in Houston that at one point 18 percent of Houston's unsheltered homeless population identified Harvey as the cause of their homelessness. Twelve percent of Harvey victims are still part of an original eviction prevention program.

Unfortunately, however, too many people are left homeless by natural disasters, and more aid is needed to bring this form of homelessness to an end.

Although many people are immediately displaced or homeless, natural disasters provide the affected communities with chances to rebuild into better conditions than they were in previous to the disaster. Sadly, such events also require the sacrifice of many homes and too often leave many homeless and in need of aid.

3. Mental illness

Around 25 percent of chronically homeless Americans, those who have been homeless for over a year and have a documented disability, have some form of severe mental illness, suggests the National Coalition for the Homeless.

This is a substantially greater percentage than the percentage of the overall mentally disabled American population, which is six percent.

Even worse, mentally ill people have a 15 percent chance of going homeless at least once per year according to the National Coalition for the Homeless.

Knowing that there are places where mentally ill people can get housing, Gruber believes the best thing organizations can do to solve this issue is simple: guide people to where they can get housing.

"It's not that a mental illness will prevent you from being housed, it should not," Gruber said. "Most people are being housed despite their mental illness. It's just they might need a little bit more support."



Story **Jack Davis, Cristian Pereira**
Photos **Seth Weprin, Jonathan Taylor**

How they can get out

With countless non-profit organizations dedicated to helping homeless people transition back to stable housing and jobs, there is still no one formula—no one correct answer.

No life, no home. If someone is homeless, trying to get out of a situation like this seems impossible.

Nobody cares, you think. It's hopeless.

But people do care. It's just hard for victims of homelessness to figure out who does.

Especially when the system seems rigged against them.

...

While escaping homelessness can easily become a daunting task, there are incredibly useful measures someone can take to start the process.

Gruber suggests one important step any homeless person should start with.

"Get shelter," Gruber said. "Go to Austin Street Center. Say, 'Hey I need your help. Not just for the night; I don't want to be homeless anymore.'"

Going to a shelter like Austin Street will provide more than just a roof for the night—shelters will also talk to a case manager and try and get you into housing.

"It's really about working with people one-on-one," Gruber said.

Sometimes, getting housing for someone is as easy as making a phone call to a family

member.

"Sometimes when you get hooked up at a shelter they'll ask, 'Do you have any family members?'" Gruber said. "And sometimes you'll say, 'Yeah, my mom lives in Irving.' And we'll say, 'If you tell Mom you've been evicted what will she say?' And you'll say, 'Oh, she'd probably tell me to come over to her house.' So many times it's like, 'Hey, we don't even need to find you a shelter.'"

The actual process of finding someone housing seems relatively simple at first glance—find a shelter and they'll help you get in contact with a case manager or a family member. But at a closer look, glaring issues present themselves.

For starters, homeless people don't feel relaxed in an environment like a shelter.

"We need to make sure that people are comfortable and welcome to come into the shelters and ask for help," Gruber said. "And not only that; instead of waiting for them to come in, we go out and say, 'Hey, would you like to come into service?' And if they say, 'No,' and then have that discussion, and ask, 'Can we somehow get you into shelter and then into housing?'"

Furthermore, many times shelters

can't find enough housing for every homeless person in the metroplex they want to help.

"It's really about going out and working with people and making sure we have enough housing," Gruber said. "If you just go and promise people something and don't deliver, that's another problem."

Gruber also explained problems within the system.

"[The system is] designed for there to be have and have-nots," Gruber said. "Part of it has to do with family background, part of it has to do with race; there are lots of different reasons. At the bottom rung of the have-nots are



A FACE IN THE CROWD One of thousands of homeless adults and children in Dallas, Blue has struggled with mental illness for much of his life.

the homeless."

Only one in four people who are eligible get subsidized housing, said Gruber. He pointed out that although people go hungry in this country, they rarely starve to death. He believes housing should be viewed the same way—people may have poor living conditions, but they shouldn't go homeless.

"That's just a decision we've made as

“That's just a decision we've made as a nation— not to invest enough money in it. We need to change how the system works in the United States.

— David Gruber, Development and Communications Director, Metro Dallas Homeless Alliance

a nation, not to invest enough money in it," Gruber said. "We need to change how the system works in the United States."

Gruber knows organizations like MDHA help, but he also knows they don't have the power to destroy the roots of the problem.

"We can try to end homelessness, we can try to help all the individuals and house them, but imagine a bathtub that's full but the tap is open," Gruber said. "What our organization is doing is we're slowly taking out water with a small measuring cup. But we need to turn off the tap!"



ON THE STREETS Millions of Americans spend any given night without a permanent place to stay. Hundreds of thousands of them are mentally ill, have previously served in the military or have been displaced by a natural disaster.

Dallas's dire situation

Racial inequality. Rising home prices. An increasing divide between the city's rich and poor. All have led to a 23 percent increase in Dallas's unsheltered homeless population—which led to the opening of St. Jude Center, a new \$6 million housing facility.

Story **Sam Ahmed, Ishan Gupta**
Photo **Seth Weprin**

Yvette Miller could never get away from the noise. Screaming. Yelling. Fighting. Death. Sitting in her apartment complex off of 635 and Skillman, she was always uneasy—feeling scared in the place she stayed in for seven years, living with paranoia every single day in that apartment complex. She lived there, but it wasn't her home.

Staying sober for 14 years was a challenge in itself, but the real challenge was never feeling safe enough to walk to her own mailbox.

Never getting a full night's sleep because of the gunshots.

Never getting away from the noise.

Homelessness is nothing new to Dallas, and according to the Metro Dallas Homeless Alliance's annual homeless census released March 21, it's on the rise.

The number of homeless people in Dallas and Collin County increased by nine percent in the past year, reflecting the nine percent national increase since 2016 reported by the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

With the shortage of affordable housing continuing today, more people remain homeless longer—a problem in Dallas as well as across America. In 2017, eight of the ten states with the highest rate of homelessness were also among the ten most expensive states by median price of housing according to Zillow.

Racial inequality is another factor that is directly affecting the homeless population. A disproportionate amount of the homeless in Dallas are African-American—about 60 percent—and a vast majority are men—nearly 80 percent.

But what stands out even more is the 32 percent increase in the unsheltered. These are the people who have given up on seeking housing and instead have decided to live out on the street.

