Outreach to the Most Vulnerable in Albuquerque

by Stephanie Lefebvre, Office Manager

Following twenty years doing outreach in the public health sector, for the past three years, Abraham Placencio has been working as the Outreach Team Lead for St. Martin Hospitality. Five days a week, his work consists in “engaging, on their own terms, and with mutual respect, people experiencing homelessness”.

With co-workers and/or community partners such as the Albuquerque Police department, or other agencies invested in assisting people experiencing homelessness, Abraham reaches out to those in need everywhere in Albuquerque, especially in high density areas from the East foothills to the West Mesa. The team distributes water, food, blankets, hygiene products, and clothes. Using a computer tablet, Abraham and his team are able to help people, right where they are, apply for Medicaid, SNAP, IDs, or hotel vouchers. Abraham describes a recent situation where he and his team interacted with a woman they assessed as very vulnerable and at high risk living on the streets. They immediately secured a hotel room for her, with a plan to then match her with a permanent housing solution.

During the outreach, Abraham and his team check that each individual they come across have been assessed through the Coordinated Assessment System. If the person has not yet taken the survey, and consents to, the VI-SPDAT survey is conducted right then. The Coordinated Assessment System is a program that connects people who are homeless with agencies that can provide the resources they need. The Vulnerability Index – Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT) is the survey conducted with a person experiencing homelessness in order to be entered in the Coordinated Assessment System.

Abraham Placencio, does outreach to people living on the streets of Albuquerque, including some of the most vulnerable people experiencing homelessness. Photo credit: Oscar Butler.

Abraham knows first hand about the positive impact of the Coordinated Assessment. He talks about a veteran he visited on the streets for 6 months. The veteran kindly accepted Abraham’s food donations and moral support, but did not agree to take the VI-SPAT survey until he experienced a tragic event. Once he agreed, the survey demonstrated that he was highly vulnerable. The veteran was able to obtain permanent housing within eight weeks.

For Abraham, “the Coordinated Assessment is a determining tool to know where a person is at and to better serve them. Once the person agrees to take the survey, they often feel that something is going to happen for them. When someone, who feels they have been disregarded by society, can see that there is hope for them, things do get better for them. Witnessing their hope is a rewarding part of my job”.

Abraham Placencio, does outreach to people living on the streets of Albuquerque, including some of the most vulnerable people experiencing homelessness. Photo credit: Oscar Butler.
Coalition Members Rally to Protect Federal Housing Programs

by Hank Hughes, Executive Director

Federal housing programs are an important safety net for low income people. For people living on disability income or minimum wage employment, housing assistance may be the only thing protecting them from falling into homelessness. Housing is a basic necessity and providing housing assistance helps people escape poverty. It is especially important for families with children. Children who are homeless or just unstably housed often fall behind in school and have poorer health and mental health than children who are stably housed.

Under President Trump’s proposed FY18 U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) budget, at least 1400 New Mexico families would lose their Housing Choice vouchers, Housing Authorities would lose $4.9 million to operate public housing and local communities would lose $22 million in Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and HOME dollars, which can be used to construct affordable housing for low and moderate income families. These drastic cuts would reverse the progress we have made in New Mexico toward ending homelessness and cause needless suffering among some of our most vulnerable neighbors including people with disabilities and children.

In early July, representatives of the NMCEH visited all the New Mexico congressional offices in Washington, DC to reinforce to our representatives’ staff members the importance of the federal housing programs. We were pleased with the generally positive response. On July 27, NMCEH held a rally and press conference in Albuquerque at the Barrett Foundation shelter to highlight the need for federal housing programs and to oppose the cuts proposed by the Trump administration.

The federal budget is being drafted this fall and there is still time to call your Representative and Senators Heinrich and Udall. They can be reached at (202) 224-3121 to express your support for programs that prevent and end homelessness.

NMCEH, Executive Director, Hank Hughes, speaks to the crowd (including Senator Bill O’Neill) at the NMCEH July 27th rally, in support of more housing programs and to oppose federal funding cuts. Each rally participant is holding a pillow to represent the hundreds of families that would lose housing under the proposed drastic cuts to the HUD budget. Photo credit: Benito Aragon.
Our Sincere Gratitude Goes Out to These Individuals & Organizations

Thank You to Our Individual and Business Supporters (since previous newsletter)

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For a list of our 77 members, please go to www.nmceh.org

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Ron Pokrasso, Peter Chapin, Avra Leodas, for doing workshops to produce works of art for the Not Just for the Birds auction.

Roni Rohr and Brenda Dominguez for involving their students in creating works of art for the Not Just for the Birds auction.

Jennifer Lopez and Zoe Lebeau for leading our Supportive Housing Toolkit series of workshops and continuing to work with New Mexico Communities on developing new supportive housing for people who are homeless.

Advisory Board:
Abigail Adler, Tom Aageson, Peter Chapin, Gloria Holloway, Betty Baxter, Karen Beall

We are holding our sixth annual Housing for All Conference at the MCM Eleganté Hotel in Albuquerque, on October 26. Please join us by registering online at www.nmceh.org
Eight New Mexico Communities Gear Up to Build More Housing for Homeless People

by Hank Hughes, Executive Director

Gallup, Silver City, Farmington, Santa Fe, Albuquerque, Socorro, Las Cruces and Alamogordo are all in various stages of developing more permanent supportive housing for people who are homeless with disabilities. This rush of activity was made possible by the Supportive Housing Toolkit project that NMCEH sponsored this spring with a grant from Enterprise Community Partners. The eight communities each sent a team of people to a series of workshops taught by Zoe Lebeau and Jennifer Lopez from Colorado. Zoe and Jenn have many years of experience developing housing for homeless people and they are now working with each community to build their projects over the next three years.

Permanent supportive housing is the most important tool we have to reduce homelessness. Since the year 2000 New Mexico has developed more than 2,000 places for homeless people in permanent supportive housing, and because of that, homelessness is actually going down. We are confident that this new batch of permanent supportive housing will help us keep reducing homelessness.