

2017 Annual Letter to our Donors and Supporters

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Since you haven't heard from me before, I would like to introduce myself. My name is Gene Lowther, and I became the new board president in January of this year after serving as a volunteer since 2012. I found Hope in the Streets through Joe and Sandy Ratterman, and they knew I was looking for a place to serve others in some capacity. I must admit, after a few trips out in the Vittle Van, I was not sure this would be a good fit for me. I was praying for God to give me some hint if this is where he wanted me to serve. Then I met a homeless man named Joseph. Joseph turned out to be just like me; he wanted a relationship, to be known as a person. While Joseph and I did not become best friends, we did build a relationship and I looked forward to our time together before he got off the streets.

As the president of Hope in the streets, when making decisions, I plan to ask myself one question; does this decision help or hinder our ability to build relationships with our clients.

As for me I am married, 24 years now, active in my Church, and like to do most things that can be done outdoors. Professionally I am a Quality Assurance Engineer and have been in the Quality Assurance field for 15 years now.

As I am writing this note, I am reminded of the many blessings we have to be thankful for and the opportunities given to us to serve. Through this opportunity we are given the chance to build a relationship with our clients.

We are thankful for the many volunteers who serve with Hope In the Streets each week. Without them, and the time they so graciously donate, we would not exist. We also would not be nearly as effective with our donated dollars if it weren't for our partner organizations that donate water, food, and other supplies to Hope in the Streets at little or no cost.

By the numbers – a summary of services provided this year

Year to date in 2017, we have served 6,302 meals to our friends on the streets. That is 6,302 smiles given, and mostly received, which hopefully brightened someone's day; they do mine. We have also provided 210 pairs of socks, 119 Hygiene kits, 62 blankets, and many hats, gloves, coats, and backpacks.

As we do every year, in the late fall we begin our annual Winter Warmth Kit campaign. We started putting this year's kits together in late October and started handing them out in mid-November (10 so far this winter). These are reserved for the hardcore homeless population in Kansas City – those individuals we know who are truly living outdoors throughout the winter season.

The Vittle Van

This year our van was treated to a complete interior redesign and overhaul. We removed the benches and added new factory seats with seat belts to make our volunteers safer while serving. We also redesigned the storage space. This will provide us with more space and a new efficient design to serve from each week.

The Answered Prayers Grant

We began a new program this year called the “Answered Prayers Grant”, which is available to help those looking to take the next step in turning their life around. From our website:

As individuals transition away from homelessness towards a sustainable lifestyle off the streets, there can be small financial obstacles that threaten their efforts and potential success. Hope in the Streets board members, volunteers, and select partnering organizations, can submit grant applications on behalf of individuals such as these in an effort to help them continue on the road to success. Grants can be requested for individuals only once in their lifetime, and are not meant to help with regular or recurring expenses. Examples of approved grants include one-time utility payments, rent down payments, tax obligations, and so on. Grants will be reviewed for requests up to \$1,000, and if approved will be paid directly toward specific expenses (not given in cash). All grants require the approval of the Hope in the Streets board of directors on a case-by-case basis.

We provided three grants this year as part of the Answered Prayers Grant program:

- The first grant was made for a gentleman who was injured by a gunshot, and as a result, he was terminated from his job (his recovery took over 4 months). After regaining employment, he needed help getting current with his electric bill to avoid having it disconnected. Our approved grant was paid directly to the electric company and allowed him to use his income to pay other ongoing living expenses.
- One gentleman lost his job, and as a result, became unable to maintain living expenses. He then found himself living on the streets. After securing new employment and a new apartment, he was able to cover all his move-in expenses except a small part of his first month’s rent. Our approved grant provided part of his first month’s rent enabling him to start restoring his life.
- One woman has been employed with Jet.com since July 2015 and is a single parent with four children. Due to landlord negligence, her apartment was condemned, leaving her family homeless. While finding a new apartment she was able to cover all move-in expenses except for her security deposit. Our approved grant helped pay her security deposit, allowing her and her family to get back into an apartment. She was able to skip the being homeless stage which is where she would have ultimately been destined for given her circumstances.

Worship Wagon Services

God continues to bless our efforts to provide a weekly church service on the streets of Kansas City. This is our third year, and we have only missed one Monday in all that time, and that was because of extreme ice and snow that kept us from being able to physically drive to our 1st & Grand location. Attendance remains strong, with as few as 10 folks on super cold winter nights, to upwards of over 100 attendees in the summer months. On average, we expect to see 40 to 60 people each Monday evening, many of which are regular attendees.

We are there on a consistent basis, providing a worship opportunity and biblical teaching every Monday evening around 6pm. This year we covered different “characters from the bible” each month, providing insights into the life and impact of key characters that God used to carry out His plan.

This year we completely overhauled the sound system to make it easier to use, quicker to set up, and its much more self-contained now. Everything needed fits in a single custom-built rolling cart. We can have the whole system up and running in as little as 5 minutes, which leaves us more time to engage and interact with the folks that are coming to our services.

The worship music leaders that come out from our partner churches are world class, and the biblical teaching is always thoughtful and impactful. We have seen first hand what music, God’s love, and the gospel message can do ... especially in the homeless street environment where we serve.

One of our church partners (Mission Church from Lenexa) felt called to step back from serving each month, but in His wisdom God provided, and Grace Church from Overland Park stepped in to take their place that very same month!

The General Store

The general store is in year two. The store continues to provide access to a variety of goods needed to live on the streets at a steep discount for our clients. Those goods include tents, sleeping bags, flashlights, and several other items.

Wrapping up

This is the first year I have served as president of Hope In the Streets. It has been a blessing for me to learn just what it takes to make an organization like Hope In the Streets work. One thing I wanted to accomplish was to serve with each of our regular volunteers and learn something about them. I learned our volunteers have widely varied backgrounds and many different reasons for serving. No two backgrounds or reasons are the same. That said, they all have one thing in common; a passion to help and serve others. Again, we would not exist without them and I cannot thank them enough for their passion and donated time.

We are proud to report again this year that there is no administrative overhead at Hope in the Streets ... every penny of every dollar we receive goes directly to providing much needed benefits to the poor and homeless in Kansas City. It is just us, our volunteers, and a passion to help those less fortunate.

If you would like to support our efforts, please visit our [donations](#) page.

We are proud and honored to be able to run our charity responsibly, from a fiscal perspective, never spending more than we can afford, and only looking for ways to expand when God blesses us with more resources than we currently need.

To those who have donated so generously to our organization, we and the homeless we serve are grateful. If you like what we are doing and how we are doing it, please help spread the word. 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.

Signing off, I hope this newsletter finds you healthy, well rested, and eager to continue supporting Hope In the Streets.

Sincerely,

Gene Lowther

on behalf of the Hope in the Streets family