A \$6 million housing facility created by Catholic Charities Dallas, the Catholic Housing Initiative and Mayor Mike Rawlings, St. Jude Center opened in early 2018 with the goals of providing a home to the unsheltered and people in

unsafe situations, reducing the number of homeless people in Dallas and finding permanent supportive housing for seniors.

Due to the work of shelters like St. Jude, the number of chronic homeless people has been declining for the past three years. St. Jude currently houses 80 individuals over the age of 55 and has a capacity of 104 residents.

Many people believe that poverty is the sole cause of the homeless increase over the past few years, but according to St. Jude Property Manager Cindy Montgomery, there are multiple different factors at play contributing to the issue.

"When the market was good for houses, some people got loans who shouldn't have gotten loans," Montgomery said. "Some of these people have been homeless for 15 or 20 years, and some just for five years. So you get into a situation where you can't afford it and you are one paycheck away from being homeless. I think it's also partly education. I wish I truly had the answer of why it grew so much because it really bothers me."

One of the residents, Yvette Miller, considers St. Jude a safe haven that provides her the opportunity to go back to Brookhaven College and continue her education. From the very first day Miller walked into her apartment at St. Jude in August, she was overwhelmed with the

64

percent of Dallas residents said homelessness was a major problem, making it the city's most pressing issue.

23

percent jump in the number of people living on the streets in Dallas and Collin County in 2018.

4,140

homeless people counted in Dallas and Collin County.

53

the average age of a homeless person in Dallas or Collin County.

32

percent jump in the homeless population from 2015.

6

million dollars: the cost of newly-opened housing facility St. Jude Center.

Source: Metro Dallas Homeless Alliance, City of Dallas Community Survey



A ONE WAY STREET Many of the unsheltered homeless haven't obtained an identification card, causing organizations to deny their access to shelters. This creates a loop of homelessness that presents a real challenge for a city seeking to find a solution.

peace and quiet she had longed for over the past seven years.

"The first day I walked into my apartment, I cried," Miller said. "I cried because I felt the peace and the serenity. It took me about a couple weeks to get adjusted and adapt to being here because it was so quiet."

St. Jude has not only given her the peace to sleep soundly at night, but it has also been a supportive environment that provides many opportunities and makes sure that each and every resident can rest easy at night.

"They took me, and they allowed me to come here," Miller said. "[Montgomery] is very hands-on. I don't know how she does it, but she makes sure that everyone's needs are met. She takes care of us, and that's one of the many things that I'm grateful for—her and the staff, because they all want us to do our best."

Similarly, military veteran Percy Taylor faced social and environmental challenges in his old apartment complex, frustrating him every minute he was there. He was always looking for

a more stable, peaceful environment to spread his passion of spoken word poetry.

When he made the decision to come to St. Jude a couple weeks ago, Taylor was lucky and grateful for the opportunity.

"It's so peaceful," Taylor said. "When you see it from the outside, it's got such a neutral presentation that you really don't know what to expect. Coming into the room, it was such a blessing to already have a TV in there, and the apartment is lovely and clean."

As well as providing a stable place for Taylor, the staff at St. Jude has encouraged and supported him during the few weeks he has been a resident here.

"As soon as I got here, I felt the welcomeness," Taylor said. "They go out of their way. It's always nice to have a positive reception when you're coming in and going out. They encourage us to interact and mingle, and they've got a lot of different projects and activities just for that."

Although Taylor notes that St. Jude has a community presentation, he stresses the importance of the staff encouraging the residents to be independent, specifically with Taylor's passion of poetry.

"When we have activities, they ask me if I would like to do it," Taylor said. "That's really encouraging to me because it's not just a hobby. It's really something inside of me that wants to come out, and it's such a good environment to have right here where I live. It feels good that you can also see people caring rather than just hearing that."

Taylor emphasizes that drug use and other commonly blamed issues aren't always directly correlated to homelessness.

"It's not always drug issues," Taylor said. "You have tried your best to still be who you are and operate where you are. Sometimes you just have challenges. You don't want to lose yourself in the midst of your struggle. It's good when we find places like this that support and encourage us."

In the future of providing places where people like Taylor

and Miller can continue their dreams, Montgomery sees Catholic Charities and other investors doing the same thing across Dallas in the coming months, but she also believes the youth will have a big role to play.

"I encourage young people to just embrace it and figure out how they can help in the future," Montgomery said. "This is going to be on your backs, and you're going to have to figure out what your place in this is. Young people are going to be the answer to a lot of things."

Although Montgomery doesn't believe that we can prevent homelessness, he thinks there are lots of ways that we can help to combat the issue, and that starts with how people view the homeless.

"We have to figure out how we're going to help a homeless person become the human being that they need to be," Montgomery said. "People give up on the homeless, and they don't think that there's a way for them to change. There is a way to change. You just have to have more people be involved and not be afraid."



Seth Weprin photo

“

I'm not in this situation because I'm stupid or dumb. I'm from New Jersey, and I've got a few bad criminal charges. I can't get no job, I can't get no housing, I can't get no-nothing. I'm just cursed. I'm just cursed—I have to stay in the institution with the rest of the outcasts of society like me. It's real damn sad. I was a good kid—I went to Catholic school, I've worked all my life, I got married when I was 24 and I had a girl. She's 26 now and she has four grandkids and she lives in Florida. That's the only thing that keeps me alive. If anything else, I'd probably have committed suicide. When you don't have anything, what is there to life? What is the point? You're supposed to worship God right? Hope he gives you a better life. I don't see that.

No one cares.”

- James



“

You know what? I can't run to Daddy. I can't run to Momma. I can't run to a husband. I can't run to a son. I'm a big girl.”

— Verde, homeless woman

Verde clutched the three crumpled-up dollar bills. After a 30-day program to get clean, she had nowhere to go. She didn't know anyone. So they dropped her off at Austin Street Center.

Walking into the shelter, she had her bag in one hand and \$3 in the other.

There were no familiar faces. Just an intimidating blur of strange people, most of them talking to themselves.

Her entire life, Verde lived in her secure world. She was born and raised in Florida with a loving mother and father.

Homelessness was never in the picture.

Eighteen years ago, she moved to Austin with her husband and their newborn son Justin, who has Down Syndrome. Soon after, they went through a divorce.

Verde medicated herself with alcohol and relied on it to cope.

"I could have killed myself," Verde said. "I could have killed somebody else. I could have killed my son, who I cherish. I woke up one morning and said 'I ain't gonna do this no more. Justin deserves better. I deserve better.'"

