
The Cure For Homelessness

“Sir, please!” a scummy man grabbed on the back of Mr. Thompson’s bag, “help me!” “Let go of me, you’re filthy rat!” Mr. Thompson yelled and pulled away from the man’s dirty hands. He scurried away to work, dusting off his briefcase. He looked back at the homeless man and saw that he was praying on his knees. The Arizona heat beamed down on the homeless man’s face as tears streamed down. Mr. Thompson scoffed at the sight and continued to walk into work. “People are only homeless because they make poor life decisions,” Mr. Thompson whispers to himself, “he would only use the money for booze or drugs.” Upon arriving to work, Mr. Thompson finds the workplace in shambles. The firm has gone under and everyone is out of their job. Frantically, he calls his stay-at-home wife to tell her the horrible news. He reassures her that he will get a job soon and the life they built together will be fine. After months of attempting to find a job that supports his wife and two kids, Mr. Thompson is left empty handed. The liquor in his cabinet becomes more and more appealing for him because it helps with the stress and bitter truth that he is not enough for his family. He becomes very violent and distant due to his constant drunken state. As a result, his wife and kids move to live with her family in Alabama. Heartbroken and angry, his drinking problem becomes worse. In less than two years, Mr. Thompson was in the same place as the homeless man he refused to help. “What do I do now?” He asks himself. Those who are homeless should turn to organizations like United Methodist Outreach Ministries (UMOM), an Arizona Non-Profit organization that strives to help people like Mr. Thompson. UMOM understands that people who have become homeless deserve a second chance to change their life and become better people. The amount of effort UMOM does for our community deserves more recognition because it is vital to the Arizona Community in the effort to fight against homelessness.

People assume that others become homeless because of their poor life decisions. However, homeless people are most times just normal people. Some who have become homeless have ran away from their abusive families or their lives spiral out of control. UMOM recognizes that these people deserve their help. “The most common misconception about the homeless stems from a lack of understanding that every person, family, and situation is unique,” (“Families Giving Back: Help Local Homeless Families”). People do not understand each other because they have not experienced the same circumstances as one another. They base their decisions of the homeless on stereotypes and common ideas that are inaccurate because each person and situation is different. UMOM understands this, and offers programs that help give the homeless a second chance. For people to be given a second chance, they need to learn life skills that may have not been previously instilled in them. UMOM optional opportunities that teach those in need how to improve themselves to become better versions of themselves. There are separate programs for families, addicts, women, teens, the disabled, and veterans.

Families who become homeless or are part of a low-income household pose a great challenge. “You’d have to work seventy hours a week at minimum wage to rent a two-bedroom apartment in Arizona,” (UMOM New Day Centers). Parents who have several children, but low paying jobs will have trouble with paying for their apartments and will result in the loss of their home and stress of the family. Parents with infants and toddlers have to pay for daycare when they go to work. It cost roughly \$211 a week for daycare per child. “One in three families (33 percent) now spend 20 percent or more of their annual household income on child care. Seven in 10 families

report paying rates higher than the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services' definition of affordable care, while nearly one in five families spends a quarter or more of their household income on child care," ("This Is How Much Child Care Costs in 2018). Those with children face the biggest challenges because the money earned at minimum wage would just go to their children's daycare and they can hardly pay for a two bedroom apartment. If the struggling family contains more than one child, it is impossible for them to afford it. UMOM understands these problems that impoverished families encounter. It helps by providing safe places for them to stay and free daycare centers. While the children are being taken care of, the parents are offered job opportunities and taught life skills. For adult working to get a depress, they provide a program that gives educational services, tutoring and testing to support them in college enrollment. UMOM also provides workforce services to teach the adults how and where to get a constant income. Not only does UMOM help with work and school, it also offers health and wellness services. It shows them where to find medical clinics and receive special services for them. For the children, they are provided a child development and wellness center. Teens are offered the Teen Activity Programs (TAP), which is a program that gives them life skills (UMOM New Day Centers).

