

Finding Shelter and Solutions for Homeless Arkansans

Part of a series exploring issues from The Community Foundation's *Aspire Arkansas* report.

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Communities Tackle Homelessness



Each year there is a count of homeless people, both those in shelters and those on the streets in Arkansas communities. Usually conducted on a night in January, the study determines the number of homeless people in Arkansas at a given point in time. In 2017, Arkansas counted nearly 2,500 homeless individuals, for a rate of 8 per 10,000 residents, a decline of 39% since 2007.

But the numbers don't tell the whole story. The faces of homeless Arkansans are young and old, black and white, straight and gay, rural and urban. Every story is unique, the reasons for becoming homeless are varied and the services needed to overcome homelessness are multi-dimensional.

Our communities are tackling homelessness in creative ways — building tiny homes, setting up task forces to plug the gaps in services for the homeless and providing targeted treatment to homeless persons with behavioral health issues rather than incarcerating them.

Join me in learning more about the people and organizations in Arkansas who are helping the homeless obtain critical identity documents, train for jobs, care for their children, get needed health services and more. I am amazed, once again, at the generous spirit of my fellow Arkansans.

Best regards,

Heather Larkin
President and CEO

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On the cover: Karen and Micheal Bowers recently moved out of homelessness and into their own apartment.

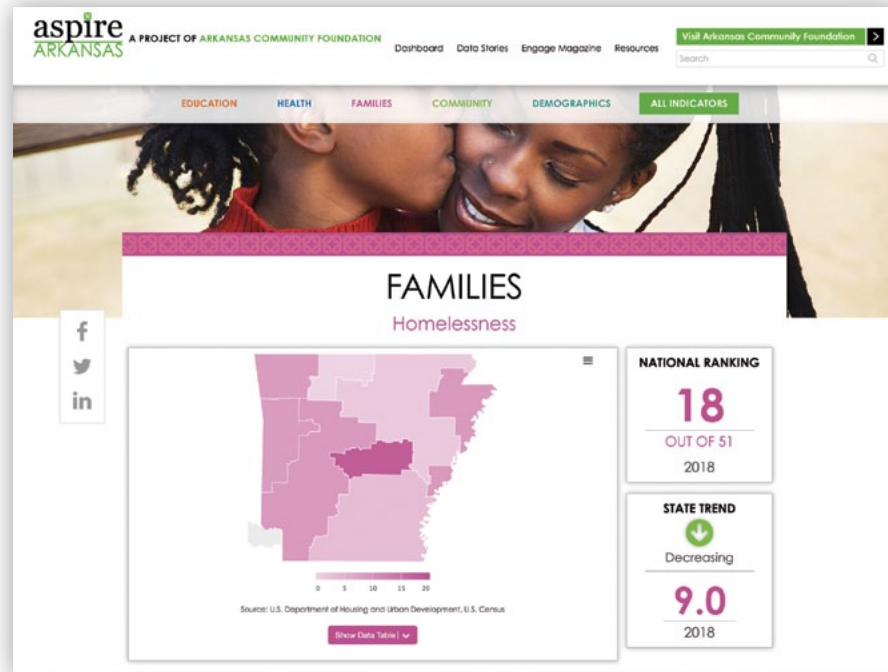
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Find out more about homeless data in the Families Section of aspirearkansas.org.

You Never Think It Will Happen to You

By Kim Dishongh



Karen Bowers became homeless after a long-undiagnosed health condition made it difficult for her to work. At HOPE Campus in Fort Smith, residents are assigned chores, and Bowers' usual chore was laundering bedding for the dormitory.

Karen Bowers used to look askance at homeless people ... but then she lost her footing.

"I was one of those who stereotyped homeless people like you see on TV — you know, the winos in the box, criminals and things like that," says Bowers, who was desperate by the time she found her way to HOPE Campus in Fort Smith. "In here, I got to hearing stories, and I realized they're just people down on their luck."