So she came to Dallas. Her case manager advised her to complete the Nexus Recovery program, and she spent 30 days clearing her head and making plans for the future.

She was released during the heart of Hurricane Harvey so it seemed like every shelter was full. Her ex-husband had remarried and Justin was living with them. Verde was on her own.

Grasping the three crumpled-up dollar bills, Verde put her past behind her and moved in to Austin Street Center.

•••

When she arrived, Verde was closed-minded, not realizing everything it would take to turn her life around.

"I felt like I was looking at my life through a peephole," Verde said. "And when the door opened, I was like, 'Wow.' There's so much I can do, there's so much I can take advantage of — I can do anything I want to do. I'm here, and I'm just that determined because this place has really pulled stuff out of me that I didn't know I had in me, because I never thought I'd have

to use those tools to survive. And it's hard, it's difficult."

Verde has used these tools to thrive.

"I look at where I am now and where I was the first day I walked into Austin Street," Verde said. "I think about how far I've come. How powerful I am as a human being. I survived this, and I'm still surviving it. I'm learnin'. I had something in me that I was born with. To give. To treasure life. This whole year, I think about how much I've grown, the friends that I've made, learned about myself. Turning a bad situation into a good thing and still getting something out of it."

While Verde is appreciative of the beauties of life, it's Justin who drives her. Once homeless, Verde's biggest challenge was coming to terms with the fact that she couldn't provide for her son.

"Had I been the person I was before," Verde said, "I would have been selfish enough to think that 'Justin, you need to be with me. Because we're divorced and you're mine.' I learned as I got myself situated that he needs to be with his dad. I can't provide for him right now. Right now, it's about me. I just knew, and still know, that this is where I need to be. I don't want to be here, but it's a situation of being here and taking advantage of it."

While independence is important to her, Verde also believes it is much easier to get back up on her feet with people around her pushing her forward.

"It's so much easier to do it when you're not alone," Verde said. "When I think about my parents, they didn't force us to do things, but they were teaching us all along to stick together. If I do something for somebody, I'm not looking for anything back because that's me, and I'm not tryna make anybody see what I'm saying. It's just who I am."

After years in the shelter, Verde has found a job and is in the market for permanent housing.

"This is not the end of my journey," Verde said. "I'm still healing, and that's a good thing. You know scripture says to not grow wise in your own eyes. Just because I've accomplished this of getting there — 'Oh it's all over!' — You can't say that. I never thought I was going to be there. Because we all deserve better, and we all can do better, so that's what keeps me moving. I deserve it, I want it, and I'm going for it, because this is not the end."

I am not a victim. I am a survivor.

Medicating herself with alcohol after a divorce, Verde chose to leave everything behind and get clean. Now at Austin Street Center, she's focused on putting herself in a position where she can provide for her son again.

story **CJ Crawford, Kamal Mamdani**
photo **Kamal Mamdani**

‘Here I am. One of those people.’

Felicia Tribble left an abusive relationship with nowhere to go. Rather than living without shelter, Tribble chose to stay at Austin Street Center.

story **CJ Crawford, Kamal Mamdani**
photo **Kamal Mamdani**

In between a rock and hard place sat Felicia Tribble. She could either choose homelessness or prison. She had no idea she'd end up at this crossroad.

She used to be a live-in caretaker, caring for elderly people that couldn't do for themselves.

She used to pass by S Malcolm X Boulevard everyday, near Austin Street Center. There she saw the homeless sitting at the bus stop.

She used to think to herself, You know, I'm just a paycheck away from being right there at that bus stop with them.

Tribble never looked down on them, never talked about them.

And she really was a paycheck away. Just like that.

Here she is, one of those people. She had no idea.

•••

Tribble was going to get married, until she moved in with her ex-fiancee, 72 year old Henry*. Until she found out he was racist. Until he started throwing food at her, verbally abusing her, raising his cane to hit her.

Day in, day out, the cycle was the same. "You's a diabetic, you old, you on all kinda medication," Tribble would say to him. "Day in and day out, it never stopped."

And a month into her stay, Tribble even found herself at odds with the law on her first assault charge. Henry accused her of things he was trying to provoke her to do, to no avail.

"He would call [the police] and say that I was doing stuff to him," Tribble said. "She's pushing me and she's throwing this at me,' which none of it was true, but they would take his side. I'm staying in his house, which I know. He tells me it's his house, it's his body, he can do whatever he want. True that, but you also have to respect me as your partner."

After losing her job and apartment, he offered her security. Food. A house. Why not? They'd been dating since 2015, and Tribble moved in with him in 2017. She was scared to leave, so she put up with him one more, long year. A year that brought three more assault charges along with it. Given her situation, all charges were finally dropped, but her representatives gave her limited options afterwards.

"You never know a person until you stay with him," Tribble said. "He [wasn't] gonna stop until something seriously bad happened to me or him. Me either hurtin' him or he end up hurtin' me or otherwise I end up in a penitentiary. I have three kids, seven grandkids. I'm not penitentiary material."

Tribble had to make up her mind. She could either endure Henry's actions,

receiving her fifth charge and going to jail for real time, or come to Austin Street Center.

She chose the shelter.

"The first week of me getting here was really hard," Tribble said, "because I didn't know what to expect. I'd never been homeless before. I'm in this room with all these people. It kinda freaked me out."

Tribble came on a Monday, filled in the paperwork on a Tuesday, and in one week she moved across the street into the Sisterhood Program, a program designed to aid women who've experienced trauma and build healthy relationships.

"I'm smiling," Tribble said. "I'm moving forward. So far, since I've been homeless, I went to school for food-service and hospitality. I graduated, got my food serving license, got my bartending license and I also graduated. Now, I'm working on getting on housing, and I'm looking for a part-time job."

Austin Street gives her, along with the other women in the program, the tools she needs to move forward, and she's set on taking full advantage of them. However, she wishes others would consider their opportunities more seriously.

"They come into class all uninterested," Tribble said, "I don't wanna be here, blahblah' — that irritates me. It probably doesn't mean much to them as it does to me or Ms. Verde. These young girls are out here, you know half of 'em are pregnant, going through whatever, going back to baby-daddy, still wanting to do whatever they were doing before. You're not going anywhere with that. You need to sit down and learn, because if you don't sit down and look back at where you come from and why you're here, you will stay here. You will never get out. It will be just a circle."

