

FROM THE CEO'S DESK: HOMELESSNESS: A COMMUNITY BURDEN, YET VMC'S MISSION



Bruce W. Spangler, CEO

Like many Knoxvilleians, the site of the underpass at I-40 and Broadway begs the question, "What is going on?" Anger is often expressed towards the many that critics say bear responsibility. "Why isn't the City doing something about it?!" "Can't those people just be more responsible?" "Why do they choose to live in such filth, squalor, and distress?" "Why don't they just get a job?" "With all the services surrounding the area, can't the agencies do something about it?!" The questions often start as inquisitive but the longer the site remains the same, the questions denigrate into accusations and indictments – against the individuals, the agencies, and the City.

The loss and diminishment of human potential is oblivious along with the unsightliness of the debris and the assumed unhealthy and unsanitary environment. Homelessness is a national experience with no city, no community, no village immune. Knoxville is no different. It has just become more observable and noticeable made apparent by the transparency of the site and the main thoroughfare of Broadway. The mask has been pulled aside or the veil rent to what some of our community are and have been enduring and experiencing. Who is to blame? Who is at fault? Who is responsible?

The answers to such questions are multifaceted, far-reaching, and complex. Resources, coordination, advocacy, along with a commitment to permanent solutions, must be both mustered and maintained. We often give all the energy to the problem and much less to the solution.

There is no question that the experience of homelessness is a burden to the individuals and families experiencing it. It is also a burden for the community due to the loss of human potential and resources supplied just to "manage" the experience.

This edition of our newsletter focuses on solutions that are effective, positive, predictable and proven. Housing First, Street Outreach, and Homeless Prevention make for positive outcomes. Your commitment of support to VMC's mission insures that the Marys of our community have the opportunity to gather the shards of a broken life under the safe and secure environment of home instead of an interstate overpass.

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FROM OUTREACH TO HOME

Outreach Case Management Works!! Many of the individuals whom VMC has assisted into housing are experiencing fulfilled lives now because of the initial outreach efforts of VMC case managers. For the chronically homeless and those suffering from a mental illness, outreach case management is a critical component in significantly reducing homelessness in our community. Many live in a continuous state of fear and hopelessness and are untrusting of those with whom they come into contact. Most of those who are mentally ill are incapable of seeking out services on their own. It takes understanding, compassion, and perseverance to do outreach among the most service resistant homeless of Knoxville. But, what a life changing experience it is!

So, here are some of our neighbors who are living fulfilled lives as a result of VMC's Outreach Case Management:



Emmett had been on the streets for several years prior to being engaged through outreach by a VMC case manager. Through the dedicated efforts of his case manager, Emmett's mental health was improved and in October 2008 he moved into the Jackson Apartments. When Minvilla Manor opened in 2010, Emmett was one of the first residents to move in. Emmett is thriving at Minvilla. He has a Circle of Friends from Church of the Ascension and regularly attends church there. He volunteers weekly in the administrative offices of VMC by gathering and emptying the trash. When Emmett first achieved housing, he made the statement: You know, this is the best time of my life."

For several years, Emmett has volunteered to take out the trash in the VMC Admin offices.

Candace ended up on the streets of Knoxville in 2002. In 2011, VMC Outreach Case Manager Caroline Carter (now Smith) engaged Candace and worked diligently to help her into housing. Caroline's love for people, regardless of who they were or their circumstances, equipped her with the characteristics she needed to reach out to the most vulnerable of Knoxville's homeless. In December 2011, Candace moved into her own apartment at Minvilla Manor. Candace, like Emmett, has a home, a community that cares for her, and case managers to provide the supportive services for her to live a fulfilled life.



Candace and Caroline in 2011 when Candace moved into Minvilla Manor.



Gary was homeless for nine years after losing his job due to health issues. A VMC case manager reached out to Gary and in February 2011 Gary moved into Minvilla Manor. Gary is always smiling and quick to offer his assistance with clean up after an activity or to offer the blessing before a meal. In Gary's own words: "Housing changes everything."