Bowers was married and working at a bookstore until a few years ago after an undiagnosed autoimmune disease left her unable to work. She and her husband divorced, and she waited three years to be approved for Social Security disability payments.

Within the same year, she lost two loved ones and a beloved dog. Bowers moved in with her son, who also was helping her financially.

"Then when he and his wife had a baby and she started having some medical problems, they had to make a decision. And they made the right decision," she says. "They couldn't take care of me and her."

Her life spiraled out of control.

"It was a turning point. I had just given up because I had lost everything. The only thing I felt like I had was I had a daughter, and she was an hour and some minutes away," she says. "I didn't have a vehicle, I didn't have money. I was going to lose the house, and I was going to lose everything inside the house. When I checked in here, I had a backpack on. I had a few pictures, I had three shirts and a pair of pants and a jacket."

Bowers met her husband, Micheal, at HOPE Campus. They exchanged their vows on Sept. 6, 2018. Micheal, who was one of the campus' first residents, lived in a tent from 2011 until 2017, when the shelter opened.

Micheal Bowers worked as a janitor until 2008 when he was laid off. He couldn't pay the rent on his apartment, so he



bounced between a couple of homeless shelters for a while before moving into his tent in what was dubbed “north campus” in Fort Smith. He returned to the Salvation Army for two weeks every Christmas for eight years to work as a bell ringer, but opted each time to return to camp when the seasonal job ended.

“I really didn’t want to stay there other than when I was working for them because one of their requirements was that you attended their church if you stayed there,” he says. “I had my own church. Since 2009 I’ve been a member of First Baptist Church, and I preferred to go there.”

One of the first to move into the dormitory at HOPE Campus, Micheal was the one to set up a library there, seeking out donations of books and movies and organizing them on shelves for future residents.

“I asked if I could do that because I like to read,” he says.

The library is open to the public, says Stephanie Wormke, development director at HOPE Campus, adding that it’s just one of the resources available to everyone in the community regardless of whether they are seeking shelter.

“We have the campus model, statistically the best model to get people back on their feet and going,” says Wormke. “It’s kind of a one-stop shop.”

The Fort Smith Housing Authority, Mercy Health System, St. Anne’s Society, the Veterans Administration, Western

Arkansas Counseling and Guidance and others have a presence on the campus, helping to address various needs — physical and mental health, housing, utilities, legal aid, job training and more.

“People can come in and do one load of laundry a week, they can take showers, eat meals — we have three meals a day that we serve — and that’s anybody in the community,” she says. “So say that after rent and everything, you only have \$100 a month left. Even just coming down for meals, that can be the difference between you being able to make your bills and not.”

Residents are given chores around the campus. “It’s our house,” Karen explains, “and we’re responsible for taking care of it.” She washed and folded more than 100 sets of bedding each week and helped start loads of clothes for people who came in. Other residents help in the kitchen, scrub bathrooms, clean up after meals and work in the community garden.

The garden helps Chef Betsey Joannides stretch the organization’s food budget to feed as many as 300 people who show up hungry. On a recent day she made stuffed zucchini with turkey sausage and some roasted veggies. “The first year we were open, I did 148,250 meals on \$900. That is truly squeezing blood out of a stone,” says Joannides, whose husband is executive director Chris Joannides.

Karen Bowers shopped with Betsey for food for the shelter



Chef Betsey Joannides

The garden helps Chef Betsey Joannides stretch the organization's food budget to feed as many as 300 people who show up hungry.

and the two became friends. “It took me a while after I got in here to start wanting to do something, and when I found out she was pregnant I was like, ‘This is going to be my get-back-into-it’ thing,” says Karen, who made a blanket for Joannides’ baby. “I’ve made a lot of friends and family here.”

Jeffery Miller, too, made friends while staying at HOPE Campus. He brought one with him, as well — his little dog, Popcorn.

