

COALITION NEWS

A PUBLICATION OF THE RELIGIOUS COALITION FOR EMERGENCY HUMAN NEEDS IN FREDERICK COUNTY



THE RELIGIOUS
COALITION

For Emergency Human Needs

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MESSAGE FROM

the Executive Director



SHAKY GROUND

Our youngest shelter resident is just 2 weeks old. For most, that concept may be difficult to grasp. A newborn with the entirety of life in front of her is already confronted with the devastating reality of not having a place to live. For many of us, that inherent stability remains a second thought, but for Frederick's most fragile residents, the next step is often a precarious one.

I speak to groups in the community about the Religious Coalition and one question gets asked frequently: "What's the one thing you need?"

Some days, this question is easily answered, especially when the need is a "thing." A volunteer, a cot, hygiene items. These are the things that this generous community is eager to supply. But on other days, when I'm feeling less-than-filtered, the answer is different.

That one thing. That *one thing* we need is to ensure that a newborn never experiences homelessness. The one thing we need is to make certain that a family gets to make decisions about what's for dessert, instead of which deserted building looks the safest. The one thing is to provide a quality of life for all that makes an impact on the chronic cycle of generational poverty. The one thing is, sadly, many things that are intractable things that need the will and the resources of the community to truly change.

What we need to do as a community, and what The Religious Coalition strives to do daily, is to provide those

suffering through poverty the opportunities for change. That's the one thing: a break in the cycle, an understanding that the disadvantages and obstacles in front of them can be overcome. That message is what we strive to teach at The Coalition. That no matter what you've endured, if you wish to forge a new way, there is a path.

We are not the end-all solution to homelessness and society's ills. I'll be the first to tell you that success is measured in inches. However, as the long-time shelter and service point on DeGrange Street, we will continue the fight. We will continue to advocate for those with the least and always push for true change. As Frederick changes and grows, we work to be a better solution to end homelessness.

This holiday season, the one thing we ask of you is to care. We can't do what we do without your awareness, your love, and your support. Shaky ground is inevitable, but so is your warmth in the holidays. Together, we can shed light on the darkest corners of our community, and ensure that no newborn enters this world into homelessness.

Warm Regards,

Nick Brown, Executive Director



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WORKING ON STABILITY

JEFF has been homeless since he was 16 but has had stretches in his adult life where he was housed, happily married, and employed. He has been homeless on-and-off for 20 years, and is currently homeless in Frederick.

He recounts the torture of getting through a night without shelter, and the desperation that he has faced.

"Sometimes 12 of us would go in on a hotel room, and all sneak in and try to sleep in there. Or we just sleep outside. I've gotten kicked out of 24-hr places like Waffle House. I try to go unnoticed and be quiet." Currently, Jeff is clean and sober and attending CORE—Community Organized Recovery Effort—daily, but it has been a long and hard road for him. "I want people to understand that we're not bad people," he says about the homeless and those afflicted with mental illness and substance abuse issues. "We are in pain and are suffering, and we're often ignorant to the solutions and resources. Drugs bring us relief. And the side effect of our illness makes us feel less-than, so it's cyclical. We can't punish people out of homelessness." When asked what he wants people to know about him, he says that he just wants others to love him and people like him. "I want people to know that I would like a chance. I want people to know that I have a lot to offer. And I want to get my life together so that I can help others."



WE ASKED

When you were homeless, what's one thing you wish people knew about you?

"When people walked by and said hello it made me feel less shameful. That although I looked like a scary person, I was just lost and needed hope." – Allison G.

"That I was smart, just uneducated about resources" – Cb W.

"That I needed treatment. People avoided me like the plague because I was homeless. Just because I had a substance abuse problem doesn't make me not human." – David N.

"I wish they knew I was human. That at points in my life I had nice things like they did. That I had an education. That I wasn't just a stain on their city street." – Tyler W.

"That I have a job and I had a job throughout my homelessness, I could just never save enough without being in the shelter." – Brandon

"That I am a person. I have dreams and goals." – Katie S.

"That I'm resilient. Everything that I've been through has made me who I am today with the values that I have." – Keith S.

What's the hardest thing about being homeless in the winter?

"The cold. It's was probably the scariest point in my life honestly. No amount of clothing or blankets can get you warm enough." – Ally

"Besides the cold, the loneliness. People don't seem to like to talk to homeless people that often so that's why it's so lonely" – Gary C.

"Sleep, without a doubt. You can bundle up all you want, but you can't get warm and you can't insulate a tent." – Tyler W. (currently homeless)

"It's a battle for most of us. Mental illness and addiction play such a huge role. It's not that we want to be homeless. We just wander and then get lost in the system." – Jane



ON STABLE GROUND

KAYLA was born to a very young single mother who worked very hard to provide for her and her older brother. When she was just 6, she was diagnosed with a rare form of blood cancer, and was hospitalized and home-schooled until her teen years. Kayla says she never felt like she had "the right guidance in life."

When she was older, she got married and had children, but the relationship was ultimately abusive. She first came into our Alan P. Linton, Jr., Emergency Shelter when she left her husband, and stayed for about two years. She says during this time, she felt so alone, disconnected, and heartsick from not being around her children. She eventually got addicted to spice-synthetic marijuana that is popular on the streets—and started to date a man who was also homeless. She says she "needed his protection," to avoid getting hurt. Being very slight and young, Kayla says it was very scary being alone on the streets, so eventually she was dependent on both her boyfriend and the drugs.

"I was almost catatonic," she said of her time in and out of the shelter and. "I knew if I was going to live, I had to make a change." Eventually, Kayla checked into a rehab, and got into a women's sober

living house. "I learned rules there, how to live life, and I learned what was good for me."

When asked what the hardest parts of being homeless are, Kayla mentions having to carry all your belongings with you and never having enough room. "I hated being pushed out at 7 am. There were nights where I could barely get any sleep. There wasn't a lot of guidance. It really was an emergency situation for someone like me."

Slowly, through living in a sober home, working numerous jobs and staying sober, Kayla has been able to afford her own place, and has her children back with her. She works full-time, and

we were able to help her with a security deposit for her own place. She knows what struggling is, and what the stakes are. "I know if I went back to [being homeless], I could die. And I don't want that today."



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HOST A HYGIENE OR IN-KIND DRIVE Collect supplies for the Cold Weather Shelter, the Emergency Family Shelter, or our personal hygiene pantry. Items like socks, underwear, toilet paper, and laundry detergent are always needed



GET IN TOUCH



THE RELIGIOUS COALITION FOR EMERGENCY HUMAN NEEDS

27 Degrange Street | Frederick, MD 21701
301.631.2670

www.rcehn.org

STAFF

NICK BROWN
Executive Director
nbrown@rcehn.org
301.631.2670 x105

CLIENT SUPPORT CENTER HOURS

Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday
10:00am-2:00pm

Tuesday
10:00am-4:00pm



The Religious Coalition for Emergency Human Needs
is a registered 501(c)(3) non-profit.