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EDITOR'S PICK

Homeless project aims to shed light, offer solutions

Nov 24, 2019

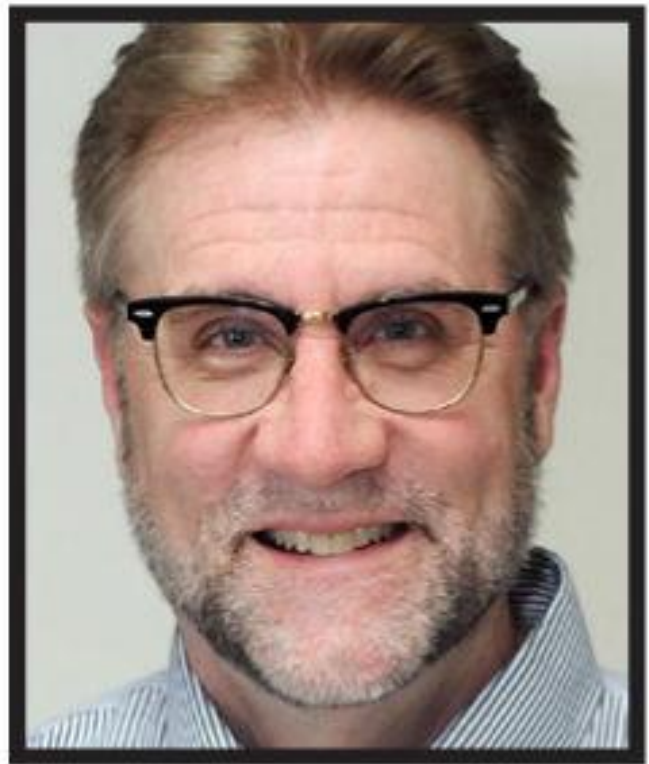


The Free Press embarks today on a continuing series about homelessness in the Mankato region as part of the public service journalism we believe serves our communities and helps them solve problems.

The “Address Unknown” project started with Free Press journalists meeting with a half dozen or so leaders of organizations that work with the homeless, help them find housing and jobs and support their safety and well-being.

What those leaders told us may surprise you. Many spoke about the “hidden nature” of the problem in Mankato. While it seems more and more one can see a homeless person walking downtown, getting breakfast at Common Grounds or lunch at the Salvation Army, the myriad of homeless people, those in emergency shelters or those in transitional housing remain invisible.

We found homelessness is not a one dimensional problem. It relates to one’s ability to get a job as most job applications require



**JOE
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The Free Press

an address.

And homelessness also has a domino effect. People can't move from sleeping in their cars or in tents if there's no room at emergency shelters like the Welcome Inn or Theresa House. People can't move from Theresa House if there's no room in Section 8 subsidized housing. And people can't move from Section 8 to free up space for others if there's not enough affordable housing.

Many affordable housing programs, with a few exceptions, have been defunded or underfunded for years. We'll be reporting on why and talk to lawmakers making those decisions.

Agencies that help the homeless often come up against attitudes about the homeless that lack a complete understanding of the problem. People don't wake up one day and decide to be homeless. Circumstances like fire, family discord, substance and physical abuse figure into the life circumstances of the homeless.

These programs have trouble getting support because people think boosting services for the homeless and housing will "be a magnet" for more homeless people. We hope to shed light on that somewhat misguided premise.

We'll also be offering solutions in our reporting. We'll be reporting on those who eventually secured stable housing, a job and were able to put food on the table. We'll be showing how you can help the agencies working on these problems.


We'll make calls to the community and those in power to marshal their resources, focus their programs and engage in partnerships to make sure the homeless can eventually call the Mankato area their hometown.

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