Popcorn was the smallest in a litter of puppies that belonged to a friend, and Jeffery took him so he wouldn’t be battered by the bigger dogs. Jeffery was living with a relative in a nearby town but when he could no longer stay in that home, he was afraid he might have to give up his pal.

“I take care of my puppy dog. He’s my main reason for living,” says Miller.

Most shelters don’t allow dogs.

“We’re the only shelter in Arkansas that has kennels,” says Wormke. “Once a month, one of our other partners, Labahn Veterinary Hospital, comes in to look at the dogs and give them their shots and everything.”

Sandra Wilson, president of the Arkansas Homeless Coalition in Little Rock, is also aware of the role dogs play and hopes to make kennels available in Central Arkansas.

“People think they only have dogs for companionship, but they also have them for safety,” Wilson says. “They can leave the dog to protect the camp, or they can sleep at night because if someone enters the camp, that dog will bark and let them know that someone’s entering their area.”

Wilson looks to various organizations around the state to see how they are addressing homelessness in hopes of finding better ways to tackle the issue in Central Arkansas. She’s watching the Russ Bus in Russellville, for example, where tiny houses — with locks on the doors — are available to those transitioning from homelessness to apartments or houses.

“We basically serve people who are situationally homeless, which means either something bad has happened to them or they’ve made a bad decision that caused them to encounter homelessness,” says Fred Teague, Russ Bus director of operations.

“We have a place for them to safely stay, not behind a store, not in a dumpster, not in a ditch and not in a city park; it’s in a safe, managed homeless camp, where they have their own private area and can keep their belongings inside.”

Through the Russ Bus program, people have access to showers and laundry facilities around the clock and are given two meals a day, but they are required to get jobs and to save 40% of their income for future housing.

“You try to equip them to think for some longevity,” says Teague. “We deal with poverty mentality. You know, broke is a state of finances, and poor is a state of mind. If somebody’s



Micheal Bowers helped set up the HOPE Campus library, filled with donated movies and books for those who pass through the shelter.





Karen and Micheal Bowers met at HOPE Campus in Fort Smith. They were married on Sept. 6, 2018, and a week later they moved into their own apartment.

Regional Crisis Stabilization Units Help People Experiencing Homelessness, Mental Illnesses



Lisa Evans, Ph.D., director of the Pulaski County Regional Crisis Stabilization Unit (far right), poses with her team in front of a mural at the CSU.

“Absolutely there is a link between mental illness and homelessness,” says Lisa Evans, Ph.D., Director of the Pulaski County Regional Crisis Stabilization Unit and an assistant professor in the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences Department of Psychiatry.

“Of people counted as homeless in our nation, between 30 and 50% have major mental illnesses like schizophrenia and bipolar disease. Chemical dependency issues would be on top of that,” she says.

In the past, there were few options for law enforcement officers when they encountered homeless people with behavioral health issues. To help this population receive essential behavioral health services and begin the journey to healthy and independent living, the Arkansas General Assembly passed Act 423 of 2017 creating four crisis stabilization units. The Sebastian County Unit opened in that same year, the Pulaski County Unit began operation in 2018, the Washington County Unit became operational in June and the Craighead County unit broke ground in April.

These units allow law enforcement personnel to quickly admit someone exhibiting behavioral health issues but who has not committed a felony to a mental health unit rather than taking the person to an emergency room or jailing them. Many, but not all the people served in the unit, are homeless.

“We want to make it as easy as possible for law enforcement officers,” says Dr. Evans. “It takes only seven minutes for a person to be admitted to the unit.” Once in the Pulaski County Unit, they receive in-patient care for up to four days and case management assistance to start them on the road to next steps such as obtaining government proof of identification, ongoing treatment and permanent living arrangements.



just broke, then you can teach them some money management skills. You try to teach them to think and save and just be responsible. It’s not their fault, because they haven’t been taught.”

