

NOVEMBER 2010



Give generously to him and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to.

There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land.

Deuteronomy 15:10-11

Welcome to the 2010 Hope in the Streets annual newsletter. I'm sitting here on the morning after Thanksgiving Day, reflecting on all that we have to be thankful for. We are grateful for the encouragement and support that comes from our volunteers, colleagues, friends, and family. We are also grateful for the many blessings from God that have allowed us to carry on our mission of helping our homeless friends in greater Kansas City. And we are grateful for the expansions we have been able to achieve that extend our reach and services to those in need.

About a year ago we introduced "The Vittle Van" to the streets of Kansas City. Those whom we serve are now very familiar with the bright sunny logo on the side of our Ford cargo van, which represents good food, a cheerful smile, and a caring and attentive ear.

If you recall, the first 5 years that we delivered meals to the homeless, we worked as volunteers for the Salvation Army *Honk & Holler* program. When Hope in the Streets branched out on our own last November, we elected to serve meals every Thursday evening, which up to that point was not covered by any other relief agency. Our homeless friends were very happy to learn that they would now have access to a meal on Thursday nights for the first time.

Back in September we made a major commitment to expand the weekly Vittle Van route. We added another day each and every week that we take out food and supplies to those living on the streets, under the bridges, and in the woods. We are now delivering meals each Sunday night in addition to Thursdays. Sunday was the last remaining night each week that did not have a relief agency serving meals on a regular basis. Now that Hope in the Streets is covering Thursdays and Sundays, and other agencies are covering the other 5 nights, our goal of seeing to it that there was a meal available every night of the week has finally been met! We couldn't be more excited, and our homeless friends are very thankful.

What made the expansion possible was a dramatic increase in volunteer interest. Our volunteer roster, which now also includes 3 newly qualified drivers, made it possible to commit to a 2nd night each week. In fact, we have so much volunteer support that we sometimes have a hard time making sure the volunteers get as much time as they would like to have on the Vittle Van. That's a good problem to have ☺

The Vittle Van is the primary means by which we establish relationships with homeless individuals in the city. It's a consistent means for regular and frequent interactions, allowing us to build up a level of trust and awareness with those we serve. Depending on the night and weather conditions, we typically serve 60 to 90 meals each time we go.

Now, with so many relationships *established*, we are beginning to take the next steps in *building and deepening* those relationships. Earlier this year, Michael Sommers (another board member) and I embarked on our first "day on the streets" research mission. We took a day off of work and immersed ourselves on the streets of Kansas City, walking from one homeless camp to another, visiting with many of those we normally serve meals to in the evenings. We spent more time listening to and talking with our homeless friends, in their camp environments, trying to learn what we can about their situation and the hurdles and roadblocks that are keeping them on the streets. We intend to do this on a regular basis going forward.

Another new program that we are developing for 2011 and beyond is what we will call the "Lazarus Program". Hope in the Streets is not a "solution for the masses" organization. We are a one-at-a-time, hands-on foundation that aims to make a big difference, one person at a time. The Lazarus Program will be a way for us to find individuals that have the potential and desire to break away from their homeless situation, and to provide them the resources and support network to emerge from homelessness and rejoin society, as we know it.

The Lazarus program will not be for everybody. We envision a complete life transformation, similar in magnitude to Lazarus who was brought back to life from 4 days of death in a tomb (see John 11). The program is not like so many government “voucher” systems, where individuals are given a temporary place to stay, a pat on the back and good luck wishes. Quite the opposite. We intend to wrap our arms around qualified individuals, and guide them along the way of ever increasing commitment to a changed lifestyle. We will hold them accountable to higher and higher levels of responsibility over time, improving their odds of eventual success. We’ll start from simple basics. For example, we’ll ask them to meet with us on a weekly basis for several weeks and prove that they can be free of drugs and alcohol for at least the time frames that we agree to meet. Show up sober, on a regular basis, and we can consider moving to the next step. Soon after, we’ll look to have them bring their own family into the picture as an extended network of support. Of course they’ll need to be able to find and hold a job along the way. They will need to agree to fully separate themselves from the environment, both places and people, that have held them back. We expect the transformation process will likely take place over a 12+ month period. There are no quick fixes here, and we can’t take all the homeless individuals off the street ... but there are likely a handful of high potential individuals that we can help. While the Lazarus Program probably won’t be a broad fix for the larger homeless problem, we hope to make a BIG DIFFERENCE in a few lives, one at a time.

If you haven’t been to our web site lately, take a look when you get a chance. We made several improvements to the site, including new sections where we are publishing statistics on the services we provide. You can see exactly how many meals, hats, gloves, blankets, etc. that we are delivering each Thursday and Sunday. We also have summary statistics from prior years posted. We have a page that shows who all of our volunteers are. Volunteers are also using the site to see when they are scheduled as crewmembers for the Vittle Van each month. There is also a new page that lists our major sponsors, of whom we are very grateful.

Finally, our Winter Warmth Kit program is stocked up and ready to go. The kits are assembled and we are prepared to start handing them out – and just in time, as the cold winter days and nights are here early this year. We would like to thank those who have donated cash and/or supplies, and also send thanks to our volunteers for putting the kits together. This is the program that got us started in 2004, and it will be our 7th consecutive year handing out these winter survival kits.

As you can see, through our various programs, Hope in the Streets is providing outreach services to Kansas City’s homeless and extremely poor. We have a unique “individual” approach ensuring that only those who are truly in need receive benefits from our foundation. There is no administrative overhead in our program ... every penny of every dollar we receive goes directly to providing much needed benefits. There are no salaries being paid, no office supplies being purchased, no third party contracts, no marketing expenses, and no office space to lease. It’s just us and our volunteers, and a desire to help those less fortunate.

If you would like to donate, please visit our website at <http://www.HopeInTheStreets.org> and click on the “Donations” link on the left side of the page or you can send a check or money order to:

Hope in the Streets
PO Box 261
Stilwell, KS 66085

To those who have donated so generously to our foundation, we and the homeless we serve are grateful. Since we are operating our foundation as a “Zero Overhead” program, our only way of attracting new donations is by word of mouth. If you like what we are doing and how we are doing it, please help spread the word. Feel free to forward this newsletter. Tell your friends, family, and co-workers about Hope in the Streets, and with God’s grace we can continue to serve the poor and homeless here in Kansas City.

Sincerely,

The Hope in the Streets Family