Despite these observations though, Tribble's focusing on herself, looking for stable income with her new licenses and degree. This process includes acknowledging her past, and her past never fails to resurface. Henry — after Tribble moved to Austin Street — is going to a nursing home. He still calls her once a month.

"[Henry] wants me to come see him and bring him something to eat and this and that," Tribble said. "I had to tell him 'when I was there, you didn't appreciate me. All you wanted to do was do what you wanted to do and cuss me out and throw food at me.' I'm out here trying to find me somewhere to stay. I gotta do me now."

She's refused to feel sorry for him. He didn't feel sorry for her. Even if she's sorry he's where he is, Henry had no sympathy for Tribble. But whatever happened has happened, and she's only getting better, only moving forward. Smiling the whole way.

*Because of the subject matter, Henry will not be named.



“

You need to sit down and learn, because if you don't look back at where you come from and why you're here, you will stay here, you will never get out. It will be just a circle.”

—Felicia Tribble, homeless woman



Homeless. Pregnant. Trapped.

Maria Eichhold, executive director of In My Shoes, an organization dedicated to providing shelter for homeless pregnant women, hopes to help women who have lost their way get back on track.

Story **Tianming Xie, Christopher Wang**
Photos **Seth Weprin, Nathan Han.**
Courtesy **Maria Eichhold**

At age 26, after leaving a toxic relationship and landing a new security job, Kate* felt she was finally back on track.

I don't have to go back. She couldn't even make it through her first day after throwing up in front of everyone on the train. That day, she tested positive for pregnancy, and her life was turned upside-down.

Not much later, on Dec 5, 2016, she lost the most important person in her life, her mother.

Losing a mother and becoming a mother. Two of the most crucial and transforming stages of a woman's life.

Having issues with family. Finding out that she was homeless. Again.

Nearly putting a knife to herself. Twice.

This is the story of just one of the 21 women that In My Shoes, a non-profit organization in Dallas providing community living within a safe environment focused on assisting women who are pregnant and homeless or at risk of homelessness, supports.

The only community living program in Dallas that provides support specifically toward pregnant, homeless women, In My Shoes was co-founded by executive director Maria Eichhold just 14 months ago.

In My Shoes supports these women through offering opportunities to learn and put into habit valuable life skills, such as cooking, cleaning, and caring for oneself, while also ensuring that every expectant or new mother has the necessary parenting skills and resources available to care

for her child. Moms and their babies are able to stay in an In My Shoes home while they learn necessary skills and receive job training to assist with finding employment.

"My educational background is in social work, and after I graduated with my master's degree, I decided to do a year of service out in Phoenix, AZ, where I lived with pregnant women who are homeless," Eichhold said. "I was able to use my skills, not only as a social worker, but I've always been passionate about helping pregnant women, being able to support them during their pregnancy and beyond."

After coming back to Dallas, Eichhold tried to work with a few other groups that were in the city, seeing if she could partner with them or if she could work under their already established 501c3, designating the organization as a non-profit.

Through that process, however, none of them worked out.

"When it came down to the point where we decided it was best for us to be own entity—to go on our own—creativity-wise, we didn't know what we wanted to call ourselves because we've been calling ourselves different names for the past four years," Eichhold said. "We had a marketing group called Triad work with us. They helped us break down why we are doing what we're doing."

The organization decided upon a name that would embody their motto: to heal what's been broken, to be the hands and feet of Christ, to show these women what a real relationship or what real love is. Thus, the organization decided upon the name, In My Shoes.

"When you say, 'put yourself in someone else's shoes,' it's about empathy, and that's what we want to have here," Eichhold said. "Empathy is not sympathy, it's not pity, but it's like 'this can be a really difficult situation for you.' I always think of shoes as setting a firm foundation as well, like, 'you have a better foundation we have shoes on.'"

The unique quality about the In My Shoes model from other "maternity" homes is the empha-

sis on community—a live-in staff members acting as supportive role models and the tools to teach the women job searching, parenting, budgeting, and other skills using evidence-based practice.

"We assume that the women come with just themselves when they get here, so they often don't have anything for the baby," Eichhold said. "We provide for them all of their basic needs and all the baby's basic needs and beyond basic needs. So, we have clothes for the mom, clothes for the babies, we have toiletries, diapers, wipes, bottles, toys."

All of these necessities and services—therapy, work and school support, parenting and life skills curriculum among others—have either been donated or privately fundraised through events.

"We're not getting any type of government funding right now," Eichhold said. "So far, it's been 90 percent individual, private donors who have blessed us with the money that we needed to renovate and to sustain us. We do trivia night, which is Feb. 2, coming up in 2019. That's one of our big fundraisers. We get a lot of support coming in there, people having a good time. We have gotten a grant purple corporate donations too."

When she just started, Eichhold thought that if she could just house one woman for one night, it means she's done something right. Now her organization has housed at least three women every night for the last 14 months.

"This isn't just a job for me," Eichhold said. "This is truly passion to be able to see these women and to be able to know that these women have a safe place to live. It means so much just to know where we've come from, where we've been, what we're doing, and there's a lot more that I know we're capable of doing, and as we grow and get more resources we'll be able to provide even more support for these women. It's hard sometimes for me to disconnect myself from the mission, from the organization, because in so many ways, it's a part of me, but at the same time, I know that it's also not all of me. We rely a lot on God too, and we wouldn't be here without him."

*Because of the subject matter, 'Kate' will not be identified

NO PLACE LIKE HOME For many of the women who no longer have a home, In My Shoes serves as a safe haven and a temporary shelter.



“ Sometimes women are just doing a Google search—those are always the ones that are surprising to me just because you know there’s a need when somebody googles ‘pregnant homeless shelter in Dallas.’ ”

–**Maria Eichhold**, Executive Director of In My Shoes



Seth Weprin photo

“

Every church is coming to feed us, and you call it donation. Behind the donation, the government is giving you tax breaks. It's a billion dollar business. The rich people are making money from us. The church, the rich people, the government, the donations give them tax breaks. What do we get? Socks? A t-shirt? And you're driving a Jaguar? A Mercedes? What do we get?

Nothing.”

- Syed Gilani

What we do

Through initiatives like Feast of Sharing and McDonald's Week, Marksmen help combat the issue of homelessness in Dallas.