The goal of HOPE Campus, like Russ Bus, is to get people back on their feet, and success stories abound.

Miller, for one, left HOPE in late June, moving into his own apartment — with Popcorn, of course.

Micheal and Karen moved into their own apartment a week after they were married. They bought a car around Thanksgiving. They, too, have a little dog, Susie.

They return to HOPE Campus a couple of times each week, now as volunteers. “We do whatever they need us to do,” says Karen. “It’s kind of our way of giving back.”



Patients between 18 and 70 years of age with symptoms of mental illness are treated in the 16-bed Pulaski County Unit that is open 24/7. Typical illnesses are major depression, anxiety, schizophrenia and drug use. Unit RNs, LPNs, technicians, interns and a social worker initiate medical treatment and on the first day begin to assess potential public and private resources for continuing treatment after the patients are released.

“We work with many organizations to initiate long-term treatment and housing for patients leaving the unit,” Dr. Evans says. “One difficulty is transportation. One part of the solution has been a new community partnership with Rock Region Metro.”

Homeless counts conducted annually in Arkansas counties identify the number of homeless people both in shelters and not sheltered. When those counts are done, the tally who self-identify as having serious mental illness are 20 to 30%. But Dr. Evans believes those statistics underrepresent the true number of homeless individuals with behavioral issues because of stigma and intermittent exhibition of symptoms.

What can communities do to support these regional centers that help homeless people with mental illnesses? Dr. Evans says because of misinformation, education is one of the ways communities can support these new efforts to combat homelessness with treatment for those who have mental illnesses. Additionally, community organizations can help by supporting needs for transportation, housing and ongoing treatment.



Lisa Evans, Ph.D. (center) joins State Rep. Clarke Tucker (left) and Pulaski County Judge Barry Hyde to formally open the Pulaski County Regional Crisis Stabilization Unit on July 6, 2018.



Spread the Word on Mental Illness

One of the best ways to combat homelessness for people with behavioral health issues is community education. Here are the top four things to know about mental illness according to Dr. Lisa Evans, Ph.D., Director of the Pulaski County Regional Crisis Stabilization Unit and an assistant professor in the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences Department of Psychiatry.

- 1 Mental illness affects one in five people. Most everyone knows a friend or family member with behavioral health issues.
- 2 Effective treatments take an investment of time — there are no quick fixes, but there can be long-term gains.
- 3 The cost for treatment of mental illness and disability because of mental illness can be decreased by the right level of intervention.
- 4 People can recover from mental illness when they get the right services and intervention.

Eureka! Couple with Vision, Heart to Help Establish ECHO Village to Address Homeless Concerns in Carroll County



Eureka Springs couple Suzie and Dan Bell and their supporters recognized a local need and created a unique solution.

As career health and medical professionals, Suzie and Dan Bell know all about diagnosing symptoms in order to treat the underlying cause of a condition.

So, when the couple took notice of an increasing pattern among the patients being seen at Eureka Christian Health Outreach (ECHO), the free medical clinic they founded in conjunction with fellow members of the First United Methodist Church of Eureka Springs, they knew there was more that could be done to help their community.

“We discovered a large number of patients we were seeing were either homeless or near homeless, couch hopping with whomever would let them stay for however long before moving on the next,” says Suzie, a speech pathologist who worked in the local school system before eventually transitioning into private practice.

“When you are homeless or home insecure, there are mental concerns on top of circumstances that can impact your health and well-being,” observes Suzie. “There are hard

choices that must be made. Do you pay this bill or buy that medication? Do you buy food, or do you pay rent?”

The couple began seeking opportunities to help alleviate some of what they were seeing and even looked into purchasing and renovating two or three local hotels before ultimately landing on the idea of building a community of small houses as a means of addressing the homelessness and homing insecurity problems plaguing Carroll County.

