

Artists Helping the Homeless

The Safety Net for the Safety Net

Artists Helping the Homeless (AHH) is more than it may appear from its name – unique among the numerous organizations in Kansas City that serve the homeless. AHH is the ***Safety Net for the Safety Net***, the organization that makes other organizations more effective, and the agency that works with the chronically homeless from the street to success.

History

Artists Helping the Homeless was the inspiration of Kar Woo, its founder and current executive director. Kar was an artist and owner of a business located in midtown Kansas City. He saw the homeless gather at a park near his shop and wanted to help, beginning by serving them dinner on Sunday evenings and providing them clothes. He started to expand his assistance, enlisting area churches to help. His passion to serve this population and his desire to target the aid led to his decision to form *Artists Helping the Homeless* as a 501C3 not-for-profit.

Aided by the organization's board and staff, over the last four years Kar has built the program into an indispensable resource for the homeless and the organizations and agencies that deal with the homeless every day, such as hospitals, police and shelters.

What does AHH do?

Artists Helping the Homeless assists in several ways when a person or family is most in need or when the person does not meet their service criteria.

AHH is the last resort contact when...

- a homeless person needs help on the street;
- a hospital is ready to discharge a homeless person and no appropriate discharge alternatives are apparent;
- the police are releasing or have picked up a homeless person, but jail is not the right place for them; and
- a shelter or other homeless facility or agency has no more room or needs other supportive services. .

AHH is known for taking on the most challenging clients within the chronic homeless population, as many of those served are dealing with drug abuse and mental health issues and may have suffered abuse and victimization while living on the streets or in shelters. AHH's one-of-a-kind approach has created trust within this community, operating several vans to provide transportation and aid at the time of greatest vulnerability--from early evening to well into the night.

AHH addresses the immediate need by...

- meeting homeless people where they are and evaluating the short- and long-term needs , and
- accessing urgent assistance--usually shelter, medical care, a meal or removal from a threatening situation.

AHH works on long-term needs by...

- finding permanent housing;
- arranging for admission into detox, inpatient treatment and transitional living programs
- reuniting homeless persons with their families;

- filling gaps that other homeless services cannot provide; and/or
- supporting individuals to follow through on all of their commitments.

AHH operates two vans during the day to provide a continuum of care through long-term support, entry into assistance programs and help the homeless fulfill their commitments to these programs. Some of this assistance can be for a few days, sometimes for a few months, and sometimes for years.

How is AHH unique?

There are many agencies and organizations in the Kansas City metro area providing excellent, desperately needed services to the homeless. *Artists Helping the Homeless* supports the homeless and these organizations in in five unique ways:

- **Street Outreach** – AHH is the only non-facility-based organization operating from the street to catch those who would fall through the homeless safety net system.
- **Chronic Cases** – AHH works with the chronic homeless persons at those times when they are most vulnerable and most in need. AHH’s dynamic case management is particularly effective with chronic populations.
- **Makes the Homeless System Better** – AHH expands the collective impact of Kansas City’s homeless services safety net. AHH helps other homeless organizations operate more effectively by filling gaps they cannot provide, connecting their clients to the services they need and supporting them in following through on the help that is offered.
- **Client Centered** – AHH works with an individual from their initial crisis until they have connected to all of the assistance available and have reached a successful, more permanent and productive situation. Rather than providing a specific service or set of services, AHH is client focused; assuring that each client identifies and access available services that will meet their needs.
- **Saves Public Dollars** – AHH saves the homeless system’s scarce resources by making sure that clients get the most effective combination of care and follow through on the assistance received, saving thousands of public dollars by reducing the homeless population's usage of costly public services such as ambulances, emergency rooms and law enforcement.

What are the results?

By the numbers – since its inception just 4 ½ years ago to June 30, 2014:

- AHH assisted over 4,000 individuals from all segments of Kansas City’s homeless population.
- AHH helped over 250 chronic homeless and at-risk young adults get off the street.
- AHH served over 120,416 meals.
- AHH assisted clients identify and access shelter, food, medical, housing and legal services with over 35,000 rides.
- AHH enrolled over 600 people in social detox services.
- AHH, based on a recent study, has saved hospitals and community emergency services over \$7,500,000.

As a result of this success, the program was the subject of a six-month study by a team from the Kansas City University of Medicine and Biosciences and presentations to the National Health Care for the Homeless Conference in both 2013 and 2014, the Missouri Association for Social Welfare and the Kansas Conference on Poverty, among others.

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