

2018 Annual Letter to our Donors and Supporters

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Welcome to the 2018 Hope in the Streets newsletter. With the cold, wet, and snow in Kansas City this November, I have found myself wondering: Could I live on the streets if I were to find myself in that situation? What would I do during the day? Where would I sleep? How would I find food? In short: How would I survive? These are just some of the questions the people we serve ask themselves on a regular basis. God has blessed Hope in the Streets with an amazing group of volunteers who get to answer some of these questions each time the Vittle Van hits the streets.

While serving over the last month, I have been asking some of our clients “What does the Vittle Van mean to you?” While most of the answers I received were about the food we serve, not all the answers were. Out of lots and lots of responses I got, I have a couple of responses I would like to share with you.

The first is from a young man we have been serving for about a year now. He proceeded to tell me how nice it is to be seen as a person, not a problem. When I asked him to explain, he said, “Most people I see or pass on the sidewalk don’t see me, or they just ignore me.” He continued with, “Not only do you see me, you know my name.” This is a direct result of our desire to restore humanity and dignity to those whom homelessness has stolen it from.

The second answer I would like to share comes from a man we have been serving for a few months now. He took a few minutes to think about his answer then told me, “It is more than the food you provide. It is the little things you also provide that help me the most. Hand warmers in the winter, and bug buttons in the summer are a big help.” He is most grateful for the dry socks and hygiene kits. He then told me, “You give me hope and the food’s good too.”

By the numbers – a summary of services provided this year

Year to date in 2018, we have served 6,050 meals to our friends on the streets. That’s 6,050 opportunities to either call someone by name or learn someone’s name while serving them. That’s 6,050 chances to hold a short conversation with someone and make them feel a little less homeless for a few minutes. We have also provided 251 pairs of socks, 156 Hygiene kits, 52 blankets, and many hats, gloves, coats, and backpacks.

The Answered Prayers Grant

This was the second year of our “Answered Prayers Grant” program. These grants have provided help to those looking to take the next step in turning their lives around and resulted in four grants during 2018. In each of the four instances below, the checks were made out to the landlords. This provides Hope in the Streets assurance the money is used for exactly what was requested and approved.

- Our first grant of 2018 was for a female fighting bone cancer and undergoing treatment. At the time of the grant she was living out of her car. Our grant provided the security deposit and first month’s rent for a small apartment which she will be able to maintain with her disability income.
- Our next grant provided the security deposit and first month’s rent for a gentleman who was hurt on the job. His disability insurance, as well as a part time job, will allow him to maintain an apartment.
- Our third grant was given to a female who had lost one of her two part-time jobs. While she found a second job to reclaim the lost income, she did fall one month behind in rent. We were able to catch that up for her.
- Our last grant of 2018 was given to another female cancer patient. While fighting the cancer she is not able to work.

For a detailed explanation of our Answered Prayers Grant program see the programs page of our website.

Worship Wagon Services

Our non-denominational church service, which we call the “Worship Wagon”, is completing its 4th year of Monday evening services. Each Monday around 6pm we have one of four different local churches responsible for bringing a music worship team as well as somebody to deliver a short gospel message centered on the theme of the month.

Our themes this year were topical in nature and varied from month to month. We covered topics such as Grace, Salvation, Forgiveness, Prayer, Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love. We have had really good turnouts every week, even when the weather goes to extremes. As you are reading this newsletter you might remember just how cold and early winter has been this year, but even in the coldest of conditions we’ll have 30+ folks gathered around our heater and participating in our services. In the spring, summer, and fall, we still ramp up towards 80-100+ folks at times.

We’ve also been seeing a higher number of regular attenders from our partner churches each week. The most engaged church group by far is Grace Church, who has several members showing up not just on their designated week, but every week! One of those volunteers, who goes by the nickname “Santa Mike”, brings out folding tables and chairs each week so that attenders from the street can sit down and enjoy a meal at a real table, which brings some much needed and added dignity to their day.

We have been discussing and praying about the possibility of expanding the Worship Wagon project to another part of town and/or an addition day each week. We are holding off on any expansion until we can identify additional church groups that can take full responsibility for one or more days each month. We have a good structure today that has 4 dedicated churches, one for each week of the month, along with a base of regular volunteers that come out every week. If or when we reach critical mass with more church groups and volunteers, then we'll consider expanding our gospel outreach efforts and explore an additional day and/or location each week to hold services. Until then we continue to pray for resources, wisdom and guidance.

Update on the General Store

The General Store has continued to be a blessing to those who are in need of items not readily available without a 2-hour or more bus trip to get to a store. The most popular items are tents and sleeping bags. We purchase these items and then individuals can purchase them for a donated amount that is half the original price of the item. The General Store is kept at Hope Faith Ministries (Kansas City's only daytime homeless outreach). This allows our clients to be able to get these items on other days when we are not out serving food. This has been a great partnership. It also keeps these items from becoming "disposal" items, as the individual has to put some "skin in the game" as it were. Previously, we were finding that since they didn't need to pay for the items, they weren't taking very good care of them as they felt they could just get a new one the next week. This has also reduced the space needed to carry all of these different types of items on the Vittle Van each week. Overall, this has been a very successful program for our organization and our friends on the street.

Wrapping up

Our Hope in the Streets home page states:

Hope in The Streets signifies what we aim to achieve ... hope for the chronic homeless. Hope for a better tomorrow, hope to stay alive one more day, and hope to survive Kansas City's cold winters and hot summers. Our foundation will inspire hope through volunteers who are taking the time and initiative to get to know those living on the streets personally, on a first name basis, and becoming a trusted and familiar face each week. Through these relationships we can then reach back out, as friends, to provide the gospel message, medical and other service referrals, housing options, and crucial life sustaining items as needed.

After spending the last month talking to the homeless about the Vittle Van, I feel Hope in the Streets is living up to this mission statement. Something that could not be done without our volunteers giving of their time and the generosity of our donors. Hope in the Streets and those we serve thank you for that generosity. If you like what we are doing and how we are doing it, please help spread the word to your family, friends, and co-workers. With God's grace we can continue to serve the poor and homeless here in Kansas City.

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.

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