“It happened that my fellow doctors and I had a 9-acre tract of land, and so we were able to make a sweetheart deal to ECHO,” says Dan, who then enlisted Eureka Springs Mayor Butch Berry — an architect by trade — to draft the plans for the couple’s new passion project... ECHO Village.

Born in South America, Suzie Bell moved from her native Bolivia to California at the age of three. “My father worked with a man from Arkansas who told him stories about the state that had my father all but convinced that Arkansas must be Heaven on earth,” recalls Suzie, who was a freshman in high school when her father retired and moved the family to De Queen.



Since breaking ground on ECHO Village in June 2018, a total of eight small homes have been completed with another two under construction targeted for completion in August 2019.

Dan, on the other hand, is a native Arkansan who was born and raised in Jonesboro.

The couple met and married while attending college at the University of Arkansas, where Suzie earned her degree in speech pathology and Dan received his engineering degree. After graduation, the Bells moved to Texas for a few years where Dan went to work for Exxon before deciding to return home to Arkansas to attend medical school at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences in Little Rock.

Upon earning his medical degree at UAMS, the Bells moved to Eureka Springs in 1985 where Dan set up his medical practice and Suzie would work as a speech pathologist in the local school system before ultimately entering private practice herself.

Since breaking ground on ECHO Village in June 2018, a total of eight homes — one of which is equipped with an additional studio apartment — have been completed with another two under construction and targeted for completion in August 2019.

“These are not inexpensive homes,” says Dan. “These homes have good flooring, nice cabinets and excellent tile work. Some of the homes even have wrap around porches. We don’t just want to put people into a home, but we want them to feel good about it and themselves.”

“It is really a credit to the people of Eureka Springs,” says Dan. “A project like this will only be as successful as the DNA of the town and their willingness to support it. The people here have genuinely stepped up and gotten behind us.”

All the completed homes are currently occupied with a mix of individuals and families selected from a dual process of written applications and personal interviews.

“We had 60 applicants for these first eight houses,” says Suzie. “That is the difficult part. There are so many people who need help. Even with the best of intentions, you are limited to how many you can help immediately, so you have to set priorities. For us, those priorities are two-fold — one being those who are in the most critical need or circumstances, and two being those who are ready and willing to actually help themselves.”

First residents of ECHO Village represent a wide demographic of ages and circumstances, among them single parents with young children, an elderly couple in their 80s and a U.S. military veteran who is all alone.

“We even have a young couple from Honduras and their three-year-old son who are all seeking legal asylum here in the United States,” says Dan.

When all is said and done, ECHO Village is projected to include a total of 26 small homes creating a communal support system designed to engage residents to lean on and lift one another.

“There will be a central gathering place, areas where residents can meet, eat and exercise together,” explains Dan. “There is going to be a community greenhouse to teach them about gardening and growing food, and we’re going to have a chicken house to provide eggs and help teach about sustainability.”

Teaching is a key component to ECHO Village residency, according to Suzie.

“Residents are required to take classes as part of their agreement for living here,” explains Suzie. “We provide a variety of classes, and they can choose those that will be most beneficial to them — topics such as parenting skills, budgeting, saving, career building. Our hope is to help them improve and prepare themselves for brighter futures.”

While significant progress is being made on ECHO Village, as with any nonprofit organization, funding concerns are ever present making donor resources such as Arkansas Community Foundation even more important to seeing the project to fruition.

“I’m working on writing a grant right now that would help us to actually hire contractors and speed the project along,” says Suzie. “We have been genuinely blessed by the number of volunteers, both from within Carroll County and even from across the state, who have stepped up to help drive this project forward. We would not be where we are without their support. But having the means to bring in professionals gives us the advantage of progressing at a faster pace so that we can help more people even sooner.”

In the meantime, Suzie and Dan say donations are always welcome. To learn more about ECHO Village, visit them on Facebook.

