



Homeless Crisis: What Can We Do?

Those in the press of serving the homeless in our community are very aware of the real challenges regarding the homeless crisis in Anchorage. Other experienced caregiving providers and I have much to say on the matter. There are many things I do not know but what I do know is that government does not have the answers to this complex issue. The "Housing First" model put forward and sustained by our federal government means well but is seriously short sighted in addressing systemic issues related to individuals experiencing homelessness. In short, the cart is before the horse. Handing people housing while not focusing on transforming hearts is a serious oversight. It is akin to the physician misdiagnosing a disease or at best treating symptoms alone. The homeless issue is complex, but we can make a difference in our world, and it begins with YOU!

Most people have someone in their sphere of influence that is struggling with life in general. Many have family or friends who have a track record of poor choices and frustrated relationships to the place of abandonment. What can you do in caring for someone you care about who is on the highway of making poor choices and has landed in the homeless status? Here are a few suggestions. They are not complete but rather a beginning place.

1. Attitude: Seeing people as real people. Take down the comparing fence that screams, "me and them." Everyone has faced difficult life decisions. At a time when someone is trying to find their way forward the judgmental attitude that says, "I pulled myself up by my bootstraps, why can't you," is not beneficial. Comparing others to yourself is natural for us but not wise because every person has their own journey including all of the painful and maybe crippling wounds experienced. Some wounds have greater negative consequences than others. Not giving up on someone is the first step of helping those in the homeless position. Have you ever experienced the feeling of being welcome somewhere but not wanted? It is a feeling no one should ever have to experience.

2. Loving: I define love as "moving towards someone else with their best interest in mind." I have certainly failed at modeling love as you undoubtedly have. However, failing to love others in our past does not predicate today or tomorrow's acts of love. If unloving actions have taken place towards someone in the past, take the opportunity to love well in the present. Maybe it's time to extend a heart and hand that has found a hiding place from others. Consider forgiving offenses! Meaning... take ownership of the offense you carry and send that offense away, no longer allowing it to cause you to stumble or hauntingly reminding others of their past. Cancel the debt owed. By the way... forgiving someone does not mean unqualified trusting. Trust is both earned and given. In moving forward to restore a relationship, begin with extending measured trust and take it slow.

3. Singing Someone's Song: This has everything to do with man's extrinsic and intrinsic value. There are people who you know as acquaintances and people you know intimately. You know WHO they are. You have walked with them in the good and bad times. Everyone has the potential of losing their way in life, getting lost in sins they have committed. Reminding someone who has taken a detour from a healthy lifestyle that they are valued carries incredible power. Most all homeless people have lost hope from making poor decisions. Hope is defined as "having a bright expectation for tomorrow." When someone has lost hope, there is no incentive to make good choices. Addictions are not generally the result of enjoying the feeling of an artificial high, but are more often than not used to numb the internal pain one feels. Reminding someone of "who they really are" restores dignity and hope. Flattery does not speak to a person's worth, affirmation does! What are their intrinsic strengths?

4. The Real Issue: Providing housing and food is important, but if the scared, underlying issues are not addressed, poor choices and behavior will rule. Loving someone enough to help them find a "soul / heart" doctor (counselor, therapist) is the most loving and rewarding thing that a person can do for someone else. People are stuck in their prison of shame. Someone must let them out. Maybe that is you or find the person who has the keys? Shame says... "you did not make a mistake; you are the mistake." God created all of us with a purpose in mind. Shame steals purpose. Everyone makes mistakes. Our loving, merciful God helps us work through our mistakes and gives opportunity to learn and grow to become what we were designed to be.

5. Find the Target: Many people in trying to help someone make life changes focus on behavior modification. Given the complexity of the human nature, one is most likely to return to former attitudes and actions. Assisting someone to pursue heart transformation will assist them to step up and out of their destructive mindsets to the place of a healthy and productive life. Behaviors reflect the condition of the heart. Address heart issues and behaviors will find new actions.

I understand this article doesn't even scratch the surface of the complexity of homelessness. I know that there is hope and a way out of this societal epidemic. It begins with you and I, and a loving and compassionate God who is the only one who can transform a broken or bruised heart.



RICHARD IRWIN
LIFE TRANSFORMATION DIRECTOR

WORDS FROM OUR GRADUATES

What was life like before the Feed Me Hope Job Training program?

This was my last chance at living.

I was shattered, life was meaningless and dark!

My life was going through a process of healing and walking by faith.

I felt lost, alone, and broken I experienced frustration, fear and hope.

I was living in a bottomless pit.

What did you experience in the Feed Me Hope Job Training Program?

Transformation.

A loving and supportive family.

The staff were always there for me no matter what.

It helped me realize there were things I needed to work on; I needed healing.

Feed Me Hope helped me draw closer to Jesus.

What is life like now that you have graduated the Feed Me Hope Job Training Program?

My life has improved greatly.

I have found my purpose.

I am now productive.

I am still moving forward in faith with God.

My life has not been easy but I now know how to handle life when I am struggling; I now can see brightness in my future.

I'm right where Christ has placed me! I know my worth and my true value in Christ!

I have received healing.



For the past several years, God has been leading me on a journey to destroy strongholds of pride, piety and self-righteousness in my life. After years of appearing to "have it all together", appearing legalistically flawless to others, with the "perfect" family, home, church, complete with prideful heart, etc. it came crashing down with a vengeance, and fell still further after I thought the initial fall was complete.