The homeless individuals, who are not part of a family, are given different programs because they do not receive special treatment like those who are in families. People in families are generally given welfare and are higher up on the list to receive affordable housing. There is a Youth Resource Center for those between the ages 18-24. Specialists help them end their housing issues and are given a place to stay as soon as possible. These programs work well for homeless males, but the females face a greater danger when they become homeless. Outrageously, 92% of homeless women have experienced sexual or physical assault. The chance of them being addicted to drugs or alcohol is twice as likely than homeless males. ("12 Must-Know Facts about Women and Homelessness"). UMOM has a program called The Bruce & Diane Halle Women's Center, which is the first Arizona shelter created just for women. Veterans also receive separate services such as transitional living, supportive services, and permanent supportive services. Individuals dealing with addiction are put in UMOM's rehabilitation programs (UMOM New Day Centers).

The main service UMOM gives is a home to those who need it most. UMOM provides four different type of housing. They provide permanent or affordable housing that takes up less than 30% of the household income, so that the family can still afford the buy things for their basic needs. Another is a permanent supportive housing, which helps the homeless who are disabled or have mental issues. Rapid Re-Housing is when a family is quickly moved into a short-term housing facility. Finally, subsidized housing is permanent housing that is affordable rent for low-income families (UMOM New Day Centers).

To get involved in UMOM is very easy because there is lots of activities and actions that people can take if they want to help. People can donate up to 400 dollars a month to UMOM and any donation is helpful. Volunteers can host local food or clothing drives, which greatly help the homeless who do not have any. Not only can they host a drive, but they can also fundraise. Fundraising has always been a major part of UMOM since it was started. The best thing someone can do if they want to show the support to fight homelessness is to attend these fundraising events. There are events for UMOM all over Arizona.

As Mr. Thompson walked through the same park again, he noticed a man sitting there. It was very late at night and the man looked too clean to be one of the fellow homeless men who

walked through here. He looked very familiar, but Mr. Thompson could not quite understand where he knew this man from. As he walked past him, the man stuck out his hand to stop Mr. Thompson from walking. "Hm, you don't remember me," the clean-shaven man grinned, "perhaps, 'filthy rat' rings a bell?"

Mr. Thompson stares in awe at the man as he chuckles lightheartedly. He is the homeless man that Mr. Thompson refused to help years ago. The man had completely changed. His once frail body was strong with muscles and he wore a clean white shirt. His beard had vanished, as did the sadness that was once so prominent in his eyes. Mr. Thompson looked him up and down in astonishment.

"But how?" He nearly whispered.

"You see, we're all rats. Stubborn rats, silly rats, smelly rats," the man laughed again, "filthy rats. But rats always have a sense of direction. Using my rat's instinct, I found help." The man reached in his pockets and pulled out a card and handed it over to Mr. Thompson

"UMOM," Mr. Thompson read aloud, "but why are you helping me?"

"I was once you. If I see someone struggling, why wouldn't I help? Why would I stand idle and let my community crumble, when I know I can do more to help?" The man got up to walk away, but stopped in his tracks. He looked back at Mr. Thompson who was now on the ground with tears in his eyes.

"The cure to homelessness is a way of thinking. It is in an individual's way of treating people the way they would want to be treated in that situation. It's not about 'why would you do this', it is about 'why wouldn't I do this'. Why would I not help you?" The man helped Mr. Thompson back up.

People give excuses for not helping others. They feel that the homeless will use the help they give in a selfish manner. One might not give their extra dollar to a homeless woman because she looks like she would spend it on drugs. Instead of giving the homeless the benefit of the doubt, people refuse to help because of stereotype. This is why UMOM is such an important organization to the community. The amount of effort UMOM does to help people who need it most, deserves more acknowledgement. They teach others that people deserve a second chance and that is the cure to homelessness.