Story **Paul Sullivan** Photos **Meyer Zinn**
Interviews **Lyle Ochs, Siddhartha Sinha**



OUT IN THE COLD Students watch a chemistry during McDonald's Week.

Two-hundred-fifty thousand dollars. A quarter of a million dollars.

That's the amount of money the annual McDonald's Week fundraiser has raised for Austin Street Center in the 20 years it has been active.

In that time, McDonald's Week has become a staple of the lion community as a whole, bringing together young and old Marksmen alike to both have fun and help those who are less fortunate.

Junior Jackson Singhal, McDonald's Week co-chair, believes that McDonald's Week's success lies in the Junior Class.

"Every year the juniors come together in a big way to make sure McDonald's is a success and to support Austin Street Shelter," Singhal said. "This year, the juniors really all got together on this one and put in a ton of work and effort to ensure that this year was a success, and I thank everyone for that."

According to Singhal, the abundance of participation from the juniors and everybody else on campus really helped.

"We had people signing up for shifts to cover selling raffle tickets and making sure that everything ran like clockwork," Singhal

said. "In a less organized or less involved Junior Class, we wouldn't have gotten everything filled, but people really stood up and helped out as much as they could."

While students think of McDonald's Week as the chance to go have fun before school or the possibility to go eat a Big Mac instead of going to class, they may often overlook the impact their contributions actually have on the people at Austin Street Shelter.

"McDonald's Week has a lot of impact on Austin Street, not just because of the money that we raised through McDonald's Week but because we, as part of McDonald's Week, are able to serve 500 meals," Singhal said. "This is a welcoming surprise for them and I think it's just important to make sure that we treat people that are homeless with humanity."

Singhal enjoys seeing the entire school come together to support one cause.

"Everyone's having a lot of fun, but at the same time, they're really cognizant of how much of a difference they're making when they donate money and take an active role in supporting Austin Street Shelter," Singhal said.

The impact we make

In order to see the of impact we make, we talked to people who provide and receive aid in our community.

> **"McDonald's Week.** In the past, we've been involved with Casa, which is an organization that helps with teenage homelessness: Young people who run away who have a difficult situation at home. We've done that, but we don't have something permanent throughout the year. There's another organization, Interfaith Housing Coalition, which helps when the entire family becomes homeless. They have apartments, so they welcome them there, and we bring toys and gifts. Also, with the Salvation Army when we work at Carr P. Collins to serve lunch there, it's a shelter for veterans and people who have been out of prison. The way I understand it, the Salvation Army offers the prison system a place to hold these people not just so they can stay but also so they can get some spiritual guidance, and we work there."

—Director of Community Service
Jorge Correa

> **"There's Austin Street Club.** We go to Austin Street a few times a year and serve food or make cookies or do whatever with them, just to kind of spend time with the homeless there because usually they're pretty bored there, so we give them something to do. We usually talk to them and get to know them." — Community Service Board x2Vol Manager Davis Yoo

> **"If I saw** [homeless people] in the street, I would talk to them. Or if they came to the car, I would talk to them, see what's going on. I never felt special or different or far from them. I always felt like those are people who

are having a different life than the rest of the people, but that doesn't make them inferior. They're just living a different life."

— Director of Community Service
Jorge Correa

> **"It might not** even be something that they remember even a week after it happens, much less a month or a year, however, far down the road. But being there in that moment with them, and them just lighting up and feeling so amazed that someone is taking the time for them, and whatever capacity you're taking the time, it really is unique. These people are so down to earth and so gracious. Most of the time, there's just something that's gone wrong, and the fact that there are people out there trying to help them in any way they can, it means a lot to them. Even if you don't see it."

— Community Service Board Chief Operations Officer Jack Katz

> **"There's only so much** we can do as students in high school, but in terms of the homeless people, we bring excitement in their lives and just make their days better." — Community Service Board x2Vol Manager Davis Yoo

> **"I've been here** at least four or five times, and my experience with volunteers has been great, especially teenage volunteers. I think they're very enthusiastic. They have a lot of

impact on my life. One hundred percent."

— Feast of Sharing attendee James Joyce

> **"I'm 76 years old.** I was born in Dallas. I went to Lincoln High School, and everyone here is just awesome. Y'all just out here taking care of business."

— Feast of Sharing attendee Anthony Lowry

> **"Every time it** was a wonderful experience and every time we loved it. The food was good, and the volunteers were always very helpful, engaged and happy to be there and help us. They made us enjoy our time and made us want to be a part of something bigger."

— Feast of Sharing attendees
The Laing family



FEAST OF SHARING Junior Lucho Hadjigenov sets a table for Dallasites enjoying a Thanksgiving meal at Fair Park.

Food for thought

St. Philip's food pantry opened in 2014 to address the gap that food deserts have left in South Dallas. Now, after success at St. Philip's, North Texas Food Bank is trying to expand and bring help to other areas.

Story **Ishan Gupta, Robert Pou** Photos **Courtesy Anyika McMillian-Herod**

Kids run down the aisles as their parents pick up canned soup and fresh foods from the top shelf and place it in their cart.

It's almost closing time, and all the customers start to rush to the checkout lanes. One by one, the employees bag all the food and send the customers on their way. Some of the employees even help customers to their cars.

But something's different at this store. Whether it's a family of five or a single adult, one thing holds true.

Nobody's paying a single cent.

•••

The St. Philip's food pantry serves roughly 1500 families in the South Dallas food desert, where there are nowhere near as many grocery stores as there are in North Dallas. Although the site is run by only two employees with the help of a few volunteers, organizers of the larger St. Philip's School and Community Center like Chief Philanthropy Officer Anyika McMillian-Herod make big contributions to ensuring the success of the pantry.

"We really are working to provide a service in this food desert community," McMillian-Herod said. "The community where we are located is considered a food desert, so we're really trying to address the hunger needs of our neighbors through our community pantry."

The food pantry is a collaboration between organizations like the St. Philip's School and Community Center, In the City for Good, the City of Dallas, Kroger, Dallas County, The Real Estate Council and Trammell Crow Company. But the biggest contributor to the pantry besides St. Philip's itself is North Texas Food Bank (NTFB).

"Our community pantry is the first time they have operated a pantry, a client choice pantry," McMillian-Herod said. "We started this collaboration with them about four years ago, and it has been so successful that now the North Texas Food Bank is opening other pantries in other communities in the DFW area that are also designated food deserts."