Volunteering in the shower house and in other capacities at DHC while walking down a path of personal inner healing, has been an integral part of this journey through the radical renewal and transformation God is doing in my life. I have seen who Christ is, and who He came to serve in a tangible way. I have come face to face with the raw, painful, yet joyful authenticity of the Gospel in ways which were not possible in the legalistic comfort of "pews, programs n' potlucks" which dominated my former life.

Through a variety of circumstances, the Holy Spirit opened my eyes to the similarities I share with our homeless neighbors, and has ignited the flames of compassion, empathy and also accountability for our brothers and sisters. God even called me to move from the hillside in South Anchorage, to a closer "urban" neighborhood, so as to live nearer to those He called me to serve. Though we may share different struggles, we still fall terminally short of our righteous God, therefore we all share true equality in our need for a Savior.

Sometimes it is only after being brought low and emptied of ourselves, dying to ourselves, coming face to face with our own sins, and passionately pursuing Christ out of last-ditch necessity, are we finally where God can best use us for His Kingdom...by His Grace alone. I am thankful to have many dear discerning brothers and sisters who recognized God's work in me at this point in my life, and invited me to serve on the board of directors. If there were ever a theme for me during this season it would be, "But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me." -2 Corinthians 12:9 and, "But he said, 'What is impossible with man is possible with God.' - Luke 18:27

I am extremely excited about the direction I see God leading us as a ministry, as we grow to provide not just basic needs for our neighbors, but expanded vocational, life skills, Christ-centered teaching and social skills, which will propagate from our guests and students, through our community. It is a privilege to work closely with my fellow board members, our exceptional staff and volunteers as we walk this next path God has for us. We appreciate your faithful prayers, volunteer hours and generous support.

HOMELESSNESS DOES NOT SHOW PARTIALITY

There is not a typical type of woman we serve in our Emergency Women's Shelter. Our women come from every ethnic group and race and range in age from their early 20's into their 70's. One thing they all have in common is disappointment and brokenness. Personally, I believe a personal encounter with Jesus is something they all need, but not all are open to such an experience. So we love them without judgment and encourage them in the areas they allow. The goal is to help restore hope to their life. Our community should consider that homelessness can happen to anyone. It shows no partiality. So I would say treat the homeless as you would want to be treated, how would you want to be treated if the shoes were reversed? Consider the women in your life and how you would want them treated should they ever become homeless.



WRITTEN BY SHELTER DIRECTOR VICKIE



Sirena graduated in 2022 and shortly after was diagnosed with aggressive stomach cancer. Sirena has been living at Suite Hope and now works for House of Transformation. She is a mother to a 12 year old boy and loves Jesus fiercely. Please join us in praying for her healing and recovery.



Class 37 student, Scotty, marries his longtime sweetheart and mother of his two children at DHC. We have had the honor of marrying three couples who have graduated from Feed Me Hope.



All students attend Life Skills, Job Skills and Christian-based Recovery. These classes address root issues and give students tools to overcome negative habits and embrace restored Hope, renewed Hearts, and transformed Lives.



Every Feed Me Hope Graduation Ceremony ends with a group prayer of blessing as graduates move forward into the next season of their lives.



A THANK YOU FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Pictured are three Board Members with Sherrie, wearing black, leading a Downtown Prayer Walk

Even on the days when it gets difficult around the Downtown Hope Center, and the pain and brokenness in our guests is palpable, there is always a moment when the goodness of God breaks through. It may be students singing in the kitchen praising the Lord while preparing a healthy dinner for the women in the shelter, women showing off the crafts they have made that day with volunteers, a woman in the shelter getting her housing voucher or the smile of a guest who has realized they are loved by our Heavenly Father as they pray with one of our faithful prayer warriors. These times and so many more are what bring joy to our hearts and keep weary staff engaged daily, 24/7, in the lives of our guests and students. Our staff tenderly encourage our guests and call them out of the, oftentimes, dark places their hearts have receded to from years on the street and much physical, mental, and emotional abuse. We are privileged to watch as light returns to their eyes and joy returns to their hearts, as cast-aside goals and dreams are revived, and as families are reunited. This year we have shared in weddings and babies coming into the world, drug addicts living clean and sober for the first time in years and people who never thought they could work finding productive employment.

All of this and so much more are what you, our partners, have made possible through the years and I am personally so grateful for each one of you. As we enter into the 4th quarter of 2023 we have 225 pictures of 'Feed Me Hope' graduates that line the walls of our hallway. As of 2022, our graduates have accumulated a 90% Job Placement rate. Fourteen of these students now are employed by Downtown Hope Center and work in all aspects of our ministry. This is a true representation of Hope Restored, Hearts Renewed, and Lives Transformed! Thank you for making this possible!

Sherrie Laurie

ALASKAN AUTUMN NEWSLETTER '23

**For anyone that has just
a mustard seed of faith,
God is with you!
Pray: Lord, Jesus, I
joyfully put the
mustard seed of faith
into my heart! Jesus
please help me guard it!
Amen.**

An encouraging word from graduate,
Sirena Blunka



We are honored to now work alongside 14 of our Feed Me Hope Graduates. From our first graduate in 2016 all the way to our most recent graduating class. We have been able to provide jobs to 14 hardworking men and women.



**SCAN TO
DONATE**



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