“Suzie and Dan are creative visionaries, local missionaries and a force of forward-thinking energy,” says Janell Robertson, executive director of Carroll County Community Foundation, an affiliate of Arkansas Community Foundation. “They and their supporters have recognized a local need and created a unique solution. It is such a great example of personal service for the greater good.”

As far as the Bells are concerned, though, there is still too much work to do when it comes to addressing issues impacting the homeless problem in Arkansas. For them, it is an ongoing mission they feel called to continue championing while also recruiting others to join in helping.

“There’s a strong possibility that we will be able to do another similar project once this one is completed,” says Suzie, optimistically. “But our larger hope would be that other people — other communities or churches — might look at what we are doing here in Eureka Springs and be moved to say ‘we can do this, too’ as a way of taking care of those in their areas.”

“We are just two very ordinary, everyday people,” says Suzie. “Don’t feel like you have to be a superhero. All it takes is one person with a vision and a heart to help... and you can do this.”



“We don’t just want to put people into a home,” says Dr. Dan Bell. “We want them to feel good about it.”



ECHO Village will include a community chicken house to help teach residents about sustainability.



Our House Career Center Employs Creative Strategies to Help Homeless Find Work



Full time employment is core to the vision of Our House when it comes to helping the homeless achieve lasting self-sufficiency.

“Far and away, the best prize that life offers is the chance to work hard at work worth doing.” — President Theodore Roosevelt

Many are familiar with the popular parable about how giving a man a fish will feed him for a day but teaching the man to fish will feed him for a lifetime. While there is much debate on the origin of adage, the lesson it teaches holds universal wisdom for those working with the homeless.

“Employment is the key to empowering a person to take control of their lives,” says Ben Goodwin, executive director of Our House, a Central Arkansas homeless shelter and resource center based in Little Rock.

“Earning your own money, making decisions on how to spend and save responsibly, taking charge of your own destiny... these are some of the surest tools we can provide to those looking to escape homelessness and improve their futures,” says Goodwin.

Founded in 1987, Our House was established in response to a two-year joint study led by the Arkansas Conference of Churches and Synagogues, the Arkansas Interfaith Conference, the United Way of Pulaski County in conjunction with other concerned community organizations which identified shelter for homeless families as a growing need in Central Arkansas.

Since then, it has expanded its offerings beyond immediate housing and shelter to include programs and services providing homeless and home insecure families with

practical skills and support necessary to regain self-sufficiency.

Among these programs is a fully staffed Career Center dedicated to helping the homeless overcome challenges that sometimes impede their ability to rejoin the work force.

“Many street homeless individuals actually want to work, but because of their circumstances, grooming or personal hygiene or even mental health issues limit their access to typical employment opportunities,” explains Goodwin.

Job readiness is another barrier Goodwin points to as challenges for those willing to work but who have spotty or no work experience, who may not possess marketable job skills or who have criminal backgrounds that can be obstacles for finding or securing employment.

Challenges on an even broader scope are what Goodwin calls life barriers for those willing, able and qualified to work but whose circumstances prevent them from otherwise taking advantage of employment opportunities.

“Consider a single parent who has two or three children and no support system,” suggests Goodwin. “There are tremendous barriers that go beyond the simple need or desire to work. You have to have childcare to have a job, but you have to have money to get childcare. It presents a very tricky conundrum.”

That is where Our House is positioned to help.

Among the programs and services Our House offers clients seeking to regain footing within the workforce include: daycare and afterschool programs to provide childcare; supplying necessary work attire or equipment relevant to the employment, such as steel-toed boots for construction or scrubs for health-related professions, etc.; hard skill training programs such as culinary arts, commercial driver’s license (CDL), certified nursing assistant (CAN), etc.; and soft skill training (conflict resolution, anger management, etc.)

“We have had great success with our Employer Alliance,” says Goodwin, speaking of a Career Center partnership program in which more than 300 Central Arkansas businesses fill upwards of 550 open positions annually with qualified, pre-screened Our House clients.