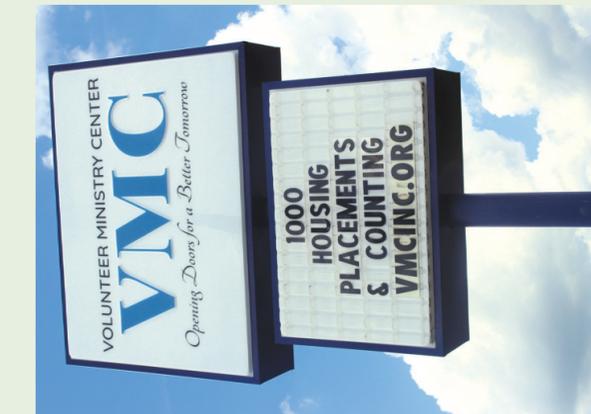
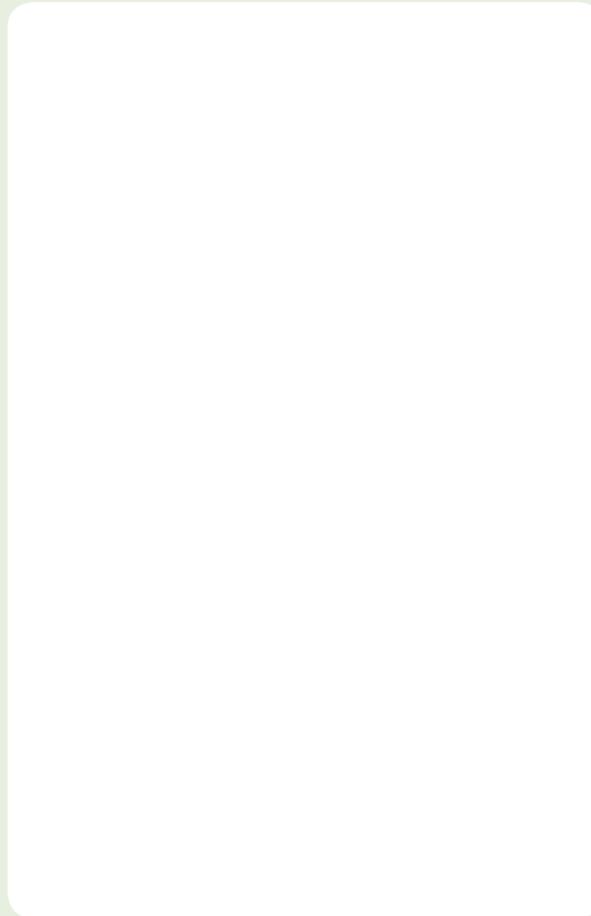
Gary enjoys using the computer in the Computer Room at Minvilla Manor.

These are just a few of the many stories of the successes of VMC's outreach case management. There are many others. What is important to note is that none of these success stories would have happened without the caring and compassionate outreach case managers who ventured out into the streets of Knoxville to seek out and help those who had lost all hope of ever having a home and living a fulfilled life.

By: Mary Beth Ramey

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NO COMEDY HERE: VALIDATING THE TRAGEDY

Meet Mary (not her real name). She says that she lives in a state of constant disappointment with dreams that have been shattered. She also lives in the state of homelessness. She is often found under the I-40 overpass and Broadway among the denizens of those gathered under the shadow cast by the overpass and homelessness. More than dreams shattered, her life has become a living nightmare. Homeless for years. Tired. Exhausted. Addicted. Living life out of the "corner of her eye, working the streets." Fearful of being hurt. Fearful of being caught. Days that seem to have no beginning. Nights that seem to have no end. She lives with shattered dreams like the shards of glass that litter the sidewalk near her.

Mary readily admits to a VMC street outreach worker that she is in active addiction and really wants to quit. Her motivation to quit is more out of exhaustion, however, than anything else. Though her drug habit has decreased from a \$700 a day to \$300 a day, the reason lies behind the taxing pace of both her habit and "working the streets" to underwrite it. Dreams of being a medical professional are long gone. She speaks glowingly and proudly of a younger extended family member who has fulfilled that dream once held by her. In learning a few details about her early life, it appears that her dreams were resting on clouds of hurt and abuse that could never support her life's ambition. She was sexually abused at the age of five and turned her first "trick" at fifteen. The world of addiction followed. It is well documented that trauma during childhood shows an increased tendency to become chemically dependent. Her traumatic childhood experiences probably explains Mary's many years of addiction and inability to achieve and sustain housing.

Now meet Megan and Dyrl. Both have taken up the challenge and role as our street outreach case managers. Recently, the City of Knoxville contracted with VMC to provide outreach services to individuals who are experiencing homelessness and are not accessing services. With a clear mandate to engage individuals like Mary and

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others under the shadows of the I-40 overpass and Broadway, Megan and Dyrll will also be active around Market Square, Old Gray cemetery and other areas as needed.

