



JUSTICE · MATTERS

Justice Matters Update on Homelessness

If you participated in the virtual Solutions Briefing on March 23 you know that the Justice Matters research committee recommended a Housing First approach to deal with homelessness. The goal of this approach is to deal with homelessness in a systemic way to resolve homelessness - not just manage the problem. This means that people need to be housed as the first step before they are asked to get a job, undergo treatment for drug dependence, etc.

The good news is that the Douglas County Commissioners voted unanimously to work with Community Solutions, a group dedicated to ending homelessness through an initiative called "Built for Zero". It will be a long-term process because it is a systemic approach to the problem. This is great news because, if implemented effectively, will eliminate homelessness in our community. We need to be very clear that as an act of justice, this will take years to implement. However, due to the current COVID-19 crisis, there is immediate needs for acts of mercy.

In the immediate future, we need to find housing for the people experiencing homelessness in our community so that they can shelter safely. This is extremely important to limiting the spread of infection in our community. We talked with the major service providers working on this this past week. The Bert Nash Homelessness Outreach Team was given \$50,000 from the State to house people that are unsheltered. That is the only money that has come through thus far.

Despite that limited amount of money available, the Lawrence Community Shelter has been able to house all of the families and reduce the number of individuals to make social distancing possible for the folks that remain. Service providers continue to advocate for funds through the Unified Command efforts (City, County, Lawrence Memorial Hospital, and Douglas County Health Department) to address the ongoing needs for housing.

The biggest barriers to getting people housed quickly are two main things:

- 1. Finding landlords with vacancies willing to rent what they have available to house people experiencing homelessness. If you are a landlord or if you know of one who might be willing to rent a vacancy, have them call Matthew Faulk at 785-505-5023.**
- 2. Money to accomplish the goal of all homeless being housed for the safety of the community. If you can contribute financially to this effort go to the Lawrence Community Shelter or Family Promise webpage and click to donate.**