According to Goodwin, the Our House Career Center works with clients from all area homeless shelters and regularly accepts referrals from local court systems, as well as the Arkansas Department of Human Services and the Arkansas Department of Workforce Services.

“There’s a long list of ways people can become active and help,” says Goodwin.

Many community, church and employer service groups get their first exposure to Our House by volunteering to purchase, prepare and serve meals at the shelter.

“These are not glum affairs by any means,” says Goodwin, noting that such volunteer groups are typically responsible for feeding up to 90 people per day.

“It is actually a very positive environment with people interacting with each other, sharing the excitement of having gotten a job or excited about an interview they just had for a job they hope to get,” says Goodwin. “Breaking bread with people who despite their circumstances are positively working to improve their lives can be an inspiring thing to witness.”

Volunteer opportunities at Our House are as varied as the clients they serve and include: interactive playground opportunities with children in the daycare program; tutoring students and helping them with homework in the after-school program; teaching job skill programs in the Career Center; or even collecting or donating professional clothing and work supplies as a resource for those seeking employment.

“On the one hand, it can be very difficult to help people escape homeless and overcome the obstacles and barriers they face,” says Goodwin of the admittedly harsh realities of working with the homeless. “The flip side is that it can also be incredibly gratifying to know you are supporting someone who is investing in ultimately supporting themselves.”

“That’s the kind of transformation we hope to spark.”



More than 300 Central Arkansas businesses annually fill upwards of 550 open positions with qualified, pre-screened homeless clients through partnerships with the Our House Career Center in Little Rock.





“What can Arkansans do to attack or prevent the problem of homelessness in Arkansas?”



Chris Joannides, MSW
Executive Director
HOPE Campus, Fort Smith

Each night over a half million individuals in the U.S. have no place to call home. In Arkansas alone there are roughly 2,700 people who are homeless and 43% of those are considered unsheltered, meaning they sleep in their automobile, abandoned buildings and often community parks. Homelessness is often caused by the lack of affordable housing options. Across the U.S. there are 7.8 million individuals who pay at least 50% of their income towards rent, significantly higher than the 30% guideline.

In addition to housing options, physical and mental health concerns, employment and addiction also play a role in homelessness. As a state we must address the community health arena and the lack of resources to reduce the amount of untreated mental illness that exists. Homeless shelters are not equipped or staffed to work with an individual that suffers from co-occurring disorders.

Another area that we must stay focused on is making sure all homeless individuals have access to the help they need. We need more “one-stop shop” models such as the HOPE Campus where we are able to offer housing options through our local housing authority, medical care through Mercy Hospital, mental health therapy, easy enrollment in Medicare and Medicaid, legal aid, three meals a day, employment and career readiness classes, showers, laundry services and a full dorm that accommodates 105 individuals each night.



Rev. S. Jhonnette Fitzjohn
Executive Director
Lucie's Place, Little Rock

At Lucie's Place, we see a variety of factors that put Arkansans at risk of homelessness. Poverty, lack of affordable housing, lack of public assistance and natural disasters are just a few. Many Arkansans have wages that barely cover their basic necessities and cannot support themselves in an emergency or natural disaster. The cost of living, while lower than some states, is still steep for Arkansans who work low-paying jobs, are at constant risk of job loss, have limited employable skills and education or who have been abandoned by their support networks (as is often the case for our members).

Lucie's Place is a nonprofit that serves LGBT young adults experiencing homelessness by providing housing and other social services through the Transitional Living Program and the Drop-in Center. These young people, who are often forced to drop out of school, find themselves homeless and at risk due to lack of acceptance from family and overt discrimination in alternative housing programs where discrimination is often institutionalized.

When Arkansans can work together to create more jobs, ensure government shelters are safe for all people regardless of identities, make public assistance accessible to those who need it most, improve education, enhance foster care systems and stop criminalizing homelessness, we will see lasting positive impact.