Given their combined 30 years of service with Volunteer Ministry Center, both have the knowledge, expertise, wisdom, and experience that will make for an effective and successful approach to reaching the Marys of our community.

Megan did just that as Mary shared about a life shattered. Megan's insight to reaching Mary demonstrates the essence of respecting humanity when someone is wounded. Megan insists that when you "validate the tragedy or the humanity of the tragedy you make the invisible visible thus creating a connection between two people."

Just like Megan, Dyrll has the ability to connect with people. In connecting, Dyrll seeks to convey two messages, "I want to be a source of credible information and to show that people in this community DO care about them."



Reaching them, however, has its challenges. Dyrll adds that many are "at ease in anonymity" and therefore makes for great difficulty in engendering trust." If the experience of homelessness is akin to shatter shards of glass, Megan and Dyrll are in the position to help pick up one piece at a time. The Marys of our community need it, no matter who or what is to blame.

By: Bruce W. Spangler



MINVILLA MANOR: 8 YEARS OF SUCCESSFUL PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING!

By: Mary Beth Ramey

Do you remember the Old Fifth Avenue Motel? That is a question frequently asked of VMC staff when giving tours of the historic building we now call Minvilla Manor. It was originally constructed in 1913 and its original name was Minvilla. However, over the years the building deteriorated as well as its purpose, with less than desired activity regularly occurring on the property. But, those are days long gone by. With extensive renovation and rehabilitation, Minvilla Manor, opening in 2010, is now home to 57 formerly chronically homeless individuals as well as being on the National Historic Register. VMC took a torn and tattered, broken-down, condemned building and turned it into an attractive and welcoming home for 144 residents since 2010. With 57 units, Minvilla Manor became a place to call home for men and women whose lives were struggling through the experience of long durations of homelessness. With in-house supportive case management and community enriching activities, each resident has the opportunity for better health in a safe and secure living condition surrounded by encouraging and reassuring staff, volunteers, and fellow neighbors. Each resident has an opportunity to flourish, reclaiming life as God intended.

Life is fulfilling at Minvilla Manor. The residents experience activities hosted by volunteers as well as staff which form a sense of community and build relationships. Since pictures speak louder than words, the following is a glimpse of life at Minvilla Manor.

By: Mary Beth Ramey



Excursions to Loves Creek to get fresh spring water to bring back to Minvilla Manor puts a big smile on Gary's face.



Property Manager Lanita Puckett oversees the operations of Minvilla Manor and maintains the leases and records of all residents



Minvilla Manor Case Managers, Pati Cox, Dustin Heffner, and Lisa LaDuca provide full time on-site case management along with supportive services.



Minvilla Manor residents enjoyed a picnic while learning about nature at Ijams Nature Center.



Darryl is all smiles during his trip with other Minvilla Manor residents to the McClung Museum



These six gentlemen were the first to move into Minvilla Manor which continues to be their home today.



Volunteer Linda Eberle hosted a field trip to Five Guys Restaurant for the Minvilla Manor residents participating in Coffee Chat

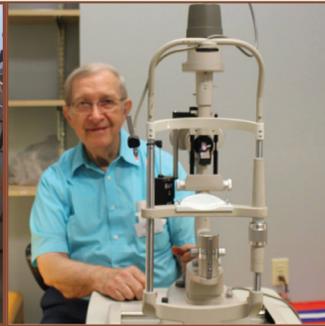


Emmett holds one of the youngest volunteers at Minvilla Manor at the monthly Coffee Chat

VMC HAPPENINGS



Legal Aid of East Tennessee provided a legal advice clinic to members of the VMC Resource Center



Dr. Paul Wittke with Remote Area Medical prepares for the RAM Vision Clinic at VMC



Members of the Episcopal Church of the Good Samaritan hosted an ice cream social for Resource Center members and Minvilla Manor residents



A fun time was had by all who attended the Annual Wine and Shine event in memory of Don Sproles.

Sam Venable and his delightful humor entertained the guests at the 7th Annual Don Sproles Memorial Evening: Wine and Shine.

IMMEDIATE NEEDS

- Deodorant
- Toothpaste
- Toothbrushes
- Shampoo
- Socks
- Boxers for men - all sizes

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