St. Philip's will completely take over the day-to-day operations of the food pantry once NTFB moves on to start pantries elsewhere. Since St. Philip's can only cover a small amount

of the area that needs a community pantry, McMillian-Herod believes that NTFB's expansion will be beneficial for the people that St. Philip's can't help.

"That's their plan now," McMillian-Herod said. "Go to other communities, open these pantries, operate them for a while and hand it over to the organizations to manage. And open more and more and more."

In 2017, 70,000 pounds of food were distributed by the pantry. Not only does St. Philip's regularly harvest fresh food from its community aquaponics garden, but it also collects food from donations through food drives held in churches and contributions made by other organizations.

"We accept donations of canned foods and fresh foods from other organizations as well for this pantry," McMillian-Herod said, "but I would say about 50 percent of the food in the pantry is secured through the North Texas Food Bank."

The biggest problem the pantry faces is their lack of assistance. There are a few volunteers who consistently help out at the pantry when they're available.

But there aren't always enough to make the process go by smoothly and timely.

"We really only have two people staffed to operate the pantry," McMillian-Herod said. "And on days that we are serving clients, we need seven to ten volunteers to facilitate an effective process of coming in, shopping, checking in, checking out and helping them to their car."

When St. Philip's first started its pantry, there was no physical space. It started as an effort to bag up food and hand it out to the people who would line up every week no matter what because they had no other options. Over time, the food pantry has developed into a successful organization that will continue to feed the people of South Dallas.

"The pantry is more sophisticated," McMillian-Herod said. "It's more dignified. It really is set up like a grocery store. To see that we've been able to grow and secure better resources to meet this need of food as a community has been really exciting and rewarding."



TRIP TO THE STORE At the St. Philip's food pantry, customers shop like they would in a normal market, but all the fresh produce is free.



LOADING UP THE VAN After making a trip to Walmart, a St. Philip's employee helps bring the food back to the food pantry for later.

300+

meals are distributed daily through the pantry's Meals on Wheels program.

32

percent of the pantry's elderly neighbors benefit from the Meals on Wheels depot.

670

different families served by the St. Philip's Community Pantry.

700

thousand pounds of food distributed by the pantry at any moment.

Source: St. Philip's Community Pantry

Models of success

Cities around the nation have taken initiatives to combat chronic homelessness by providing housing and a sense of community to those who need it most.

Story **Sid Vattamreddy**
Photos **Creative Commons**

SALT LAKE CITY

Relocating homeless to secure accommodations

In 2005, Salt Lake City set forth a goal to fully eradicate chronic homelessness. Over a decade later, the state is well on its way to do so.

Chronic homelessness is a subset of homelessness that describes the people who have been on the streets for over a year or four times in the past three years and have a disabling condition, such as a serious mental illness, an addiction or a serious physical condition.

The chronic homeless population represents about 20 percent of the total homeless population, according to the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Chronically homeless people cost the government somewhere between \$30,000 and \$50,000 annually through services like emergency room visits and jail time.

Salt Lake City's solution, a model known as Housing First, has reduced the number of chronically homeless people by

91 percent, from almost 2,000 to less than 150 now, according to Lloyd Pendleton, director of Utah's homeless task force.

Pendleton states the principle behind Housing First is that stable housing comes first and then other services follow.

The model relocates people living on the streets or in shelters and immediately places them in secure accommodations, as opposed to other models that move individuals through different levels of housing where each level is closer to independent housing.

Housing First focuses on the idea that a homeless person's most important need is to obtain stable housing and that the other challenges, such as addiction or mental illness, are secondary concerns that will be addressed afterwards.

Individuals adopted into this program do need to pay some rent – either \$50 a month or 30 percent of income, whichever is higher.

provide safe spaces for people to stay and focus on permanent housing solutions.

Although Seattle certainly has a way to go, its approach to homelessness is proving to be successful.

When compared with numbers from 2017, the city has seen a 10 percent increase in the rate of households paying their rent and a 19 percent increase in the rate of people moving into permanent housing.

Additionally, the city has enhanced 67 percent of the 1773 homeless shelters with extended hours and supportive services.



HELPING HANDS Members of Seattle's city council come together to serve food to the homeless as a part of the city's revamped initiative.



HOME SWEET HOME Residents of Community First! Village, located on the outskirts of Austin, live together in RVs and tiny homes such as this one.

AUSTIN

Village created to offer shelter, community

Community First! Village, located just outside of Austin is a 27-acre vibrant and enriching community offering a bold new idea for the homeless.

The concept of the Community First! Village, pioneered by real estate developer Alan Graham, is a variation of the Housing First model, in which the goal of the program is to not only provide housing, but also establish a welcoming community.

Graham, whose involvement with the homeless community began 20 years ago when he and some friends started providing fresh food and clean clothes out of their trucks, came upon this idea by interacting with the homeless. When he asked the people he was forging relationships with what they desired the most, the idea of a community emerged.

Originally, Graham wished to create the Village within Austin, and in 2008, the City Council granted a long term land lease. However, Graham was met with major pushback from the citizens of the city and decided to purchase land outside the city limits. He began moving homeless people into small houses and

RVs in 2014.

Today, over 200 people who in the past were chronically homeless now live in Community First! Village. Many of the Village's residents are employed on site, and all are required to pay rent, ranging from \$225 to \$430 per month.

The Village offers addiction help through a free clinic operated by Austin Recovery, and some residents have even taken initiative to better their lives by attending college.

Community First! Village is the largest community of its kind anywhere in the world, and it is only increasing in size. In October, the Village broke ground on 24 acre expansion that will add 110 RV sites, 200 small homes and a 20,000 square foot health facility. This expansion will bring the Village's total population to around 480 people – about 40 percent of the chronically homeless people in Austin.

The idea of making community, along with necessary housing, a main priority in the solution for homelessness is certainly a revolutionary one, and communities such as Community First! Village are proving that it can work.

No home for homework

The homeless youth population is often lost in the shuffle. When they struggle with economic and residential instability, their education is the first to suffer.

Story **Sai Thirunagari, Nathan Han** Photos **Nathan Han**



UNDER CONSTRUCTION Fannie C. Harris Youth Center is still being renovated to function as an emergency shelter for homeless high school students.



MURAL MAGIC Artist Rolando Diaz painted this mural that rests inside Fannie C. Harris with the help of students from Booker T. Washington High School.