Spring Hunter and Phillip Fletcher work together with other nonprofit representatives on the Conway Homeless Task Force.

Nonprofits Get Together to Fill Gaps in Services to Conway Homeless

Mayor Bart Castleberry formed a Homeless Task Force in Conway in 2018 to determine how best to address homelessness, what services are available and what needs are unmet. On that task force are representatives from many local nonprofits that help area homeless citizens.

Though Conway has several groups that provide excellent transitional housing, the task force determined a true emergency homeless shelter is needed, and Faulkner County Community Foundation made a Giving Tree grant to the Conway Ministry Center for a feasibility study.

“We don't want to build an emergency shelter for people to have a bed one night and be back out on the street,” says Spring Hunter, executive director of Conway Ministry Center. “We want to provide good case management to help people find housing solutions.”

The feasibility study includes gathering information about how the community views the issue of homelessness. It explores what kind of financial and community support is available to build the emergency shelter and provide ongoing support, whether it is giving money or volunteering time and talents. In addition, an impact study is being conducted with homeless people in Faulkner County.

Debbie Hendrix, social services director of the Salvation Army Conway Corps, is working on the impact study to get

information from homeless people on how the community can better serve their needs.

“We're interviewing homeless people, and we hope to have some of them come to the next meeting of the task force so that we can all hear directly from them what they feel are the best actions we can take,” Hendrix says.

Phillip Fletcher, founder and executive director of City of Hope Outreach, is helping plan forums later this year to get input from the public about how homeless people and families can be helped. He believes having multiple nonprofits tackle the issue together is a valuable exercise.

“It is important that we have the opportunity to get out of our organizational silos and communicate with other service providers to discuss what we see, examine different practices and share resources,” says Fletcher. “It strengthens personal and professional relationships and builds trust.”

Shelley Mehl, executive director of the Faulkner County Community Foundation and a member of the Conway City Council, is happy the task force and the feasibility grant came together for a purpose.

“The stars aligned, and we had all the right people at the table and multiple resources. None of us can do it alone,” she says.



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Inspired Giving Leads Donors to Match Made in Heaven



Sue and Lynn Jenkins

community,” says Sue. “It was more than a handout... it was a hand up.”

Inspired by what they saw, the Jenkins consulted financial advisor Jackson Rhoades in Mountain Home on how best to target their charitable giving to support homeless assistance programs like Jericho Way. Rhoades connected them with Arkansas Community Foundation.

Missouri native Lynn Jenkins moved to Little Rock at age 11 when his father relocated the family to Arkansas. Born and raised in Mountain Home, Sue Roller moved to Little Rock with her family at age 14. The teenage sweethearts met when both families moved into a newly developed subdivision just a few homes apart. Two children and six grandchildren later, they will celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary in January.

Caring for people in their time of need is not only a family calling, but it has become the family business thanks to Sue’s father, the late Denver Roller who acquired Drummond Funeral Home — the state’s oldest — in the mid-1950s.

Sue and Lynn became second generation funeral professionals, joining the business in 1967 and eventually taking over from her father. Today, the third generation — son, Hunter Jenkins, and daughter and son-in-law, Renata and Tim Byler — has joined to help grow the Roller brand to now include 29 funeral homes, nine cemeteries, two crematories and two floral shops across Arkansas and Memphis.

For Sue and Lynn Jenkins of Little Rock, giving comes as naturally as breathing.

Drawn by their deep, shared faith to focus on homelessness issues in 2012, the Jenkins reached out to then-Mayor Mark Stodola to discuss ideas and concerns. Stodola, in turn, introduced them to a then-emerging charity called Jericho Way.

For the Jenkins, it was a philanthropic match made in Heaven.

Established in 2013, Jericho Way Day Resource Center works to identify and provide services targeted at transitioning clients out of homelessness.

“We were impressed with their attempts to give the homeless back their self-respect and help them to rejoin the

