



Jonesboro initiative connects the homeless with key resources

By Corey Parks

When most people hear the word poverty, they likely visualize a malnourished child in a third world country. What probably does not come to mind is a single mother of two living out of her car trying to avoid losing her children, whose only meals come from their school lunch program. While both these visuals represent poverty, the majority of people only envision the first.

Poverty is defined as the “state or condition of having little or no money, goods, or means of support.” By this definition, it is easy to evaluate our communities and know third world countries are not the only ones affected by poverty.

There are two types of impoverished people, those in absolute poverty and those in relative poverty. Absolute poverty focuses on a person’s inability to meet certain health standards, while relative poverty compares an individual’s living standards to those of their community. In the United States, we use income thresholds to measure poverty.

According to the Census Bureau, the national rate of poverty is 13.5 percent compared to 19.1 percent in Arkansas. That means roughly 550,000 Arkansans are in poverty. Poverty rates, similar to unemployment rates, provide a window into the economic health of our communities.

Across the state of Arkansas, there are a number of organizations whose mission is to provide assistance to impoverished citizens. One of these organizations is the Jonesboro-HUB (Helping Underserved Belong). The HUB, founded by Mayor Harold Perrin’s Task Force to End Homelessness, connects individuals with resources to begin their journey out of homelessness. To further explain the HUB and provide leaders insight into how they can offer a similar program in their community, Mayor Perrin answered the following questions:

What is the HUB?

“The HUB assists any homeless or near-homeless individual; however, those ready to make changes in their lives are the focus. Services include assistance with identification documents, job readiness programming, mental health counseling, job and career readiness classes, and financial literacy and budgeting. Guests receive services for up to six months with the expectation that within that time they will have made significant steps out of homelessness.”

Why did you create a task force to address homelessness?

“The taskforce, made of employees and volunteers of organizations that provide services to our homeless and near homeless populations, was created to develop a strategic plan to end homelessness in Jonesboro and the surrounding area.”

How did the task force decide what services should be available?

“Taskforce members are in the field daily, so they based the HUB’s services on the needs of the people contacted. The goal is to provide comprehensive services, a one-stop shop—if you will—so our homeless residents can get the services they need in one location.”

What are the characteristics or traits that qualify guests as being “ready” to make changes in their lives? Why are they the focus for assistance?

“We classify someone as ‘ready’ to make a change when they have a regular source of income, are willing to move into permanent housing, and have shown their commitment by attending classes determined by a social worker. Classes include financial management and literacy, basic life skills, and others necessary to equip the client to move from homelessness to self-sufficiency. While the HUB stands ready to help any homeless or near homeless resident, the grant we received is to provide ‘rapid rehousing’ to homeless individuals and families.”

What recommendations would you give communities looking to start a similar program in their area?

“We urge any community willing to reach out to the homeless population to ‘go for it!’ Communities will be amazed at the volunteerism and support they will receive. Communities must realize the need will only get worse if something isn’t done to intervene.”

How can a community combat homelessness and poverty in general if they are unable to fund a similar program?

“Organize your community and volunteers. The HUB was established without any expenditure of funds because the location, furniture, equipment, and utilities were donated. Also, volunteers staff the HUB and service providers send representatives to the HUB to serve those who enter. Some services cannot be covered by grant funds, so local fundraising and community partnerships are needed for a venture like this. It does not take a lot of money to serve the homeless, but it does require hard work and a dedicated community.”

For more information on the Jonesboro Hub, visit hubjonesboro.org.



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