Greasy hair. Mismatched clothes. No heater at home. All things that could make her stand out. But she keeps to herself. She's quiet. She tries to blend into the background. She doesn't want the other eighth graders to know her family is close to being homeless.

But one of her classmates finds out that she doesn't have running water. That she lives in a shack. That she only washes her hair at school.

Parents and students gather to help. They pay for her water. Install a hot-water heater. Bring her groceries every few weeks.

And everything changes for her.

•••

A public-school teacher at the time, eighth grade humanities instructor Danielle Clayton noticed the striking transformation.

"She came back just happy," Clayton said. "She had this sense of self and purpose and personality. All of a sudden, she was engaged in class and learned so much more. The kids that helped her also became friends with her. That I think was the key difference."

But for the more-than 1.3 million homeless students in U.S. public schools, such a change doesn't always occur.

According to Dallas ISD's count, over 3,500 students lack a permanent nighttime residence and at least 112 sleep without shelter.

Economic instability in general leads to problems such as employment and residential insecurity, harming children while they are still learning and developing.

"Employment instability — what studies have shown how it affects kids — creates a stressful home environment, which can affect

social and emotional instability and also academic growth," Clayton said.

But for those students that do sleep unsheltered, a new drop-in center for Dallas's homeless youth opened in November.

Fannie C. Harris Youth Center, just outside of Fair Park, was previously a shuttered DISD elementary school.

Now, the building currently serves as one of many drop-in centers in the area.

After8toEducate, a coalition between local nonprofits CitySquare and Promise House and the city of Dallas, runs the center and its renovation.

“If you don't know where your next meal is coming from, you don't care about this higher-level education.”

— **Danielle Clayton**, eighth grade humanities instructor

After8 plans to open Fannie C. Harris Youth Center as an emergency shelter for homeless high school students in the spring of 2019. Plans include 35 beds in a dormitory-style wing.

The rate of both homelessness and child poverty in Dallas are among the highest in the nation, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, which ranked Dallas with the third-worst child poverty rate among major U.S. cities in 2017.

Many of the city's homeless youth identify as LGBT, with estimates from social workers going up to 40 percent. One year ago, city officials set reducing homelessness among LGBT youth as a goal by 2020.

For programs like After8 and Promise House, an organization that runs shelters specifically designed to end homeless youth, part of the issue is that they don't want to be found.

"The issue is that a lot of homeless kids are

invisible," Evans said. "They'll avoid adults because they don't want to be forced into foster care or emergency shelter."

That residential instability leads to issues in the classroom, especially for those of a younger age.

Human neuroplasticity, the ability for the brain to change throughout an individual's life, decreases during adulthood. Thus, unstable environments at a young age may impair children's development of social-emotional security and regulation.

"How [children] learn to regulate emotion is through mimicry," Clayton said. "When they don't have a strong person or environment to mimic, they lose that capacity. Their ability to grasp knowledge and grasp situational behaviors is severely limited at a very early age."

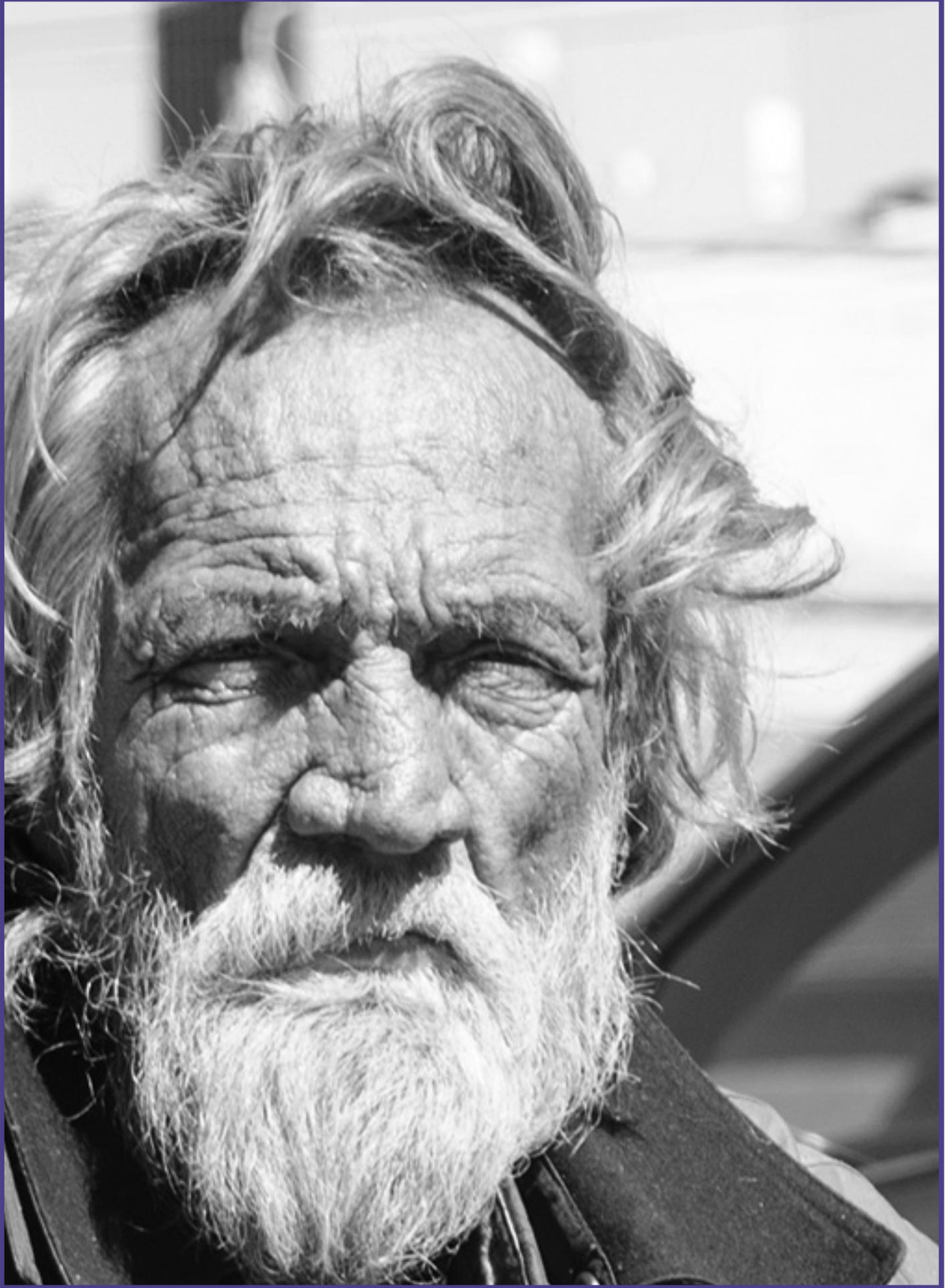
When Clayton instructed in public education, she taught about 166 students each day and encountered many kids who experienced insecure living conditions.

