

MINUTES
Organizational Meeting to Help the Homeless
February 12, 2019

Meeting Location:

Cross Ways Church of Worship, at 197 Ridgeline Drive in Aberdeen (off NC 5).

Meeting Called to Order: 6 p.m.

Opening Prayer and Comments:

Pastors Gary and Karen Ashley (of the hosting church)

Moderator:

Cliff Brown, retired Sergeant with the State Department of Corrections and former President of the State Employees Association of NC.

Attendance:

There were 54 people in attendance, including Sheriff Ronnie Fields, Major Andy Conway, both of Moore County Sheriff's Office, Pinehurst Police Chief Earl Phipps and Gary Richardson, Executive Director: Richmond County Rescue Mission. Also in attendance was Jaymie Baxley, staff writer for *The Pilot*.

Background Information:

There was a meeting held on February 5, 2019, in which 16 people were in attendance. The topic discussed was the homeless population of Moore County. This grew from three others, almost over night; interested to help Cliff Brown with formation of this new group that would focus their efforts on helping the homeless. The article in *The Pilot* (issue dated 2/10/19) discussing this meeting, invited anyone from the public to attend future meetings. That date would be February 12, 2019. These meetings were conducted by group Founder, Cliff Brown.

Purpose of This Meeting:

The purpose was to discuss suggestions for becoming structurally organized, determine a name, and discuss a skeletal mission plan, and information gathering about the homeless from the audience and from speakers. Lastly, gather contact information from those in attendance who were interested in helping, going forward.

Goal:

The goal of this new group will be to be a clearinghouse for services offered in Moore County to the homeless. This is what sets this group apart from others. Many services are offered in the county, but there is no one entity that pulls them all together in an organized fashion for ease of use. Because of this, those who qualify for assistance do not always know what is available. Also, there is no place for a man to go who is homeless, unless it is an encampment in the woods. There are places for women and children, but not for men. If there is a homeless family, they can be split up when the mother and children get help, but the man has to remain on the street.

Definition of Homeless:

A homeless individual is not just a person who can be seen and counted in the shelters, as has been the case in the past. (See *The Pilot* article of 2/7/19 “Homeless Are Going Uncounted.”) Homeless people are hidden in plain sight, most times behind stores and in the woods. If a person is crashing on a friend’s couch or bouncing from one family to another, that person will be considered homeless by this group. If a person doesn’t have a home but not necessarily without shelter, they will be categorized as homeless.

Law Enforcement:

Police departments were invited to this meeting, and those who came were representatives of the Pinehurst Police department and Moore County Sheriff Dept. Moore County Sheriff Ronnie Fields spoke a short time and said we will help however we can and support your efforts to help the homeless. Sheriff Fields discussed the issues his department has dealt with homeless in violation of any laws. Mostly the issues were just being in an abandoned building to stay warm and find a safe place to sleep. He did not relate any serious issues related to the homeless.

It was mentioned more than once in the meeting that some law enforcement departments and city/county officials don’t want to address the homeless population, because they feel it would encourage more homeless to come. It was noted that this mindset is gradually changing, thanks in part to Jaymie Baxley who authored all the articles in *The Pilot* that are referenced in these minutes. Also it is a situation that is getting more traction and concern from the community as the homeless are becoming more and more prevalent and visible. The awareness is creating more dialogue and a desire for people to be moved to action to help with this tragedy.

Open Discussion from The Audience**Our Approach (or Focus):**

One man who spoke is on the V.A. Hospital board, he related the issues facing homeless Veterans. His group has worked with getting them help.

Cliff said the approach has to be to reach the leader of a homeless group of people. Then they can help us gain entry into their encampments so we can find out what their needs are and how to best deal with them. He added “There is always a leader and the rest are followers, so get the leader involved. If you can win the trust of the leader, the others will follow. Truth and trust is key, and then take care of their needs by embracing all the services offered in Moore County and beyond.”

Group Name/Church Affiliation:

The tentative name that was talked about was Lifting Lives, but then someone noted it was taken already. Sue Deutsch said she knows two lawyers who are willing to give of their time for legal issues. She is going to check with them to see if the name **Lifting More Lives** can be used. Cliff Brown will also discuss with them options such as the possibilities of becoming incorporated, setting up a 501c3 with a board, etc. A discussion

took place of the advantages and disadvantages of being affiliated with a church or not affiliated. He will also discuss that issue with the attorney(s).

Speaker:

Pastor Gary Richardson spoke about the program he spearheaded in Rockingham. He has had fantastic success. He is the senior pastor of Place of Grace Campus and executive director and founder of Richmond County Rescue Mission.

This program takes the homeless in, and they go through all the steps necessary to get them prepared for eventual employment. That is their goal. Three people got jobs this very day. Gary's program keeps the clients busy from early a.m. to late p.m., so they don't lapse backwards. The church owned about 26 acres that he swapped out for land that had an old school building on it, and that's how they got up and running. The program offers everything from welding classes to proper appearance and presentation for job interviews. They provide meals throughout the day. It's extremely successful and almost unbelievable!

Mr. Fritz Healy added that he had approached the Southern Pines Town Council to open a homeless shelter with his own money. He was rejected time and time again because of bureaucratic roadblocks. Mr. Healy said being somehow affiliated with a church would be a way to skirt around some of these obstacles that Mr. Gary Richardson managed to avoid.

Jon Rachels is Director of Operations for AWOL (Angles Working on Lobelia), which is a nonprofit created in the aftermath of Hurricane Florence. They help displaced families in Vass. He said it is very difficult to determine exactly how many homeless there are in Moore County. Multiple encampments for the homeless have been found in wooded areas across the county, but there has been no formal effort to count the encampments or identify the number of people living in them.

It was mentioned by someone in the audience that Tandra Chamberlain, who is a social worker at Pinecrest High School, works with those whom are considered homeless among the high school students. A woman from the audience added that there are homeless students in all grade levels. Over 70 students at Pinecrest high school are without a permanent home and often live with friends, in cars or encampments.

If money is donated to the school to pay for a child's lunch that can't pay it themselves, the money does not go for their lunch. It goes to their delinquent bill FIRST. This is because there is a separate company who does the lunch program and not the school.

Another woman mentioned the homeless could be taught to sew because there are sewing factories that need workers. Other programs are being sought out to train those unemployed, a skill to find a job. Cliff mentioned discussing with Sandhills Community College to help set up a training program as one is developed to fit these needs.

Mary Burgess had a “homeless mat” made of “PLARN” with her for display. They are made by hand at Sacred Heart church. They are made up of plastic shopping bags, so they keep the user warmer when lying on the ground.

Cliff provided his phone number should anyone have more questions or ideas: (910) - 639-4772 –C and (910)-246-8205 –H. and.email: cwbrown58@gmail.com

Plan:

Now that contact information has been gathered, Cliff will be sending out information via e-mail for future meetings, so momentum can continue and enthusiasm can spread. March 7nd a conference takes place in Sanford at the Senior Enrichment Center and another in Raleigh May 21-22 that he will be attending to gather more information.

The attorney(s) will be contacted to determine what name can legally be used, what the organizational structure should be (501c3), appointment of a board, and how to proceed to meet city, county, and legal requirements. It will take time to do things correctly and to formalize who and what we are before the hands-on component can take place.

Adjourned:

The meeting was adjourned at 8:02 PM

Next meeting date will be set and posted as soon as possible.