

Shelter Committee Report

January 2021

As there is no actual shelter this winter our report will be in two parts: A vision statement for REACH's entering into a permanent lease of 720 W. Main Street, and a report of the Outreach Zone collaboration with the Father Tracy Advocacy Center (FTAC), MC Collaborative (MC²), and the Southwest Area Neighborhood Association at Montgomery Center (SWAN).

720 West Main St. Vision Statement

The building at 720 West Main St is the ideal location for a community support center and temporary winter shelter. West Main St can be seen as a "Corridor of Care". There are many helping agencies housed in the West Main St. area: from St. Mary's walk-in mental health center, to Open Access' substance abuse treatment access, to DePaul's mental health supported housing, St. Peter's Soup Kitchen, and many others. A drop-in community support center and temporary winter shelter will fit into this neighborhood. More importantly, it will truly serve the needs of other neighborhoods in the area.

Many of the neighborhoods in the southwest of Rochester face the myriad deprivations of extreme poverty. While social services have become more efficient and centralized, this striving towards efficiency has created an environment where many people feel left out, and the neighborhoods feel abandoned. The recent civil unrest and health inequities of the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrate the lost relationship between providers and the neighborhoods of Rochester.

The relationship building and support services at 720 West Main St will be led by a REACH Executive Director Position. Whether it is the shelter, or the community drop-in center, people will be able to access assistance with benefits, housing, food, clothing, mental health, substance abuse treatment, physical health needs, etc.

720 West Main St will provide an ideal service platform to re-engage the West Main St neighborhoods with services the people in the area want, 720 West Main St will have the flexibility to quickly adapt to meet the needs of the community by bringing in the providers people want/need. In the winter, 720 West Main St can transition into a much needed "Code Blue" shelter for the housing deprived. REACH, the Coptic Community, and St. Peter's Kitchen can revitalize 720 West Main St, which in turn will help revitalize the surrounding neighborhoods.

Outreach Zone

The Outreach Zone arose from the belief that it is incumbent on service providers to bring services directly to the people, especially in the areas of Rochester, NY hardest hit by the

deprivations of extreme poverty. The pandemic, civil unrest, and political uncertainty of 2020 clearly demonstrated the need for service providers to truly meet people “where they are at”; physically, socially, economically, emotionally, and trust-wise.

Over the years, the social support systems of Rochester, NY have become more centralized and efficient. On many levels this has been necessary, but the relationships with the neighborhoods have deteriorated for the sake of this efficiency. As the relationships between provider systems and the people being served eroded, people began to feel like numbers, rather than people.

The lack of relationships can be seen as Rochester continues to rank as one of the top 5 poorest cities in the United States. The symptoms of this extreme poverty (inadequate housing, poor health outcomes, a deficient educational system, high arrest levels, opioid/drug crises, etc.) are exacerbated and highlighted with social, political, and public health unrest of the nation. It became even more apparent to founding member agencies of the **Outreach Zone** (the *Father Tracy Advocacy Center (FTAC)*, *MC Collaborative (MC²)*, and the *Southwest Area Neighborhood Association at Montgomery Center (SWAN)*) that services had to be brought to the streets.

On the streets is where the Outreach Zone will find out directly from the people being served what is needed and wanted, rather than prescribing a fix from afar and bringing it into the neighborhood. Learning from the people being served is how the Outreach Zone will develop the services provided. The longer-term objective is to make the individuals, families, businesses, churches, and community organizations in the neighborhoods, the “case managers” for the individuals and families in need.

All of this work can be done safely during a pandemic. Meeting individuals outdoors with masks and appropriate physical distancing is a best practice for assisting people during a pandemic. The traditional method of bringing people indoors to crowded waiting rooms is not responsible, or often possible, during a pandemic. Also, meeting people outdoors mitigates many symptoms of people’s disabilities (anxiety, PTSD, substance abuse issues, etc.). This type of service provision is safe on a public health level and adherent to the fundamental values outlined in the American Disability Act.

RESULTS

The Outreach Zone far exceeded its own expectations in the first three months of activity. The flexibility provided by the United Way Crisis Funding allowed the Outreach Zone to rapidly lay the foundation for the work and get out on the streets. The month of October was

spent prepping the anchor agencies' physical plants and schedules, researching, and gathering supplies.

The anchor agencies proved to be ideal locations for safely and centrally storing supplies that would be given out during Outreach Zone walks. FTAC and SWAN at Montgomery Place are also safe places to muster before walks. The areas are sanitized, there is space for physical distancing, and all providers wear masks. It was decided that walks should be done four days a week after lunch. Many people living in poverty utilize free lunch programs, so the lunch hour is not the most effective time to meet with people. Tuesday and Wednesday Outreach Zone walks were launched from Montgomery Center and Thursday and Friday were launched from FTAC.

By the end of the first month (November) of Outreach Zone walks the build-up of numbers of people met was substantial: 30-50 people a week were met in the Jefferson/Plymouth area and 70-100 people a week in the North Clinton/Joseph Ave area. Even with Holidays and weather, over 800 meetings occurred in November and December.

Needless to say, this type of work needs support. The **REACH Shelter Committee** has provided fundamental support for the effort through supplies. **REACH** has donated socks, gloves, blankets, sandwiches, snacks, hygiene bags, hand warmers, etc. These items are truly needed by the people being served by the Outreach Zone. We created 30 gift bags for the Father Tracy Advocacy Center at Christmas.

As the Outreach Zone efforts expand to serve the most vulnerable in our community, the supply need will increase. The Outreach Zone is grateful for the support of the **REACH** Community and look forward to the expansion of the support. Please check our Facebook Page and our Web Page for any further announcements concerning needs for these programs during this winter.

Respectfully submitted,

Andy Carey and Deborah Peiffer