Some of her students changed homes every six months and occasionally lived with strangers.

"Perhaps they don't know how to punctuate a paragraph or sentence," Clayton said. "It's the unique perspective or the connections they're able to make if they care enough to make them. But if you don't know where your next meal is coming from, you don't care about this higher-level education."

While long-term solutions must still be developed, Clayton sees everyday ways people can address the issues facing students who are close to or at homelessness.

"If we can create a sense of community, like that girl when she was involved in a community and had people looking out for her and her family, she was a totally different person," Clayton said. "It's really important that we acknowledge the outliers of our society and bring them in a little bit in easy ways."



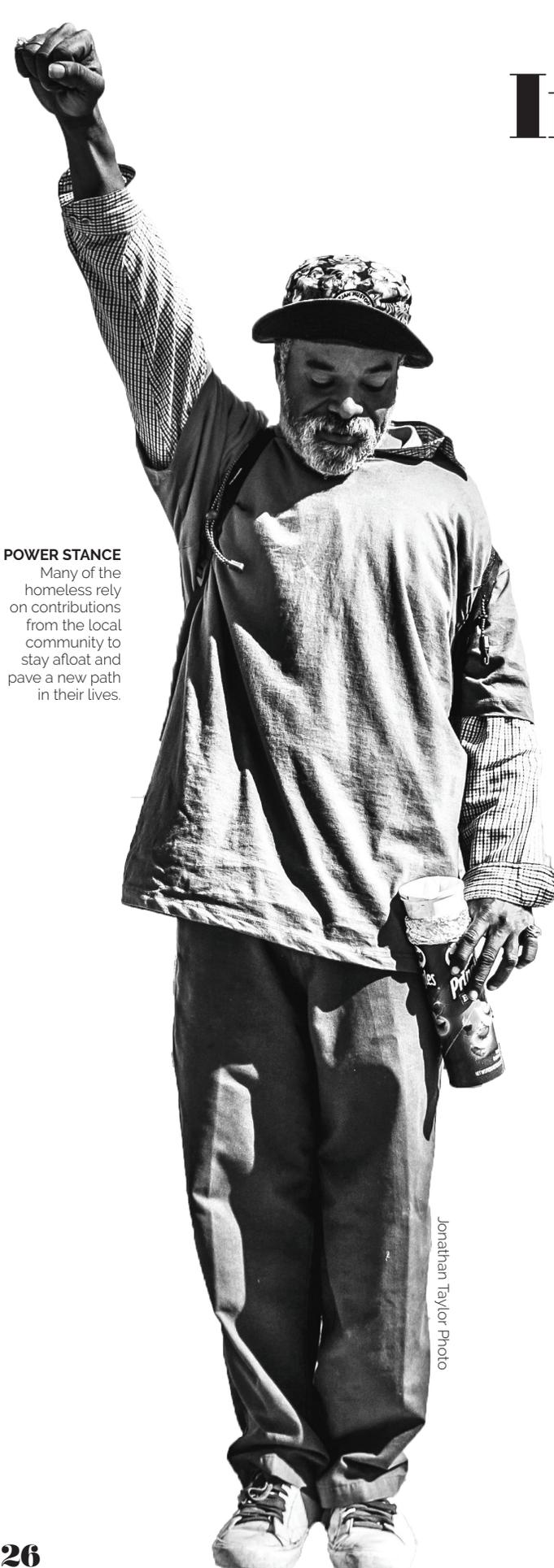
Adnan Khan photo

“

I tried to get in [to The Bridge Homeless Recovery Center], and they wouldn't let me in. So, I've been right here on the street. They let me out of the hospital the day before Thanksgiving. I don't have a way of calling anybody, I don't have a way of doing anything. I'm stuck with women's clothes. I don't have an ID. I don't have anything. I've been on the street. I'm in really bad shape cause I just got out of the hospital. I've got COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease).

I can't breathe.”

- Rusty



POWER STANCE

Many of the homeless rely on contributions from the local community to stay afloat and pave a new path in their lives.

Jonathan Taylor Photo

Inspire a change

It's our responsibility to better the lives of those who share the city with us.

Do something. Such a vague, broad yet commanding pair of words.

In our community, it's our responsibility to do something. Take action. Speak up.

We are all in such a fortunate situation to be a part of such a wonderful institution, community and city that can serve as a platform for us to do almost anything, and it'd be a true shame and failure on our part if we didn't use this platform that has been provided to us to the best of our abilities and to the utmost benefit of others.

In this sense, we all have a duty to fulfill—a duty centered around supporting those who are less fortunate than we are, particularly those who don't even have a place they can call home to go to every night.

There are so many ways each of us can make a difference: joining a community service program; going out and establishing relationships with some

of the homeless to build their trust; starting your own foundation to raise awareness to the ever-growing issue of homelessness in our city. The possibilities

are truly endless, so there's no reason why we can't take a step toward the goal of raising people out of homelessness.

It's undeniable: homelessness is a daunting, nearly-insurmountable task that appears impossible to solve through each of our own actions. We've all thought about it: what difference is the three hours I spend stocking up my local food pantry going to make in helping get over 4000 people off the streets?

Our actions seem to be meaningless given the tiny magnitude of them. It's important, however, to remember that these little actions we so-often dismiss will eventually pile up and gain ground. Imagine thousands, millions of hands working together in unison toward one common goal but each in our own, distinct way. Imagine the impact—the change we can make.

Just remember, we each have the duty to inspire a change in the lives of others; the lives of those who are homeless. We each have the duty to do something.



Christopher Wang
Focus editor

of the homeless to build their trust; starting your own foundation to raise awareness to the ever-growing issue of homelessness in our city. The possibilities



Seth Weprin Photo



READY FOR A CHANGE Linda, 69, was raised in Richardson and worked alongside various organizations for over 20 years before being displaced—she's ready for the opportunity to start a new chapter in her life.

